

Designing Optimized Strategies for Sustainable Development of Agritourism: A Case Study in the Coastal Provinces of the Caspian Sea in Iran

Maryam Mahmoodi*¹, Mohammad Chizari², Khalil Kalantari³, Abdolreza Rokneddin Eftekhari⁴

1 PhD. of Agricultural Extension and Education, Tarbiat Modares University, Iran.

2 Professor of Agricultural Extension and Education, Tarbiat Modares University, Iran.

3 Professor in Regional Planning, Department of Agricultural Management and Development, University of Tehran, Iran.

4 Associate professor of Geography and Rural Planning, Tarbiat Modares University, Iran.

nmahmoodi@hotmail.com

Agro-tourism is gradually being adopted in some rural areas of Iran. However, unplanned development of this type of tourism can result in unfavorable and negative results. This article presents the current situation of agro-tourism in the coastal provinces of Iran in terms of strategic management perspective and determines and prioritizes appropriate strategic recommendations using SWOC and QSPM analysis to make this industry to be more developed and effective. Data required for determining the internal and external environment of agro-tourism development were collected using interview with twelve experts in the field of rural tourism and technical experts from the agriculture sector employed by the Ministry of Agriculture of Iran. Two questionnaires were developed using external and internal factors identified, and determined strategies administered to agricultural experts at the Agricultural Organization, and Agricultural Management Center of intended Provinces and experts participated the formal group meeting in order to weight SWOC factors and prioritize the identified strategies, respectively. Results showed that conservative strategies are the suggested strategies for development of agro-tourism in the intended areas of the study emphasizing on; developing an approach for marketing sustainable agro-tourism services, enhancing the quality of infrastructures and increase access to technologies, encouraging local rural communities to participate, and reinforcing them through training regarding entrepreneurship, marketing and management of sustainable agro-tourism, investing in agro-tourism, and encouraging the NGOs and private sector to participate.

Key words: Coastal Provinces of Caspian Sea, QSPM, Strategic planning, Sustainable agro-tourism, SWOC analysis