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The Agritourism Value Chain: An Application to the Dehesa Areas of Extremadura

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Abstract: The serious socioeconomic problems faced by rural environments in general, and the agricultural sector in particular, in peripheral European territories since the end of the last century have led to depopulation phenomena, the abandonment of unique traditional uses, and the loss of cultural identity. The promotion of a well-understood agrotourism sector in these territories, as an income-diversifying activity that promotes a more sustainable tourism, is a measure widely applauded by the scientific community, which seeks to curb such problems and offer an opportunity to the inhabitants who are less and less dedicated to the much maltreated primary sector. However, it is crucial to know in a personalized way the value chain associated with agrotourism and in particular that linked to the Extremadura dehesa, especially when this has not traditionally been considered a tourist resource. This paper presents a recent bibliographical review regarding the potential of the Extremadura dehesa as a viable agrotourism resource. The lack of knowledge that the tourist offer has about agrotourism and the dehesa as a business niche and diversification of income, or the gap between some activities and the appropriate channels of the value chain, are some remarkable conclusions, coinciding with those of other authors and similar territories.

Keywords: agritourism; dehesa; value chain; rural environments; depopulation; Extremadura (Spain)

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1. Introduction

Rural environments face numerous socioeconomic problems in the peripheral areas of Europe. These problems increase when the productive base is centered on agricultural activity, especially when this is of an extensive nature [1]. This serious situation has caused, for decades, an almost constant loss of population as a result of emigration processes, aging, masculinization, etc. Similarly, as a result of the loss of demographic numbers, there has been a progressive abandonment of traditional uses and a loss of cultural identity. Moreover, sometimes there is a negative connotation of the rural world, when the reality can and should be different. In order to try to curb these problems, in 2017, the Spanish government launched the National Strategy against the Demographic Challenge [2], which was associated with a group of specific action measures [3] to balance the territorial and socioeconomic development of the country. Among its objectives was the creation of new opportunities in those rural areas with the greatest problems [4–7]. However, the results of applying measures to curb the problems of depopulation are not immediate because different areas have to be agreed simultaneously: improving access to essential goods and services for the population in rural areas and taking advantage of the potential of these territories to carry out diverse and viable economic activities, which at the same time protect the uniqueness of the rural environment, are some of the areas to be considered [8,9].

In the specific case of Extremadura (Spain), the regional government launched the Strategy for the Demographic and Territorial Challenge of Extremadura [10] as an adaptation to the National Strategy in order to strengthen the equal opportunities for the population

living in the region and to alleviate depopulation, among other objectives. To this end, ten strategic objectives are being pursued, among which are the promotion of conditions that attract people to rural areas, provide facilities to have a sustainable economy in all aspects of this concept, and economically diversify the rural world. Despite the fact that the Extremadura region is the autonomous community with the sixth largest number of farms in 2020 and has the highest percentage of usable agricultural area (UAA) in relation to the total area [11], it has seen its average UAA per farm decrease by more than 13.8 hectares compared to 2009 (it is the autonomous community with the fourth largest decrease in Spain), despite the European Structural Funds aid received in these years [12]. To this must be added the slight increase of 6.2% in the average income per inhabitant and household in rural areas of Extremadura between 2016 and 2020 (well below the CPI). While the inhabitants of small municipalities saw their average annual incomes grow by just 330 €/year and at the household level by 550 €/year, the inhabitants of the cities did so by just over 350 €/year and at the household level by 685 €/year (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Comparison of average Useful Agricultural Areas (UAA) per farm and autonomous community and income levels in Extremadura by type of rurality: (**a**) average UAA (in ha) per farm in 2009; (**b**) average UAA (in ha) per farm in 2020; (**c**) average income per inhabitant (euros/year) in Extremadura between 2016 and 2020; (**d**) average income per household (euros/year) in Extremadura between 2016 and 2020.

Considering the continuous increase in the consumer price index in recent years and the lack of opportunities and basic services in many rural areas of Extremadura, along with the fact that many of the main centers of economic activity are less than an hour's drive away [13,14], there are few alternatives enabling the working-age population to remain in their rural centers of origin.

Since the 1980s, administrations of different levels have been committed to the development of tourism. In this sense, the European Union, the Spanish government, and

the different autonomous communities that make up the government are seeking to halt the processes of depopulation, aging, and the loss of natural and semi-natural ecosystems characteristic of rural environments [15]. Tourism also contributes to a more equitable territorial planning, greater territorial cohesion, and greater socioeconomic development of the population, among others. This economic activity has accounted for an average of 10.4% of the national GDP in the last decade, and in 2022 accounted for 12.1% of the total employment in Spain [16]. Rural tourism was promoted as a sustainable alternative to the overcrowded sun and beach tourism that had prevailed until then [17–20]. It is characterized by its development in a rural environment, which is perceived by tourists and tour operators as [21,22] (a) an environment characterized by an abundance of natural spaces with little transformation, interspersed with spaces dedicated to traditional agricultural activities; (b) small rural villages (especially those with fewer than 5000 inhabitants); and (c) the survival of a traditional cultural heritage and a local way of life, in many cases associated with the use of this environment, among other factors.

Although the implementation of rural tourism in depressed municipalities was initially an attractive and effective complementary activity, the fact is that the excessive growth of rural lodgings associated with this type of tourism and the enormous territorial coincidence of many of them (in Extremadura a large percentage is concentrated in the north of the province of Cáceres) has made it a less viable option from an economic point of view [23]. In this regard, the measures described by Montiel [24] and Muñoz [25] to consider in the sustainable implementation of new rural accommodation in these environments are remarkable. The inclusion of a model of equipment with a low impact on the environment, obtaining resources on a local scale, and the consideration of the tourist activity itself as complementary and not the only important one, while involving the local population in the management of the tourist activity (incorporating into the offer activities linked to knowledge of the cultural heritage, experiences, customs, etc., that promote dialogue between population and tourist), are some of the most important measures in this regard.

