



## AGRITOURISM TO GENERATE VALUE-ADDED FOR RURAL REGIONS

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### **Abstract**

*Rural impoverishment is one of the biggest economic problems in a country, driven by limited income opportunities and ongoing rural-urban migration. Peasants are abandoning their fertile arable lands unplanted, uncultivated, and susceptible to erosion. In addition to creating the path for erosion by wind and water, unplanted arable lands also pose a greater threat to the world's population: future starvation. While the number of individuals working in agricultural food production is declining due to rural-urban migration, the number of people in need of food that peasants in rural regions must produce is simultaneously rising. Since the main reason for rural-urban migration is rural impoverishment, the solution must be sought in the relevant regions. Agriculture is, in fact, the key to overcoming the big obstacle preventing development in rural areas. Agritourism, a synergistic blend of agriculture and tourism, has emerged as a potential strategy for alleviating rural poverty and stimulating local economies. This study investigates the perceptions and behaviors of potential agritourism clients in Türkiye using a structured online survey conducted in October 2024, garnering 592 responses. Non-parametric methods, including the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, were used due to non-normal distribution of data. Findings suggest a strong inclination among clients to purchase farm products and handicrafts, a heightened*

*awareness of environmental issues, and perceived contributions to rural development. These results support agritourism as a sustainable tool for economic and ecological uplift in rural regions.*

*Keywords: Agritourism, rural development, sustainable tourism, non-parametric analysis*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Second Industrial Revolution marked significant progress for humanity but inadvertently led to socio-economic decline in rural areas. Industrial growth attracted investment and migration to cities, resulting in rural depopulation, high unemployment, and poverty (Ammirato & Felicetti, 2013). Many rural residents lack access to essential services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure, perpetuating hardship. Efforts to improve rural areas have been hindered by a disconnect between policymakers and the realities of these regions. While some propose constructing industries to create jobs, they often overlook the potential of local agriculture. Involving communities in development decisions is crucial (Chaudhry, 2007). Agritourism, combining agriculture and tourism, emerges as a promising tool for rural development, diversifying income sources and enhancing farm profitability (Mahaliyanaarachchi, 2015; Van Sandt and McFadden, 2016). It offers economic benefits to SMSFs while promoting local employment (Gilbert, 1989). The rising interest in rural authenticity and slower-paced lifestyles, especially post-Covid-19, heightens agritourism's appeal (Bosmann et al., 2021). Researchers (Harcombe, 1999; Kumar et al., 2015) suggest that agritourism can drive economic growth and reduce rural poverty. It also facilitates job diversification (Hamilpurka, 2012) and serves as a risk mitigator for farmers' income (Schilling et al., 2014). This paper explores whether agritourism can provide supplementary income and contribute to rural development while preserving the environment.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

People are looking for new forms of tourism that are distinct from anonymity and uniformity, claim Maxfield and Wiltshier (2018). These days, tourists are more drawn to the outdoors because they want to escape the hectic pace of city life. They come to experience rural life for a day, a weekend, or even a longer stay. Visitors to a farm eventually become clients or tourists, and farmers turn into hosts.

A "working farm," where crops are grown and harvested, animals are bred, and farm operators earn a living through the aforementioned activities, is the most crucial location for agritourism activities. For, farms' natural resources and amenities are the equities of agritourism

(Bagi and Reeder, 2012). With the help of local organizations, these natural resources, along with unconventional farming practices on a farm, can generate extra revenue for farmers' microbusinesses (Sgroi et al., 2018).

The primary goal of agritourism is to diversify revenue streams and add value to the farm and its surroundings. Farms and value addition are connected by this alternative economic activity (Maetzold, 2002). Small and medium-sized farms (SMSFs) in Europe have been using farm activity diversification in recent decades to increase farm earnings in a variety of ways. Because even if they continued their usual agricultural operations, factors like low production, pests, and—most importantly—climate change had an impact on SMSFs' earnings and reduced their revenue.

### **How Agritourism Can Support Rural Development and Help Fight Rural Poverty**

Considering the positive impacts of agritourism, including its economic, environmental, and social benefits to a region, identifying the elements that boost agritourism revenue can help develop and implement the policies required for rural development and sustainability.

