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Perceived Economic, Social, and Environmental Benefits of Agritourism among Workers in Arakan, North Cotabato

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ABSTRACT

In this descriptive study, the economic, social, and environmental benefits of agritourism were assessed by workers in Arakan, North Cotabato. To participate, 120 agritourism workers were selected using purposive sampling. Workers believe that agritourism offers substantial economic benefits. It helped them to find work, earn money, and meet their financial demands on a daily basis. The reported social benefits of agritourism among workers in Arakan, North Cotabato were significant. It assisted them in gaining empowerment, contributed to the improvement of their lives and fostered a sense of belonging and solidarity. Workers in Arakan, North Cotabato, viewed agritourism as offering significant environmental benefits. It informed workers on how to look after the environment, showcased conservation initiatives, and encouraged sustainable agriculture practices. Future experimental studies were recommended to confirm these perceptions and explore other factors that affect perceived benefits among workers through multi-perspective analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The term agritourism combines agriculture and tourism, highlighting their interconnectedness (Sznajder *et al.*, 2009). It denotes a particular segment of rural tourism in which visitors engage actively in agricultural endeavors while workers offer lodging, meals, and support, among numerous other services, on their premises (Petroman & Petroman, 2010).

Agritourism is increasingly becoming recognized as a unique category of recreational activity among the numerous options available to guests in determining their travel destinations (Rozier Rich *et al.*, 2016). It functions as the phenomenon of tourism activities focused on agricultural establishments. It includes rural's leisure activities based in agriculture, hospitality services, education through agriculture, and a series of outdoor recreational possibilities (Barbieri, 2014).

The advent of agritourism is somehow described as a consequence of economic changes impacting both segments of the market such as households as consumers and farmers as producers. From the perspective of supply, farmers experiencing a decline in the terms of trade-off for agriculture consistently seek other opportunities to generate additional or possibly alternative sources of income (Bagi & Reeder, 2012).

The status of agritourism in industrialized nations has notably facilitated regional development and has consequently garnered increasing interest in developing nations. Thus, implementation of agritourism in developing countries is progressively on the rise (Khanal & Mishra, 2014). The perceived benefits of agritourism are frequently linked to various farm enterprises and household characteristics indicating that farmers'

characteristics should be examined as they influence workers' perceptions (Tew & Barbieri, 2012).

In the context of developing nations, agritourism is not only for rural development but also for the alleviation of poverty. To this point, agritourism has been conducted in economically stable nations, emphasizing on established agritourism destinations and choices (Ohe & Ciani, 2012). Although the study conducted by Malkanthi *et al.* (2015) in Sri Lanka examined the preparedness of farmers to commence spice tourism, it failed to take into account tourism-related elements, including the characteristics of possible tourists and the differences between full-time and part-time workers, which considerably influence the workers' readiness. In Malaysia, as studied by Kunasekaran *et al.* (2012) found that workers typically maintained a positive perspective on agrotourism as a result of their established ties specifically to the sector of tourism, demonstrating that farmers are favored to participate in more extensive tourism undertakings due to their attributes and skill sets.

In the Philippines, specifically in Calanan Bongabon Nueva Ecija, there existed a significant level of awareness regarding agritourism, particularly concerning the substantial opportunity to foster connections between urban residents and rural lifestyles and culture. The workers held the view that agritourism contributed to the improvement of their living standards. However, owing to challenges, specifically the absence of capital, the requisite technical expertise in managing an agritourism business, and the lack of clearly identified target customers among others, a moderate level of willingness to engage in agritourism was closely observed (Agustin *et al.*, 2023). The findings of this research will yield valuable insights

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regarding the support of local government office thru the Department of Tourism and accredited agritourist farms to the workers in Arakan, North Cotabato. This research sought to ascertain the perceptions of agritourism among workers in relation to the benefits obtained from economic, social, and environmental indicators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Agritourism: Definition and Global Context

Agritourism is slowly gaining acknowledgment as a separate classification of leisure activity among the various choices accessible to travelers when choosing travel destinations. Sonnino (2004) has characterized agritourism as hospitality-related endeavors carried out by agricultural owners and with their family members, wherein these endeavors are interrelated and supplementary to farming operations (Phillip *et al.*, 2010). Agritourism is also defined as tourism activities that are small in scale, founded on family or cooperative principles, and established in rural areas by individuals involved in agricultural practices (Kizos & Iosifides, 2007), in conjunction with the offering of tourism experiences on functioning farms (Wall, 2000). It is posited that agritourism alleviates the downfall effects of tourism while concurrently fulfilling the dual aims of improving the livelihoods of economically disadvantaged rural communities and aiding in sustainable tourism development (Su *et al.*, 2019).