Within rural tourism and considering the measures of Muñoz in 2015 [25] and Shen et al. in 2022 [26], agrotourism is beginning to be seen as a feasible model with which to promote economic diversification and viability in rural environments and less-favored areas or LFAs according to the EU [27], which are characterized by population densities of less than 150 inhabitants/km^2 and the presence of outstanding agricultural activity [28], while preserving their heritage and associated landscapes [29], as in the Spanish case in Extremadura's municipalities [30–33]. This type of tourism varies widely depending on the country that legislates it and the activities that the promoter wishes to offer, but basically, it is closely related to farmers who offer on their active farms local food or outdoor recreation linked to the usual activity on that farm [34]. In the particular case of the autonomous community of Extremadura, this is related to providing lodging on farms where the tourist can enjoy the typical local cuisine and/or actively participates in some of the traditional agricultural production tasks that occur in that area [35]. Some of the benefits of this type of rural tourism are the improvement in complementary incomes to those acquired through the agricultural activity (which should continue to be the main economic activity) [31,36], the increase in local employment, and the preservation of a traditional rural landscape that would otherwise disappear [37,38]. However, in Extremadura the agrotourism phenomenon has yet to be exploited, despite the potential that this territory harbors (according to the MAPA in 2023 [1], more than 324.324000 hectares in Extremadura are under cultivation, which represents 34% of the Spanish cultivated area, and tobacco and tomatoes stand out as the crops whose percentages in Extremadura exceed 80% of the national area), and the volume of its surface are destined to the primary sector in general and to the dehesa in particular: 97.4% of the municipalities (378) and 98.5% of the population of Extremadura, according to the INE [39], have pasture land in their municipalities (representing 24.4% of the total surface area of 1,014,865 hectares). In addition, it is noteworthy that 68.3% of the dehesa in Extremadura is concentrated in municipalities with a population of fewer than 5000 inhabitants (Figure 2 and Table 1). Although there is a significant percentage of the de-

hesa in the municipal group with the largest population, there is a predominant dedication to the service sector, with a very reduced weight given to the primary sector (oriented to irrigation and the scarce agri-food transformation industry which has little to do with the dehesa). In addition, the municipalities are generally very extensive, and to this is added the fact that there is an enormous population concentration in the main centers, leaving most of the territory without demographic resources. This means that the link between the large municipalities of Extremadura and the dehesa is very residual. On the other hand, municipalities with fewer than 5000 inhabitants (considered rural environments) are much more socioeconomically dependent on the ecosystem services offered by the dehesa; they are traditionally very dependent on the primary sector, with a marked use of a traditional or less mechanized type [40]; they concentrate most of the dehesa surface area in their municipalities and, in addition, these are on average much smaller than those of the large municipalities. These are also the environments that concentrate the largest traces of cultural heritage linked to traditional uses. On the other hand, if we consider the density limit estimated by the EU to speak of the risk of depopulation (12.5 inhabitants/km^2), in Extremadura 44% of the municipalities (171) would meet this standard. Hence, rural environments are the ones chosen to evaluate the implementation of agritourism activities as a complement to their income within the use of the dehesa (Table 1).

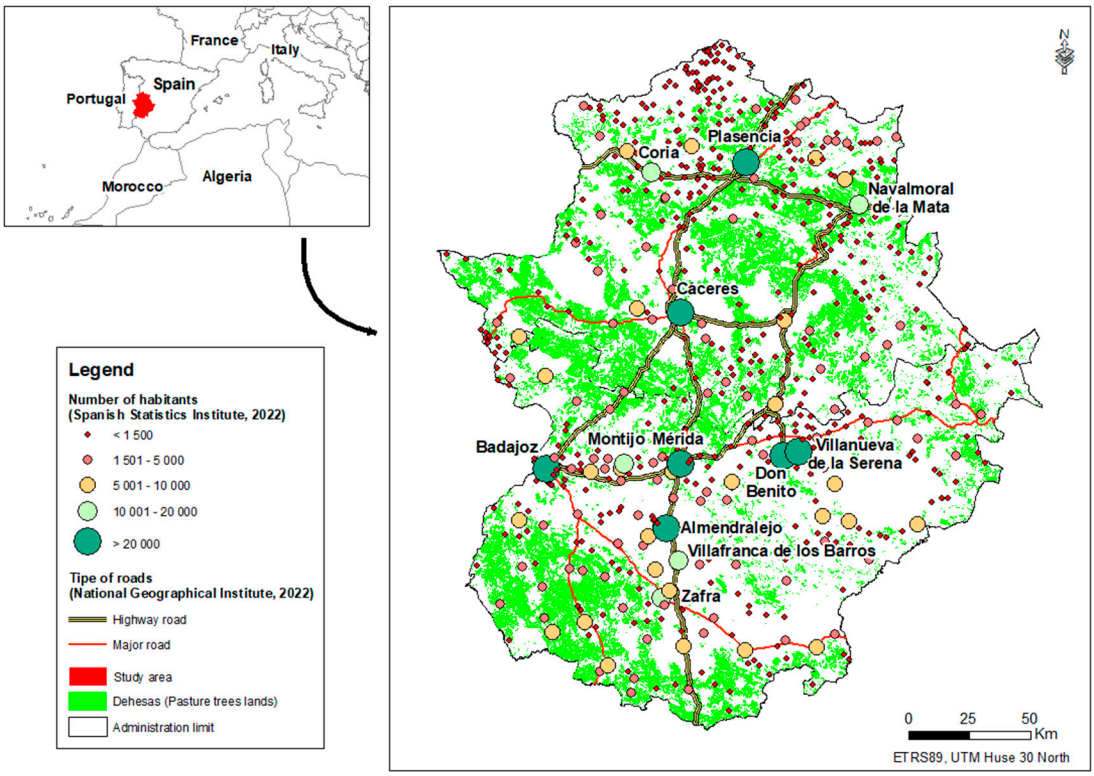

Figure 2. Study area.

Table 1. Dehesa area and population related by municipal group in 2022.

