

# Advancing Local Agritourism Programs in Achieving New Normal Goals: A Sustainable Marketing Strategy Approach from the University of Baguio- Sihtm

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines sustainable marketing strategies to enhance agritourism development in Barangay Alapang, La Trinidad, Benguet. Grounded in three UN Sustainable Development Goals—Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17)—it identifies effective marketing practices, analyzes agritourism's economic and community roles during the pandemic, highlights challenges, and proposes recommendations to support local stakeholders, including the School of International Hospitality and Tourism Management (SIHTM) at the University of Baguio.

Using mixed methods, the study surveyed 118 local farmers and conducted interviews and focus group discussions with government officials, along with policy analysis. It aimed to explore how sustainable marketing strategies can be applied to strengthen local agritourism initiatives, particularly within the SIHTM program at the University of Baguio.

Agritourism promotion primarily depends on digital marketing via platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, with 79% of farmers aware of these strategies, reflecting pandemic-era global tourism trends favoring local markets and online engagement. Challenges include prioritizing short-term financial gain over long-term sustainability (noted by 78% of respondents) and limited use of creative tools such as virtual tours.

Agritourism contributes to livelihoods by generating income, employment, and infrastructure development, yet cultural preservation remains underrepresented. The community has adapted through online sales but continues to face constraints such as limited budgets, inadequate infrastructure, regulatory barriers, and a lack of collaboration.

Recommendations include adopting integrated marketing approaches, providing sustainable tourism training, strengthening stakeholder partnerships, and preserving cultural heritage preservation.

**Keywords:** Sustainable marketing, agritourism, new normal, digital marketing, farmers, SDGs

## INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector, once among the fastest-growing industries worldwide, served as a reminder of how fragile progress can be confronted with global emergencies. Tourism has long been a major economic driver. In 2020, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) indicated that the tourism sector was among the first and most severely affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. The World Travel & Tourism Council (2020) also highlighted that the economic damage to tourism caused by the pandemic was five times greater than the effects of the 2008 global financial crisis.

Due to public health concerns, almost one out of ten considered taking vacations or travel-related products (Bunghez, 2020). International tourist arrivals and tourism revenue in the Philippines fell by roughly 80% in 2020 and 90% in 2021 (Caynila et al., 2022).

To help the devastated industry, Southeast Asian countries boosted domestic tourism through support programs, travel incentives, and marketing campaigns. The UNWTO reported that 37.28 million domestic tourist visits were made in the Philippines in 2021 (Statista Research Department, 2022). The local government of Benguet recognized the vital role of the tourism sector in ensuring a steady and safe recovery for the province after the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling the economy to pursue its growth targets (Hent, 2022).

In support of recovery in the new normal, marketing strategies began focusing on travellers' perceptions of safety and security, key factors in destination choice (Rahman et al., 2021; Zou & Yu, 2022). In the Philippines, the Department of Tourism (2021) identified digital technology as a bridge for adapting to post-pandemic conditions.

The province of Benguet exemplifies this adaptation, where localized agritourism has been strategically developed to support post-pandemic tourism recovery. Crest (2024) documented how Tuba's Sanagi Agritourism Farm evolved from a small-scale mushroom enterprise into a dynamic destination offering hands-on experiences in organic farming, product innovation, and community-based learning. Also, the municipality of Atok capitalized on its floral landscapes by promoting attractions such as Northern Blossoms and Sakura Park (Agoot, 2025)

Agritourism in Alapang features the First Potted Flower Festival, held in April 2020 and supported by Barangay Ordinance No. 32, s. 2019. This ordinance established the annual Alapang Potted Flower Festival every April to promote initiatives that boost tourism and protect the barangay's attractions. Known as the "Potted Flower capital of the Philippines," this festival fosters community pride and strengthens the tourism culture among residents.

The "new normal" in the tourism industry reflects a diverse and disrupted environment. Despite the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity brought about by the pandemic, the agricultural producers of Barangay Alapang have found their opportunities for business growth. By leveraging agrarian resources, the farmers attract potential visitors to the various farms and ranches in Alapang.

