The interconnection of tourism with the agri-food sector and manufacturing, development tools in the era of COVID-19 and beyond

Evangelia D. Parisi
PhD, Laboratory Teaching Staff at Ionian University, Greece-Department of Digital Media & Communication
parisieuagelia@ionio.gr

Abstract
In a particularly difficult economic situation, such as the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that completely reversed the positive development of the relevant figures by the beginning of 2020, the importance of tourism is increasing, as it is not only the heavy industry of Greece, but also a direct financier of the economy. Previous research highlights the importance of cooperation as a crucial element in the development of regional tourism. In this context of cooperative relationships, the role of primary production, agri-food and manufacturing in promoting and raising awareness of existing tourism-related activities, including those related to food and drink, is vital. The proposed study sought to identify and highlight those factors that favour or hinder the development of entrepreneurship in the primary sector, focusing on the impact of the current outbreak of the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic, as well as the business opportunities that will be created by linking tourism with primary production, agri-food and manufacturing on the island of Kefalonia. This island belongs to the Ionian Islands Region and is a tourist destination with great potential. Data were collected from multiple sources, such as secondary data, information from the internet, by filling in a questionnaire from a statistically sufficient sample of the population consisting of primary production manufacturing enterprises. The analysis of the data revealed the key role of the agri-food sector. This in turn underlines the need for a greater focus on how to exploit it in the hospitality sector, so that it can become a top development prospect for Kefalonia and can contribute decisively to its economic progress. Further studies on the common denominators and criteria for distinguishing between sustainable business practices would be valuable for researchers and practitioners, destination management organizations and regional development policy makers.

Keywords: Kefalonia, Primary Sector, Tourism Product, COVID-19.

1. Introduction
Tourism, especially mass tourism, has developed rapidly since 1970 in Greece, changing the economic character of many regions of the country. The tourism sector in Greece was looking forward to further growth in economic growth, but the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led the tourism industry to one of its worst years. This is not a Greek phenomenon, but a global reality.

The pandemic has brought about significant changes, among other things, in the preferences of tourists, in terms of the type of holiday they want. They are now looking for authentic places to spend their holiday time, staying in nature, in a healthy environment and at a human pace (Quynh et al., 2021; Shafiee et al., 2021).

These new conditions create the conditions for the effective interconnection of tourism with the agri-food sector and manufacturing. This interconnection concerns both the country's tourism product in general and the thematic tourism aspects that have agri-food products and agri-food culture at their core, such as gastronomic tourism and agritourism. The aim of the study was to investigate the current situation, what the general interconnection between them is, and what actions are being or will be taken to develop gastronomic and wine tourism. The result of all this is to propose steps that could bridge the gap between the two sectors. Food is, after all, an integral part of tourism, contributing to tourists' experiences and influencing their decisions. Greek production has the advantage of being renowned for its high quality, with more than half of its value coming from three categories linked to healthy eating: fruit, vegetables and olive oil. At the same time, foreign visitors seem to appreciate Greek gastronomy.

Greece has significant comparative advantages in the agri-food sector, based on the diversity of the country, the favorable natural environment in the lowland areas of the country, the quality and nutritional value of a relatively wide range of agricultural products (olives, grapes, pulses, citrus fruits and others) and internationally recognized food traditions. These advantages have not been sufficiently exploited due to significant and chronic structural weaknesses. The main weaknesses are small and fragmented farms, low productivity, inefficient organization, low integration of new technologies and equipment, insufficient vocational training, low level of R & D, high dependence on subsidies, and poor promotion and branding of Greek agri-food products.

Producers of agricultural products and hoteliers need to work together so that local products can take their rightful place in and outside the EU Region. Bringing together producers with the distribution channels of agri-food products and people in tourism, not only ensures the availability of local production, but also enhances the quality, competitiveness of both sectors and also involves other sectors of the local economy.

