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# Farm tourism: a question of gender and competence?

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on farm-tourist hosts and who they are in terms of education and competence. Gender is a central variable in the analysis. The analysis is based on an on-line survey of 448 farm tourist businesses conducted in spring 2009. In addition, we have interviewed a sample of women and men hosts on 19 farm tourism enterprises. Quotations from these interviews are used mainly to illustrate and enrich the quantitative material. The study finds that women are more likely to be managers of farm tourism businesses, and have higher levels of formal education than men. Men are more likely to have vocational education, local attachment and competence obtained by growing up on a farm and having lived most of their lives in the local community. Men have practical experiences from farm work and outdoor activities relevant for farm tourism businesses. Level of education does not have any significant impact on turnover, profitability and expected profit. As the businesses are small-scale and developed from the farms' material resources, the competence required is the ability to transform the farm resources into a tourist product. This competence might be achieved not only through formal educational, but also previous work experiences, courses, networks, advisory services and daily experience. Our interviews show that the hosts refer to their vocational backgrounds as important and relevant, and they refer to their practically obtained competence rather than to their educational backgrounds.

## **Introduction**

Rural tourism, including farm tourism, is met with increasing interest by many parts of the population (Blekesaune et al 2010) and is presently one of the fastest growing tourism market segments (Brown and Hall 2000). This is accompanied by an awareness of the economic significance of knowledge and competence as success factors. Generally speaking, the use of new knowledge and competence to stimulate innovation and development is very important for most industries and individual enterprises (Cooper 2006, Hallin and Marnburg 2008). Since the 1990s, there has been considerable focus on the emergence of the 'knowledge economy' as a new phase of economic development in which knowledge is the key resource and learning one of the most important processes. Yet a focus on knowledge has been rarely applied by practitioners in the tourist industry and researchers in tourist studies (Stamboulis and Skayannis 2003).

Although the academic debate on knowledge has come relatively late to tourism, it has gained ground, particularly in management and business oriented tourism research (Hallin and Marnburg 2008; Swan and Scarbrough 2001). There is also an emerging literature on innovation, which is often used as a proxy for knowledge. Since knowledge seems to be a critical source of competitive advantage, as well as a production factor in addition to the traditional ones of capital, labour and land (Gherardi 2000), we think it is important to explore within the field of agritourism.

Farming is a primary industry, and tourist hosting is a service industry. Therefore it is generally expected that there would be a large gap between the competences needed in the two industries (Brandth and Haugen 2008), and that consequently, farmers may not have the adequate knowledge and competence for tourist hosting. Farming is physical, material and tangible work, and the product is food or fibre. Tourist hosting is intangible, its production happens in interaction with the visitors, and it is consumed almost the moment it is produced (Crang 1997). Hosting is front-line work and, as other service work, may be characterized as emotional work – dealing with the management and commercialization of feelings. Despite these differences, both farming and agri-tourist hosting is work done on the farm site, in the context of the home, and embedded in everyday lives. As the place, the home and the farm heritage are parts of the product of tourist hosting, this might require special (emotional) skills. Today's tourists are well-informed and pretentious agents. They want to learn and

experience something new on their holidays, and they require good service. This places demands on the knowledge and competence of the tourist hosts.

In this paper we focus on small agritourism businesses and their hosts (who are owners-managers-workers). We explore the characteristics of hosts - such as gender, age, farm background, formal education and in-migration - and how these factors might influence the business. Furthermore, we focus on practice-based knowledge and its importance for the business.

### **Knowledge – a contested concept**

Knowledge is a critical feature of the contemporary economy. The knowledge management approach sees knowledge as “created, disseminated and embedded in products, services and systems” (Gherardi 2000:213). Rural tourism studies have also found the entrepreneurs’ knowledge to be a source of competitive advantage (Hernandes-Maestro et al 2009). There are, however, many types of knowledge and competence with various sources, functions and statuses.

Polyani (1966) differentiates between explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is knowledge in the form of communication that can be codified in books, documents, databases, web-pages, etc. Tacit knowledge refers to intellectual and physical capabilities and skills that cannot be fully articulated or codified. It is not taught, but learned through context-specific activities, such as through interactions with visitors. People learn from their daily experience in specific contexts, and develop new knowledge within their domains of competence. Tacit knowledge is important and usable knowledge, but it is normally not an object of reflection and is difficult to measure.