In numerous instances, agritourism and agro-tourism have been employed replaceable with the terminology of farm tourism and rural tourism (Yang *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, scholars categorize the notion of agritourism into various agritourism product classifications. These scholars have utilized the level of visitors' engagement in agriculture-related activities carried out during the creation and consumption of tourism service products as the ground for this classification of agritourism products (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008).

Agritourism in the Philippines

The concept of agritourism was first introduced in the Philippines last 1990s when the Department of Tourism and the United Nations Development Programme worked with one another to create the Philippine Tourism Master Plan, which was based on the principles of sustainable development and employed agricultural and rural regions for the purpose of environmental preservation (Montefrio & Sin, 2019). Within the Asian context, agritourism in the region is characterized by the adaptive competencies of recreational farm operators to maneuver through diverse economic and social challenges. The future of agritourism in the Philippines is marked by complex dynamics in which local involvement evolves due to the advantages of tourism development within the nation (Yamagishi *et al.*, 2024). However, it has been recognized that one of the developing segments of tourism in the region is farm tourism. Farm tours have also been considered as specialized activities, particularly

in Central Luzon. Despite the growth of this tourism niche, there remains a need for additional studies that investigate its social impact (Uysal *et al.*, 2011). There continues to be a necessity to outline the transformation of residents' quality of life, particularly through the framework of resilience and empowerment, in order to elucidate the distinctive phenomenon of agritourism in the Philippines (Hsiao & Tuan, 2023).

Furthermore, agritourism in the Philippines signifies a sustainable tourism sector that provides income formation, consciousness in the conservation of biodiversity, social transformation, and the safeguarding of cultural background and legacy (Yamagishi *et al.*, 2021). Agritourism in the Philippines encompasses farm tours, accommodations on farms, fruit and vegetable planting, picking and harvesting, feeding for the animals, and cultural explorations, allowing visitors to engage with traditional farming practices, experiencing local cuisine, and gain understanding of the daily lives of every local farmers. Acknowledging the industry's potential, the Department of Tourism (DOT) has been diligently advocating for agritourism as a sustainable form of tourism that provides advantages to both tourists and workers (DOT, 2018).

The amalgamation of tourism and agriculture presents a favorable avenue for generating employment opportunities, enhancing income, reducing poverty, and mitigating urban issues. Furthermore, tourism serves as a channel for the exchange of ideas, specifically within the youth demographic, and promotes the dissemination of technological improvements. Importantly, farm tourism not only contributes to ensure health and environmental benefits but also advocates for practices such as promoting organic agriculture and the adopting safer water and food methods by eschewing pesticides and chemicals. These efforts acknowledge agritourism as a driving force for the preservation of heritage and the discovery of ecological richness, deeply embedded in the historical story of the Philippines, where agriculture has been essential in shaping the social framework of the nation (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2019).

Economic Benefits of Agritourism

Agritourism promotes economic progression by supporting in the establishment of demand for locally produced goods and other related rural products and services (Ammirato *et al.*, 2020). Tregua *et al.* (2018) considering agritourism to be an effective instrument for boosting local economic development through reciprocal enhancement and territorial promotion, the relationship between agrifood products and tourism must be emphasized. The positive effects of agritourism go beyond the confines of farms, highlighting that increased earnings in agritourism ventures can stimulate local economies by means of elevated sales taxes, opportunities for local employment generations, and the encouragement of local businesses (Broccardo *et al.*, 2017).