In Greece, several efforts have been made and are still being made by various bodies, such as the "Greek Breakfast" initiative of the Chamber of Hotels or the granting of the "Greek Cuisine" label to businesses, the granting of the special label "Visitable Winery" and finally the definition of the specifications of tourist accommodation for their inclusion in the NSRF (Leader) programs of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food. Various regions, such as Thessaly, Crete, Epirus, Epirus, Eastern Macedonia, and Peloponnese are also acting in this direction at local level (SETE, 2017). All these initiatives have a positive impact on the economy, as the linking of tourism with local gastronomy, culture, and local production will help support professionals and boost production, consumption and employment.

In addition, new forms of tourism such as gastronomic, agrotourism and wine tourism will be able to emerge, because apart from the natural beauties, quality agricultural products can be offered (Karagiannis & Metaxas, 2020). This is important because each region has its own "tourist magnets" for its tourists. In addition, many regions are developing a database of information about the product: when and by whom the product or recipe was invented, associated with a particular region, what characteristics and qualities it has, the history of the product (De Albuquerque Meneguel et al., 2019; Forleo & Benedetto, 2020).

The island of Kefalonia is one of those regions of Greece that has tourism development as a front as a prospect, as it has a number of untapped potentials. Kefalonia's tourism profile includes mainly small hotels and tourist accommodation and this caters to the above mentioned forms of tourism.

The olive groves and oil production, the vineyards and wineries with unique varieties of wines, the famous products such as honey, madeleines, and so much more, add value to the tourist product. The area therefore boasts an impressive natural landscape with strong contrasts and a wealth of remarkable natural ecosystems.

The content of the study includes the theoretical framework, in which a brief overview of the current situation of the primary sector on the island of Kefalonia is given, as well as a conceptual approach with the concepts under study. In the methodological framework, the research approach used is presented. From the results of the research, the potential for successful business projects in the agri-food sector and how they can be combined with the tourism sector and Hospitality services are highlighted. Finally, it concludes by presenting guidelines and action lines.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Description of the Ionian islands region - the island of Kefalonia

The Region of the Ionian Islands is an island region, stretching along the western mainland coast of Greece. It is distinguished by its beautiful islands characterized by a rich natural and cultural environment. It is divided into the regional units of Corfu, Kefalonia, Lefkada and Zakynthos. The headquarters of the Region is located in Corfu. The Ionian Islands include important and interesting natural ecosystems, as they have a high rainfall index and a mild climate. They also exhibit high biodiversity, as the ecosystems include rich flora and fauna, while seasonal bird migration enriches the ecosystems of the Region with rare and internationally threatened bird species. All the Regions are rich in vegetation and each has a distinct natural geographic identity

The largest Regional Unit of the Region in terms of area is Kefallinia (904 sq. km.), which is the study area. The prefecture of Kefallinia includes Kefalonia and Ithaca with a population of 38,770 inhabitants. The climate is of Mediterranean land type. The prefecture occupies an important strategic and geopolitical position, with a strong geomorphological relief and unique geological phenomena (Katavothores). Kefalonia has many beautiful places, among which the most outstanding are Asos, Myrtos and Fiskardo. The Archaeological Museum of Argostoli, the Korgialeneio Museum, the museum of the Cosmetatou Foundation, the monastery of Agios Gerasimos, the castle of Agios Georgios, the Melissani Lake Cave and the traditional oil mill of Kaminarata in Paliki are some of the attractions of the island. The prefecture has an adequate educational infrastructure, telecommunications and transport network. However, the health sector needs support.

2.2 The production sectors in Kefalonia

2.2.1 The primary sector

The distribution of employment in the sectors of economic activity is characterized after the year 2000 by a shift to the tertiary sector, at a rate comparable to that of the country, at the expense of employment in the primary sector.

The geomorphology of the island's terrain favored the development of agricultural activities and for years agriculture and livestock farming were the main source of income for the island feeders of economic growth. Similarly, Fisheries and Forests have not been areas of strong economic activity.

In the distribution of agricultural land by Regional Unit, the P.E. of Kefalonia - Ithaca has the most annual crops and other areas (65.49% and 76.18% of the respective areas).