Another differentiation of knowledge along somewhat similar lanes is ‘practical’ knowledge vs. ‘formal/abstract’ knowledge. Atherton (2003:1388) has made a list of the most common polarities of knowledge, which include applied vs. abstracted, contextualized vs. de-contextualized, informal vs. formal, intuitive vs. rationalized, and subjective vs. objective. Atherton argues that it is the practical forms of knowledge that represent the typical knowledge of small firms. Gherardi (2000:215) has also argued that “...practice is a system of activities in which knowing is not separated from doing.” Participating in a practice is a way to acquire knowledge and to develop and maintain this knowledge. Bourdieu (1990)

conceptualized knowledge, transmitted through familiarity with previous situations, as *sens pratique*. Practical knowledge may in this way be inscribed in the habitus of the practitioner, making knowledge and competence time and place specific. Farm tourist hosts, for instance, draw on competence and knowledge created through their past practices as farmers and rural community dwellers – and this knowledge is made relevant by the practices of their new work situation (see Brandth et al 2010). Articulated as practice, knowledge becomes a contextualized/situated, social and dynamic accomplishment (Gherardi 2000). In feminist theory, ‘situated knowledge’ (Haraway 1991) and ‘embodied knowledge’ are terms that have increased the awareness of the androcentric character of knowledge used to understand social experience. Knowledge is always limited by history, culture, tradition – even so-called ‘universal’ knowledge is situated.

It has been suggested “that knowledge which is contextual, social or tacit has been taken to be of lesser value in relation to competitive advantage” (Thompson et al. 2001, p.923). However, in their study of skills in various types of interactive service work, based on qualitative case studies, they found aesthetic and social skills and competencies to be critical in this type of work. Thompson et al. (2001) are of the opinion that service workers ‘knowledgeability’ (which is not based on abstract knowledge) should not be underestimated. According to Atherton (2003), small businesses, which are typical in rural tourism, are viewed to lack knowledge. Here knowledge is probably thought about in terms of abstract, decontextualized knowledge.

Research has suggested that level of education, attendance in courses related to the business activity, and experience may be positively correlated to the performance of the firm. Pointing at contradictory results regarding the effects of these types of knowledges, Hernandez-Maestro et al, (2009) found that experience had little effect on objective quality, but that the level of education had strong and positive effects on quality. This paper deals with all three types of knowledge: formal education, courses and practical experience-based knowledge.

The analysis is organized as follows: First we identify the farm-tourist hosts by means of their background characteristics. Second, we explore the relationship between (primarily) educational level and the prospects of the business. Lastly, we focus on practical knowledge and looks into the value which the hosts themselves put on the different types of knowledge.

## **Data and methods**

The paper is drawn from two empirical studies; an online-survey to farm tourist businesses and interviews with a sample of farm tourist hosts.

The statistical analyses are based on a nationwide online survey conducted in 2009<sup>1</sup> among small-scale farm-tourist enterprises in Norway. The survey was sent by e-mail to all of the enterprises which are members of HANEN - the national trade and market association of farm-based tourism. The enterprises offer various products, services, and activities based on the resources of their farms, such as food produced on the farm, accommodation, catering, activities, and leasing of hunting and fishing rights.

Although not all farm-based tourist enterprises in Norway are members of this organisation, we believe that the answers derived from the sample of members of this association gives a reasonably representative picture of farm tourism businesses in Norway. 448 members of HANEN received the survey, and the response rate was relatively high; 66.5 % (298). A possible source of selection bias in this sample could be that successful farmers were more motivated to answer the survey than less successful farmers. We should bear this in mind when interpreting the statistical analyses in this paper. The majority of the respondents (90%) are the main person responsible for the business, either alone or together with others, most commonly their spouse. In 8% of the cases, it is their spouse who is mainly responsible.

The survey covered subjects such as the tourist hosts' background, characteristics of the enterprises, the scale of the business, use of labour, the profitability of the business, and the implementation of development schemes and plans for the future of the business. Women slightly outweighed men in the sample, although nine out of ten of the enterprises were family enterprises run by married couples.

The interviews of farm hosts were conducted in 2005 -2008. The total sample consists of 19 farm tourism enterprises from various districts in Norway. The sample was selected from HANEN's agritourism marketing catalogue and through our network and knowledge of possible cases. Criteria for sampling were that the businesses had small-scale tourism activities based on a family farm which was run by the farm couple. In one of the cases the

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<sup>1</sup>For further details about this inquiry, see Kroken et al. 2009.

agritourism operation was a joint operation between two farms. By the time of the interviews all of them had been doing agritourism from three to twenty three years and they seemed to have succeeded in the market.

