

# **Agritourism as a Means for Rural Development in Ghana**

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August 2020

## **Problem**

As the COVID-19 pandemic ravages the livelihood and security of people across the globe, farmers in Ghana—particularly women farmers and petty traders selling food—are being hit especially hard. While it may seem premature to discuss the benefits of tourism while a pandemic is affecting the local, regional, national, and global food industries, and international travel is restricted, agricultural producers, vendors, and rural populations in Ghana will benefit greatly by preparing for the possibilities offered by agritourism on the other side of the pandemic.

Ten years prior to Ghana's *Year of Return, 2019*, the initiative to promote tourism surrounding the 400<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the arrival of enslaved Africans in the Americas, President Barack Obama visited Ghana as a way to strengthen the relationship between the two nations. In Obama's remarks to the Ghanaian parliament, he spoke about four themes, one of which was opportunity. Praising the progress of the Ghanaian state and her leaders, Obama tied food stability to economic success and a growing perception of stability which makes Ghana attractive to foreign investment (Slack, 2012).

At the time of Obama's visit, the World Economic Forum ranked Ghana 110 out of 139 of the world's favorite tourism destinations (Blanke & Chiesa, 2009). By 2010, the nation had moved up to 108 on this list. In 2011, Forbes Magazine listed Ghana as the eleventh friendliest country in the world (GhanaWeb, 2013). Given the upward trend in these international rankings, it would appear that Ghana's tourism efforts in the short wake of Obama's visit are producing positive results.

In the decade following Obama's visit, Ghana continued to be promoted as an international touristic destination, with only a slight dip in 2018, yet still contributed 4.8% of Ghana's GDP in the same year (Preko, 2020). Speaking at the World Trade Organization's Fourth Global Review of Aid for Trade in Geneva, United Nations World Tourism Organization's Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai, made a call for the increased recognition and support for tourism. "Recent research shows a striking disparity between tourism's high potential and current contribution to development and the low priority it has been given so far in terms of aid, namely regarding Aid for Trade and Official Development Assistance." Rifai went on to say, "Tourism is a key trade category in developing countries, accounting for 56% of the overall service exports of Least Developed Countries and thus has a great potential for high impact in Aid for Trade" (Risi, 2018).

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*This research was supported by the Center for Global Studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign through the U.S. Department of Education's Title VI NRC program. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Nathan C. Crook, The Ohio State University – Ohio State ATI, 1328 Dover Road, Wooster, Ohio 44691. Email: [crook.55@osu.edu](mailto:crook.55@osu.edu)*

At the close of Ghana's *Year of Return, 2019*, in January 2020, The Reality Check Team of the BBC reported that from January to September 2019, Ghana experienced "an additional 237,000 visitors - a rise of 45% compared with the same period the previous year - with significant increases in visitors from the US and UK." The report goes on to state that the purposes of international visitors was not collected as the state did not request tourists to state the reason for their visit.

In addition to international travel to Ghana for tourism, domestic interest in the regional and traditional cultures in Ghana is on the rise. During the decade between Obama's visit and Ghana's *Year of Return, 2019*, domestic interest in rediscovering Ghana's traditional cultures also increased. To illustrate this trend, Joeva Rock, a research fellow in the Department of Nutrition and Food Studies at New York University, writes that food trends in Ghana have increasingly emphasized traditional foods prepared using locally produced and procured ingredients. He claims that recently, "people desire dishes once considered too "local" and common – in a pejorative sense – but which have enjoyed a resurgence in popularity" (Rock, 2018).

With the resurgence in popularity of traditional foods comes a host of factors Ghanaian consumers consider when choosing to patronize a traditional eatery. Traditional dishes, quality of ingredients, and taste of food are not the only factors taken into consideration. Seeking to better understand the factors that determine diners' decision-making in choosing to eat at traditional catering establishments in Ho—the capital city of Ghana's Volta Region—Mensah, Agboka, and Azilla-Gbettor, of the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Ho Polytechnic, found that hygiene and sanitation factors are the most important. "Patrons of traditional catering establishments consider hygiene and sanitation related factors imperative when deciding on where to eat. Ensuring high standard sanitation and hygienic practices at food service establishments is critical to preventing direct and cross-contamination of food to avoid foodborne diseases. Therefore, it is important to maintain food safety procedures to enhance cleanliness at the work environment by promoting personal hygiene, safe handling of food in terms of preparation and service, clean utensils, and appliance storage" (Mensah, Agboka, and Azilla-Gbettor, 2017). Knowing that hygiene and sanitation are key considerations when patronizing a traditional food establishment, education and training of producers in these areas will go a long way toward boosting national tourism and international agritourism in Ghana.

