

THE RURAL TOURISM AS DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY OR FARMS. THE CASE OF DIRECT SALES IN SICILY

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ABSTRACT

Tourism has an important role modifying rural communities in their environmental, economic, social and cultural structures, processes and dynamics. In this context rural tourism plays a primary role because it is not the rural product that reaches the consumer in the purchase point, but it is the consumer (tourist) that has to move towards tourist destination to enjoy the product. So, the aim of this study is to analyse how the opportunities created by the rural tourism can represent a vector to promote the growth of farms and territory. Specifically, through a telephone survey conducted among the Sicilian entrepreneurs which join to the national network Campagna Amica, it has been analysed how the direct sales in the farm can contribute competitiveness to business and therefore to the permanence of man in the territory. The empirical analysis has shown that direct sales, associated with the conventional sales, can represent a growing opportunity for farms and whole rural community, leading to an improvement of business economic performances, an increase of investments and a creation of new job opportunities. This highlighted that agriculture can play a positive role on many components of the territorial system in which it operates.

Keywords: Rural Development, Short Supply Chain, Value Creation, Business Competitiveness

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the seventies of the last century, with the increasing concern expressed by the international community towards food security and farming sustainability, new vision of agriculture whose purpose is to promote an activity that is able, not only to produce food products, but also to preserve the environment using appropriate, profitable and socially desirable techniques begins (Lee and FarzipoorSaen, 2012; Wiengarten and Pagell, 2012).

The agricultural activity has always contributed to the creation of rural landscapes of which we can enjoy today, to human permanence in areas which are otherwise exposed to degradation, to determine and preserve social values, to create a body of knowledge that are typical of specific areas, to valorise the human, economic and environmental resources of the various rural communities, to qualify and promote the image of many territories, increasing their attractive capacities and contributing to

their development (Lanfranchi and Giannetto 2014). Therefore, agriculture contributes to the preservation and protection of the territory through the presence of man. To talk about the territorial development it is necessary to refer to the concept of multifunctionality of agriculture. In fact, according to some authors (Binder and Witt, 2012), the multifunctionality of agriculture is a way to indicate evolutionary paths of differentiation and integration of income for farmers, especially in marginal areas where the business competitiveness is particularly difficult to achieve in function of territorial structural weaknesses.

The productivity of the primary sector, in fact, is no more an absolute value, but it must be made compatible with other aims felt by the community, such as the environmental and biodiversity protection, the quality and safety of food, the maintenance of employment levels and the protection of rural areas by humans (Potter and Burney, 2002).

In developed economies, agriculture is increasingly considered in a systemic approach, able to produce food

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commodities and to meet the new needs of the consumer, providing both public goods (biodiversity, agricultural landscape) and services (tourism, energy, educational services) and foods with specific attributes (typical products) (Ageron *et al.*, 2012; Ginaldi *et al.*, 2012).

In the last years, to promote the rural development policies the public operator has established a multifunctional vision of agricultural activity, attributing its multiple functions and responding to the new society needs (Gray, 2000). In this way there are farms which, at the same time, contribute to food production, preservation of natural resources, employment and sustainable development of the rural territory (Fichera, 2007).

In the context of multifunctionality the rural tourism, which allows to satisfy the growing interest towards the natural heritage and rural culture by modern society that, with the advent of new technologies and hectic lifestyle, it is deprived of these values is increasingly affirming. This contribute to reduce the exodus of population from rural areas and to create job opportunities, promoting the socio-economic development of disadvantaged areas (Bulin, 2011). Rural tourism can assume various aspects concerning all kinds of hiking which create economic value in rural areas, especially in peri-urban areas and in holiday destinations, as well as direct sales in farm. The present study aims at analysing how the direct sales of food products in farm can contribute to the development and maintenance of agricultural activity in Sicilian rural territories, where the favourable pedo-climatic conditions encourage visitors-consumers during the whole year (Grillone *et al.*, 2009; 2012; 2014; Ibáñez *et al.*, 2014; D'Asaro and Grillone, 2012; Agnese *et al.*, 2008). Specifically, it has been carried out a survey on Sicilian entrepreneurs which adhere to the Italian network of direct sales Campagna amica and it has been analysed how this particular business strategy, attracting tourists-consumers, could contribute to the business competitiveness and therefore to the permanence of man in the rural territory.