It has been observed that farm workers are increasingly

leveraging agritourism as a strategy to enhance and diversify their familial income (Tew & Barbieri, 2012). This approach to income enhancement is particularly conventional among farm workers who are experiencing an agrarian instability and rural distress (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009). Strategies for income enhancement, such as agritourism, are notably more conventional among small-scale farm workers who predominantly inhabit peri-urban regions, and who encounter considerable pressures from progressive urbanization (Gomes *et al.*, 2019). The benefits accrued by farm workers and distributors from agritourism have now been thoroughly established across various international settings (Nematpour & Khodadadi, 2020). They identified that, among several factors, the pursuit not only with personal values but also for income growth constitute as the most significant motivations for farm workers to engage in agritourism.

Agritourism, in general, exerts a beneficial influence on the economy; however, a limited number of researchers have also reported negative effects associated with agritourism. They discovered that agritourism may result in a reduction of agricultural output due to disruptions in the ecological processes instigated by tourist intrusion (Jamshidi *et al.*, 2017). A decline in agricultural labor and the seasonality of farm income represent some additional adverse outcomes stemming from agritourism activities (Tchetchik *et al.*, 2006). According to Jęczyk *et al.* (2015), agritourism has the capacity to enhance the local economy by creating revenue and creating job opportunities for farm workers, local enterprises, and service providers. It possesses the potential to diversify the rural economy and reduce possible reliance on conventional agricultural methods. Agricultural tourism fosters economic growth by raising the requisition for local products and different rural goods and services (Boz *et al.*, 2018). Agricultural tourism has the potential to broaden the local tax base and strengthen community resilience in times of economic downturn, as it serves as somehow affordable option to other travel methods (Van Sandt & McFadden, 2016). However, the next generation of farm workers perceives agricultural tourism as a challenge aimed at improving their status in life instead of just a tool for economic growth (Chiodo *et al.*, 2019).

Agritourism brings fresh sources of revenue for farm workers, thereby diversifying the local economy. It offers residents employment opportunities in the tourism industry, in addition to roles in agricultural pursuits. In agricultural areas, this may aid in diminishing joblessness rates and enhancing income levels (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014).

Social Benefits of Agritourism

According to Muresan *et al.* (2016), the effect of agritourism on the standards of quality of life is considerable in terms of profitability in various respects. Therefore, the rural regions where agritourism is to be implemented will evolve into locations where the components of local sustainable improvement will converge. There will be a

growing interest in enhancing infrastructure, fostering a spiritual life within rural communities, and strategic objectives concerning human resources, technological advancements, and heritage conservation may be fulfilled, as noted by Iorio and Corsale (2010).

Through their quantitative research, Ciolac (2020) underscored the positive effects on family life that result from the amalgamation of farming activities and visitor interactions. The effects of agritourism in local level can be advantageous for the welfare of communities, thereby invigorating social capital in terms of networks that enable aggregated action. Communities with substantial social capital are more proficient at engaging in sustainable and comprehensive agritourism development. By offering unforgettable agritourism experiences, owners enhance their interactions with the guests. Consequently, visitors are able to gain a deeper experience and form a strong bond with the farm. These experiences result in increased gains and profits; however, they require additional time, effort, and management from the provider (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

Social capital heightens the motivation to participate in agritourism endeavors, subsequently promoting community pride and involvement. There is a considerable need to enhance the involvement of local communities in the tourism sector. These communities ought to be engaged in every stage of tourism planning and development to guarantee that all their tourism-related activities and products provide benefits for the residents. This would signify a significant progress in ensuring that a more appropriate community is engaged in the industry, which is essential for the improvement of sustainable livelihoods within the locality (Magigi & Ramadhani, 2013).

By bringing individuals together, agritourism promotes community involvement. They work together to display their products and traditions, nurturing a sense of pride and unity among community members. Additionally, it encourages interaction between locals and visitors, promoting cultural exchange and establishing connections among individuals. (Paniccia & Leoni, 2019).

Agritourism facilitates the preservation of local customs, cultural heritage, and traditional agricultural practices. It establishes opportunities to showcase local intricacies, thereby nurturing pride and cultural identity within the community (LaPan & Barbieri, 2014). Empower local communities through the direct distribution of tourism revenue, which fosters livelihood opportunities, additional income, and new employment. This may alleviate poverty and encourage development, necessitating support from provincial and local governments via capacity-building initiatives and ongoing efforts to promote, plan, and ensure these programs' safety for tourists and communities (Milanes *et al.*, 2024).