Municipal Size (Inhab.)	Inhab.	% Inhab.	Count Muni.	% Muni.	Average Surf. Muni (ha.).	Inhab./km^2 Average	Average Surf. Dehesa (ha.)	% Dehesa
≥20,000	441,025	41.8	7	1.8	73,712	121.02	128,827.96	12.68
10,000–19,999	85,482	8.1	6	1.6	16,297	127.98	27,896.99	2.74
5001–9999	137,133	13.0	21	5.4	25,547	92.47	165,038.43	16.24
<5000	375,706	35.6	344	88.7	8476	19.66	694,620.36	68.34
Total	1,039,346	98.5	378	97.4	10,757 [1]	27.30 [2]	1,016,383.75	100.00

[1–2] Average weighted by the number of municipalities included in each group.

A good way to analyze the level of implementation of this type of agritourism activity in a territory, and to identify its resources with greater tourism potential, as well as the relationships among economic actors, is to generate a value chain. This is a representation of all the promoters that offer goods or services, their resources, and the relationships among them. The purpose is to generate added value to the activity in which they interact (in this case agritourism) from an economic, social, cultural, heritage, and identity point of view [41]. In the value chain, each specific activity is evaluated within four large blocks or components (production, transformation, distribution, and marketing) to detect problems that prevent goods or a service from being economically viable and generating the value for which it was created [42,43]. The value chain has been applied to tourism for quite some time, but if we consider those recent ones that take into account the territory as a key element, the work reported in [44] is interesting. It proposes a methodology for identifying value chains associated with gastronomic tourism. In it, the authors take into account the territoriality of the components of the tourism value chain, and the sensitive and specialized demand for this type of activity, which seeks quality over quantity in non-mass tourism, and the assessment of the potential (the importance of an element to the rest of the chain according to the interest it has for the demand) and functionality concepts (whether a resource has the services considered basic by the demand for a satisfactory experience) of the resource. The methodology consists of four groups: group 1 includes all the elements extracted directly from the territory and with a very direct link and identity associated with it (they are the indispensable elements for the development of the tourism activity); group 2 is formed by elements that do not come from the territory itself but are very important for marketing; group 3 is composed of those elements that make up the tourism offer (restaurants, accommodations, activity promoters, etc.; they are not essential but contribute a lot of value to tourism); and group 4, the final group, corresponds to elements that are transversal to the rest of the groups, such as the contributions of innovation, and training in all the links of the tourism chain.

As a research problem and a recommended stage towards the implementation of these agritourism activities in a territory such as Extremadura, the aim of this work is to analyze those agritourism experiences in areas similar to the farmscape [45] of the dehesa and rural environments in Extremadura that have been collected in a bibliography, in order to subsequently identify the traditional agricultural activities and resources with sufficient tourist potential to satisfy the increasing demand for this type of unique experience linked to the Extremadura pasture and to evaluate their possibilities for implementation. To this end, we start from the premise that such agritourism activities must serve as a complement to the main traditional activity and not as a substitute model (a predominant trend in Extremadura since the end of the last century). Studies relating agritourism activities with dehesas such as this one are not very abundant in the literature (as they are mostly linked to mountain areas, pastures, vineyards, and olive groves, among others, as reported in [46,47]), despite the fact that the extensive use of these semi-natural ecosystems has been reduced in recent years due to the lack of generational replacement, among other issues, and where tourism as a complement has not been proposed as an alternative to mitigate such problems [48–50]. For this reason, and through a recent bibliographic analysis of the agritourism and its value chain in rural environments, this article pursues the following specific objectives:

1. Identify the most influential sectors in agritourism associated with the dehesa and the resources with the greatest potential for tourism;
2. Consider which relations can exist between the supply of agritourism products and livestock farming in the dehesa, considering their specific value chain;
3. Determine the possible problems to be taken into account when implementing these types of agrotourism activities in general and in those less favored European areas (LAZs) linked to the dehesa, as is the case of the autonomous community of Extremadura in particular.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Area

Extremadura is an autonomous community located in the southwest of Spain and Europe and on the border with Portugal. This autonomous community is divided into two provinces, north and south, Cáceres and Badajoz, respectively, with a total of 388 municipalities. The average population density of this region is 27 inhabitants/km^2, although the average density of the rural environments drops to 19.6 inhabitants/km^2, well below the national and European average (just over 95 inhabitants/km^2 and 109 inhabitants/km^2, respectively).

The main axes of socioeconomic development are located around the A66-Ruta de la Plata highway (north–south in the center of Extremadura) and the A5-Badajoz/Madrid highway (southwest–northeast), which concentrate eight of the nine main population centers in Extremadura (those with more than 20,000 inhabitants, listed in Figure 2).

This extensive Spanish region is home to numerous unique natural, semi-natural, and artificial ecosystems, as shown by the fact that 30.6% of its surface area is under environmental protection and there are even overlaps between them. Special Protection Areas for Birds (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), both included in the Natura 2000 Network, are worth mentioning. In addition, there is also a Network of Protected Natural Spaces (ENP) made up of Natural Parks, Natural Reserves, Natural Monuments, etc. Of course, there is also a National Park, three Biosphere Reserves or Ramsar Areas, and a Geopark declared by UNESCO in 2011 [51]. Landscape diversity and biotic heterogeneity are complemented by different agro-livestock and forestry activities, which for decades have coexisted in perfect balance. One of the examples of coexistence and traditional silvopastoral and forest uses that are most respectful of the surrounding environment is the dehesa. There is quite a lot of literature dedicated to the analysis of agritourism in natural and semi-natural ecosystems of pastures, mountain areas, and mixed areas. However, there are hardly any studies that analyze the dehesa as an agritourism resource, or that describe value chains associated with this specific activity and ecosystem. The dehesa is not in itself a pastureland (such as, e.g., those existing in the vicinity of Český Krumlov in the Czech Republic), much less a mountain area (such as those found in the Alpine or Pyrenean regions). According to [52], this is defined as a multifunctional livestock and/or hunting exploitation system in which at least 50% of the surface area is occupied by pastureland with scattered adult acorn-producing trees and with a fraction of the area covered between 5 and 60%. To this definition the Extremadura law [53] adds an exploitation unit whose minimum surface area exceeds 100 hectares. These large semi-natural expanses of open pastures with holm oak (Quercus ilex) and cork oak (Quercus suber) woodland, whose origins date back to the middle of the 7th century, are found exclusively in the center–south of the Iberian Peninsula and are linked to plains or slightly undulating reliefs with little slope (the Spanish or Portuguese mid-mountain areas are already home to the Mediterranean forest from which it originates). The dehesa ecosystems are characterized by a multitude of traditional ecosystem uses closely linked to the nearby rural environment and its economy, in which the primary sector is very important. There is extensive grazing with native species of sheep, such as the Merino breed, cattle (some of them brave breeds), and pigs (highlighting the Iberian breed for its gourmet products) [54]; the complementary agricultural uses are very focused on the cultivation of cereals (mainly wheat, barley and rye) and the different seasonal forestry uses of the existing quercus trees, such as the pruning of the trees to obtain firewood, the different types of charcoal with a high caloric power and durability, and the extraction every eight to ten years of the bark of the cork oak to obtain cork. Furthermore, the fruit of these species, acorns, are used as a human food base (in bread and different sweets) and as feed for the livestock (the richness of acorns as healthy fats for livestock such as the Iberian pig is well known), as well as hunting activities itself. To this multitude of economic resources are added others of a scenic nature linked to the agricultural sector that make it unique in Europe, numerous traditional trades and associated cultural heritage which are of no less magnitude, and its