The primary goal of these business initiatives is not only to generate income for locals but also to educate visitors and contribute to their revitalization. Barangay Alapang envisions itself as a premier flower-producing barangay and eco-tourism destination in La Trinidad by 2020. It also aims to accelerate agricultural development, livestock production, and other gainful employment opportunities. One of its key goals is to expand the potential and benefits that agritourism can bring to the local economy.

The 7 Ps marketing framework was first created by E. Jerome McCarthy and presented in his 1960 publication, *Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach*. Initially launched as the 4 Ps (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion), the model was designed primarily for product-based marketing in an era when service-oriented considerations were less prominent. To address the growing importance of services and customer experience, Booms and Bitner (1981) later expanded the framework by adding three more elements: people, process, and physical evidence. This resulted in the comprehensive 7 Ps model, widely used today in both service- and experience-based industries such as tourism and hospitality. As shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** The 7Ps Marketing Mix Model

The 7 Ps Marketing Mix is a useful framework for designing marketing plans, encompassing seven key elements: Product (goods/services offered), Price (amount customers pay), Place (distribution and delivery), Promotion (communication methods to target market), People (all persons involved in service), Process (service delivery flow), and Physical Evidence (tangible factors influencing customer perception). Organizations are encouraged to continuously evaluate these elements to remain competitive and responsive to changing consumer needs.

In this study, the 7 Ps framework serves as the foundation for assessing and enhancing sustainable marketing strategies for local agritourism programs in the “new normal.” Each element is analyzed to determine its role in promoting sustainable, community-centered agritourism, culminating in recommendations for integrated and practical marketing strategies amid local tourism development.

This study focuses on reinforcing the key variables outlined in the operational framework. The initial inputs consist of the various activities and attractions that sustain agritourism in Barangay Alapang. The methodology employs documentary analysis, qualitative descriptive approaches, survey questionnaires, statistical treatment, and interpretation of the data. The expected output is a sustainable marketing strategy developed by the School of International Hospitality and Tourism Department of the University of Baguio. As shown in **Figure 2. Paradigm of the study**

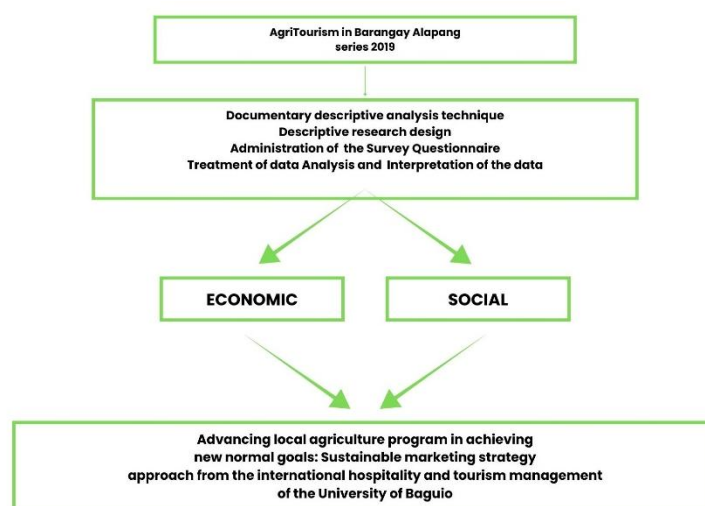


FIGURE 2 Paradigm of the Study

## OBJECTIVES

The study primarily focused on investigating how sustainable marketing strategies can strengthen agritourism development in Barangay Alapang. It centered on achieving one key United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 8): Decent Work and Economic Growth. This goal is particularly relevant, as the research aims to assess and propose new marketing strategies or evaluate the effectiveness of existing ones within the context of agritourism.

This study also seeks to explore sustainable marketing approaches with the School of International Hospitality and Tourism Management of the University of Baguio, with particular emphasis on their application in agritourism initiatives in Alapang, Benguet.

## METHODS

This research employed a parallel exploratory sequential design, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to thoroughly investigate sustainable marketing strategies in Barangay Alapang’s agritourism sector.

The quantitative component involved a descriptive survey administered to local farmers to gather information on perceived benefits, agritourism-related challenges, and other relevant variables. The study population consisted of 118 local farmers in Barangay Alapang, La Trinidad, Benguet, based on the Community Profile of Barangay Alapang

(2009). These individuals were identified as the primary respondents due to their direct participation in agricultural and agritourism activities in the area.