Environmental Benefits of Agritourism

Giurea *et al.* (2018), mentioned that agritourism serves as a conduit for reassessing the waste and consumption

issues associated with non-renewable energy sources. The practices of resource recovery, reuse, redevelopment, regeneration, and valuation must be seen as a key component of agritourism sustainability. Choo and Jamal (2009) identified a significant inclination among farmers to adopt environmentally sustainable practices, including measures for water conservation, initiatives for material recycling, and educating guests about conservation matters.

Numerous agritourism entrepreneurs are fostering an increased consciousness regarding the use of natural resources to produce energy with minimal impact to environment (Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2017). Furthermore, agritourism provides a means to minimize food waste and repurpose unsold items. Composting on the farm typically involves using excess greens from the garden, and food remnants can be efficiently utilized to nourish animals. Agricultural products that are not sold through conventional means can be employed in dining services or transformed into marketable goods (Bonadonna *et al.*, 2019).

Agritourism offers chances for farmers to embrace sustainable farming techniques, such as organic agriculture, agroforestry, or conservation agriculture. This fosters environmental stewardship and the adoption of eco-friendly practices designed to reduce environmental impacts (Ispas *et al.*, 2019).

Agritourism can also be linked to conservation practices like wildlife habitat restoration, sustainable forestry, or wetland preservation. It may also promote ecotourism activities to help create awareness and build support for the efforts toward environmental conservation (Weyland *et al.*, 2021)

Agriculture, farming, and environmental sustainability. Many agritourism programs stress organic farming with conservation techniques and environmental resource protection. Agritourism promotes the sustainable growth of the region by emphasizing effective land use, water conservation, and biodiversity preservation (Muresan *et al.*, 2016).

If tourism is engaged in a sustainable and responsible manner, it is vital to create a balanced connection between the promotion of tourism and the safeguarding of the environment and local communities. This can be achieved through various strategies, such as managing the number of tourists in specific areas, promoting travel to underprivileged destinations, educating tourists on responsible behaviors, and directing resources towards sustainable tourism projects (Canet & Panaligan, 2024). The impact of environmental values on consumer intentions greatly affects involvement in agritourism. This indicates that agritourism farms possess the ability to draw a greater number of visitors who are inclined to support sustainable practices by advocating environmental sustainability (Cortez *et al.*, 2024).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a descriptive research design to quantitatively evaluate the perceived economic, social, and

environmental benefits of agritourism among workers in Arakan. Furthermore, it constitutes an appropriate research design as the variables of interest are particularly effective for delineating phenomena or events about which limited information exists, thereby acknowledging new or emerging phenomena, especially the benefits of establishing agritourism as it impacts all workers. For the purposes of this study, the perceived benefits of agritourism for the workers are evaluated in reference to economic, social, and environmental benefits. Arakan, a first-class municipality situated in the province of North Cotabato, Philippines, was selected as the study location due to the predominance of agritourism workers within the population. The respondents for this study consists of agritourism workers in Arakan, North Cotabato. There were 120 workers selected using purposive sampling. As the primary tool for data collection, a questionnaire was utilized. To obtain the necessary information, the researchers employed a questionnaire that was revised and modified from the study conducted by Recio *et al.* (2014). The revised and modified questionnaire was pilot tested among thirty agritourism workers in the nearby municipality of North Cotabato Province. All comments during pilot testing were considered in the final questionnaire. The questionnaire was subjected to reliability test with a Cronbach value of 0.914 which indicates excellent internal consistency. The questionnaire comprised a series of questions presented to the respondents. The survey consisted of three parts. Assertions related to economic benefit included statements regarding income generation, job creation, and financial stability. Statements regarding social benefits were associated with community cohesion, empowerment, and improved quality of life. For the environmental benefits, it comprise sustainable farming practices, environmental awareness, and conservation effort. The answers provided by the participants were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 where 1 meant “strongly disagree” and 5 meant “strongly agree”. In order to find out the level of perception of workers from Arakan, North Cotabato regarding the benefits of agritourism, the descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentage, and mean were calculated. For the utmost confidentiality of the study, no names were provided in the reports. The participants were kept anonymous. The researchers did not include their opinions but rather only present the data that would be collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceived Economic Benefits

Table 1 illustrates the perceived economic benefits of agritourism among workers in Arakan, North Cotabato. The data reveals that job creation attained the highest mean score (4.64), followed by income generation (4.42), and financial stability (4.26).