ecological functions for endangered or very vulnerable species as promoters of ecological connectivity of their habitats, which form an environment with great potential for tourism that so far has not been exploited [28,34]. All this has led to its consideration by the EU as a High Nature Value Farming and Forestry (HNV) area, which, with more surface area and one of the most valuable areas in Europe, is worthy of being protected and maintained over time with its traditional forms of exploitation [55,56]. This is the ecosystem to which this article associates the resources with the potential to implement agritourism activities in LFAs such as Extremadura, and which is so closely linked to the economic system of many of the municipalities in the region, most of them rural environments.

2.2. Methods of the Literature Review

To achieve the objectives, a bibliographic search of recent works (from January 2016 to June 2023, both included) related to agritourism and those value chains that link rural tourism with traditional agricultural use of rural environments was performed, with special emphasis on uses linked to Spanish and Portuguese dehesas or large extensions of farms in the case of foreign works.

The bibliographic selection was made on the Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, and Dialnet platforms, the latter more focused on Spanish production. The keywords used in all of them as search engines were agrotourism, rural tourism, tourism and agriculture, rural tourism in dehesas, farm tourism, and farm tourism in EU. From more than 8000 initial references, 250 were selected. The criteria for selecting the references were related to the location of the studies (centered mainly in Spain, or at least in southwestern European regions), the subject matter addressed (successful experiences in implementing agritourism activities in large areas similar to the Extremadura dehesa, or analysis of problems related to rural tourism versus agriculture and/or livestock farming on a local scale).

Regarding the identification of elements that make up the value chain of agritourism in dehesas, with special emphasis on the case of Extremadura, the work of [44] is very fascinating, in which they propose a methodology to identify value chains (in this case of gastronomic tourism) considering the following:

- The territoriality of the elements of the value chain for a given tourism, distinguishing those that are key from the other essential but more ancillary elements;
- The demand for such tourism, which is very focused on experiences, sensitivity, and the quality of these, rather than quantity;
- In relation to the first concept, they evaluate the degree of importance of an element in the value chain in terms of whether it meets the requirements that make it attractive to visit from the point of view of the demand of the tourism sector analyzed; in relation to tourism functionality, the authors identify whether the elements evaluated have a series of basic minimum services so that the visitor can have a satisfactory tourism experience.

In the case of this study, the generic elements of the agritourism value chain for the Extremaduran dehesa were adapted from the literature consulted, without losing sight of the general approach proposed by [44]: territoriality, the relationship between producers/supply and demand as part of the value chain itself, and the tourism potential and functionality of the elements of the chain. This article focuses on the identification and grouping of elements that make up the dehesa value chain in Extremadura (the equivalent of Phase 1 of the related paper).

3. Results

The value chain considers the main elements related to the use of Extremadura's dehesas. It is based on the premise that tourists seeking agritourism activities seek a variety of active learning experiences. Among them, the literature includes learning and connection with the rural environment, the land uses, the agricultural and livestock use, and the direct contact with the people who live in that environment. Furthermore, the literature discusses the remarkable natural and cultural, tangible and intangible tourism potentials of

Extremadura [57]. Therefore, in the literature analyzed, a series of activities and distinctive characteristics of agritourism are highlighted. Many of them can be developed in the Extremadura dehesas, since they maintain unique traditional agricultural and livestock activities in the local environment in which they are located [23,58,59].

3.1. The Dehesa as a Tourist Resource

On this basis, the Extremadura dehesa offers a multitude of possibilities linked to traditional economic activities, with sheep and cattle grazing, cork extraction, cereal sowing, or uses derived from oak or cork oak wood (charcoal, picón and firewood), and hunting, perhaps some of the most outstanding [60,61].

Associated with the previous uses, there are a series of activities and crafts that are currently at a high risk of disappearing, such as dry stone constructions for the demarcation of farms, huts for the personnel who work the fields, the tools used by the shepherds in their daily lives (bowls, spoons, bags, etc.), or even the knowledge of medicinal plants in this environment.

A key element for the bibliography is the development of agritourism activities characterized by being active experiences. These include the observation of the natural and/or agricultural landscape, where situations or activities typical of daily primary activities are recreated and, in many cases, there is an offer of traditional products for direct sale and the hospitality of the lodging, in which both parties benefit: farmers and local population, as well as tourists [41,58]. In relation to this, some authors highlight the low predisposition of agricultural producers to collaborate in the creation of connections and associative networks to diversify their economies towards agritourism tasks from the point of view of maximizing sustainability in the sector. Structured associationism is key in a rural tourism model based largely on the private sector, such as agritourism, to promote efficient and equitable development that helps to preserve the related heritage (natural, cultural, intangible, etc.) [62]. In addition, in these cases, a lack of information, training, and skills training necessary to meet the increasing volume of tourists seeking experiences linked to agritourism in some of its varieties is detected [63]; it is also essential that entrepreneurs of agritourism activities are included in the main tourism dissemination websites, given that much of the demand chooses accommodation through this route [64].