Despite growing international tourism and increased domestic interest in traditional Ghanaian foods, agritourism programs remain underdeveloped in Ghana. If Ghana can prepare now for the return of tourists post COVID-19, farmers and agricultural producers will be better suited to capitalize on this growing trend. What's more, for Ghanaian agricultural suppliers, producers, and vendors up and down the value chain, preparing for and envisioning a prosperous economic future through agritourism will go a long way toward sustaining a sense of hope that life will go on.

## **Aim**

This white paper envisions how agriculturists in Ghana might participate in the rapidly growing international field of agritourism. It focuses more narrowly on the existing opportunities and

potential benefits to rural development to the development of agritourism programs in the rural areas surrounding Ho—the capital city of the Ho Municipal District—and Ghana’s Volta Region. Specifically, this white paper examines the potential for an agritourism trail centered on eight small town surrounding the city of Ho. Each of these communities produce foods considered representative foods of the area which are also locally and regionally recognizable foods that generate a premium at market.

Over the past five years, I have worked with a dedicated group of scholars and community developers focusing their efforts on Ho, Volta Region, Ghana. Through the NGO Ghana Beyond Subsistence, I have worked with Ghanaian educators, leaders, extension officers, farmers, and other cultural producers to assess the efficacy of international rural development efforts in the region. From these experiences, I have learned that the best foreign investment in Ghana is supporting locally identified needs as opposed to imposing foreign structures on Ghanaians. I have learned to trust local expertise and to champion their causes. I have also observed that my background as a cultural anthropologist affords me the opportunity to bring people together to meet many needs for the common good. This agritourism trail will draw from some of the strengths that we have with Ghana Beyond Subsistence in that it will draw from our work with farmers in eight communities in greater Ho, Ghana. The anthropologic portions of this project are based on original ethnographic research conducted with the farmers in these various communities.

## **Background**

Agritourism is a commercial activity that combines three variables: food, agriculture, and tourism (Viglia & Abrate, 2017). It is a niche form of tourism that brings consumers to farms, ranches, orchards, and other agricultural facilities (Popescu, 2017). The National Agricultural Law Center defines agritourism as “a form of commercial enterprise that links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism in order to attract visitors onto a farm, ranch, or other agricultural business for the purposes of entertaining and/or educating the visitors and generating income for the farm, ranch, or business owner” (NALC, 2020). This type of rural development through tourism is a potential catalyst for economic and cultural development by attracting visitors to small communities where traditional foodstuffs and foods are produced.

Historically, common agritourism activities in developed nations have been limited to rural bed & breakfasts, dude ranches, farm stands, farmer markets, and U-Pick operations, where tourists experience a sanitized, commercialized version of rural life. However, agritourism is much more varied. More recent trends in agritourism are driven by the Farm-to-Fork movement and include educational opportunities at demonstration farms, agricultural museums, living history farms, distillery and winery tours and tastings, and workshops designed to teach traditional cookery practices. This interest in food and agricultural sustainability has the potential to bring tourists to farms where they can experience the diverse aspects of planting, growing, harvesting, preserving, preparing, and consuming food. With the range of agritourism opportunities available in more developed nations, it makes sense to adapt existing agritourism models for use in developing nations where international tourists are already traveling.

When Alexander Preko, Senior Lecturer of Marketing at the University of Professional Studies in Accra, interviewed tourists about what would entice them to return, he found five areas that

“positively influenced international tourist satisfaction”: community interaction, tour guide performance, transport, food, and souvenir shopping (Preko, 2020). This type of tourism has the potential to generate financial, educational, and social benefits for tourists, producers, and communities (Lupi et al, 2017). Using the tourist-producer-community model, some of the benefits to each are as follows. An agritourism trail offers travelers new insights into traditional food production and offers tourists an insider perspective into traditional agricultural operations such as cultivation, care for, harvesting of crops using common methods, and food preservation and preparation using traditional methods.