2. AGRICULTURE AND RURAL TOURSIM

Rural areas contain great potentialities that must be managed and valorised in order to become concretely an opportunity to activate the developmental dynamics that last over time and meet the sustainability, not only territorial but also social and economic. The man who settles in a certain environment, through the anthropisation process, contributes to the creation of the landscape (Agnolletti, 2006). It is therefore impossible to talk about the environment without considering the presence of man

that plays a key role in the integrated territorial management in which economic needs, welfare, progress and environmental protection represent variables that have to find the right synergy (Jangprajuck *et al.*, 2011). In this way the relationship between man and environment create differentiated landscapes (vineyards, cereal fields, olive groves,) according to the human needs that are the result of culture and rural tradition handed down over the generations.

Agriculture and ancient knowledge become critical successful factors for rural areas and for all actors that work there. Indeed the accumulation of knowledge and the application of specific productive techniques are a source of competitive advantage for the farm and for the territory in which it operates. The human activity carried out in the rural landscape, therefore, contributes to the creation of value (investments, employment and income) through the production of agricultural products, but also by means of all those activities related to agriculture (agritourism, educational farm, production of renewable energy, social agriculture,) (Tudisca *et al.*, 2013a; 2014a; Ballarin *et al.*, 2011). This process derives from the combination of several productive factors (some general, others specific of the local rural heritage) and individuals (farmers, rural community,) in order to produce tourist-recreative goods and services (Belletti *et al.*, 2011). Today, a particularly important aspect is attributed to the recreational function of the environment with the related anthropic-cultural characters of rural areas; all this determines a demand of ecological and sustainable tourism in response to mass tourism (Fernández *et al.*, 2011). Surely, nowadays there is an increasing demand towards respect and recovery of territorial and environmental values which need to be able to formulate an integrated offer that can satisfy the needs of customers/users/consumers of a particular territorial and productive system (Pastore, 2002).

Tourism has also an important role modifying rural communities in their environmental, economic, social and cultural structures, processes and dynamics (Theodoropoulou and Kaldis, 2008; Andereck *et al.*, 2005). In effect, tourism largely contributes to the formation of places, fostering reconfiguration and restructuring processes that tend to create new rural opportunities in function of services it provides to the society as a whole satisfying demands, needs and desires of tourists (Figueiredo, 2011; Crouch, 2006).

In the value creation process of a determined territory, rural tourism plays a primary role (**Fig. 1**), because it is not the rural product that reaches the consumer in the purchase point, but it is the consumer (tourist) that has to move towards tourist destination to enjoy the product (Croce and Perri, 2008).

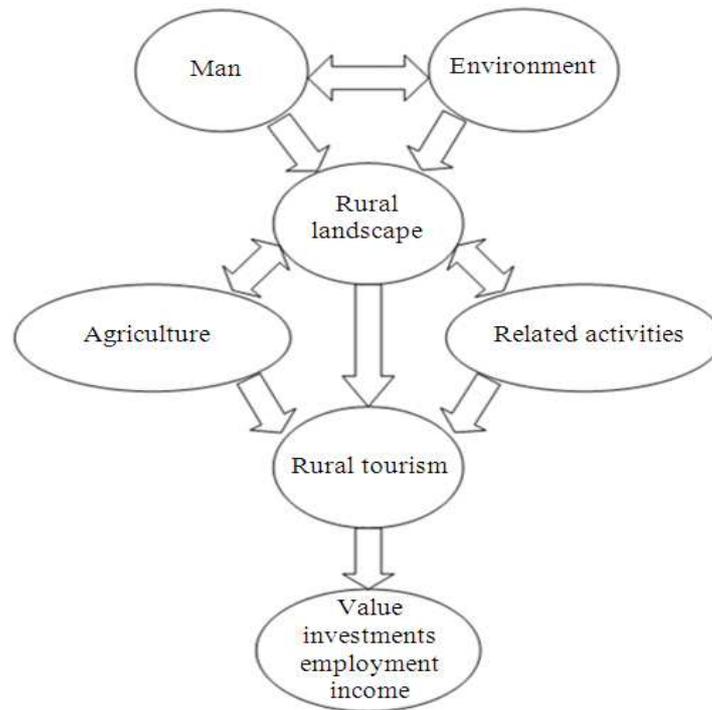


Fig. 1. Creation of value in rural territories through rural tourism. Source: Our processing

In this way the tourism and in particular the rural tourism, becomes a resource to be taken into consideration especially by those farms that can not compete with the conditions imposed by the globalization of markets (Goebel *et al.*, 2012).