Given the manageable population size, the study adopted a total population sampling approach, wherein all 118 farmers were invited to participate. In addition, purposive sampling was applied to select an additional two key informants from the Municipal Tourism Office (MTO) and the Local Government Unit (LGU) because of their expertise and active roles in local tourism projects. In total, the study included 120 respondents. To address the research objectives, the researcher used a structured survey questionnaire composed of four sections: (1) sustainable marketing strategies, (2) contributions of agritourism, (3) challenges in promoting agritourism, and (4) demographic information.

The survey collected quantitative data on the factors influencing agritourism in Barangay Alapang. Meanwhile, key informant interviews were also conducted with MTO and Unit LGU representatives to obtain qualitative insights on existing marketing strategies, community readiness, and institutional support in agritourism development.

Before data collection, the researcher sought formal approval and coordination with the Barangay Council of Alapang, the MTO, and LGUs. After administering the surveys, documentary analysis was conducted by reviewing secondary sources such as records of tourist arrivals, agricultural tourism profiles from the Alapang Tourism Office, population data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), and documents related to the Farm Tourism Development Act of 2016, which provides the legal framework for promoting farm tourism in the Philippines.

Data collected from the surveys, interviews, and documentary analysis were organized and analyzed using descriptive statistical tools, particularly frequency and percentage. These methods were used to interpret the response distributions and identify prevailing patterns among local farmers. The analysis provided insights into existing sustainable marketing strategies, the contributions of agritourism to the local economy and community, and the challenges faced in hindering its promotion.

The researcher took deliberate steps to ensure compliance with fundamental ethical principles, prioritizing the protection, dignity, and rights of all participants. Ethical standards were carefully upheld throughout the entire research process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Marketing Strategies Employed by Barangay Alapang to Promote Agritourism

Effective marketing strategies are essential to the success of agritourism initiatives. In Barangay Alapang, evaluating the sustainable marketing strategies used to promote agritourism provides insight into how local efforts align with both community development goals and the principles of sustainability.

**Table 1**

*Marketing Strategies Used to Promote Agritourism in Barangay Alapang*

Marketing Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Social Media Promotion	120	100%
Collaborations with Local Businesses	103	85.83%
Website and Online Presence	81	67.5%
Local Events and Festivals	72	60%
Tour Packages and Bundles	29	24.16%

Table 1 presents the marketing strategies employed in promoting agritourism in Barangay Alapang. The data reveal that social media promotion is the most widely used strategy, with 120 respondents (100%) identifying it as a key promotional tool. The result is consistent with Lama's (2024) observation that social media has become the most dominant and cost-effective channel in the tourism industry, fostering engagement through visuals, storytelling, and interactive content.

The second most prevalent strategy involves collaboration with local businesses, reported by 103 respondents (85.83%). This highlights the strong interdependence between agritourism and the local economic ecosystem, where farms, food producers, souvenir shops, and transport providers work together to enhance visitor experience. Such partnerships foster community-based development, strengthen the local value chain, and reflect the sustainable principle of inclusive growth—an important component of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Meanwhile, website and online presence ranked third (67.5%), indicating that a growing number of participants recognize the importance of maintaining visibility beyond social media. However, most of these online efforts remain informal and uncoordinated, often limited to individual Facebook pages or posts rather than a unified tourism website. This gap suggests the need for an official digital platform or portal managed collaboratively by the barangay and local tourism office to centralize information and promote consistency in branding.

Local events and festivals, cited by 60% of respondents, also contribute significantly to agritourism promotion. Activities such as harvest festivals, cultural showcases, and farm visits serve dual purposes: they attract tourists while preserving the community's agricultural identity and traditions. According to Sznajder et al. (2021), events rooted in local culture enhance the authenticity and appeal of agritourism destinations, creating emotional connections between visitors and host communities.

Lastly, tour packages and bundles received the lowest percentage (24.16%), suggesting an area with great potential for development. The limited use of bundled tour products may be due to the small-scale nature of most farm operations or the absence of intermediaries coordinating different tourism elements. Developing integrated tour packages that combine farm experiences, local cuisine, and cultural immersion could enhance the attractiveness and convenience of visiting Alapang. This finding aligns with Liang et al. (2020), who emphasized that packaged experiences increase market competitiveness and visitor satisfaction by offering comprehensive, value-added services.