### **Benefits for Tourists**

A robust agritourism trail clusters a variety of experiences into a single itinerary which builds value for tourists, which—in turn—better delivers a range of traditional cultural experiences mediated for tourists.

It will also provide for educational opportunities geared toward appreciating the rural and introducing tourists to the cultural aspects of how locally produced foodstuffs are used in the traditional rural context. Agritourism affords tourists the opportunity to engage with food production from planting seeds, caring for crops, harvesting, preserving, and preparing a traditional meal alongside community members. This approach places the emphasis of the touristic experience on agriculture as a form of cultural production.

Agricultural tourism trails offer varied activities intended to bring consumers to agricultural producers as a way of creating relationships between the producer and consumer. For tourists, experiencing and experimenting with local traditional foods through active, applied experiences provide an education of the culture, while allowing them an opportunity to build relationships through community interaction. Agritourism offers an engaging, immersive experience where tourists may learn about communities, their history, traditions, and contemporary practices while being invited to participate.

### **Benefits for Producers**

Many of the farmers in this proposed agritourism trail produce more food than they need for their own subsistence. Surplus traditional foodstuffs and value-added products can be sold at market to help farm families procure goods that they don't produce themselves, but with an agritourism trail bringing tourists to their farms, farmers can reap a greater share of the benefits generated by adding value to produce. Increased visitation through agritourism also encourages diversification in farming activities, such as staple crops, leafy greens, fruit, vegetables, small ruminants (sheep and goats), poultry raising, and petty trading. And this variation of seasonal activities will offer incentives for domestic tourists to return at different times of the year.

Additional benefits to farmers and their families may include increased ability to pay school fees, improved and diversified diet, increased sense of accomplishment through small business entrepreneurship, and increased financial ability to improve their homes, farms, and communities. Increased visitation to traditional communities will also encourage agricultural producers to engage in sustainable farm practices, to improve crop and herd health, and to better maintain their farms and equipment. Where education in these practices is lacking, farmer

training seminars; herd immunization and treatments for sheep, goats, and chickens; and training in hygiene and sanitation can be made available through cooperative extension networks.

### **Benefits for Communities**

Tourism is often discussed as having benefits for tourists who have the economic ability to travel; however, on the other side of the tourism equation is rural community development. For example, in traditional communities, farmers will build social and cultural capital by working together to identify distinctive and representative aspects of their food system. They will collaborate with other communities to develop itineraries, plan programming, and promote appropriate hygienic and sanitary practices. This way, their traditional communities will become recognized as places where tourists can participate in traditional cultural activities.

An alarming trend in rural communities across the globe is the loss of opportunity that drives young people to seek jobs elsewhere. Perhaps one of the greatest benefits to rural Ghanaian communities is the potential to build an economic structure that provides for the needs of their educated youth and helps retain them. This way, traditional communities can create a way of preserving their rural lifestyle while retaining their educated youth who otherwise may have to leave for more prosperous places.

### **Case Studies**

The way people put together a meal can reveal a lot about the group. The agricultural practices, ingredients, cooking methods and energy they focus into feeding themselves extends beyond nourishment alone. Culinary skills reflect different beliefs, traditions, and habits. The foods presented at the Ghanaian table are as colorful and vibrant as the clothing and people, and agriculturalists in Ghana have developed a cuisine that transcends tribal boundaries to include recipes that can be considered national dishes. While the ingredients lending structure to the Ghanaian kitchen are representative of the cuisine, most ingredients are commonly available elsewhere and are “Ghanaian” only in their interactions with one another.

Ghanaian cuisine is organized around the starch—such as cassava, yam, corn, or rice—which is served with a sauce, soup, or stew, and a variety of meats, seafoods, snails, or fish. While the following foods are not an exhaustive listing of the Ghanaian kitchen, they are intended to provide a sampling of dishes agritourists may be introduced to while traveling an agritourism trail in Ghana’s Volta Region. In this way, agritourism in Ghana is a strategy for preserving intangible cultural heritage.