Another activity that is highly applauded by the scientific community is the existing relationship between the rural environment in general and the agricultural and livestock farming sector in particular, with a series of typical products of the area and various types of agricultural and livestock farming activities, even at certain times of the year, depending on the farming activities that were carried out in each of them. Gastronomic tourism is another complement to the agritourism offer [44,65,66].

3.2. The Value Chain of Agritourism in the Dehesa

A very interesting study on agritourism activities with an analysis of the most influential factors affectiung the increase of income in the farms that implemented them is [67]. Its authors showed that the agritourism activities that offered the greatest opportunities for increasing incomes were those related to the tasting and direct sale of typical local products, or the offer of cultural and sports activities (active) in the environment of the farm. These two groups of alternative activities favor the preservation of the cultural and landscape heritage and the economic activity of the primary sector of the nearby local environment, while at the same time increasing the economic benefits of the business, eliminating unnecessary intermediaries and favoring the rapprochement between producers and consumers. On the other hand, it is also necessary to identify which resources are the most appropriate, or which actors and services of the value chain we have to make our offer known to in order to maximize the endogenous resources of the territory in question.

Thus, following the methodology proposed by [44] to identify the elements of the agritourism value chain, and taking into account part of the methodology proposed by [68], the value chain for agritourism in dehesas is shown below, adapted to the particularities of

these ecosystems and rural environments in Extremadura (Figures 3 and S1). While Figure 3 lists the elements and their relationships that could be involved in the implementation of agritourism, Figure S1 in the annex provides an expanded view of this chain. It identifies, among other issues, the relationship of the different elements with the territory and the transversality of research, innovation, and development resources in all areas of the value chain analyzed.

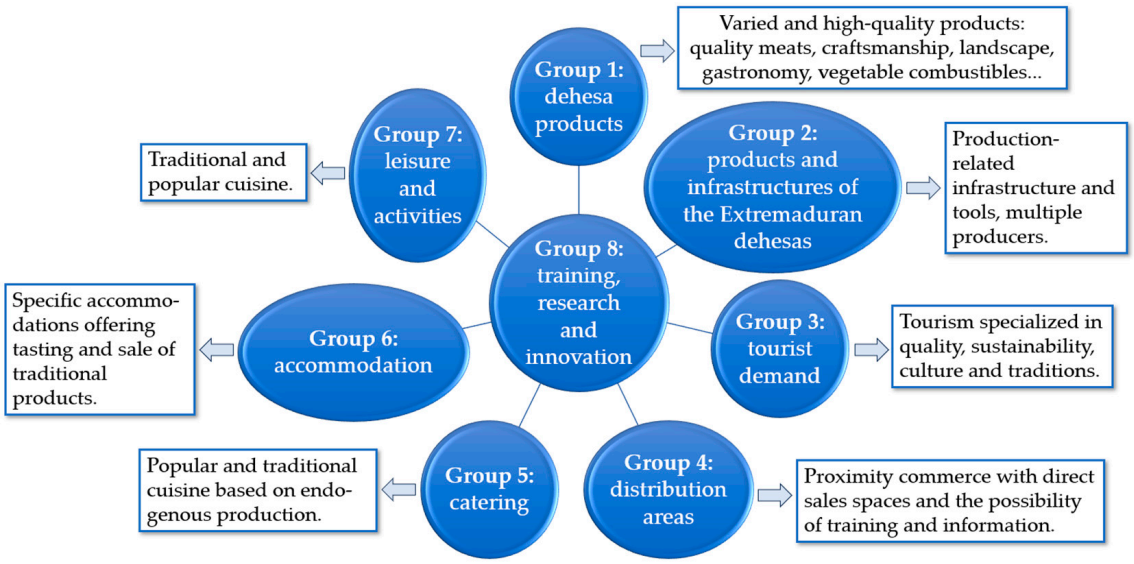

Figure 3. Simplified value chain of agritourism in the dehesa land use. Source: own elaboration based on the research works of [44,68].

As can be seen in Figure 3 and Figure S1, the first group of elements in the value chain is made up of all the products extracted from the Extremadura dehesa. This is a very heterogeneous group of elements because it is possible to find products destined for gastronomic tourism (lamb, beef, and Iberian pork with a Denominación de Origen products (DO). declaration of Extremadura, a Spanish quality label that distinguishes products for their high quality, for being of natural origin, and because their producers have elaborated them following traditional production methods and respecting the environment) [69,70], others linked to ecotourism (the dehesa landscape itself is a unique place for activities such as hiking and taking advantage of the collection of wild seasonal products), and products associated with traditional craft activities (the pruning of oak and cork oak for the use of firewood as a green fuel, the creation of charcoal, the extraction of cork, and dry stone constructions associated with the dehesa declared Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2018). A large number of these products of the first group are characterized by their high quality and for being the result of traditional uses and exploitation by the local community in which they are produced, which give them a great uniqueness and are part of the cultural heritage of some unique pastureland areas in Europe.