Rural tourism has spread in many countries of central and northern Europe since the sixties of last century; instead in southern Europe it has developed in the following decade according to the European economic policies adopted to encourage the reduction of rural exodus and to promote the economic development of disadvantaged areas. The literature on tourism in rural areas includes a multitude of reflections which refer to different disciplines and methodologies.

The term “rural tourism” has no agreed definition. Lane (1994) defines rural tourism as tourism located in rural areas that integrates the unique characteristics of heritage, such as the environment, economy and history. In particular, according to Lane rural tourism should: Be located in rural areas, functionally rural, rural in scale i.e., usually small-scale; be traditional in character; grow slowly and organically; be connected with local families; represent the complex pattern of rural environment, economy, history and location.

Rural tourism refers to all types of tourism carried out in rural areas that are not necessarily performed by

an agricultural entrepreneur through the use of his farm (agritourism, direct sales in farm, educational farms), also including the initiatives of hospitality in rural villages. So, rural tourism is expressed through visits to the farms, explanation on the crop cultivation methods, tasting of agrifood products and all those forms directly related to the resources of rural areas (Brunori *et al.*, 2009). The integration of elements such as territory, local and traditional food production and networks between actors, can characterise local spaces of cooperation and strengthen the development on the territory. It is evident that rural tourism, as well as all forms of contemporary tourism, is developing rapidly driven by demand for a new type of consumer which does not search more for the fruition of a different place, but an alternative experience of life that has as its objective not “what can I buy that I do not have”, but “what can I try that I have not yet experienced”.

Tourists which for various reasons come in the countryside express a demand for infrastructures that should be present in the area, accommodation facilities (agritourims, restaurants, hotels), landscape beauties, local and typical products, in order to have the goods and services necessary to the normal life needs according to their disposable income (Thilmany *et al.*, 2008).

In this context the agricultural activity is able to differentiate the tourist offer producing agricultural goods with characteristics different from conventional ones (e.g., organic or typical products, geographical indication) and moving along the supply chain, acquiring functions of the downstream of the production phase (e.g., agritourism and direct sales).

Rural communities, in tourism development, identify an opportunity to diversify the economy of rural areas and revitalize territories otherwise no more competitive in the face of market dynamics and evolution of agricultural policies.

So, farmers become the main actors of territorial development and can activate multiplicative effects both in the primary activity and in the related satellite industries. In the first case there is an integration of the entrepreneur's income that is added to that one resulting from traditional productive function; in the second case, there are the conditions to promote the territorial development through the creation of new infrastructures and accommodation facilities with the consequent increase in employment and income of operators which reside in that territory (Ali Pour *et al.*, 2011; Mcareavey and Mcdonagh, 2011).

Thus a new interest for agriculture emerges, one of the possible ways of understanding rural tourism linked to new types of sustainable practices and arise new reciprocities that put at the center of the relationship between tourist and territory the experience of agricultural practice (Di Vittorio, 2010). The tourist asks to be able to experience directly the productive activity and the new farm entrepreneur integrates and completes its offer according to tourist needs. The creation of this new relationship brings the tourist to discover the territory through the production cycle and allows that the farmer transmits his knowledge and his link with the territory (Guarino and Doneddu, 2011).

In this sense, in addition to traditional tourism products (cities, beach resorts, mountain resorts)-that have reached a stage of maturity and that can be affected by seasonality-are created, in response to the emerging needs of the tourist/consumer, new tourism products (minor cultural itineraries, food and wine tours, spa and musical packages), which allow to valorise local resources and to discover their potentialities (Yun, 2009). Therefore, rural tourism becomes a strategic and transversal axis able to promote developmental processes in rural areas according to the tourist demand, that is not a demand of single goods or specific services, but it is a composite demand closely related to the relationship of complementarity more or less direct among the several elements that characterise a rural territory (Hwang *et al.*, 2012).

