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**Francesc Fusté Forné**

PhD Researcher

Universitat de Girona (Catalonia, Spain)

Lincoln University (New Zealand)

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**Local cheese in farmers' markets:  
community and tourism development in Canterbury, New Zealand**

Food tourism has been spreading during the recent decades, both in urban environments and in rural areas. Food is a key motivation for many trips. This research delineates the conceptual linkages between food tourism and local community development. To achieve this, the study sets the relationship that exists among local cheese producers and farmers' markets in the region of Canterbury (New Zealand). The wide natural appeal and a traditional community sense of place come together in a place where both hosts and guests are delighted to experience the taste of the land through local food.

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Keywords: cheese tourism, community development, farmers' markets, food tourism, New Zealand, local produce, Canterbury region, rural tourism

**Francesc Fusté Forné**

PhD Researcher

Universitat de Girona (Catalonia, Spain)

Lincoln University (New Zealand)

Email: [researchexperiencetourism@gmail.com](mailto:researchexperiencetourism@gmail.com)

**Francesc Fusté Forné** is a PhD researcher at the *Universitat de Girona* (Catalonia, Spain) and a visiting researcher at Lincoln University (New Zealand). His research has been focused on rural tourism and food tourism, and their contributions to the local development. He is also interested in the study of the interaction between experiences and tourism both in the industry and the landscape.

## **Introduction**

Nowadays, more and more consumers are delighted to taste quality food products, valuing terms of appearance, freshness, taste or texture. The processes of production, processing and control of the products become a key issue together with the means to maintain traditional values without damaging the resources that make development possible (Fusté, 2015a). Local food is distinguished by the territory quality in terms of both natural and cultural landscapes. Moreover, the added value that is generated in relation to the products with quality labels represents also an important factor for regional economic development (Bigné, 2011), locating the quality of production in a specific *terroir*. Hall and Sharples (2003) define food tourism as the journey to gastronomic regions, with recreational and entertainment purposes, which includes visits to primary and secondary food producers, gastronomic festivals, food fairs, events, farmers markets, cooking shows and demonstrations, tasting quality food products or other tourist activities related to food. They give to the farmers' markets the category of tourism attraction. The goal of this research is, from a theoretical point of view, to discuss the linkages between local cheese produce and tourism development, which can lead to further research on the quantitative impact of this relationship. The paper deals with farmers' markets in New Zealand's Canterbury region, where agriculture and specifically milk production play a key role both in society and economy.

## **Food tourism and local community development**

In the interfaces between tourism and agriculture, it is not enough to consider just the amount of visitors or their expenditure, because if employment opportunities and incomes do not reach local people, communities do not take advantage of the development of tourism (Cànoves, Villarino, Priestley & Blanco, 2004; Telfer & Wall, 1996). There are several authors who recognize the benefits of food tourism as a tool for local development (Bèssiere, 1998; Berno Laurin & Maltezakis, 2014; Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis & Cambourne, 2003; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; López-Guzmán, Di-Clemente & Hernández-Mogollón, 2014; Millán, Morales & Pérez, 2014; Sidali, Kastenholz & Bianchi, 2013; Torres, 2002). In this sense, food tourism is able to set a close connection between food, territories and communities since it includes products and experiences that encapsulate both cultural and natural idiosyncrasies (Fusté, 2015a; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2008; Hillel, Belhassen & Shani, 2013; Kim & Ellis, 2015; Richards, 2002; Sims, 2009). Direct and indirect benefits of linking agriculture and tourism are, according to Berno, Laurin and Maltezakis (2014: 105)

“increasing economic development; the pride of place, generating attractive, vital and viable rural areas; and a vibrant and locally distinctive tourism product”.

Tourism development allows to improve infrastructures and, at the same time, benefit the agricultural sector; nonetheless, it is usual as well to find that many farmers fail when they change ways of working as a response to the special needs of a growing tourism demand. In this sense, the multifunctionality in the agriculture has been widely studied (OECD, 2001, 2003; Van Huylenbroeck & Durand, 2003), together with the connections between rural tourism and farm diversification (Sharpley & Vass, 2006), and also very recent research shows how farmers face land and rural development issues (Honig, Petersen, Shearing, Pintér & Kotze, 2015; Zasada & Piorr, 2015). In all cases, agriculture must be the starting point of food tourism: “agriculture provides the product; culture provides the authenticity; and tourism provides the infrastructure and services” (Berno Laurin & Maltezakis, 2014: 113). In addition, there is a growth of niche markets that revalued local food artisan producers, and France, Italy and Spain are the countries where this trend is most clearly observed (Barrera, 1999; Henderson, 2009), with also many examples in countries like Australia and New Zealand (Hall, 2004).

### **Cheese produce and local markets in the Canterbury region (New Zealand)**

Stokowski (1991: 3) defines *sense of place* as a social idea where “the meanings people collectively hold about communities and place are developed and confirmed in a social context through social interaction, and these meanings are transmitted and sustained through social relationship in extended networks of people”. Coles and Crang (2011: 90) state that “the market itself, constituted by distinctive material textures and sensory experiences, plays an important role in the appreciation of the goods within it. Its location [...]; its architecture; its assortment of material displays, as old wheelbarrows, push carts and tables are used to display produce; the crowds, noise and sense of activity; all of these are vital to the feel and meanings of the market. That sense of place translates into a particular sort of packaging of the goods for sale, a packaging that presents a sense of where these goods are from and hence what qualities they have”. One of the products that better represents this sense *from farm gate to dinner plate* is cheese, made of milk obtained from the cows feeding and grazing on the land.