In summary, the marketing strategies used in Barangay Alapang demonstrate an encouraging shift toward digital and collaborative approaches. However, the findings also highlight the need for more structured, community-wide marketing systems that move beyond individual initiatives. Establishing a coordinated marketing plan—anchored in the 7 Ps framework—would allow Alapang to strengthen its identity as a sustainable agritourism destination, effectively balancing economic growth, environmental stewardship, and community participation.

**Table 2** Sustainability of the Marketing Strategies Currently Used in Agritourism

<b>Sustainability of the Marketing Strategies</b>	<b>Frequenc Percenta</b>	
	<b>y</b>	<b>ge</b>
Short-term gains over long-term environmental, social, and economic gains	92	76.67%
Some sustainability efforts fall short in addressing significant issues.	17	14.17%
Moderate sustainability efforts but with room for improvement	6	5%
Long-term benefits and minimizing negative impacts	3	2.5%
Showcasing innovation and actively contributing to environmental, social, and economic well-being	2	1.66%

**Table 2** shows that a majority of respondents in Barangay Alapang (76.67%) prioritized short-term gains over long-term environmental, social, and economic sustainability in their current marketing strategies for agritourism. This indicated that immediate financial benefits tend to take precedence over more holistic and enduring goals, suggesting a limited focus on sustainable development practices within the community's marketing approach.

Conversely, only a small percentage of respondents (1.66%) recognized the importance of showcasing innovation and actively contributing to long-term well-being, pointing to a clear gap in integrating forward-looking sustainability and social responsibility measures into marketing efforts. These findings underscore the need for capacity building and awareness programs that promote sustainable tourism principles among local agritourism stakeholders.



### Contributions of Agritourism to the Economic and Social Status of Barangay Alapang

Agritourism serves as a key driver in expanding and diversifying the local economy while fostering stronger community interaction in rural areas such as Barangay Alapang. As the community adapts to the realities of the new normal, it becomes essential to analyze how agritourism initiatives have influenced local livelihoods and social dynamics.

**Table 3** *Economic Impacts of Agritourism in Barangay Alapang*

Economic Impacts	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Job Creation	28	23.33%	3
Support for Local Business	65	54.16%	1
Community Engagement	29	24.16%	2
Preservation of Cultural Heritage	8	6.67%	4
Culinary Experiences	0	0%	5

**Table 3** shows that support for local businesses is viewed as the primary economic benefit of agritourism in Barangay Alapang, with 54.16% of respondents recognizing its importance. Agritourism strengthens the local economy by generating income for farmers and small businesses directly involved in agriculture and related tourism activities.

In contrast, culinary experiences received no recognition (0%), indicating minimal or no current focus on food-related tourism in the area. This aligns with existing research showing that while farm tourism in the Philippines offers a variety of attractions, culinary aspects like farm-to-table dining are not yet widely developed or promoted in some areas (Yamagishi et al., 2021).

**Table 4** *Specific Economic Benefits of Agritourism in the Barangay*

Economic Benefits	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Diversification of Income	50	41.66%	2
Job Creation	33	27.5%	4
Support for Local Businesses	39	32.5%	3
Additional Income for Farmers and Land owners	52	43.33%	1
Pressure on Natural Resources	0	0%	5

**Table 4** showed that additional income for farmers and landowners is regarded as the most important economic benefit of agritourism, cited by 43.33% of respondents. This finding emphasizes the role of agritourism in enhancing financial stability among farming households by providing supplementary income sources.

Interestingly, none of the respondents identified pressure on natural resources as a significant concern. This suggests that the community may not yet perceive environmental degradation as a possible consequence of tourism growth. While this may reflect the small scale of current agritourism activities, it also highlights the importance of environmental education to ensure that expansion remains ecologically balanced.