The findings revealed that the progress of employment opportunities for workers is positively influenced by agritourism in the sector, but also generally alleviated unemployment through other diverse job opportunities

Table 1: Perceived economic benefits of agritourism among workers in Arakan, North Cotabato

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Rating	Qualitative Description
Income Generation	4.42	Agree	High
Job Creation	4.64	Strongly Agree	Very High
Financial Stability	4.26	Agree	High
Grand Mean	4.44	Agree	High

that contribute towards the development of the economy. On the other hand, the higher income earns from tours, events, and accommodations on a working farm enhances employees' economic security. Income earned by people engaged in agritourism is perceived as more stable and reliable than employment in agriculture because agritourism is more reliable. Further, economic security is manifested among employees actively participating in agritourism businesses with longer operating periods. Such businesses are those that have services available all year round, hence stabilizing household income and enabling better planning for long-term financial goals rather than short-term financial goals.

This result is in line with Jęczyk *et al.* (2015)'s study which brought the factor of agritourism as a major asset in creating a wider job market and foster local economy by more than just the farm income for the farmers but also enabling other local businesses to gain profit and

create job opportunities for the workers, the rural people, and the service providers. Not only does agritourism give impetus to the economic growth of the countryside, but it also helps in reducing the reliance on traditional farm practices. In the same way, Broccardo *et al.* (2017) found out that the high income which accompanies agritourism was the main positive consequence of agritourism besides creating many other economic development activities such as higher local sales tax revenues, local employment, and business startups that result in a new ethical economic paradigm nested within the local community.

Perceived Social Benefits

Table 2 demonstrates the perceived social benefits of agritourism among workers in Arakan, North Cotabato. The data indicates that empowerment achieved the highest mean score (4.46), followed closely by improved quality of life (4.42), and community cohesion (4.12).

Table 2: Perceived social benefits of agritourism among workers in Arakan, North Cotabato

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Rating	Qualitative Description
Community Cohesion	4.12	Agree	High
Empowerment	4.46	Agree	High
Improved Quality of Life	4.42	Agree	High
Grand Mean	4.33	Agree	High

The data show how agritourism plays a vital part in the empowerment of employees through the offering of new skills and self-determining opportunities to benefit themselves in co-agency. Most agritourism working people have already put themselves in a situation, either directly or indirectly, from where they take a lead in deciding on all aspects of management, visitor experience, and common connection with consumers, which encourages and enhances a feeling of being in command within the work space. The findings also stress much importance on the contributions of agritourism in improving living standards across these workers. Income stability and diversified income base widen their horizons in terms of living standards. Agritourism is a bridge that connects people towards very common goals. Through this, people build a stronger bonding and solidarity between various local communities around their local cultural heritage. These people engaged in agritourism often collaborate on various projects run to promote local businesses, safeguard heritage, and advance projects for sustainable practices in tourism. Such teaming of people not only ties the social fabric tighter but also builds a bigger picture of common identity that applies to that particular rural area. According to Muresan *et al.* (2016) states that agritourism

has a significant impact on the quality of life as it provides an opportunity to earn in different areas. In this way, it is ready to be a key part of local sustainable development. Likewise, Milanés *et al.* (2024) that with fair distribution of tourism return, establishment of employment and creation of supplemental income and jobs, agritourism can effectively release poverty and promote the development of the community in the local net by empowering the community.