### **Starches**

Starches are an important staple in the Ghanaian diet, and it is not uncommon to see multiple starches presented on the same plate. Some of the most important starches consumed in Ghana’s Volta Region are cassava, cocoyam, corn, and rice. These staples are often prepared as fufu, banku, akple, and kenke. Fufu is made by pounding cassava and green (unripened) plantain or cocoyam together and adding water until its well mixed to a thick paste. Fufu is served with light soup, palm nut soup, or groundnut soup. Banku is fermented corn dough and fermented cassava dough mixed together, boiled until thickened into a smooth, whitish paste, molded into balls and served with okro soup, stew, red or green pepper sauce, and fish. Akple is a traditional starch consumed primarily in the Volta Region. It is dried maize flour mixed with boiling salted water

until it forms a paste thick enough to be rolled into a ball. Similar to banku, akple is typically served with stew or soup. Most commonly, akple is served with pepper sauce and small herrings or other fish. Kenke is prepared from fermented ground white corn (maize) dough, which is wrapped in a corn husk or banana leaves and steamed. Kenke is often served with pepper sauce, soup, stews, and fish. It can also be diluted in water and served as a beverage. Less commonly consumed starches are konkonte and omo tuo. Konkonte ‘face the wall’ is prepared with dry cassava flour and pairs with palm nut soup, groundnut soup, okro stew, meat, and fish. Omo tuo is a rice ball shaped out of soft steamed rice and served with soup, stew or pepper sauce. Omo Tuo is more commonly associated with the Muslim community and consumed in the Ho Zongo.

Rice is also an important starch across Ghana; however, much of the rice consumed domestically is not grown in Ghana, but imported. The best known rice dishes are jollof rice, waakye, and fried rice. Jollof rice is a popular dish in Ghana and across West Africa that is often presented at celebratory meals such as weddings, funerals, and holidays. Jollof is prepared with tomato sauce and spices, and is often presented alongside spaghetti, shito, meat or fish. Waakye is seasoned rice dish prepared with red or black-eyed beans, and colored red by adding dried waakey grass to the water in which the rice will be steamed. This dish is frequently served with shito, fried plantains, gari, salads, spaghetti, avocado, meat, or fish. Fried rice in Ghana is similar to Chinese fried rice in that it is prepared with vegetables, egg, and sometimes meat and fried in a wok.

Gari is a cassava product that is shredded, dried, and fried, and has a texture similar to couscous. Considered a Ghanaian delicacy, gari is a versatile starch and can be prepared as savory and sweet dishes. Gari foto is frequently served as a side and is flavored with canned or smoked fish. Gari pinor is gari soaked in hot salted water, covered, and left to stand until firm; it can be eaten the same way as fufu, banku, and akple. Gari soakings, a thin mush made with gari, sugar, groundnuts, and evaporated milk, is a favorite among school children.

### **Soups, Stews, and Sauces**

Ghana is a tropical nation where daytime temperatures average ninety degrees and nighttime temperatures average 70 degrees year-round. To cope with the constant heat, Ghanaians believe that a hearty hot meal better prepares the body to thrive in hot temperatures. Where meals are organized around the starch, starches are typically consumed with a protein-rich soup or stew and meat such as chicken, goat, beef, or fish and seafood. Some of the most popular soups in the Volta Region are red red, groundnut, palmtree, okro, garden egg, and tuo zaafi.

Red Red is a thick stew of cowpeas, cooked with tomatoes, ginger, and garlic. This dish gets its name from the inclusion of traditionally pressed red palm oil. It is often served with fried plantains or gari. Groundnut soup is a spicy chicken and tomato soup with ginger, onion, garlic, and scotch bonnet peppers. It is thickened with ground peanut paste or creamy peanut butter and is a popular accompaniment to fufu, banku, and rice balls. Palm nut soup is a local delicacy made with palm nuts, chopped onion, dried shrimp or crayfish, and chili pepper or scotch bonnet peppers. It is served with other dishes such as fufu, banku, and rice. Light soup is a thin, yet spicy soup made with chili pepper, tomatoes, onion, and fish or meat. Okro stew is similar in flavor profile and texture to light soup but has the inclusion of okra. Garden Egg Stew is also similar in flavor and texture to light soup with the addition of small white eggplants referred to as garden eggs. Tuo zaafi with ayoyo or dawadawa is a stew prepared using nutrient-rich leafy

greens that is eaten by Muslim immigrants from Northern Ghana, living in the Ho Zongo. It typically accompanies ayoyo or dawadawa, which is similar to banku but softer in texture and less sticky. Dawadawa is prepared by cooking corn dough and adding a little cassava.