However, rural tourism presents also negative aspects, limitations or obstacles for rural development (Ribeiro and Marques, 2002). Firstly this is attributable to the economic and social vulnerability of many rural areas and rural tourism establishments, for their private character and limited dimension.

Another relevant aspect is the "collective" nature and "not private" of some of the rural resources used in the process of creating the tourist value. These resources are produced and maintained with the contribution of numerous actors, often by means of long term processes. Surely, many rural resources have the nature of public goods which are freely usable by a plurality of actors that organise them in the production process of the tourist good. Under these conditions, not always the value generated by tourism remunerates those that effectively contribute to the maintaining of rural capital, compromising the reproduction of these capitals and thus the sustainability of the tourist valorisation process (Garrod *et al.*, 2006).

manner, sometimes detached from local contexts and specificities. Indeed, frequently they use traditional local features (e.g., landscape, natural resources, food productions, agricultural practices, festivities) to promote the establishments and to attract guests, but in practical terms those features are not materialized in the services and activities offered (Figueiredo and Raschi, 2013). So local resources are not being capitalized and valued and the specific character of rural tourism is not fulfilled (Perkins, 2006).

Finally, tourism activities may contribute to increase conflicts, among local population and between rural dwellers and tourists and tourism operators, therefore also contributing to reshape rural contexts

2.1. Direct Sales: An Opportunity for Farm Development

As above mentioned, rural tourism through its various typologies promotes the productive activities of a territory and allows the human permanence in it.

A particular segment of rural tourism is the wine and food tourism. This refers to the fruition of local agrifood products by the tourists-consumers, that not necessarily stay overnight in the place of production, but they can also make day trips (Belletti, 2010).

The arrival of tourists-consumers in rural areas generate a demand for goods and services which it translates into an increase of value for the territory and farms (Renko *et al.*, 2010; Polidori *et al.*, 2008).

In this context, the agricultural activity is included in a synergistic way, producing an increase in the added value by means of the direct sales of agricultural

products and the creation of value through the valorisation of the built and often unused farm heritage (Polo-Peña *et al.*, 2012).

A possible strategy to increase the added value of agricultural products through rural tourism is the direct sales carried out directly in farm or agritourism (Hall *et al.*, 2003).

The farm direct sales represents a particular kind of short supply chain where consumers buy products directly on farms in which entrepreneurs fit out appropriate spaces for the sale of farm products (Uematsu and Mishra, 2011). In Italy, according to the 6th General Census of Agriculture, in 2010 the farms engaged in direct sales amounted to 210,625 units, of which 17,531 in Sicily (ISTAT, 2012). This is essentially due to the new vision of consumers regarding agriculture that is associated with a strongly expressed ethical position concerning the value of sustaining valued local rural landscapes and lifestyles and the importance of reconnecting urban dwellers with rural areas, farming and quality food production (Holloway *et al.*, 2006).

The use of direct sales determines several advantages for the farm: Higher revenues by increasing of the sales price compared to wholesale one; demand stability due to consumer's loyalty; possibility to affect directly the price by reduction of production costs related, mainly, to the transport and packaging costs (Rizzo and Mazzamuto, 2009; Cicatiello, 2008). The absence of intermediaries, that are normally along the supply chain, can be a source of competitive advantage because the entrepreneur can obtain a higher remuneration of productive factors, reappropriating of a value portion which usually gets dispersed in the various stages of the supply chain, becoming price-maker (Tudisca *et al.*, 2013b; 2014b; Bandarra, 2011; Saccomandi, 1999). In this case, the farmer is not subject to the price but he may decide to apply a different price, higher than one that is determined in the case of sale to fruit and vegetable wholesale markets or contracts with the Large Organized Distribution (LOD). This type of sale, in addition, by the full utilization of the work of the farmer's family produces positive effects on the farm economic performance, because it increases the available liquid assets in the business current assets and lowers the anticipation capital requirement for the coverage of short-term debts that are present during the management activity.

Through direct sales entrepreneurs go beyond the mere offer of accommodation and meals, reaffirming the role of agricultural production and its related activities. In many cases, direct sales coincides with the transformation in business of activities already existing

in the enterprise, especially related to female work but also to the competence and professionalism of farmers. Sure enough, in order to adapt them to the new tourist demand they update their skills becoming local entrepreneurs. This new figure draws from the territory and the agricultural practice the necessary and essential tools for the success of agricultural and tourist's activity (Di Trapani *et al.*, 2013).