In the second group we can find different types of producers and infrastructures directly associated with the multiple uses they have been associated with for decades in the Extremadura dehesa. Thus, producers such as cattle breeders, farmers, and foresters who have taken advantage of the pastures to sow cereal, or the semi-natural forest areas to take advantage of the wood from the trees, are joined by other ancestral trades already in danger of disappearing, such as the charcoal maker (who makes charcoal from the wood of the trees in the pasture), the charcoaler (who makes charcoal as a traditional means of heating the houses), the cork cutter (who extracts cork from the cork oak, a typical tree of the dehesa), the furrier (an intermediary who bought the wool from the sheep in the dehesa to sell to textile companies), or even the shearer (who was in charge of removing the wool from the sheep in spring as a measure to relieve them of the summer heat and

at the same time to obtain a highly valued product in the textile industry), among others. Craft trades stand out as intangible cultural heritage of the local communities linked to the use of the pastures. However, the infrastructures and tools used for agricultural work are also of great interest. The typical instances and spaces of a dehesa are extremely attractive because each one of them is conceived for a very clear function (from the housing area, to the silo and store grain, water infrastructure for the workers and livestock, the network of roads and paths to move around the pasture, and the infrastructure to prevent livestock from escaping from one plot to another on the farm, among others). Furthermore, some of the tools used in the pasture are also special, such as the carlanca (a spiked collar that was put on the dogs that guarded the livestock to prevent wolves from killing them), and the celemín (an instrument used for catching and moving the grain of the harvest and also a unit of measurement that was equivalent to approximately 4.6 L). In this second group are the different uses and forms of exploitation of the pasture: grazing, browsing (consisting of the cattle eating the leaves of the branches on the ground after pruning the trees of the pasture as a further use of resources), cork extraction, hunting, and the collection of fruits such as acorns (fruit of the oak) to be used as food for livestock (Iberian pig), or even for liquors and digestives (acorn liqueur is well known).

In the third group, mention is made of the potential demand for agritourism in Extremadura's dehesas. According to the bibliography consulted, the vast majority coincides with a very clear profile of tourist: a user attracted by quality rather than quantity, who is keenly aware of the concept of sustainability (especially with its environmental protection pillar), who avoids crowded spaces and seeks active learning experiences in which he is involved with the environment to get to know the particularities and way of life of the local communities in that area (and who is exceptionally attracted, therefore, by the local culture and traditions). To these characteristics and in the case of tourists arriving in Extremadura (an autonomous community close to large Spanish cities such as Madrid and Seville, and Portuguese towns such as Castelo Branco, Evora, Beja, and even Lisbon, which is just over 2 h away from the Extremadura city of Badajoz) is added the fact that they seek in the rural environment (among which is the dehesa) a place to relax from the stress of the city (disconnect) and seek a healthier way of life.

In the fourth group are those elements of the value chain related to the distribution of products and services. In the case of the Extremadura dehesa, the distribution potential is high, given the existing road infrastructure, which allows the region to be crossed from north to south in 2.5 h, and from east to west in barely 2.15 h (despite the existing deficient railway infrastructure). This allows the producers of the Extremadura dehesa to consider a distribution of their products on a local and regional scale that, if well planned, can be successful. In the case of local commerce, producers' distribution to direct sales spaces (local stores and supermarkets, stores specializing in artisanal products, etc.) where they can make their products known, as well as attending specific distribution events (livestock fairs, multisectorial agricultural fairs, etc.), can undoubtedly help them to improve their economic income and diversify their economic activity. In this sense, social relations with different sectors of activity nearby and belonging to collectives within the value chain are key.

Groups 5, 6, and 7 are part of the commercialization of products and their supply to the final consumer. In the case of the fifth group, it is made up of catering elements where the sale of agri-food products for gastronomic tourism can take place. Thus, in addition to the large restaurants in Extremadura (this autonomous community has 26 large restaurants, which hold several Michelin Stars and Repsol Suns, among which the Atrio Restaurant in Cáceres stands out, with 3 Stars and 3 Suns), these endogenous products can be very well received in traditional and popular cuisine spaces and others specialized in hunting cuisine. Nor should we lose sight of the existing tapas culture in the autonomous community of Extremadura.

The sixth group refers to the supply of accommodation. Although Extremadura has an extensive network of rural accommodation (according to [71], in 2022 there was a network of

1056 rural accommodations, which housed 238,298 tourists, that is, 12.8% of the tourists who came to Extremadura in that year), the fact is that the amount of accommodation dedicated to agritourism is less than 0.5% of the supply. A type of agritourism accommodation in which active learning activities are offered (including outdoor and indoor recreation), with tours, opportunities to learn about the potential of the associated agricultural and natural landscape, tastings of traditional products (and the possibility of buying them directly), without losing sight of the basic and diversified production of the pasture for the maintenance of traditional spaces and uses, would be the ideal concept. This ideal business concept could perfectly fit among the people of Extremadura and on a national and international scale (this type of tourism is highly demanded by tourists from Portugal and central and northern Europe). Of course, it is essential to count on the local population to develop all the activities, from the uses that keep the dehesa alive, to the complementary activities for the agricultural economy (agritourism). It is also necessary to count on the local population and businesses compatible with the agritourism project in the dehesa in order to generate networks of mutual use in those services not offered by some but offered by others.

The seventh group of elements in the chain is related to leisure and recreational or alternative activities. In this sense, the range of activities to be developed is very diverse, going from tasting, show cooking, and tastings of endogenous garden products, meats, or cereal derivatives, to excursions and various routes (hiking, horseback riding, cycling, electric vehicles, etc.) in order to learn about the benefits of the wild products of the dehesa (asparagus, wild potato, thistles, medicinal plants, etc.) and the diversity of the landscape. Alternative activities include photographic safaris, fishing activities in the small existing lagoons, and even night-based recreation involving festivities and Extremaduran folklore (traditional songs and dances of the local community).

Finally, although its associated elements form part of the eighth group, the fact is that this group for training, research, and innovation is common to the rest of the groups and phases of the value chain (which is why it appears in the center of the relationships in Figure 3). The aim is to reflect the need for constant innovation in all areas of the chain as an added value that singles out and optimizes the resources of the agritourism business concept associated with the dehesa. Key to this is the training (among other aspects in the digital field) of employees in the agritourism activity (both in the agricultural and livestock exploitation sectors, as well as the associated tourism) through the university, by providing training courses related to the hotel and catering industry, the primary sector in general, and the environmental and landscape branch. Events to disseminate these innovations applied to the field of agritourism in dehesas are also very important, taking into account that they represent a mark of quality and distinction for this type of tourism.