According to ELSTAT data for the last two censuses, the percentage of the economically active population employed in the primary sector is 21.06%. In agricultural activity 32,000 ha of annual crops, about 11,000 ha of vines, 80,000 ha of olives are cultivated, followed by the category of other land with 42.60%, which includes family vegetable gardens, permanent pastures and pastures, barren pastures, nurseries, other perennial plantations and fallow land. In recent years, efforts have been made to develop other crops (vegetables, greenhouses, cereals, citrus fruits and Due to the large area occupied by the tree crops of olive trees, it would be expected that they constitute one of the main incomes of the inhabitants. However, it only contributes to the income of the inhabitants in a complementary way, since there is fragmentation of ownership and a lack of certification and standardization of olive oil. Indicatively, some of the agricultural products that have claimed certification are cheese and wines, while the rest are not identified (Kefalonia Business Plan, 2012).

Organic farming accounts for only 1% of the total organic area in the country, with the result that Kefalonia ranks at the bottom of the country. Mostly olive and vine crops.

At the level of spatial distribution based on the 2011 & 2021 ELSTAT census, Kefalonia has the largest share of livestock production in the region. Livestock farming is an important economic resource on the island, mainly due to the small family farms that complement agriculture. Among livestock production, goat and cattle holdings stand out, amounting to 202 000 and 4 000 respectively. The CAP subsidy policy applied, based on the size of livestock, is at the root of these developments livestock plants to meet local needs and partly for the tourist sector.

Honey is also the main beekeeping product of Kefalonia. But although there are about 270 beekeepers, only 5-6 of them are professionally engaged. However, beekeeping has considerable potential due to the rich beehive flora.

Fishing is mainly recreational due to extensive fish farming activity. The prefecture of Kefallinia & Ithaca has the largest number and capacity of fish farms.

2.2.2. The secondary production sector

The secondary production sector, based on manufacturing, energy production and construction, employs 21.40%. The enterprises are mainly family type with a focus on processing of agricultural products. In particular, there is an upward trend in the agro-industrial sector (cheese dairies, mills and wineries). In particular, the wineries in the area are becoming a driving force in the sector, following an innovative path that leads to constant diversification and quality improvement of production, with distinctions in international competitions. The production of the local sweet mantola is also on the rise.

2.2.3 The tertiary sector of production

The tourism sector (12%) dominates the tertiary sector, but has developed in a one-dimensional way. It employs 57.99% of the total active population. The prefecture of Kefalonia accounts for 10.13% of the total arrivals in the Ionian Islands region (ELSTAT, 2021). To date, no organized alternative tourism opportunities have been recorded in the region, with few exceptions. The intensive use of productive factors in tourism has resulted in a change of land use in the coastal area, the devaluation of agricultural land and inland settlements and the weakening of economic activities not directly or indirectly related to tourism.

3. Methodological framework

Initially, for the approach of the topic, the main source of literature search was the internet through search engines of scientific journals and data collected by the Department of Rural Economy and Development of the Ionian Islands Region. The primary research was based on data collected through a questionnaire from a sample of owners of primary sector product processing enterprises (cheese plants, wineries, oil mills, meat processing plants, plants for the standardization of local sweets and a fish standardization and production plant) the questions were closed questions and multiple choice. The sampling method used was non-probability sampling (convenience sampling). The survey was conducted between the months of April 2022 to May 2022. A list of email addresses was created and an electronic mailing of the questionnaire is done. The use of the Google Forms application was chosen to create the electronic questionnaire. Those who were distributed the questionnaires were given the necessary instructions to complete them correctly by encouraging them to read the short informative text included. This way of obtaining the data allows for a greater response and allows for more honest answers.

4. Results of the survey

This section presents the results of the quantitative research method. 40 questionnaires were sent out and the response rates were high as 32 were completed, i.e. approximately 93%. Initially, there are questions concerning the profiling of the companies taking part in the survey. Most of the enterprises 46.9% operate in the domestic market and 34.4% of them also export. 77.4% have been operating for more than ten years. 80% of them operate in conventional and organic way and produce the same products. 96.6% employ staff and 64.5% employ up to 9 people. They are small and medium-sized enterprises, most of them family-run. It is important to note that the majority of the staff employed (65.6%) have some specialization in the agro-food sector. 35.5% of business activities were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 1).