Indeed, the farm direct sales is a business strategy that through the encounter between tourists-consumers and productive offer favors the development of agricultural activities and all activities that are related to it (Aguglia, 2009).

The synergistic process created among farms, tourists and territory provides benefits for all actors involved in the process. For the farm, in addition to sales prices increase, there is also a rise of land value and of all products and services related to rural tourism as well as a diversified food and wine basket (Mettepenningen *et al.*, 2012). Tourists present in the area generate a multiplicative effect on activities related to agriculture such as agritourism, but also on the accommodations facilities of the territory, generating new employment. This helps to reduce the socio-economic decline of rural areas, allowing the human permanence in the territory and avoiding rural exodus phenomena (Tudisca *et al.*, 2014c; 2011; Feagan, 2008).

Nevertheless, the direct sales cannot be the only marketing strategy for a farm, because the produced quantities can be hardly absorbed exclusively by local and/or tourist demand (Sini, 2009). Direct sales could represent a winning strategy for the farm if it is inserted within the wider business marketing strategy, or it is placed side by side to the traditional sale methods (fruit and vegetable wholesale markets, contracts with Large Organized Distribution), (Raffaelli *et al.*, 2009). The direct sales effectiveness also presupposes that in the farm family there is a state of unemployment, because the possible created economic advantage would be absorbed by the sale staff.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to analyse how rural tourism can contribute to value creation for farms and territory through the direct sales, Sicilians farmers which have already undertaken this business strategy have been interviewed. In particular, a survey among the 380 Sicilian farmers that adhere to the Campagna Amica Foundation was been carried out. This foundation was instituted in 2008 by Coldiretti, one of the main Italian organizations of farmers. In 2012, in Italy there were 5,264

Campagnaamica points, of which 380 in Sicily. The Foundation promotes and supports agriculture in three different areas: Direct sales, tourism and environmental sustainability. In particular: It organizes and promotes the points of excellence of the Italian agricultural supply chain from producer to consumer; it valorises the typical Italian products; supports campaigns to defend the heritage of forests, lakes, rivers and biodiversity; monitors prices, lifestyles and eating habits of citizens; produces instruments of knowledge and information for professional nutritional education; promotes virtuous lifestyles towards the environment and consumptions.

The survey affected 301 entrepreneurs that realised direct sales in one or more farm outlets. Among them, 167 realised exclusively the direct sales in farm, while 134 sold agrifood products both in farm outlets and at farmers' markets. The choice to exclude 79 enterprises that realised exclusively direct sales at farmers' markets has been determined by the aim of this research, that is to analyse how the direct sales through the enhancement of landscape and environmental resources contributes to create value for the farm.

The survey has been conducted by means of telephone interview to farmers, through a specific questionnaire. The collected information aimed at delineating the characteristics of productive offer (product portfolio) and the obtained benefits in the business performance by adopted strategy.

The choice to perform the data collection through the telephone survey has been determined for its numerous advantages: (a) limited cost of information collection; (b) rapidity of data collection; (c) high flexibility; (d) possibility of obtaining a representative framework of detection also for local territorial areas with a high degree of dislocation from the major towns (Marbach, 2000). The questionnaire administered by telephone to entrepreneurs has been divided into three parts. The first one concerning the general information about the type of enterprise (farm, cooperative, agritourism, size and regional localisation), the socio-demographic characteristics of entrepreneur, the products intended for direct sales and their sales modalities (farm outlets and/or farmers' markets) and the customers' influx during the year.

In the second part we asked to entrepreneurs information about some variables that affected business management and concerned external factors (access to bank credit, public aids) of which the enterprise used to carry out its activity. In the third part of the questionnaire we analysed the reasons that led farmers to adopt the direct sales, its benefits for the business and the effects

on economic performance. It was asked to assign a priority (or rank) at every respondent for each of the possible answers, giving a score according to a 1-5 scale where the higher score represents the higher priority (Tudisca *et al.*, 2013c; Trabalzi and De Rosa, 2012). Given a set of observations, characterised by qualitative measures, they are ordered in ascending order (from lowest to the highest) and it is assigned to each one an ordinal number, starting from the first and proceeding gradually to the last (e.g., 1, 2, 3, ...). This number is called rank (Vianelli and Ingrassia, 2011).