In addition to the groups described in Figure 3, Figure S1 shows the hierarchies that give importance to all these resources within the value chain: the first three groups (1, 2, and 3), together with group 8 (which is found in all the groups) form part of the basic, indispensable core (Level 1) of elements that make up the chain and have much to do with the elements most closely linked to the territory and its potential. These elements refer to the products, producers, and singularities of the Extremadura pastureland area in relation to the associated agritourism proposal. Behind this basic nucleus is Level 2, which is made up of two varieties of group 4 (together with group 8 for R&D&I), which allude to the distribution areas of the products and services linked to agritourism in the dehesa. This is a complementary level to the basic Level 1, but it is equally essential to provide an outlet for products and services linked to the rural environment and the local community in general, and to the dehesa in particular. This is also the level with the most deficiencies in terms of relations between economic spheres, since currently in the majority of cases in Extremadura the relations with tourist service entities are very residual (they are closely linked to the sale of quality meats and, to a lesser extent, the use of cereals). Finally, there is Level 3, which is aimed at the marketing of agritourism products and services of the dehesa for the case of Extremadura. Here we find groups 5, 6, and 7 (along with group 8, which is common to all

levels), which are linked to catering, accommodation, leisure, and parallel activities. This level offers many possibilities, given that the infrastructure (catering, rural accommodation, hostels, and campsites) and the entities for the organization of events already exist and are of good quality. The problem lies in including in the value chains the activities related to agritourism in the dehesa and disseminating them appropriately.

3.3. Strengths and Weaknesses of Agritourism in the Extremaduran Dehesa

One of the most interesting analyses when evaluating the repercussions of agritourism in the rural environments where it is implemented is that which refers to its impacts on the economy, society, and the local environment. Despite its importance, this type of study is not abundant in the recent literature and the few studies that do exist identified two factors that greatly influence the relationship between local agro-farmers and tourism entities: the type of tourism business and, above all, its ownership [72]; and its diversification and the existence of effective social networks between the two. Thus, there is a greater probability of implementation of agritourism activities in those cases where the owner is a farmer or livestock farmer (male or female, preferably under 40 years of age, since this group is more in favor of the implementation of agritourism and training in this type of activity than older people) [68], who already has their own agricultural land, with adequate access and production infrastructures [73], and who can also supply their products and services in a quantity and at a quality that is in accordance with the needs of the existing tourist demand [74,75].

In addition, some studies confirmed that being part of the agritourism value chain gives local people more opportunities to opt for extra services (from the promotion of excursions to recreational activities, to tastings and gastronomic tourism, among others) and, therefore, to obtain more income than if they were outside these circuits. In addition, there are other benefits such as increased employment in the local environment, preservation of the local tangible and intangible heritage, and diversification of activities [76,77]. Among the most outstanding problems in the relations between local communities and the various forms of rural tourism are those related to the difference in the sufficiency and quality of production of agricultural products, where in some cases the local population cannot supply the tourist demand, neither in quantity of agricultural products, nor sometimes in quality according to what the tourist demands. Having a qualified labor force, adequate infrastructure [78], improving the exchange of information between agricultural producers and intermediary tourist entities in the supply, enforcing the applicability of minimum quality standards, taking advantage of web dissemination and digital support tools [79], together with correct interventions by the administrators is the basis for these local communities to be effectively included in the agritourism value chains in Extremadura [80–84].

4. Discussion

Perhaps one of the most relevant ideas of this study is the confirmation that the implementation of agritourism activities around the uses and exploitation of the dehesa is feasible. Moreover, the potential attractiveness of these spaces combines nature and culture in a very unique way [85]. In addition, it offers multiple benefits for the local communities where they are implemented, with an improvement to the sustainability (in its three pillars) of the rural environment and its population, the increase in employment and opportunities for socioeconomic development mainly in terms of the young population, and the opportunity to diversify economic activities in an efficient manner [86,87], maintaining the infrastructure [84] and the traditional agricultural and livestock use, while complementing them with natural spaces and bodies of water in a nearby environment [87], are some of the most outstanding benefits [85]. These statements coincide with most of the reviewed works and this study attempts to respond to the need to investigate agritourism associated with another geographic space and tourism potential [71].

In order to implement these types of agritourism activities in rural environments such as Extremadura, farmers must first consider what model of agritourism they intend

to offer [88]: following the didactic model (offering an experience based on the active observation of the tourist that shows the way of life and the activities carried out in a dehesa), or the recreational model, which is focused on lodging and leisure in a dehesa environment. The first model does preserve the natural resources and identity of the traditional way of use that rural environments have developed in nearby dehesas; the second is doomed, as Barbieri rightly points out, to transform this ecosystem into outdoor recreational macro-areas oriented to the leisure of the urbanite, thus losing its identity and its original uses.

Even if rural communities consider the implementation of the didactic model of agritourism in their dehesas (with the direct sale of local products or leisure services), the diversification of activities and increase in income are far from assured. The success of this diversification in European LFAs such as the rural environments of Extremadura (similar to those of Italy or Portugal), in addition to suffering from problems of depopulation, population aging, and abandonment of the primary sector in general (including the traditional uses of the dehesa), suffer from no less important deficiencies such as knowledge of these types of activity and their benefits, adequate training to satisfy the demanding tourist, and the efficient management of the resources derived from carrying out both activities at the same time [89]. Although the case of Extremadura is not similar to that of Sardinia studied in [89] (since in Extremadura there are only a couple of lodgings that offer agritourism activities), given the similar characteristics in both cases, similar results could be expected: the increase in income with agritourism and the fixation of the working-age agricultural population are not assured and many farmers may have problems in remunerating the work of their hired family members in accordance with the market and in coping with both activities. In order to achieve adequate income, it is key to expand the tourism offer, improve business management, have relations with tourism and leisure promoters linked to the territory, and have a good brand image.

