



Case Study

Fallängetorp

Lillstugan seen from the outside
(photo provided by Stina Barrsäter)

1. Introduction

Fallängetorp is an ecological farm located in Krylbo (Västmanland County), in central Sweden, that breeds sheep, cows and pigs. The farm is a family business managed by the husband and wife team Per and Anitha, and her daughter Stina.

It produces and sells meat and wool. They also provide accommodation through a cabin, called Lillstugan, and a hostel, the Bed & Breakfast Mellangården. The family also owns a forest, where they have hiking tracks and places for the kids to play. The farm, which places special emphasis on accessibility for people with physical disabilities, provides a range of leisure activities to its guests to make their stay more enjoyable, as well as the opportunity for tourists to engage in farming activities.

When did the agrotourism business start?

NAME OF THE BUSINESS

Fallängetorp farm

LOCATION

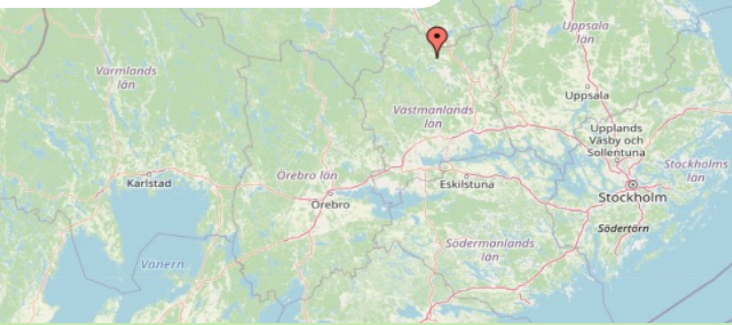
Krylbo, Västmanland County, Sweden

2. About the agrotourism

The farm is located in Krylbo, in Västmanland County, in central Sweden, 150 km away from Stockholm. It is a flat, but forested region. The Dalarna province has wetlands and areas of natural importance, many of which are included in the Natura 2000 network and, therefore, enjoy protection for their conservation. The province also stands out for its biodiversity, with bird and fish species native to the region.

The county, situated between the more touristic regions of Stockholm and Dalarna, is characterised by the demand for nature tourism. Bird watching is one of the most popular activities in the county. Although tourist demand is not yet very high, it is gradually increasing in parallel with a growing interest in nature tourism.

The farm dates back to the 1940s. Per was already born there. The first accommodation, the cabin, was opened in 2008, following a long Swedish tradition of staying on a farm. In 2013, Mellangården was opened and they started developing the leisure activities they are currently offering.



Number of workers

Stina is the only hired person in the business. That means that she is the only full-time worker, along with the owners, her mother Anitha and her stepfather Per. Her sister also usually assists them, but she works full-time in another job. That makes a total of four workers.

Some tourist data from the agrotourism

The farm has a total capacity of twenty people, five in the cabin and 15 in the Bed & Breakfast. Calculating the number of guests they host is complex as they receive people who only come for the day, but they estimate it to be around 1000 bed nights per year. During the high season, which spans from May until September, the farm is usually fully booked, especially the cabin. During the low season, they receive fewer tourists and more workers engaged in the forestry activities of the region. This is, therefore, a profile that is far removed from the typical tourist.

The typical profile of the Swedish national tourist is that of a family, parents with children, or extended family, including grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, etc. They tend to come from the Stockholm region. With respect to tourists of international origin, they usually come from Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the farm received mainly international guests, but after the borders were closed and the freedom of movement was limited for a prolonged period, the trend has switched, and they now host more domestic tourists. The distribution is around 65% Swedish tourists, and the remaining 35% are international. However, the cabin is mostly rented by international guests.

As for the activities organised on the farm, the most

popular is the one called "Be Farmer for a Day". This daytime activity consists of being around the animals: seeing them, feeding them, and taking care of them.

The idea is to reflect a typical day on the farm. Another activity organised on the farm is the fika. It is a Swedish tradition which involves enjoying coffee accompanied by a snack. On the Fallängertorp farm, they arrange what they call the "farmer's fika", consisting of coffee, tea, and a considerable amount of food, such as sandwiches or sausages. Besides these activities, the farm offers outdoor cooking practices where guests and hosts cook together over the fire. In the forest, they also have hiking paths for tourists, as well as a playground and a climbing area for children.