4. RESULTS

The detected enterprises were distributed throughout Sicily, even if Ragusa Province was the most representative (15.0% of enterprises), followed by Trapani (13.3%) and Palermo (12.0%) (**Table 1**). The majority of sample had a farm size less than 2 hectares (47.5%), followed by 2-5 ha (31.6%), while those with an area over 5 ha accounted only for 20.9% of the total.

As regards the socio-demographic characteristics of entrepreneurs, 62.5% were males while 37.5% were females (**Table 2**).

The majority of entrepreneurs aged between 31 and 40 years (52.8%), while only 4.7% was over 60 years.

Among the 301 detected enterprises, farms represented the most common type (84.1%), followed by agritourisms (9.3%) and cooperatives (6.6%) (**Fig. 2**).

With regard to the marketing modality, it is important to highlight that products for direct sales were always a portion of the agricultural production (ranging from a minimum of 10% to a maximum of 25%); the remaining production was marketed through traditional channels (fruit and vegetable wholesale markets, LDO, packing centres).

The majority of detected enterprises produced and commercialised fruit and vegetables (225 units), followed by those that sold olive oil (120), milk, cheese and dairy products (59), cereals, bread, pasta and bakery products (45), wines and/or vinegars (36), fresh meat, cold cuts and eggs (33), canned vegetables and processed products (26), plants and flowers (15), honey (9) (**Table 3**). It should be noted that in almost all the productive structures analysed, there was the presence of a diversified product portfolio according to the practiced farming system.

The influx of customers during the summer months was distributed throughout the week while, from autumn to spring, it was concentrated during weekends and holiday periods.

Table 1. Enterprises with direct sales by province and farm area

Provinces	Farm area (ha)			Total	
	<1.99	2.00-4.99	>5.00	N.	%
Agrigento	15.0	10.0	9.0	34.0	11.3
Caltanissetta	18.0	5.0	6.0	29.0	9.6
Catania	21.0	8.0	6.0	35.0	11.6
Enna	18.0	6.0	11.0	35.0	11.6
Messina	13.0	2.0	6.0	21.0	7.0
Palermo	10.0	22.0	4.0	36.0	12.0
Trapani	9.0	19.0	12.0	40.0	13.3
Ragusa	22.0	18.0	5.0	45.0	15.0
Siracusa	17.0	5.0	4.0	26.0	8.6
Sicily	143.0	95.0	63.0	301.0	100.0
%	47.5	31.6	20.9	100.0	

Source: Our processing of directly collected data

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of entrepreneurs

Age (years)	Sex		Total	
	Males	Females	N.	%
25-30	30.0	5.0	35.0	11.6
31-40	92.0	67.0	159.0	52.8
41-50	40.0	29.0	69.0	22.9
51-60	14.0	10.0	24.0	8.0
≥ 60	12.0	2.0	14.0	4.7
Total	188.0	113.0	301.0	100.0
%	62.5	37.5	100.0	

Source: Our processing of directly collected data

Table 3. Enterprises with direct sales by agrifood products

Agrifood products	Enterprises (No.)
Fruit and vegetables	225
Olive oil	120
Milk, cheese and dairy products	59
Cereals, bread, pasta and bakery products	45
Wines and/or vinegars	36
Fresh meat, cold cuts and eggs	33
Canned vegetables and processed products	26
Plants and flowers	15
Honey	9
Other	13

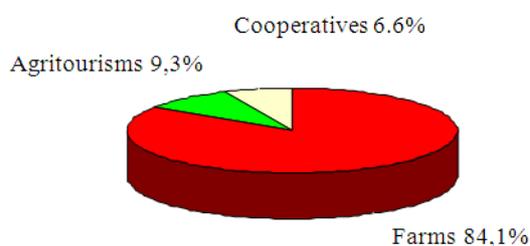


Fig. 2. Distribution by type of enterprise; Source: Our processing of directly collected data

The farm outlet was managed by the entrepreneur or his family (especially women and young people), becoming crucial for increase of the remuneration of production factors brought by the entrepreneur in the enterprise.