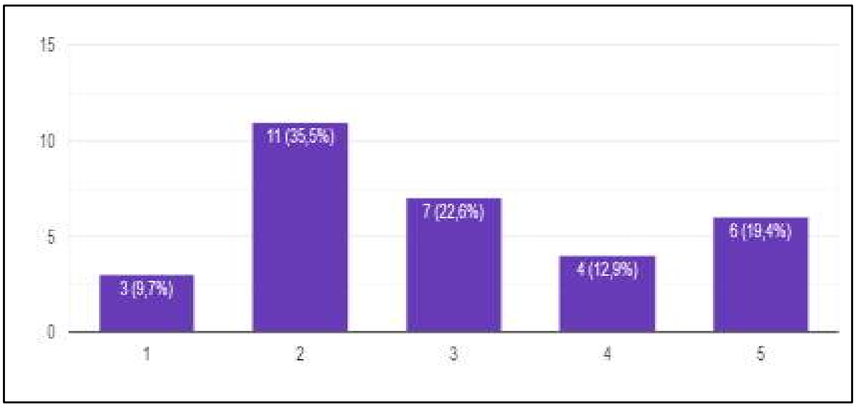

Figure 1. Results (1)

Delays in the delivery of products were caused during that period and 50% experienced payment defaults. In addition, the most significant problems they experienced were related to inventory and procurement management at 29% and 22.6% respectively. 16 enterprises or 50 % had human resource shortages due to Covid-19 illness, however, during the pandemic, the enterprises remained open with 51.6 % physically present and 32.3 % had a combination of physical presence and toilets to serve their customers. The internet helped in selling products - services in 50%.20 enterprises i.e. 62.5% consider that despite the problems, the pandemic crisis had some positive effects on their business, as they went on producing and finding new products. Almost all businesses are places that can be visited all year round, especially in spring. 51.6% of the visitors are tourists, from the educational community and local population. During the visit, the visitor can experience some activity by 87.1% (Figure 2 & 3) related to following the process of production, testing and purchase of the product.

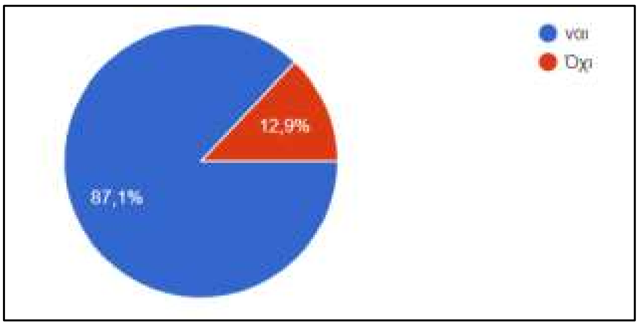

Figure 2. Results (2)

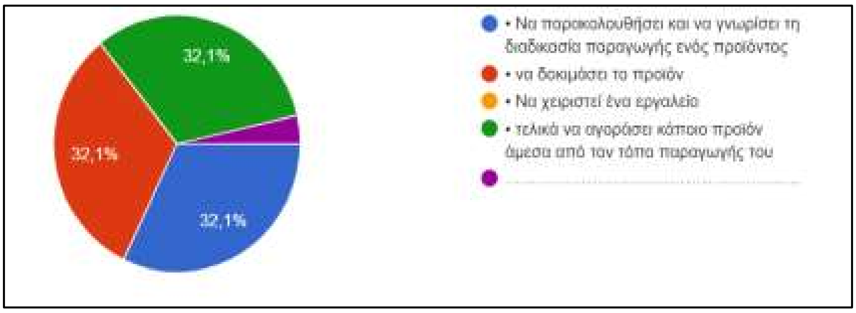

Figure 3. Results (3)

A significant 67.7% of the facilities include tasting and sales areas for local products, promotion and exhibition areas, even guesthouses (figure 4 & 5) and 96.8% of the production is based on defined quality and safety standards since most products are certified, such as local cheese products, processed meat products, traditional products (mantolas), jams and spoon sweets, honey, Kefalonian wines.