**Table 5** *Agritourism Benefits Contribute to the Social Fabric of Barangay Alapang*

Agritourism benefits	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Income generation	49	40.83%	2
Job Opportunities	40	33.33%	3
Cultural preservation	4	3.33%	5
Infrastructure development	59	49.16%	1
Environmental protection	12	10%	4

**Table 5** showed that infrastructure development is seen as the most important social benefit of agritourism in Barangay Alapang, with half of the respondents (49.16%) recognizing its value. This highlighted that the community

primarily associates agritourism with improving physical facilities, such as roads, transportation, and basic services, which not only make the area more accessible to visitors but also enhance the daily lives of residents.

On the other hand, cultural preservation is viewed as a much less significant benefit, acknowledged by only 3.39% of respondents, reflecting a weaker connection between agritourism and cultural heritage protection. This supports observations in broader literature that balancing economic growth with cultural conservation remains a persistent challenge in rural tourism (Limocon & Manlapaz, 2024). Strengthening community-based programs that integrate cultural storytelling, traditional crafts, and local performances into agritourism activities could help preserve cultural identity while boosting tourism appeal.

**Table 6**

*Management Strategies Agritourism Embraces in Barangay Alapang for the New Normal*

Management Strategies	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Communication Strategy	32	26.67%	2
Training	17	14.16%	3
Outdoor Entertainment	3	2.5%	4
Online Sales	84	70%	1
Virtual Tours	2	1.67%	5

**Table 6** showed that online sales are the most important management strategy adopted by agritourism stakeholders in Barangay Alapang to adapt to the new normal, with 70% (84 respondents) highlighting its significance. This indicated that the community heavily depends on digital commerce avenues used to promote and sell their agricultural products and services. In contrast, virtual tours are much less utilized or recognized, with only 1.69% (2 respondents) seeing them as valuable, suggesting that these immersive digital experiences are still underdeveloped or not widely known in the area.

### **Challenges Encountered in Promoting Agritourism in Barangay**

As agritourism gains traction as an economic alternative in rural communities, various promotional and operational difficulties continue to surface. In Barangay Alapang, these challenges play a significant role in determining the viability of tourism-based agricultural initiatives.

**Table 7**

*Challenges Encountered in Promoting Agritourism in Barangay*

Challenges Encountered	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Marketing and Promotion	70	58.33%	1
Infrastructure Development	29	24.16%	2
Sustainable Development	14	11.67%	3
Accessibility	8	6.67%	4

**Table 7** shows that marketing and promotion are the most significant challenges, representing 58.33% followed by infrastructure development (24.16%). This indicates that most agritourism ventures struggle with attracting visitors and sustaining market visibility due to inadequate promotional strategies and fragmented communication efforts.

Although accessibility ranks lowest (6.67%), it remains a critical issue, particularly for remote agricultural areas with limited road infrastructure and public transport options. These challenges echo findings from global

agritourism research, such as those conducted in the United States, where limited infrastructure and regulatory complexities similarly hinder rural tourism growth.

### Action Plan

The following action plan was developed in response to the challenges and opportunities identified in promoting agritourism in Barangay Alapang. It outlines targeted interventions that address gaps in marketing, stakeholder collaboration, and resource management. Specifically, the plan aims to strengthen the barangay's marketing capacity, foster partnerships between local farmers and tourism agencies, and promote environmentally and culturally sustainable tourism practices.

Grounded in the findings—particularly the constraints of limited marketing budgets and the need for stronger stakeholder engagement—the plan emphasizes integrated marketing campaigns, capacity-building programs, and community-based initiatives. By aligning these strategies with the community's priorities and available resources, the action plan provides a sustainable framework to enhance agritourism's economic, social, and environmental contributions in Barangay Alapang.

**Table 8** Action Plan

Program/ Project	Strategies	Activities	Persons Involved	Time Frame	Resources Needed	Expected Outcome
Agritourism Integrated Marketing Launch	- Develop engaging social media campaigns - Design brochures and flyers - Produce virtual farm tour videos	Social media content calendar - Photograph y and videograph y sessions - Brochure distributio n at key locations	Barangay Council, Municipal Tourism Office, Local marketing professionals, Student interns	Q4 2025 (Preparation ); Q1 2026 (Full launch)	Budget for ad placements, printing, media equipment, video production team, and training workshops	At least 30% growth in tourist inquiries and online engagement within the first six months
Community-Led Agritourism Partnership Forum	Organize regular multi-sector forums - Identify potential collaborati ve projects	Inviting key stakeholders - Planning meetings - Visioning and action planning sessions	Barangay Council, Dept. of Agriculture, Dept. of Tourism, Local cooperatives	Q3 2025 (Forum setup); Ongoing quarterly meetings	Meeting venue, facilitation kits, refreshments, materials for workshops	2–3 new community-led agritourism initiatives established within one year
Agritourism Skills Training Series	Quarterly workshops on selected topics	Digital marketing seminars - Farm tour hosting training -	Municipal Tourism Office invited industry experts, University	Quarterly (start Q3 2025)	Training modules, speaker honoraria, logistics support	At least 50 local participants are certified in agritourism annually