Taking into consideration some external factors to the enterprise that affected business management, it is interesting to analyse the findings regarding the access to bank credit. In effect, although 93% of farmers have highlighted the importance of bank credit access for agricultural activity, only 10.3% declared a maintenance of constant conditions in recent years, while the majority (270 interviewees) complained about a worsening of required conditions for access and thus an increase of interest expenses (**Table 4**).

The analysis has also denoted that the majority of entrepreneurs (59.8%) has declared that direct payments affected the farm income marginally, representing less than 10% of the agricultural enterprise revenues (**Table 5**).

Conversely, the Common Agricultural Policy remained essential for the realisation of planned investments and production decisions for almost all of the respondents (78.4%).

In the continuation of the survey it seems interesting to analyse the reasons that led entrepreneurs to join Campagna Amica Foundation, supporting the traditional marketing methods with the introduction of direct sales in the farm (**Fig. 3**).

According to the interviewees the low sales prices represented the main motivation, assigning it the highest priority (5). The second motivation in order of importance was the geographical location of the farm (4), followed by marketing strategy diversification (2). As regard advantages that determines the direct sales, respondents declared that farm income supplement was the main issue in terms of importance, giving it the highest priority (5) (**Fig. 4**).

Another parameter considered of fundamental importance was the increase of liquid assets that, in the priority scale assumed a value just lower (4), while marginal importance was attributed to the reduction of the transport and packaging costs (1).

Finally analysing the real effects on the business performance of the direct sales introduction, entrepreneurs have assigned the greatest importance (5) to the profitability increase (**Fig. 5**).

It is interesting to note that respondents have attributed a high importance to the other two variables too, highlighting how business investments (4) and human resources optimisation (3).

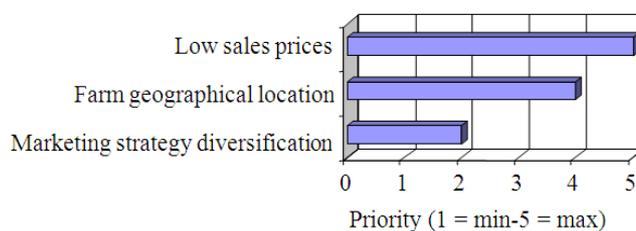


Fig. 3. Motivations of direct sales introduction; Source: Our processing of directly collected data

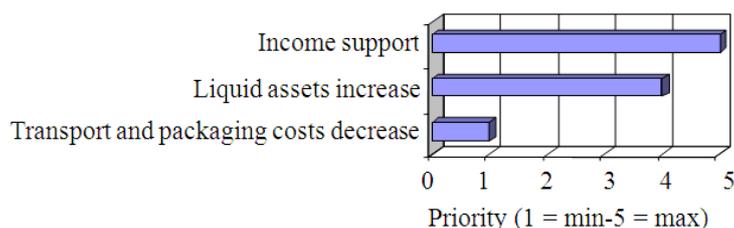


Fig. 4. Direct sales advantages; Source: Our processing of directly collected data

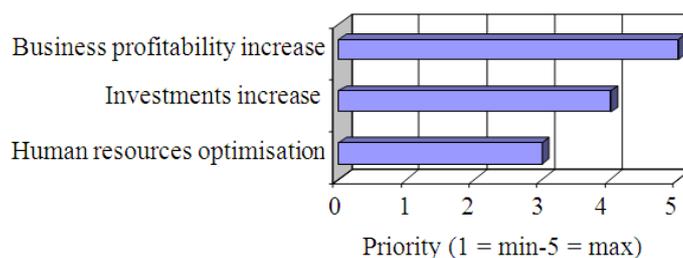


Fig. 5. Direct sales effects on the business performance; Source: Our processing of directly collected data

Table 4. Some external factors related to business management

Importance of bank credit access		Conditions of credit bank access		CAP importance for the realisation of investments	
YES	NO	Constant	Worsened	YES	NO
280	21	31	270	236	65

Source: Our processing of directly collected data

Table 5. Direct payments incidence on farm income

<10%	10-20%	20-30%	>30%
180	71	30	20

Source: Our processing of directly collected data

5. DISCUSSION

The survey highlighted how direct sales has been carried out mainly by young entrepreneurs, unlike other studies where farmers had an advanced age (Massoli and

De Gaetano, 2004). Sure enough they, are able to respond significantly to new opportunities and changes of market than older entrepreneurs (Parker, 2006).