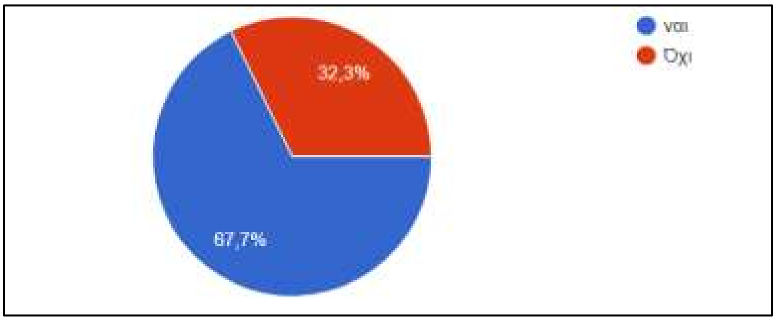

Figure 4. Results (4)

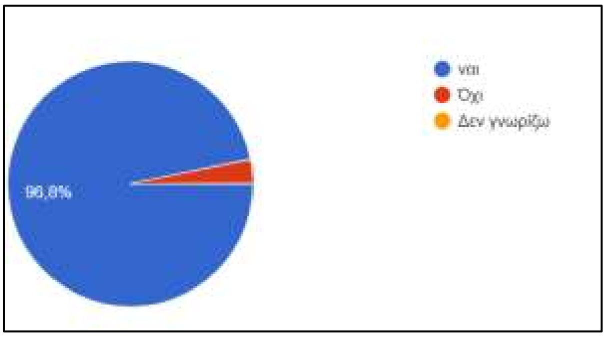

Figure 5. Results (5)

81.3% responded that there is a difficulty in the process of certification of local products and it concerns administrative and bureaucratic issues. 81,3% manage an online platform where certified and non-local products are available, in order to provide visitors with a more complete information (figure 6 & 7).

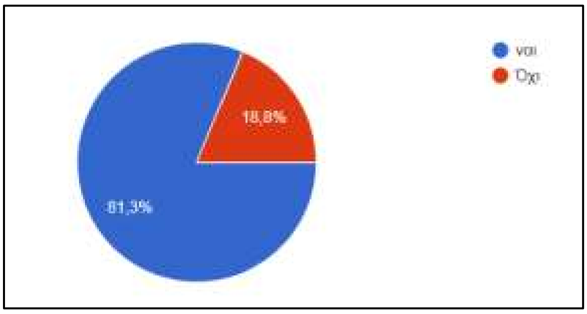

Figure 6. Results (6)

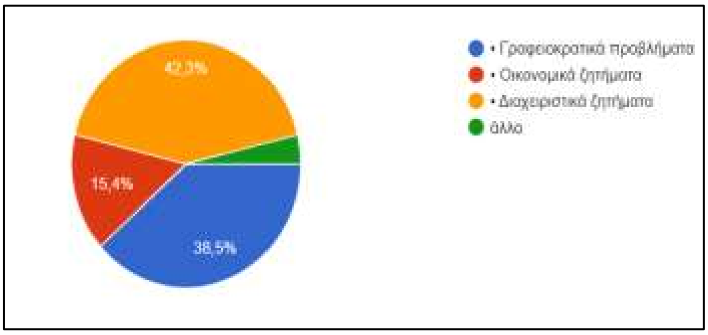

Figure 7. Results (7)

All of them recognize the importance of the certification of local products of the island because they highlight gastronomic tourism, strengthen the identity of the island and help to promote them in international markets. 58% of the enterprises, i.e. 18 enterprises, consider that there is sufficient production of agricultural products in Kefalonia to meet the demand of the local and non-local population. 65.6% consider important the promotion of products in hotels and/or tourist accommodation (figure 8).