From the nineteen cases (twenty farms), 35 people were formally interviewed; sixteen women and nineteen men. Each interview was conducted at the farm site and lasted between two and three hours; they were audio-taped and later fully transcribed. The interviews were semi-structured and flexible in style, giving the possibility to follow up on matters that were particularly interesting in each case. As a starting point for the interview, a list was made of items to explore and this encouraged open discussion. The development of the product and the business, consequences for the farm and the family, their working situation, competence, division of work and gender identity were of interest.

All except four of the couples in our sample had operated a farm before starting agritourism, and their farm is thus an important part of the product they offer as the activities take place on the farm and its surroundings. Although the majority either had been or still are part-time farmers, they have diverse backgrounds and work experiences.

In the survey, four combinations of agritourism and conventional farm activities were identified based on the amount of work input in both activities (Kroken et al., 2009). On some farms, agritourism was the sole or main activity; on other farms it was an equal combination between tourism and farm production; and on some farms, tourism was an additional. Lastly, tourism is combined with farming on a hobby basis (2009, p. 36). In our sample nine of the farms have tourism activities as their main activity, while five have an equal combination of farming and tourism. Five of the farms have tourism as an additional or hobby activity.

## Results

### *What are the characteristics of the farm tourist host and their activities?*

This section deals with the question: who are the farm tourism hosts? To answer this question we have considered gender, age, level of education, farm background and local attachment (Table 1).

**Table 1. Background variables of the farm tourist hosts**

<i>Background variables</i>	N	%
<i>Gender</i>	283	
• Women		56
• Men		44
<i>Age</i>	296	
• Less than 40		14
• 40-49		34
• 50-59		37
• 60 and more		16
<i>Grown up on a farm</i>	294	
• Yes		59
• No		40
<i>Local attachment</i>	271	
• Lived in the local community all life		34
• Return migrant		23
• In-migrant		43
<i>Education level</i>	297	
• Primary and lower secondary school		6
• Upper secondary (vocational)		27
• Upper secondary (general studies)		16
• University/college		52
<i>Farm tourism</i>	205	
• Main activity		29
• Equal combination with farming		33
• Additional activity to farming/other activities		38

More than half of the respondents were women. This is in line with previous research suggesting that farm tourism might challenge the traditional gender dynamics in family farming and create new opportunities for women (Brandth and Haugen 2010, Garcia Ramon et al. 1995). Our data shows that more women than men are in charge of the family based tourism business. In three quarters of the businesses, women are reported to be in charge, either as the sole manager (45%) or together with their husbands in 30 percent of the cases. Only in one quarter of the cases were men the sole manager. However, as these farm-tourism



enterprises are based on family labour, most spouses are involved in one way or another. The majority of the farm hosts are in their forties and fifties.

The upbringing on a farm could be a valuable asset providing contextualised knowledge relevant for work as tourist hosts. More than half of the respondents have grown up on a farm, either on the farm they operate today (39%) or on another farm (20%). Another background variable that we believe is relevant is local attachment, measured by whether the hosts have lived all their life in the local community, are return migrants (lived another place some years and returned to the place where they grew up), or are in-migrants moving to the place as adults. Familiarity with farming, country life, and local culture may generate tacit knowledge, while those who are in-migrants may bring with them new ideas and an outsider ‘gaze’. Those who have lived all their life at the same place might ‘go native’ and be less aware of the local attractions.

The overall level of education is high among the hosts. More than half (52 %) have university/college education. Haugen and Vik (2008) have compared the level of education among farm-tourism entrepreneurs and farmers and found a significant difference in favour of the farm-tourism entrepreneurs. They argued that the high educational level among the farm-tourism entrepreneurs was probably one of the success factors contributing to a profitable business within tourism (op.cit.) We are interested in whether women and men managers have different levels of education (Table 2).