The farm also provides two Zooms Uphill, a terrain vehicle for people with physical disabilities. One of the workhorses of the farm is to enable people with physical disabilities to enjoy nature without barriers. That is also why the Bed & Breakfast is accessible for people in wheelchairs or with other impeding physical disabilities. The farm has a tractor and a wagon that can be accessed by wheelchairs and baby strollers, too.

The farm has a shop selling the meat they produce from their animals. To accomplish this, they collaborate with other producers, who assist in processing their meat and crafting products such as burgers or sausages. They also sell wood and grain to bigger companies.



The "Be Farmer for a Day" activity, with the tractor and wagon for people with physical disabilities (photo provided by Stina Barrsäter)



Guests taking part in the "Be Farmer for a Day" activity (photo provided by Stina Barrsäter)



Tourists taking part in the hiking trail (photo provided by Stina Barrsäter)

About commercialization

The Fallängetorp farm uses several channels to commercialise its accommodation services. The website is not one of them, but it has a section which provides the necessary information for tourists to book their stay on the farm. The booking can be made through an email or a phone call, or even the farm's social media.

The farm is advertised on multiple booking platforms. The most popular one is Booking.com, but it is also present on VRBO, formerly known as HomeAway, BookSpot, Blue Pillow, etc. They have a profile on Tripadvisor, but the option to book or see the booking availability is disabled.

About advertising

The farm is mainly advertised through its website, which is available in Swedish, English and German: <https://fallangetorp.se/>. It is also present on several social media platforms, like Instagram and Facebook.

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Fallangetorp>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/fallangetorp/>

They also receive support from local groups that advertise the farm through their own channels, including websites that promote the region and area where the farm is located. They highlight the relevance of word-of-mouth. If people around the farm, like neighbours or local businesses, are given the opportunity to be informed about the activities developed there, it will be more likely that they will provide positive feedback and advertise the farm in an organic way.

Fallängetorp is also advertised on the website of Bo på Lantgård, the professional organisation that groups businesses engaged in rural tourism. The farm has a sole profile on Google Business, for both the agrotourism and the shop. Those are the profiles:

- Bo på Lantgård: <https://www.farmstaysweden.com/gardar/fallangetorp-lantbruk/>
- Google Business: <http://tinyurl.com/mva4et72>

The farm doesn't currently have any physical advertising materials, like leaflets or catalogues. They used to have one leaflet in Swedish several years ago, but they stopped printing and using it.



A cow looking deeply into the camera. (photo by Sylvia Adams)

About starting up the business

The farm belonged to Per's family, who bought it back in the 1940s. He was even born there. Afterwards, Per and Anitha bought the farm next to theirs. The couple also purchased more houses and farmlands. One of these lands had a building in the middle of a field, which was used for animals to graze and where tractors needed to pass through. A Swedish law allows

people living in a house surrounded by lands where farming activities are developed to stop them if they are causing any harm to their quality of life. Therefore, Per and Anitha didn't dare to rent or sell this house out of fear that, after a while, the new owners would try to force them to stop their agricultural work.



Tourists enjoying the fika, the Swedish traditional brunch (photo provided by Stina Barrsäter)



Mellangården's kitchen is adapted for physically disabled people (photo provided by Stina Barrsäter)

During that time, Anitha was working as a consultant for foundations. One day, she was sitting in a café when she saw people with disabilities accompanied by their caregivers. It was then that she decided that they had to turn the house into a rural hostel adapted for people with physical disabilities. The different members of the family had already shown interest in the knowledge of different realities.

Another main reason that prompted them to embark on this venture was the desire to educate people about the reality of agricultural work and the daily lives of farmers in Sweden. They also wanted to showcase the stress-free life, calmness, nature, and well-being of rural areas.

After opening the first accommodations, the family realised how many tourists were interested in the animals. They then decided to extend their offer with livestock activities, such as the aforementioned "Be a Farmer for a Day".