As far as cheese tourism involves visiting areas of cheese making and milk production (Fusté, 2015b), where largely milk production means richness of the land, the case of Canterbury is particularly relevant because it is the largest milk production region in the

South Island of New Zealand. At the same time, according to New Zealand Tourism (2015), “farmers’ markets [in New Zealand] provide a great insight into the regional heartland and are an ideal place to sample local fare, meet the locals and experience the New Zealand way of life. Virtually unknown 10 years ago, farmers’ markets are now an established part of the retail scene offering good value for money for shoppers and providing small businesses with an affordable shop front. In a country that can grow almost anything, New Zealand markets are stacked with fresh vegetables and fruit – some of it organic – locally-made cheeses and gourmet treats, fish and meat, home-made jams and preserves, flowers and plants, all vying for stall space alongside warm bread, fresh baking, hand-made chocolates, boutique wines and beers”. Local farmers’ markets appear then as the perfect platform to deliver this handcrafted produce to a consumer that is at the same time local and international.

The cheesemaking process in the Canterbury region is mainly carried out from cows’ milk, but some of the production uses milk from goats and sheep. The Region of Canterbury has some cheese firms – among which Barrys Bay Traditional Cheese, Emilio’s Cheese, Karikaas Natural Dairy Products, Mt Grey Cheese or Talbot Forest Cheese can be highlighted – and their presence in local markets is important to promote their brands and supply their pieces of cheese, especially for cheese producers such as Emilio’s Cheese and Mt Grey Cheese, who distribute only locally. It is not the goal of this article to deal with the characteristics of cheese producers, but to emphasize the retailing through local markets as a way to interact with consumers and deliver a local product in a local framework. Small producers without chains of supply need to make a lot of different cheese types in order to reach a bigger market – with as many different tastes as different people – and to sell products at a very low price; presence at farmers’ markets is a vital selling opportunity for them.

In this sense, MacDonald (2013) emphasizes the importance of the integration between the natural, the local and the traditional aspects, in a reference to the wishes of a consumer who appreciates food associated with the identity of a landscape, its authenticity and sense of place. According to Naalyan (2014), visits to the markets themselves are an expression of the desire of tourists to experience authentic local products, nonetheless most of the visitors to New Zealand’s farmers’ markets are local people so far. “Food tourism creates wonderful opportunities for better integration of local communities in the tourism industry. Thus tourism acquire sustainable and socially responsible nature [*sic*]” (Naalyan, 2014: 61). There are up to sixteen local farmers’ markets within the Canterbury region that should represent a pathway for *cheese authenticity* as a way to attract visitors, and helping the local

development as well. This number of markets is obtained from a threefold source; the Farmers' Markets New Zealand website, the Canterbury Food and Wine Trails, and the author's visits throughout the region.

Definitively, a Farmers' Market is a food market where visitors can find food produced in local areas and where the vendor must be directly involved in the growing or production process of the food (New Zealand Farmers Market, 2015). They reconnect people and land through local food, and increase sustainability in their communities thanks to a regional focus, which at the same time encourages the preservation of agricultural land (New Zealand Tourism, 2015). Therefore farmers' markets are places where products have an added-value in a way to enhance local pride; they help understand the proximity between production and consumption; and they are places that imply both community and tourism development because they involve co-creation and co-participation. "Certain places and sites (with their landscapes, social practices, buildings, residents, symbols and meaning) achieve the status of tourists sights because of their physical, social, cultural – and commercial – attributes" (Britton, 1991: 462) – farmers' markets certainly have this potential.

## **Conclusion**

Who is more credible than the residents of the host community? (Walsh, Jamrozy & Burr, 2001). "An apple bought directly from a local orchardist makes so much more sense than one shipped to a central distribution point only to be transported back to your local retail outlet [...]. Farmers' markets play a role in the region's social collateral by fostering a sense of community and pride" (New Zealand Tourism, 2015). Local foods, supported by local agriculture can benefit local holistic development and this is the reason why more and more farmers are developing their business to include tourism and culinary experiences because they see the need to diversify and the consequent financial benefit (Berno Laurin & Maltezakis, 2014). In the framework of the farmers' markets, everyone is part of the value creation process, from the cheese's artisans to the tourists, and the whole community that expresses its own sense of place by hosting the market. The experience can be even more positive when this cultural and natural landscape is enjoyed together with story-telling – for example when visiting farms or factories – which allows in turn to diversify the tourism portfolio of a destination.

However cheese tourism is rarely studied by academics (Fusté, 2015b), and there is also a lack of study in bridging connections between farmers' markets, food tourism and local development, this conceptual paper brings together discussion on these issues. Further

research on this area can deal with quantitative analysis of the correlation between the variables presented, community development and tourism development. Also, the in-depth study of another means to promote local foods as festivals or edible landscapes; comparisons with well-known produce markets such as Boqueria's Market in Barcelona (Spain) or Porta Palazzo in Torino (Italy); and outputs from local community networks could be issues for further research.

### **Acknowledgements**

This research is made possible thanks to the financial support of NESSIE Project and European Commission.

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