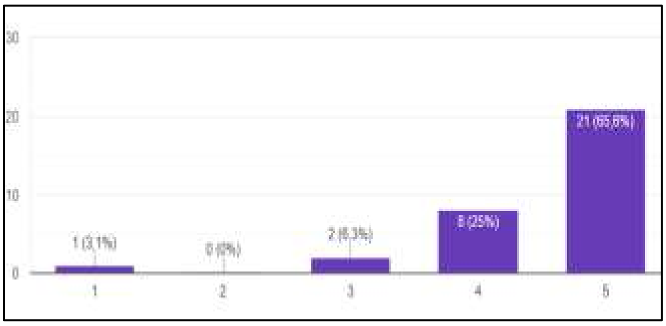

Figure 8. Results (8)

53.1% of the enterprises promote their products using social media and 21.9% of the enterprises promote their products by participating in gastronomic events. On the side of hospitality services, the promotion of local products is done through some actions such as promotion in the Kefalonian breakfast and in the menu of the catering businesses on the island (figure 9 & 10).

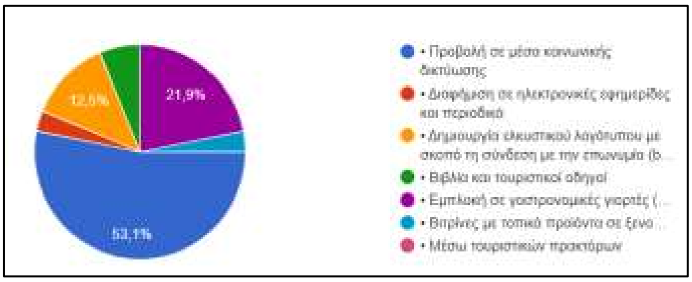

Figure 9. Results (9)

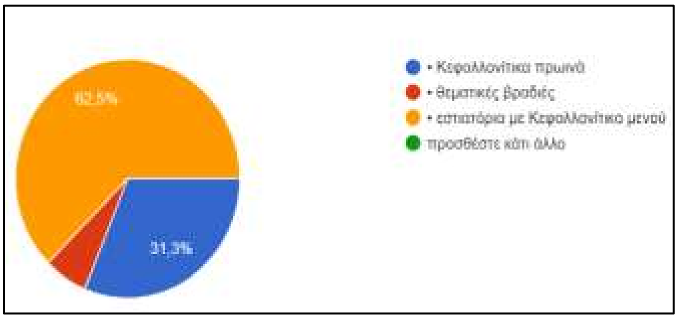

Figure 10. Results (10)

24 businesses or 75% consider that the promotion of some alternative forms of tourism related to agri-food such as gastronomic or agrotourism on the island, would significantly contribute to the enhancement and enrichment of the tourism product offered. The initiatives taken by businesses in this direction are gastronomic events, wine tasting and the organization of visits to get to know local products (figures 11 & 12).

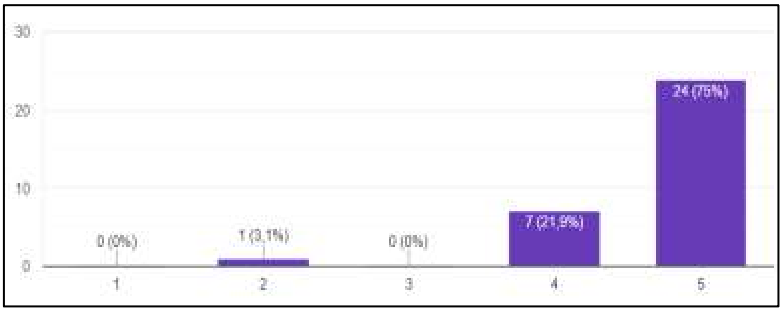

Figure 11. Results (11)