One of the most striking features of rural environments in Extremadura in general (including those linked to the dehesa) is that there are barely three or four establishments offering some kind of low-level agritourism activity (i.e., lodging and tasting of local products). Bearing in mind that the region does have an adequate range of restaurants and leisure activities, together with an enviable cultural and natural heritage in the vicinity of these areas, it is even more incredible that agritourism has yet to be discovered (and in the case of the dehesa, there is no agritourism yet). Surely the disinformation on the part of the local community and farmers, the lack of promotion of this type of tourism in the region, and the generic regulations on rural tourism in Extremadura are the most important causes. For this reason, the authors of this study are already immersed in a process of surveying the regional rural tourism offer to identify these causes, despite the potential of this autonomous community and the fact that slightly more than half of the rural lodgings in this autonomous community is located within a radius of 3 km of pastureland [48].

According to [60], the effort of agricultural producers to develop these types of activities is high, but if they intend to offer a specialized tourism such as this they need to update their offer of activities, consider the advice of tourists, and adapt their infrastructure to the standardized requirements of tourists. These actions need institutional support so that they can be carried out, and so that the local population is educated about the meaning of these types of initiatives; furthermore, it would ensure that the competent administration is shown as an ally and not as an enemy (bureaucratic simplification and common sense in many cases are not abundant in these cases) [31,32,36].

It is also essential to have a close relationship between administrations in areas directly related to agritourism. This is the case, for example, of administrations related to tourism and the environment, where the limitations to safeguard a given natural environment can be a barrier to install a certain infrastructure that favors, for example, access to agritourism lodging. The search for an intermediate solution that favors the objectives of both administrations would be ideal to promote the development of agritourism activities linked to the dehesa and to attract a greater volume of tourists specialized in this area [58,59].

Finally, it is necessary to make the owners of these dehesa farms aware of the need to update in areas such as digital technology or to include mechanisms that optimize resources (such as the use of water for food or drink for livestock), mechanize some harvesting techniques, and adapt the facilities to the requirements of tourists for this type of activity [86].

Some of the future research proposed after the results obtained in this work are related to the need to concretely identify the potentialities and weaknesses found by the managers of the existing rural lodging offer in Extremadura, in order to propose actions to mitigate them, while increasing the degree of knowledge about agritourism and its possibilities in the environment of the Extremadura dehesa.

5. Conclusions

Following the results obtained, the following conclusions are listed below:

- The implementation of agritourism activities linked to the Extremadura dehesa is feasible and has a high potential for development, given the unique landscapes, the agricultural and livestock uses and exploitations carried out, their cultural links with the local community, and the numerous nearby rural environments and heritage associated with their activities. In addition, the socioeconomic benefits of implementing this type of initiative in rural environments (some of them with problems of depopulation and population aging) are high, with the most outstanding benefits including increases in employment, especially among the young population and the family environment; the diversification of economic activities (both agro-livestock and tourism); and the preservation of traditional trades and customs linked to the tasks of the pasture;
- The sectors that stand out as the most influential in the implementation of agritourism activities in Extremadura's dehesa are first of all those referred to in Level 1 of the value chain, that is, those linked to the territory, such as the existence of dehesa in which a diversity of agro–silvo–pastoral uses and exploitations coexist in a semi-natural space that is already attractive in itself. Economic activities such as the production of meat and cheeses with D.O. in Extremadura and its part of the transformation chain are some of the most outstanding sectors. However, agritourism activities linked to accommodation, recreation, and active visits to the pastures have great potential (although it is hardly exploited in Extremadura). Other very influential sectors for the development of agritourism activities are those linked to the commercialization of agritourism (despite being part of Level 3 of the chain), given the existence of a whole network of restaurants and tourist lodgings with dehesas in their immediate surroundings, which could consider this initiative as an alternative to rural tourism, which is so overcrowded in some areas of Extremadura;
- The relationship between agritourism and the agro-livestock activities in the dehesa is currently very scarce in Extremadura, although if the owners of the dehesas directly or in collaboration with rural lodging businessmen were to bet on it, it could be very close and productive, according to the works reviewed. The forms of agritourism related to the native gastronomy linked to the dehesa, or visits to the semi-natural environment linked to it are a small sample of the relationships that could be developed and their possibilities. In addition, the growing demand for this type of tourism and the authenticity of the offer related to the use of this pastureland system in an autonomous community such as Extremadura (one of the two European regions with the largest pastureland surface area), make this a relationship of high potential value [23]. Another very interesting relationship is the possibility of direct contact between tourists and dehesa producers. In this sense, this tourist offer provides an opportunity to learn about unique ways of life and uses that cannot be seen in other parts of Europe. The extraction of cork or charcoal, the construction of infrastructures such as plot boundaries with dry stone, and even the way in which the soil resource is used in a sustainable way and what this entails (food for livestock, sowing interspersed with rest areas, environmentally friendly tools, etc.), not to mention information and intangible

culture linked to traditions, temporal changes, festivals, songs and dances associated with certain tasks and periods of time closely linked to agriculture or livestock, etc., are some of these examples;

- As for the main problems identified that may be faced by those entrepreneurs who intend to open an agritourism business linked to the exploitation of the Extremadura dehesa, there is a need to raise awareness and train the native farmers of the Extremadura dehesa on the benefits of agritourism as a complement to their income and an alternative to ensure the survival of an exploitation that otherwise would be difficult to maintain. Another problem to consider is the fact that the local businessmen linked to the dehesa must ensure minimum standards of quality and uniformity in order to satisfy the demand for this type of tourism, and to try to include himself in the value chain to offer his products and services to a local clientele (in addition to the tourists themselves) [90]. The need to inform the local community about agritourism in the dehesa is very important, so that they feel able to identify with this economic approach and can transmit it and participate in establishing a brand image for the territory with these characteristics that is identifiable by the potential tourist demand, and this is another important current weak point. Furthermore, being included in appropriate digital marketing portals and increasing the average stay of in the accommodation provided through proper planning of the activities to be carried out [58,65] would significantly increase the socioeconomic benefits for this community. Finally, the administration should encourage and facilitate, as far as possible, that this type of initiative, which is linked to such a unique and important area as the dehesa, is carried out in the simplest possible way, avoiding obstacles and misunderstandings in the regulations and tourist typification, among other issues.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/agriculture13112078/s1, Figure S1: Global value chain of agritourism in Extremaduran dehesa land use. Source: own elaboration based on the research works of [44,68].

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