Perceived Environmental Benefits

Table 3 delineates the perceived environmental benefits of agritourism among workers in Arakan, North Cotabato. The data indicates that environmental awareness achieved the highest mean score (4.48), succeeded by conservation efforts (4.32), and sustainable farming practices (4.14). Research showed that agritourism is a major factor that increases environmental consciousness among the labor force. Workers, while doing their daily tasks, get taught about environmental sustainability, climate change, and biodiversity preservation quite often. Agritourism make workers still get the desire to acquaint with environmental conservation and the importance of using green practices. Besides, agritourism is a contributor to conservation as it

Table 3: Perceived environmental benefits of agritourism among workers in Arakan, North Cotabato

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Rating	Qualitative Description
Sustainable Farming Practices	4.14	Agree	High
Environmental Awareness	4.48	Agree	High
Conservation Effort	4.32	Agree	High
Grand Mean	4.31	Agree	High

takes an active part in this area by, among other things, involving the workers in projects set up to protect the natural resources. Workers involved in the conservation projects not only acquire knowledge but also get the skills needed for sustainable land management and environmental advocacy, thus, they influence the local natural resources significantly. In this sense, eco-friendly agriculture or sustainable farming was considered a major area where agritourism workers felt direct environmental benefits. It gives the workers hands-on demonstration and skills in sustainable farming practices like organic farming, crop rotation, and agroforestry. Hence, farming sustainably is an indication of the success of agri-tourism, being that visitors are often in search of green comforts with the same values as theirs.

Environmental responsible practices, and sustainable agriculture are identified as agritourism by Ammirato *et al.* (2020). Through education and practical, this is achieved by utilizing land efficiently, conserving water, and preventing nature destruction thus making the whole community self-sustainable. Canet and Panaligan (2024) also argue on the necessity of eco-tourism that supports the balance of the tourism industry and the environment along with the just treatment of the residents in facilitating the eco-tourism. The latter can be promulgated through the teachings of the concerned local communities together with the funding of sustainable tourism projects.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the economic value created for workers through agritourism is heavily influenced by job creation, generation of income, and their enhanced financial status. Agritourism is a big help with improving workers opportunities in the farmer business. It also decreases unemployment by providing a range of job positions, and diversifies income, leading to stability through economic growth. Compared to traditional agricultural activity, agritourism tends to provide more regular and stable income to its workers (especially those employed by year-round operations), which can facilitate long-term budgeting and household stability.

The social aspects of the agritourism service are about the feeling of empowerment and superior quality of life and about having better social ties. So it adds a lot to the power of workers, to the skills, decision-maker-power and agency of agritourism workers. Thus, agritourism definitely nurtures self-improvement and community development as it helps improve the quality of life by creating more reliable income opportunities and strengthens the bond among members of the community through collaborations, preservation of culture, and

shared economic objectives. Agritourism is obviously one strategy through which self-improvement and community development can move hand in hand. Environmental benefits are also considerable for the employees working since their environmental consciousness has been raised; their motives have been fostered to participate in conservation initiatives and levels of integration into sustainable agricultural methodologies have been inculcated. The outcomes indicate that much leaning is toward the fact that agritourism is one of the major tools of environmental awareness, conservation, and sustainable practice among workers. It educates them and practically involves them for their purposes of conserving the environment, sustainable farming, and stewardship towards it. These efforts ultimately preserve natural resources and correspondingly align with the necessity for more eco-friendly tourism experiences.

Recommendations

While reflecting on the possible impact of the study’s major findings and conclusions, the researchers would like to give the following suggestions: the establishment of training schemes for employees involved in agritourism with an emphasis on sustainable agricultural practices and hospitality management. These will equip the employees with the necessary skill sets to foster both the environmentally sustainable approaches and hospitality strategies for guest satisfaction, thus sustainably securing the way forward for expansion and development of agritourism businesses.

Grants, low-interest loans, and general training will be provided as specialized financial and technical aid to agritourism extension and workers from underrepresented communities. This will contribute to the establishment of sustainable and successful agritourism enterprises by these workers.

Encouraging more community input into agricultural tourism project planning and decision-making will guarantee that the benefits will be dispersed fairly and equitably. Active local stakeholder engagement will yield strategies that are inclusive of, and responsive to, the needs and priorities of the entire community.

Perhaps future experimental studies with workers may help confirm the perception expressed in this study about agritourism benefits in the locality. Multiple perspective analyses will then determine other factors that may explain the perceived benefits of agritourism for the workers.

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