		Sustainability best practice lectures	of Baguio trainers, and Youth groups			
Agritourism Cultural Heritage Program	Storytelling sessions - Traditional crafts demonstrations - Integration of indigenous knowledge in tours	Identify resource persons - Schedule regular events - Develop heritage scripts/materials	Barangay officials, elders, local artists, school teachers, and community organizations	Monthly/bi-monthly events (start Q4 2025)	Event venues, documentation equipment, materials for craft demos	Increase in culturally themed farm tours and documented heritage narratives
"Farm-to-Table" Culinary Experience Program	- Home-cooked meal events - Use locally sourced ingredients - Recipe sharing and demos	- Farm meal preparations - Culinary workshops - Develop a local ingredient cookbook	Local tourism committee, farmers' association, community cooks, food bloggers	Pilot event Q1 2026; Regular events every 2 months	Cooking equipment, food supplies, promotional materials	At least 500 tourists/year participate in meal events; increased sales for local farmers

**Table 8** shows the Agritourism Action Plan that aims to revitalize the local agritourism sector through innovative marketing, community collaboration, and skills training, emphasizing cultural heritage and culinary experiences. By fostering multi-sector partnerships and targeted initiatives, it seeks to boost tourist engagement, support local livelihoods, and promote sustainable rural development.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlight important implications for the continued development of agritourism in Barangay Alapang. The combined use of digital and traditional marketing strategies—particularly the strong reliance on social media—underscores the importance of adopting modern communication tools to effectively reach broader audiences. The positive socio-economic impacts observed indicate that agritourism serves as a viable strategy for increasing farmers' incomes, promoting community solidarity, fostering cultural pride, and encouraging youth engagement, particularly in the context of the post-pandemic “new normal.”

However, several challenges persist, including limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, a lack of specialized training, and weak institutional support. These issues must be addressed to ensure the sustainable growth of agritourism in the community. Moreover, environmental and cultural concerns remain critical, emphasizing the need to preserve both the natural landscape and the cultural identity of Barangay Alapang. A balanced approach—one that

harmonizes development with environmental stewardship and cultural preservation—is essential for long-term success.

To address these challenges and build upon the strengths identified in the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

**1. Integrated Marketing Plan**

The Barangay Council and the Municipal Tourism Office should jointly develop a comprehensive marketing plan that combines both digital and traditional media. This plan should leverage platforms such as social media, radio programs, printed brochures, and virtual farm tours to attract a broader audience and strengthen Alapang's visibility as an agritourism destination.

**2. Partnership and Collaboration Forum**

The Barangay Council, in coordination with the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Tourism (DOT), should organize a partnership forum that brings together local farmers, agribusiness owners, and cooperatives. This initiative would support the co-creation of community-led agritourism projects that reflect shared goals and resources.

**3. Capacity-Building and Training Programs**

The Municipal Tourism Office should conduct quarterly training sessions for local farmers, youth groups, and entrepreneurs. Training topics should include digital marketing, farm tour management, sustainable hospitality practices, and basic financial literacy to enhance their operational efficiency and competitiveness.

**4. Cultural Preservation Initiatives**

Barangay officials and community-based organizations should collaborate to implement programs that safeguard local culture and traditions. Activities may include storytelling sessions, traditional craft demonstrations, and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into farm tour narratives to enrich visitor experiences.

**5. Culinary Tourism Sub-Program**

The Local Tourism Committee, in partnership with senior members of the farmers' association, should establish a culinary tourism program that highlights home-cooked meals made from locally sourced ingredients. This initiative would not only support local producers but also promote Alapang's unique food heritage as a key component of its agritourism identity.

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