**Table 2. Educational level of managers by gender. Percentages. (N=282)**

<i>Level of education</i>	Women	Men
Primary and lower secondary school	4	8
Upper secondary school (vocational education)	17	40
Upper secondary school (general education)	18	12
University/college	61	39
Total	100	99
N=	160	122

Women have a significantly higher level of education than men, as 61 percent of the women have achieved higher education compared with 39 percent of the men. On the other hand, a much higher share of the men have vocational education. Our data does not tell what kind of vocational training they have. From other studies we know that many male tourism

entrepreneurs have agricultural training (Haugen and Vik 2008), but they may have also undertaken training in practical skills such as carpentry, plumbing, electrical engineering etc. - skills that might be useful for the farm tourism enterprise. Men are commonly responsible for construction and maintenance work on the enterprise (Brandth and Haugen 2010). Our data gives an overview of the formal, and hence ‘objectivized’, knowledge in Atherton’s (2003) terms. Below we will explore how the level of education might influence the current situation and future plans of the enterprise.

Generally speaking, most farms are handed down from father to son and the majority of farms transformed to farm-tourism businesses have probably been within the family for generations. In Norway, 86 percent of farmers are men suggesting that most women are in-migrants.

**Table 3. Attachment to the local community by gender. Percentages. (N=271)**

<i>Attachment to the local community</i>	Women	Men
Lived in the community all life	18	55
Returned to the community	25	21
In-migrant as an adult	57	25
Total	100	101
N=	154	117

Pearson’s  $\chi^2$  42.746 2 df, p= 0.000

Table 3 confirms that there is a significant gender difference regarding attachment to the local community. Women hosts are more likely to be in-migrants to the rural community, while men more commonly have a continuous local belonging. More than eighty percent of the women hosts are return- or in-migrants. Although women as in-migrants might lack practical knowledge about farm life and the local culture, they might bring valuable new ideas and relevant work experiences and knowledge with them into the farm business. There is a significant difference in level of education among those who have stayed all their life in the rural community and those who are return- or in-migrants. Not surprisingly, the latter groups have the highest level of education.

We also asked respondents for their views on the level of competence in their company, and whether they saw a need to enhance this. Another question explored whether they had made plans to enhance competence in their business, either amongst themselves or by employing or hiring people with desired competencies (Table 4).

**Table 4. Need and plans to enhance competence in the enterprise, by gender. Percentages.**

<i>Need to enhance competence</i> (N=276) <sup>1)</sup>	Women	Men	Total
Yes	46	43	45
No	49	52	50
Does not know	5	5	5
Total	100	100	100
<i>Plans to enhance competence</i> (N=270) <sup>2)</sup>			
Yes, among the current staff	41	35	39
Yes, by employing or hiring help	9	10	9
No, no plans	50	55	52
Total	100	100	100

<sup>1)</sup> Pearson's  $\chi^2$  0,230 2 df, p= 0,892 <sup>2)</sup> Pearson's  $\chi^2$  0,965 2df, p= 0,617

Nearly one half (45%) of the respondents think that they need to increase business competence. There are no significant differences between women and men regarding this question. Neither did we find any significant difference in views about the need to enhance competencies between those with different levels of education, those who have grown up on a farm nor between those who were in-migrants and those who were not. The only significant difference was between different age groups. Younger hosts were more likely than older hosts to state a need to enhance competence. Despite their higher formal education, we suggest that this may perhaps be insufficient as they might lack the practical knowledge and experience older respondents may have. One of the young farm hosts with a culinary profession, Ann, complained that she felt uneasy if the guests asked her questions about the farm history, even though she grew up on the farm. She was never interested in farming: “We [she and her in-migrant husband] have to learn everything about the farm in order to be professional hosts.” By contrast, Roger had low formal educations but felt confident with his own skills, and comments: “One is born and raised with it [outdoor activities like hunting and angling], and that is the best knowledge.” Also, level of education does not reflect the fact that many of those with low levels of formal education might have attended many courses relevant for the business.

Approximately half of the hosts (48%) have plans to increase the competence of their business, either by increasing their own competence or by employing or hiring necessary competence. We do not find any significant differences between women and men hosts regarding their plans to increase competence.

There are various ways to increase competence in the company. One of our informants, Martin, who had established the farm tourist business as a private limited company together with the neighbouring farm, told us how they choose different strategies to enhance and supplement their own competencies. In addition to attending different courses on customer service and hosting, they had also very consciously selected board members who could supplement their own competencies:

We have one person with marketing education on our board. And we have a shopkeeper and a woman who is educated within agriculture, but is working with small scale tourism. And finally we have a woman working within financial management.