Apodaca-González et al. (2014) emphasized that agritourism practices can dynamize the development process in rural areas and thus reduce poverty, especially in developing countries.

According to Lucha et al. (2016), agritourism can be viewed as a feasible business venture that can reduce risks by augmenting and diversifying a farmer's revenue source. Agritourism can give farmers an alternate source of income, which can benefit them financially in several ways, according to another study (Nilson, 2002). Additionally, Ventura and Milone (2000) noted that agritourism generates steady revenue all year round. According to other researchers (Busby and Rendle, 2000), agritourism can help farmers continue their traditional agricultural practices in addition to serving as a second source of income.

Agritourism diversification on family farms provides the farm's operating family with another source of revenue. In addition to helping the family improve their standard of living, this additional revenue will act as a kind of insurance against the dangers associated with uncertain agricultural markets (Blay-Palmer et al., 2016).

In addition to increasing the value of crops, animals, and other natural resources that a farm has to offer, agritourism offers an opportunity to build a relationship between the local tourism industry and the agricultural community (Das and Rainey, 2010).

## **Agritourism as a Driver of Employment and Business Development**

Providing tourism services on farms may and likely will create employment opportunities for unemployed people living in nearby villages, carrying out agricultural activities, as it is well known that regions with intense agricultural activities deal with issues of unemployment, among other challenges (Çıkmış et al., 2009). Carpio et al., (2008) also point out the additional employment opportunities created by agritourism activities for the rural population. Avcu and Yayla's (2021) research demonstrates that strengthening rural economies through diversified agricultural activities (e.g., alternative income sources) significantly mitigates migration pressures and improves rural wellbeing, paving the way for initiatives like agritourism to take off.

Agritourism has the potential to create both direct and indirect work opportunities. Jobs may be created on farms as guides and hospitality workers, as well as in supporting sectors like restaurants and transportation. This employment inflow may lead to a decrease in rural unemployment rates (Beed and Barlow, 2013).

Family members, particularly the women of the farm household, can find work through agritourism (Oppermann, 1995). By offering substitute work options that complement regional customs and culture, agritourism can lessen poverty in rural regions (Stavroulakis et al., 2014).

In a rural region, agritourism operations employ personnel as liaison officers, kitchen workers, housekeepers, and others, in addition to those in the farming sector. Additionally, it gives local craftspeople a chance to showcase and market their wares to tourists who visit their region more regularly. This year-round tourist sector has the potential to develop into a reliable source of revenue. Thus, regional tourism boosts the local economy (Bosmann et al., 2021). Wolfe and Hammock (2006) highlight the same point, asserting that agritourism supports locals by giving them work opportunities.

## **Environmental Benefits and Sustainable Development through Agritourism**

Researcher Sachaleli (2020) emphasizes one of the most important features of agritourism as being a sustainable development model due to its environmentally friendly aspects.

Seong-Woo and Sou-Yeon (2005) state that apart from its economic contributions benefits, agritourism has an educational aspect in terms of the environment. It's a means to educate city-born and bred people about how the food is produced, how the animals are bred (Busby and Rendle, 2000; Oppermann, 1995).

Barbieri (2013) states that agritourism has minimal impact on the local environment and heritage. In Italy, researchers Di Betta and Amenta (2013) conducted a study showing that

environmental quality is essential for agritourism operations and that, at the same time, agritourism helps preserve the environment.

Ait-Yahia Ghidouche et al. (2021) claim that in addition to benefiting farmers and visitors, agritourism directly reduces poverty, inequality, and ensures food security while also protecting water resources.

It is argued that to maintain land in agriculture, many small farms that are uncompetitive because of labor, financial, or scale constraints have resorted to agritourism (Bagi and Reeder 2012). This fact doesn't only affect the economic situation of the farm operators but also the environment in which they carry out agritourism activities. Their continuing farming operations keep the arable lands from being swept away by erosion. Also, Barbieri and Mshenga (2008) claim that agritourism may be a powerful tool for teaching clients about the importance of farmers, the challenges they face, and their sustainability initiatives.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Lucha et al. (2016) stated that empirical research on agritourism is underdeveloped, although the popularity of agritourism operations has increased. Generally, financial analysis of agritourism operations is not studied, as these studies must be based on larger and longer-scale research. Thus, this study is focused on clients' preferences about spending their holidays on an active farm, their preferences in purchasing farm products and regional handicrafts, and finally their perception on environmental issues related to farm holidays.