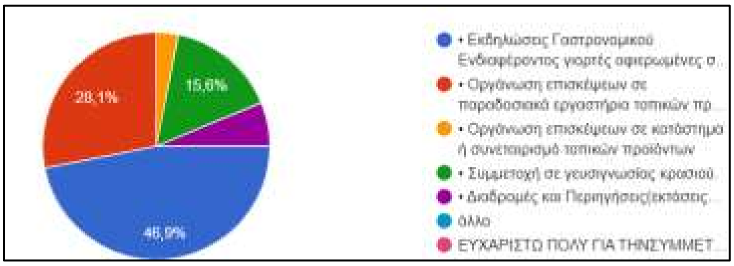

Figure 12. Results (12)

5. Conclusion

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has created a new reality in the social and economic environment. It continues to affect in unprecedented ways the daily lives of citizens and the functioning of businesses. Linking tourism with local gastronomy, culture and production can enhance the tourist product and travel experience, strengthening the island as a tourist destination. These new conditions create the conditions for interconnection through alternative and gastronomic tourism based on the culture of agri-food. The results might provide some important starting points for the support of lifelong learning in practice.

The manufacturing enterprises of primary production products in Kefalonia have a very remarkable profile. They have experience in agri-food and in the production of conventional and organic products. They are small and medium-sized, family-run businesses with several years of presence on the market, especially on the domestic market, and with export potential. Their production is sufficient to meet the demand of the local and non-domestic population. Although the pandemic has confronted them with many problems, they have nevertheless kept their businesses open and, using technology and social networks, have not only promoted their products, but have tried to innovate by developing and enriching their range. In addition, most of them hold a quality certificate for their products and seek to obtain it, because they consider it important to strengthen the island's identity and of course it ensures a competitive position in the market and makes their products widely known. Very importantly, they are involved in shaping the tourist experience in a variety of ways and activities, as their premises are open to all throughout the year, providing opportunities to participate in the production process, tasting and buying and even staying in accommodation. In addition, they use the tools of technology to provide visitors with more complete information on the local products on offer.

As a result, efforts are also being made on the part of tourism businesses to link agri-food with tourism. Indicatively, the Kefalonian breakfast, the existence of local products in the local menu, participation in events of gastronomic interest, the promotion and tasting of wines and the organization of visits to get to know local products. The level of the agri-food sector appears to be quite high from the above. The foundations and guarantees for cooperation with tourism businesses are in place, but personal initiatives and actions alone are not enough. A series of coordinated actions at local and regional level should be established. The interconnection of the agri-food sector in particular, which is one of the most dynamic sectors with the tourism product on the island of Kefalonia, but also with other individual manufacturing sectors, can bring significant economic benefits (increased production, creation of networks and other cooperative schemes, change in the tourism pattern, etc.) and create new dynamic and stable jobs.

6. Actions

Proposed actions, incentives and policy measures, described below, could help in this direction. In particular:

- Creation of tailor-made "all-inclusive" packages that include specific percentages of consumption of local products.
- Promoting local agricultural products with a local origin to visitors to archaeological and other sites, in order to promote local identity.
- Provide incentives for the creation of joint ventures and partnerships between businesses active in the tourism sector, such as hotels and restaurants and manufacturing and agricultural businesses and schemes.
- A program for the creation of sales outlets and showrooms in hotels and restaurants, with the cooperation of the Chambers of Commerce and Municipalities.
- Training of professionals and workers in the primary sector in areas such as marketing, sales, supply chain, entrepreneurship, public relations, etc. and particularly in relation to the dynamic development of digital technology.
- Support from specific funding programs and funding schemes from European and national programs would make a significant contribution to the development of standardization units in the primary sector and the promotion of intermediate entrepreneurship acting as a link between tourism and primary and secondary sector businesses.
- The development of the online platform will simplify and accelerate the purchase and sale of products in the market, while it will serve not only the tourism market but also exports.
- The operation of complex tourist accommodation including agritourism activities would contribute to the diversification of the tourism product.
- Strengthening standardization - certification by reducing barriers.
- Finally, the creation of clusters at local level would ensure high quality products and create the necessary rivalry between sectors on the form and packaging of products promoted in the tourism sector.

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