In the survey, respondents were asked whether they agreed to a range of statements regarding the promotion of farm tourism development. More than one third of the respondents (38%) fully or somewhat agreed to the following statement “The level of competence in the farm tourism industry is too low.” Combined with the fact that 48 percent saw a need to enhance the competence in their own company, this illustrates the increased focus on professionalization of the industry. Interestingly, the member association HANEN, together with Innovation Norway and Norsk Form, has recently (April 2010) developed and launched a network-based tool ([www.gardsutvikleren.no](http://www.gardsutvikleren.no)) in order to create increased consciousness and competence among those who aim to pursue a business idea within farm tourism. Their goal is to help farmers to create attractive enterprises.

### ***How does formal education matter?***

One important question is whether and in what ways the level of education influences the business. Other questions are whether and how gender, age, farming background and attachment to local community influence the business both in the present and when it comes to the plans for its future. In order to answer these questions a linear regression model was constructed. This model shows how the various independent variables influence the business, and the results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5 Possible influences of background variables on the agritourism business. Linear regression models**

Dependent variables:	I	II	III	IV	V	VII
	Share of household - income from agritourism	Turnover	Profitable	Expected profits	Enhance competence	Innovations
Independent variables:	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.
(Constant)	3.126	6.041	0.568	2.429	0.950	1.340
University (yes=1, no=0)	0.043	0.387	0.051	0.151	-0.040	0.049
Gender (women=1, men=0)	<b>- 0.306 **</b>	<b>-0.634*</b>	-0.036	<b>-0.444*</b>	-0.038	-0.047
Age (years)	-0.007	-0.009	-0.005	0.003	<b>-0.009**</b>	<b>-0.014***</b>
In-migrant (yes=1, no=0)	0.093	0.039	0.017	0.431	0.076	-0.016
Grown up on a farm (yes=1, no=0)	0.087	-0.176	<b>-0.125*</b>	0.305	0.011	-0.006
(N=)	251	250	242	162	247	266
DF	5	5	5	5	5	5
R2	0.018	0.022	0.037	0.036	0.028	0.076

\*) significant on 10%-level, \*\*) significant on 5%-level (\*\*\*) significant on 1%-level

Descriptions of how the original dependent variables are recoded:

I: Percentage of household income from agritourism (1:0 %, 2: 1-24 %, 3: 25-49, 4: 50-74, 5: 75-100 %).

II: Turnover agritourism 2008: (1: No turnover... 11: > 5.000.000 NOK).

III: Enterprise profitable 2008 (1: Yes, 0: No).

IV: Expected profits 2008 (1: <50.000 NOK. 7: >800.000 NOK).

V: Plans to enhance the competence of the enterprise (1: Yes, 0: No).

VI: Innovations -Plans to develop new goods and services (1: Yes, 0: No).

Quite surprisingly, we do not find any significant influence of background variables of educational level and in-migration on the agritourism business. The variables that have significant influence are gender, age and farm background.

Gender makes a slight difference. More female respondents reported that income from the farm tourism business constitutes a lower share of the total household income than do male respondents (p-value 0.046). This indicates that when women are the managers, the agritourism business contributes less to the overall household income than when men are the managers. Further, female respondents report less turnover and expect less profit than do male respondents. Those who grew up on a farm are less likely to report that the enterprise is profitable. (Significant only at 10 %-level).

We did not find any significant influence of age regarding share of income from agritourism to the total household income, turnover or expected profits. However, the younger respondents expressed a greater need to enhance their competence. There is also a significant

age difference regarding innovation. The younger hosts had more plans to improve the business by developing new products and services than did older respondents. This was an important strategy in order to expand their market share.

### ***Practice-based knowledge***

We have seen that farm managers' level of education does not have any effect on the outcome of the business. It might be that other forms of knowledge (such as previous experience) are equally or more important, as indicated in the theory section. Through interviews with farm hosts, we were able to gain insights into their practice-based knowledge. For Brit, this was provided by her former work experience:

I was born on a farm and I have agricultural education and work practice from farming. In addition I have dropped by various occupations: as an agricultural substitute, with the agricultural extension service, as a teacher at an agricultural school and now as a self-employed person with a multifunctional business.

As shown previously, 48 percent of respondents express a need to enhance the competence in their business. One way to do this is to attend courses. In our interviews we found that the hosts have attended many and varied types of courses: Marketing, entrepreneurship, time-use analysis, food licensing, internal control, economy, hosting – to mention just a few. In addition to courses concerning marketing and the operation of the business, they have also taken various courses relevant for the products and activities they offer. Examples here are handicrafts, cheese making, baking traditions, and 'horse and health.' But not everything can be learned this way, as Laila explains:

We have taken an incredible amount of courses and trained ourselves in many ways. Something has been positive, and something totally wasted. This is nothing to make a secret of. But, what you can't take a course in is how to enjoy having people so close upon you.