Kontomire (palava sauce) is boiled tender cocoyam leaves, salted fish, palm oil, and boiled eggs, served with steamed or boiled yam, plantains, avocado, meat, or fish. It is often served with steamed yam. Shito (black sauce) is a traditional condiment prepared with black pepper, dried fish and dried shrimp. Red sauce is a tomato-based sauce with ginger, onion, and scotch bonnet peppers. This thick, all-purpose condiment is often presented alongside an array of starches.

Soups and stews are often served with side dishes such as kelewele, which is fried soft plantains marinated in pepper, ginger, and garlic; and mpotopotom, which is boiled yam mashed with red oil and flavored with pepper or fish.

This agritourism trail will introduce tourists to traditional farming practices in the following eight towns and will feature the products the farmers self-identify as their most recognizable:

<b>Town</b>	<b>Products offered</b>
Adaklu Waya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Groundnuts, also known as peanuts, are a staple in the Ghanaian diet. Groundnuts are used for savory soups and stews, condiments, and snacks. Ground nuts are the primary cash crops cultivated in this town.</li></ul>
Akoefe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Farmers in this small town are primarily subsistence farmers who grow their own food and engage in petty trading of a variety of goods. What agriculturalists in this small town are best known for their soups, stews, and fufu.</li><li>• Palm wine is another representative food. Palm wine tappers first cut down an aged palm tree that is no longer producing palm nuts and tap the tree by gouging a series of holes in the trunk and then collecting the sap, or palm wine, as it drips out. Palm wine can be consumed fresh or hard.</li></ul>
Akrofu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gari produced in Akrofu is considered to be some of the best available in the Volta Region. Consumer's will travel to Akrofu specifically to purchase local gari. Akrofu gari is also a desirable product when available in the Ho market.</li></ul>
Hodzo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Honey is a valuable cash crop in this town. Bee farmers in Hodzo use traditional beehives made from a hollowed-out log with the ends sealed to protect the hive. Bees gather pollen from orange trees and wild blossoms which give this honey a rich dark color and a bold flavor. Hodzo honey is recognized in the Volta Region for its high quality and delicious flavor.</li></ul>

- Oranges, coconuts, and pineapples are also important crops in this town and are taken as part of the local diet. Surplus fruits are transported to Ho for sale in the market.
- Kpenoe
- Akpeteshi. Palm wine tappers and distillers in this traditional area are well known for producing high quality Akpeteshi, a local gin distilled from locally produced palm wine. Where other communities produce palm wine for immediate consumption, Kpenoe reserves the majority of their palm wine for distilling into Akpeteshi.
- Takla
- Rice is an important staple grown in Takla. Given the geography of the town, farmers grow both lowland and upland varieties intended for local consumption.
  - Other important staples grown in Takla are corn, casava, and cowpeas
- Wegbe
- Traditional palm oil pressing is a sustainable agricultural process in Ghana. The climate is well suited for growing palm trees which produce palm nuts, or kernels, for approximately 25 years. During this time, renewable palm fronds are harvested for myriad uses. Toward the end of palm productivity, the trees are harvested and tapped for palm wine.
  - Other important crops are oranges, pineapples, coconuts, yams, casava
- Ziavi
- Coffee. Ziavi is situated on the northern slope of the Togo Atakora mountain range which provides the climate for growing coffee beans. Prior to 2018, Ziavi produced coffee mainly for local consumption. Since 2018 the town has produced and marketed their coffee for regional consumption.

### **A Way Forward**

As stated above, this white paper stresses that the way forward, when there are limited tourism options, is to plan for and promote tourism post COVID-19. This process begins with (1) researching and documenting agricultural and cultural food traditions by identifying iconic and representative foodstuffs, foods, meals, and cuisines. (2) The second step is to enhance the agricultural producers' knowledge base in sustainable farming practices, equipment care, food service worker hygiene, and commercial food safety protocols. (3) The third step is to build interest among potential travelers by sharing information online via a website and social media.

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