As well as noted in other studies (Busby and Rendle, 2000), the influx of customers during the summer months was distributed throughout the week both for the transfer of the urban population in holiday residences and the consumer's movements to have some rest period and therefore enjoy the beauties offered by the rural landscape; from autumn to spring, conversely, the influx

of consumers was concentrated during weekends and holiday periods related to the major festivities.

In agritourisms the sale of agrifood products and the reception were particularly suitable to the enhancement of female work, particularly with regard to relational relationships with customers, while young people found employment and sufficient motivations to engage in family activities (Henke and Salvioni, 2010).

Results also showed that bank credit represented a critical success factor for the enterprise, despite the economic conditions have worsened, increasing the business risk (Santeramo *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, the capital is considered as one of the basic essentials for boosting vital sector of agriculture. It plays an important role in agricultural development because timely availability of capital leads to adoption modern technologies, which increase the farm production and ultimately the growth rate (Riaz *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, agriculture credit is an important element for modernization in agriculture.

It is important to note that, unlike other studies (Constantin, 2013; Křístková and Habrychová, 2011), the majority of entrepreneurs declared that direct payments affected the farm income marginally. However, for the realisation of planned investments and production decisions the Common Agricultural Policy remained essential for almost all of the respondents, as well as showed by other studies (Kallas *et al.*, 2012).

The low sales prices represented the main motivation of direct sales introduction, while the diversification of the business marketing strategy would not be a key factor for success, but rather a result of market conditions that determined low sales prices for agricultural products (Mazoyer, 2005) and geographical location that played a key role for short supply chain (Harris, 2010). The perception of the advantages that determines the direct sales resulted quite clear. The respondents, in fact, declared that the main advantage of direct sales, in terms of importance, was the farm income supplement as well as showed by other authors (Traversac *et al.*, 2011; Gardini and Lazzarin, 2007).

Results showed also that farmers have been able to change their entrepreneurial strategies, improving their economic performance and thus incorporating 'added value' (Sgroi *et al.*, 2014; Chinnici *et al.*, 2013; Veidal and Korneliussen, 2013; Crescimanno and Galati, 2012).

Sure enough, farmers utilized direct sales as a value-added way to capitalize on their comparative advantages, their diverse agricultural products and their locations near large, urban, tourist-generating areas, maintained agricultural land in production and avoided exodus rural phenomena (Tudisca *et al.*,

2014d; Brezuleanu *et al.*, 2013; Crnčan *et al.*, 2011; Kalantari *et al.*, 2008; Che *et al.*, 2005).

6. CONCLUSION

In addition to produce food products, agriculture can play a positive role on many components of the territorial system in which it operates. It is precisely from this role that it must get the guidelines for creating new income opportunities for the entrepreneur and for the rural territory. Today more than in the past, in developed economies the community has for agriculture larger and more differentiated expectations, not only in relation to the diversification of the productive offer of agricultural products, but also to other functions (landscapes, receptivity, energy production from renewable sources, educational farms, social activities), that are included in rural tourism. Rural tourism in recent years has become an effective tool to address the socio-economic problems of rural areas and agricultural sector, in particular where local government investments and private stakeholders projects attract tourists and increase local socioeconomic development. As a function of these new aspects of agricultural activity, in this study we observed that entrepreneurs which have joined to Campagna amica Foundation, were able to transform these opportunities into an occasion to generate income and be competitive by means of the direct sales. Sure enough, the results showed an entrepreneurial network characterized by young entrepreneurs which were able to reorient their business strategy in order to remain competitive on the market also thanks to bank credit that represented a critical success factor for the vitality and growth of the enterprise. The most important reason that has driven entrepreneurs to carry out direct sales was the low sales price of agricultural products. This marketing strategy allowed an income supplement of enterprise that, together with a remuneration increase of invested capital, determined a valorisation of human resources, thus avoiding rural exodus phenomena.

However, it should be remembered that as such the farmer, is required to produce for the market. The direct sales strategy should be always considered as an income supplement and can not be the only sales strategy for agricultural enterprises. This is confirmed in the detected enterprises where the direct sales does not absorb ever the whole farm production but only its part. In any case, direct sales, through the encounter between producer and tourist-consumer, allow to valorise the natural heritage and create the conditions for a synergistic development of the territory.

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