They received public funds from the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture to set up the agrotourism business. Although they also got financial aid from the European Union, the economic support was channelled mainly through national funds.

The biggest challenges or barriers that they found at the start were the legal requirements deriving from Swedish law. The first difficulty they encountered was related to the certifications needed to be able to start operating the agrotourism business. Swedish law requires a credential proving that the premises meet a number of requirements, especially in terms of fire and safety. These conditions also apply to the food served in the hotel establishments. Although this is an ordinary and common procedure, Stina and Anitha stress the cumbersome nature of the procedure and, above all, its high cost, which can be a barrier to entry for many entrepreneurs who want to engage in agrotourism.

The other major challenge they faced was the creation of a business separate from the farm that would deal solely with the accommodation they offer to tourists. Indeed, the legal requirements, including tax treatment, that apply to both the farming and tourism sectors are different. This is why, although the two businesses are run jointly, they each have their own legal regime. For this same reason, the family owns another company solely devoted to selling the meat they produce from their livestock.



Cows standing on the farm's land (photo provided by Stina Barrsäter)

About managing an agrotourism business

Managing a farm is complicated as new challenges need to be faced daily. Often, the solution to these problems does not depend on the farmer. Last year, for example, the farm was affected by the African swine fever plague (ASF). The ASF is a devastating infectious disease of pigs, usually deadly. Although it doesn't affect humans, the lack of a vaccine or cure results in a massive loss of farm pigs. The family had to slaughter every pig they had because of this disease, which also forced them to close the farm to tourists until December.

Their expectations for the near future, consequently, are to increase the demand for tourism on the farm. Stina and Anitha believe that there is a growing interest in nature and contact with animals. In order to promote the development of the tourist side of the farm, they are planning improvements to the facilities: the construction of a sauna, additional accommodation and a new barbecue.

The farm has 1,000 hectares of arable land. One-third is dedicated to growing oats and wheat, another third is allocated for grazing the animals in summer, while the remaining third is used for cattle grazing in winter. As for the total number of livestock, the farm has eight cows, 250 sheep and 30 pigs. All the animals are bred on the farm, until the moment they are sent to the slaughterhouse for meat that is later sold in the shop.

With regard to the division of tasks and the workload, the family acknowledges that it is sometimes very difficult to keep up with two parallel businesses.

The "Be Farmer for a Day" activity brings them additional income, as it is open to people who don't stay on the farm, but it is also a greater effort for them. In fact, when the ewes give birth, they can work for up to 24 hours in the sheephouse.

At the same time, the family sees opening up these livestock activities to tourism as an easy way to earn an income: the animals are grazing in the fields and their work is limited to taking tourists to meet them. This is the same philosophy they follow for the exploitation of the forest they own, as they insist that the trees will grow in the same way, whether there are tourists or not. This is an idea they try to convey to forest owners who are still reluctant to open their woodlands to tourism.

According to the family's estimates, around 50% of the household's income comes from farming and the other half from tourism services.

Stina and Anitha are discussing what to include in an agrotourism training program. They both stress a crucial point: safety. The farm strictly follows rules to ensure the safety of animals and guests. Visitors aren't allowed to freely roam the stables; they must always follow the hosts' instructions. There are specific regulations in place for the animals' well-being, too. For example, tourists from abroad can't interact with the animals until they've spent at least 48 hours in Sweden to prevent any diseases from spreading. Therefore, it's essential to cover safety extensively in the training materials.



Kids cuddling sheep on the farm's land. (photo provided by Stina Barrsäter)

Advice for new entrepreneurs

“People need to know that opening an agrotourism is not frightening. It’s not as hard as it may sound. The biggest fear is they think that maybe people staying on the farm could be a threat, a hassle or a danger to their daily work. During these ten years, we have had no guests that have disturbed us or that haven’t behaved in an appropriate way. So, losing this irrational fear is a first step.

Another piece of advice could be: look at what you have and what you can do with that. The path is made up of small steps. You can start by opening your farm to the public once a year and gradually develop your business. Make wise use of the resources you have, because sometimes we don’t know the economic potential we already have at our disposal”.



Still Tourism Around Yard



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