For some farm hosts, the courses they attended functioned to confirm that they already did things right - things that they have figured out by themselves by trial and error. Inger says: "You are a bit self-taught [in hosting visitors]. You are either fond of people and know how to

treat them, or you must perhaps look for another job.” She continues: “We have learned that if you are cheerful and nice and receive the guest in a proper way, then we can succeed without having had all these courses. What you learn from the most, is experience.”

During their everyday work as tourist hosts, high importance is attached to taking good care of the guests. To be a tourist host demands that they are always available for the guests, and are in a good mood. Service mindedness is considered necessary in order to build a good reputation for the place. Martin, who works full time within agritourism while leasing his land to a neighbour, explains that as a tourist host one has to offer oneself all the time, and continues: “I think one must be aware that when you do farm tourism, you are part of the product whether you like it or not.” Mariann, who runs a successful tourist farm together with her husband, has the same experience: “We are the place in a way. I think it is because of us that people come here. I am quite sure of that.” The guests are interested in hearing about how the local people live and what they do, and their farming background gives them legitimacy as experts on the place and the surrounding landscape and nature.

Thus, competence must be seen in relation to what the visitors demand. Roger, who runs his tourist business in a remote, mountainous area explains:

The guests are people who are especially interested in how it is to live here 12 months a year, in these surroundings. (...) How can we handle the seasons and how can we provide for ourselves here (...) We are born and grown up with it, and that is the best knowledge.

In this way, farm tourism hosts have practical knowledge from their own life and work on the farm, which is what the visitors are curious to learn about.

## **Conclusions**

The level of education is relatively high among farm tourist hosts. Women are more likely to be the managers of the business. Further, women managers have the highest level of education and are return- and in-migrants to a greater extent than men. Men are more likely to have vocational education and a local attachment provided by growing up on a farm and having lived most of their lives in the local community. This implies that more men have local knowledge and practical experiences from farm work and outdoor activities relevant for the

farm tourism businesses. They have learnt from their daily experiences since childhood – and hold valuable tacit knowledge.

Nearly half of the sample is of the opinion that both the industry itself and their enterprises are in need of improved competence. Approximately half of the enterprises have plans to improve competence; most of them plan to achieve this by attending courses related to the business activity. Another way to increase competence within the enterprise is to hire or employ people with the required competencies. But only a few (9%) plan to choose this strategy.

In this paper we have primarily been interested in knowledge operationalized as level of education and its influence on business income, profitability, competence and innovation.. Our analysis of the survey data shows, however, that level of education does not have any significant impact on income, turnover, profitability and expected profit. In other words, even women managers with higher levels of (formal) education compared with men do not have higher turnover or profits from the agritourism enterprise they are running.

Agritourism businesses are small businesses developed from existing farms and the material resources they have available. They therefore need to be able to transform farm resources into a tourist product. This competence is not necessarily a result of formal education , but is also drawn from previous work experiences. Competence is also achieved through courses, networks, advisory services and daily experience. Most tourist businesses are small scale and have been built up over many years through small steps.

Our interviews show that the hosts have varied backgrounds, both in terms of education and work experience. They refer to their vocational backgrounds as important and relevant. It is interesting that they refer to their practically obtained competence during adolescence and employment experiences, and rarely to their educational backgrounds. None of the interviewees had education within the hospitality and tourist sector, but some had converted their hobbies and interests into tourism products. Activities offered such as hunting, fishing and adventures in the wilderness are products grounded in the traditional competences of rural men. Likewise, the homey atmosphere, the aesthetics of the place and the quality of the food and services may be said to be rooted in the traditional competences of women.



What they themselves stress as an important competence in the interviews is tied to what cannot be learned through formal education, what might be described as social competence. They need to enjoy handling visitors and work front stage.

Our study does not show a simple link between level of education and profitability of the business. A weakness of our survey data is that we do not know *what kind of* education the hosts have and therefore cannot comment on the relevance of different types of education for operating a farm tourism business. Our interviews support the idea that there are many types of knowledge and competence with various sources, functions and statuses. Practical knowledge might be as important as formal education, which is supported by the finding that younger tourist hosts express a greater need to enhance their competence than do older hosts who might have more practical experience.

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