Therefore, a survey composed of 34 questions, aiming to assess preferences, expectations and willingness of customers regarding agritourism, is conducted online between 01.10.2024 and 31.10.2024. Likert Scale statements are used to determine the perception and expectations of clients about spending their holidays on an active farm. The statements asked to determine the demographic characteristics of the respondents are either multiple-choice or yes/no questions. Likert Scale is ranked as; 5 – Strongly Agree, 4- Agree, 3- Don't know, 2- Disagree, 1- Strongly Disagree. Consequently, a total of 592 respondents replied the survey and their replies are assessed and tested for the hypotheses.

The data gathered by this survey were subjected to a reliability test by Cronbach's Alpha. The coefficient computed by Cronbach's Alpha for the dataset obtained based on the survey yielded a value of 0.9077. This computation is rounded to 0.91, which falls within the range of excellent reliability based on Internal Consistency ranges of Cronbach's Alpha test. This result proves that the data obtained by the survey are sufficiently correlated and collectively measure the intended underlying object.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is applied to the dataset of the survey and it yielded a test statistic of  $D=0,909$  along with an associated p-value being  $< 0.05$ . The large value of the test statistic, which is 0,909, indicates that there is a substantial deviation between the empirical distribution function (EDF) of the sample and the cumulative distribution function (CDF) of a normal distribution. When it comes to p-value, it remained significantly below the 0,05 threshold, indicating that the survey results are not normally distributed. Hence, the hypotheses of this study are tested using non-parametric tests.

The data collected by the survey regarding the demographics of the respondents is as follows:

- 57,60% of the respondents are females and 42,40% are males.
- 30,41% of the respondents are single, while 69,59% are married.
- Age distribution of the respondents is as follows: 5,57% of the respondents are younger than 25 years old. 6,76% are between 26-35 years old, 15,54% are between 36-45 years old. The second larger group is the respondents who are between 46-55 years old with a percentage of 26,12%, just after the largest group of age which is composed of respondents between 56-65 years old. The percentage of this group is 34,63%. Finally, the respondents who are older than 65 years compose the group with a percentage of 10,98%.
- 8,65% of the respondents have a high school level or inferior education. 4,83 % have an associate's degree, 39,43% have a bachelor's degree, while 25,12% have graduate degree and 21,96% have PhD degree.
- 25,17% of respondents have no children, 31,42% have one child only, while 39,02% have two children and 3,89% have 3 three children. Only 0,51% of the respondents have more than 3 children.
- The majority of respondents, 49,49% live in Istanbul, followed by Ankara by 17,06% , Izmir 7,27% and Adana, 4,39%. The remaining 21,79% live in 29 different cities of Türkiye and Europe.
- When it comes to going on holidays, 28,50% of respondents go on holidays once a year, 32,10% go twice a year, while 31,70% go on holidays more than twice a year. However, 7,70% of the respondents do not go on holidays.
- The average days spent on holidays is one – two days for 1,69% of the respondents. 19,59% of the respondents spend three-four days on holidays. 46,79% spend one week on holidays, while 12,67% spend two weeks. Only 12,16 of respondents spend more than two weeks on holidays. The percentage of respondents who do not go on holidays.

- 27,03% of the respondents have already spent time on an active farm, while 72,97% have never been on such a farm before.

The hypotheses of this study are:

H1 - Clients tend to purchase farm products and local handicrafts both during and after their visits, thereby supporting the rural economy.

H2 - Clients believe that spending time on an active farm will help raise awareness concerning environmental issues, and

H3- Clients believe that spending time on an active farm will help to promote rural development.

Since the survey data were previously determined to be not normally distributed, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was selected for this analysis. This non-parametric test is appropriate to compare two related variables measured on the same subjects, such as before-and-after measures or two different but linked survey items. It assesses whether the median difference between paired responses is significantly different from zero.

## EMPIRICAL RESULTS

It is important to note that the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test is used to compare the replies given for proposed statements as paired data rather than to evaluate each statement separately. For each of the hypotheses, two statements are proposed to the respondents and every respondent answered both of them, and the study concentrated on how each respondent's two answers differed from one another. The test was able to determine whether buying handicrafts from neighboring villages or straight from the farm resulted in a statistically significant change in preference thanks to this matched design.

It is also essential to emphasize that when using paired Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests, like the one used in here, the median Likert scores for each item are presented separately as descriptive statistics, which offer information about the participants' overall degree of agreement with each statement separately. Nevertheless, rather than using the individual scores, the effect size ( $r$ ) is determined using the distribution of differences between paired responses. The Wilcoxon test is used to determine whether the median difference between two related observations (e.g.. Statement "I would like to purchase from the farm, the natural products which I consumed during the time spent in there" vs. Statement "I can purchase some handicrafts from the nearby villages while I spend my holidays in a farm", etc.) is substantially different from zero. Therefore, the effect size, which is given as a common metric for the pair, indicates the strength and consistency of that within-subject comparison.

## H1 - Clients tend to purchase farm products and local handicrafts both during and after their visits, thereby supporting the rural economy

According to Kim et al. (2019), agritourism may influence clients' buying habits for agricultural products following their visit, which could have long-term positive economic effects. According to the study, participating in agritourism affects consumers' food buying habits, with a greater desire for locally grown agricultural products. Purchases made after a visit can have a significant impact on customers' plans to return to the agritourism farm. Buying locally boosts the local economy and helps one stay connected to the experience (Yamagishi, et al., 2024).

Therefore, statements "I would like to purchase from the farm, the natural products which I consumed during the time spent in there" and statement "I can purchase some handicrafts from the nearby villages while I spend my holidays in a farm" are put forth in order to test Hypothesis 1, which proposes that "Clients tend to purchase farm products and local handicrafts both during and after their visits, thereby supporting the rural economy."

The hypotheses are constructed as follows:

$H_1$  (*Alternative Hypothesis*): Clients tend to purchase farm products and local handicrafts both during and after their visits, thereby supporting the rural economy.

$H_0$  (*Null Hypothesis*): Clients do not tend to purchase farm products and local handicrafts both during and after their visits, thereby supporting the rural economy.

Table 1. Outcome of the Statement "I would like to purchase from the farm, the natural products which I consumed during the time spent in there"

Likert Scale	Frequency	Overall Score	Percentage	Weight
5	288	1440	48,65	
4	161	644	27,20	
3	107	321	18,07	<b>4,16</b>
2	22	44	3,72	
1	14	14	2,36	
<b>Total</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>2463</b>	<b>100</b>	

Table 2. Outcomes of the Statement "I can purchase some handicrafts from the nearby villages while I spend my holidays on a farm"

Likert Scale	Frequency	Overall Score	Percentage	Weight
5	241	1205	40,71	
4	174	696	29,40	
3	136	408	22,97	<b>4,01</b>
2	24	48	4,05	
1	17	17	2,87	
<b>Total</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>2374</b>	<b>100</b>	

The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Hypothesis 1 yields the following results:

Table 3. Computation obtained by Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for the analysis of Hypothesis 1

<b>Test Statistic</b>	9.4230
<b>p-value</b>	0,00051
<b>z-score</b>	-18,82
<b>effect size <i>r</i></b>	-0,773

As can be seen on the table, the computed p-value is highly significant (0.00051). This computation allows us to reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) with strong statistical confidence. It supports the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ), accepting that clients tend to purchase farm products and local handicrafts both during and after their visits, thereby supporting the rural economy.

## **H2 - Clients believe that spending time on an active farm will help raise awareness concerning environmental issues**

In the Azienda Agricola Model, Némethy et al. (2022) showed how agritourism can enhance recycling procedures by turning raw materials into completed goods, highlighting a zero-waste strategy, and promoting sustainable development.

Circularity techniques like resource conservation, recycling, and waste reduction are used by Sicilian agritourism farms, and they directly affect environmental sustainability (Ingrassia et al., 2023).

According to Tavares de Carvalho et al. (2024), agritourism promotes the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) and helps cut waste and pollution when combined with the ideas of the circular economy. This concept improves visitor satisfaction while simultaneously helping the environment.

So, the second hypothesis which is "Clients believe that spending time on an active farm will help raise awareness concerning environmental issues"; Statement "Spending my holidays on an active farm will cause less environmental pollution," and Statement "Spending my holidays on an active farm will allow me to handle recycling more effectively" are proposed to the respondents.

The hypotheses to test Hypothesis 2 are constructed as follows:

$H_1$  (*Alternative Hypothesis*): Clients believe that spending time on an active farm will help raise awareness concerning environmental issues.

$H_0$  (*Null Hypothesis*): Clients do not believe that spending time on an active farm will help raise awareness concerning environmental issues.

The outcome of the replies provided by respondents to the statements is as follows:

Table 4. The outcome of replies provided by respondents to the statement proposed as “Spending my holidays on an active farm will cause less environmental pollution”

Likert Scale	Frequency	Overall Score	Percentage	Weight
5	306	1530	51,69	
4	139	556	23,48	
3	99	297	16,72	<b>4,15</b>
2	25	50	4,22	
1	23	23	3,89	
<b>Total</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>2456</b>	<b>100</b>	

Table 5. The outcome of replies provided by respondents to the statement proposed as “Spending my holidays on an active farm will allow me to address the issue of recycling more effectively”

Likert Scale	Frequency	Overall Score	Percentage	Weight
5	252	1260	42,57	
4	157	628	26,52	
3	118	354	19,93	<b>3,96</b>
2	36	72	6,08	
1	29	29	4,90	
<b>Total</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>2343</b>	<b>100</b>	

The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Hypothesis 2 yields the following results:

Table 6. Computation obtained by Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for the analysis of Hypothesis 2

<b>Test Statistic</b>	3.946,5
<b>p-value</b>	$9,43 \times 10^{-9}$
<b>z-score</b>	-20,13
<b>effect size <i>r</i></b>	-0,827

The test shows that the computed p-value is highly significant ( $9,43 \times 10^{-9}$ ). This computation allows us to reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) with strong statistical confidence, allowing to accept the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ), which claims that clients believe that spending time on an active farm will help raise awareness concerning environmental issues.

### H3 - Clients believe that spending their holidays on an active farm will help to promote rural development

Agritourism activities in Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka, not only give farmers an extra source of income but also encourage sustainable agricultural practices by encouraging eco-tourism and locally produced goods, according to a study by Willaddara and Ranaweera (2024). By strengthening the rural economy, agritourism also contributes to local development, according to the same study. When tourism is introduced in agricultural settings, it opens up new commercial prospects for local eateries, transportation services, and craftspeople.

According to studies carried in the Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion by Grillini et al. (2024), agritourism plays a major role in local development by encouraging economic sustainability and aiding community-driven projects.

Therefore, Hypothesis 3, "Clients believe that spending their holidays on an active farm will help to promote rural development", is tested by proposing Statement "Spending my holidays on an active farm will create a second income source for the farmer", and Statement "Spending my holidays on an active farm will also help rural development" to respondents.

The hypotheses to test Hypothesis 3 are constructed as follows:

$H_1$  (*Alternative Hypothesis*): Clients believe that spending their holidays on an active farm will help to promote rural development.

$H_0$  (*Null Hypothesis*): Clients do not believe that spending their holidays on an active farm will help to promote rural development.

The outcome of the replies provided by respondents to the statements is as follows:

Table 7. The outcome of replies provided by respondents to the statement proposed as "Spending my holidays on an active farm will create a second income source for the farmer"

Likert Scale	Frequency	Overall Score	Percentage	Weight
5	245	1225	41,39	
4	166	664	28,04	
3	103	309	17,40	<b>3,92</b>
2	43	86	7,26	
1	35	35	5,91	
<b>Total</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>2319</b>	<b>100</b>	

Table 8. The outcome of replies provided by respondents to the statement proposed as “Spending my holidays on an active farm will also help rural development”

Likert Scale	Frequency	Overall Score	Percentage	Weight
5	301	1505	50,84	
4	177	708	29,90	
3	75	225	12,67	<b>4,22</b>
2	22	44	3,72	
1	17	17	2,87	
<b>Total</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>2499</b>	<b>100</b>	

The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Hypothesis 3 yields the following results:

Table 9. Computation obtained by Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for the analysis of Hypothesis 2

<b>Test Statistic</b>	3.639,5
<b>p-value</b>	$4,62 \times 10^{-16}$
<b>z-score</b>	-20,21
<b>effect size <i>r</i></b>	-0,830

The computed p-value is highly significant ( $4,62 \times 10^{-16}$ ). Based on this computation, we reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) with strong statistical confidence. The result supports the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ), accepting that clients believe that spending time on an active farm will help to promote rural development.

## CONCLUSION

Rural poverty has been a persistent problem in rural areas that are not typically found in well-known mountain or coastal regions. The rural population has been compelled to migrate to large cities in quest of respectable living standards due to inadequate income opportunities, limited access to health and education services, underdeveloped infrastructure, and a lack of cultural and social vitality. This has compelled rural populations to migrate to urban centers in search of better living standards, further exacerbating the economic and social decline of these areas. Attempts at rural development have often failed due to top-down planning by those unfamiliar with the on-the-ground realities of these regions.

Nearly four decades ago, agritourism emerged as a significant force in the development of rural areas that were underdeveloped. It was built on the agricultural and natural, cultural, and historical assets that these communities already possessed. Agritourism is a significant and

beneficial tool for rural development, according to studies by Wicks and Merrett in the United States of America (2003), Wolfe and Hammock in Georgia (2006), Marandola et al. in Italy (2006), Civelek et al. in Türkiye (2014), Mura and Kljucnikov in Slovakia (2018), and Fountain et al. in New Zealand (2021).

The survey conducted for this study showed that if farms engage in agritourism activities besides their ordinary agricultural operations, they can obtain additional income not only from and during the visits of the clients but also after they leave the farm. They also intend to purchase handicrafts from the surrounding villages, causing an extra income for the people living around the farm. Nowadays, clients are conscious of the fact that their agritourism activities will support not only the farm where they spend their holidays but also local development. They also know that agritourism activities are a perfect means to raise awareness on environmental issues. Thus, if farmers are told and convinced to engage in agritourism as well as their ongoing agricultural operations, they may earn an additional income to enable them to sustain their production and also can create employment opportunities for the residents living around their farm. In the

The potential for agritourism in Türkiye is extensive and profound. To fully harness this potential, the study recommends several key strategies:

- Policy incentives such as grants or subsidies to facilitate the development of agritourism infrastructure.
- Capacity-building initiatives that equip farmers and local actors with skills in hospitality, marketing, and sustainable practices.
- Promotion of local goods, including branding systems to enhance product visibility and consumer trust.
- Digital transformation, with platforms to support marketing and bookings.
- Environmental stewardship, encouraging farms to adopt eco-friendly operations

With conscious visitors increasingly motivated by environmental and social impact, agritourism offers a unique synergy between economic sustainability and ecological preservation. When adequately supported and embraced, it has the potential to sustain agricultural operations, promote rural entrepreneurship, and foster inclusive community development. It's not just two birds, but a whole flock—agritourism offers a multifaceted solution through a single, well-aimed initiative

Despite these promising insights, the study's limitations should be acknowledged. The survey sample was geographically skewed, with a substantial proportion of respondents from Istanbul, which may affect the representativeness of the results. Additionally, the online, self-reported format may have excluded certain rural demographics and introduced a potential bias

linked to stated rather than observed behaviors. Future research should aim for broader geographic inclusion, longitudinal data collection, and comparative case studies to deepen understanding and strengthen the generalizability of findings.

Eventually, with coordinated planning, localized implementation, and interdisciplinary collaboration, agritourism could serve as a transformative solution—addressing both rural poverty and environmental sustainability in Türkiye and beyond.

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