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DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEMS OF RURAL TOURISM IN AZERBAIJAN

ПРОБЛЕМИ РОЗВИТКУ СІЛЬСЬКОГО ТУРИЗМУ В АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНІ

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The article delves into an examination of the position and significance of agritourism within the contextual framework of regional development in Azerbaijan. A focal point is placed on elucidating its consequential influence across diverse sectors of the national economy. Agritourism, as a pivotal agent, not only fortifies occupational opportunities but also amplifies the requisites for goods and services, concurrently invigorating both domestic and international relationships, thereby augmenting the market orientation of various sectors. The strategic integration and invigoration of agritourism endeavors within rural domains manifestly engender a pronounced and multiplicative impact on the socio-economic fabric of regional landscapes. In the discourse surrounding the harnessing of agritourism potential, it is imperative to discerningly direct attention towards facets of socio-economic and ecological sustainability, alongside the imperative exigency of safeguarding natural heritage. The principal axes for evaluating the sustainability of agritourism development encompass budgetary considerations, socio-economic and ecological sustainability, as well as the impetus for nature conservation, concurrently entwined with infrastructural augmentation. The article meticulously scrutinizes the extant state and prospective trajectories of agritourism development, particularly in relation to its instrumental role in regional socio-economic amelioration. It undertakes a nuanced analysis of the determinants shaping the evolution of this genre of tourism, expounding upon the intricate environmental considerations attendant to agritourism. Significantly, it discerns the role and situates agritourism within the socio-economic developmental matrix of regional demarcations, proffering insights into avenues for accentuating its catalytic role. A discerning examination of the reciprocal dynamics between the cadence and characteristics of agricultural development and the trajectory of agritourism development is executed, with a particular emphasis on innovative paradigms, promotional imperatives, and related determinants. The narrative extends its purview to underscore the consequential role of agritourism in the realization of the multifunctionality intrinsic to rural agriculture. Concomitantly, it articulates strategic imperatives geared towards reinforcing the salubrious role of tourism, with a pronounced emphasis on agritourism, in the purview of sustainable and harmonized regional development.

Keywords: tourism, agritourism, tourist, issues, socio-economic development, international experience.

У статті розглядається місце та значення агротуризму в контексті регіонального розвитку Азербайджану. Основна увага приділяється з'ясуванню його послідовного впливу на різноманітні сектори національної економіки. Агротуризм, як ключовий агент, не тільки зміцнює можливості для зайнятості, але й розширює потреби в товарах і послугах, одночасно пожвавлюючи як внутрішні, так і міжнародні відносини, збільшуючи таким чином ринкову орієнтацію різних секторів. Стратегічна інтеграція та пожвавлення агротуристичних заходів у сільській місцевості явно спричиняють виражений і мультиплікативний вплив на соціально-економічну структуру регіональних ландшафтів. У дискурсі щодо використання потенціалу агротуризму вкрай важливо звернути увагу на аспекти соціально-економічної та екологічної стійкості, поряд із нагальною вимогою охорони природної спадщини. Основні осі для оцінки сталості розвитку агротуризму охоплюють бюджетні міркування, соціально-економічну та екологічну стійкість, а також стимул для збереження природи, одночасно переплітаючись із розширенням інфраструктури. У статті прискіпливо розглянуто сучасний стан і перспективні траєкторії розвитку агротуризму, зокрема щодо його інструментальної ролі в соціально-економічному покращенні регіону. Він проводить детальний аналіз детермінант, що формують еволюцію цього жанру туризму, розкриваючи складні екологічні міркування, пов'язані з агротуризмом. Важливо, що він розпізнає роль і розміщує агротуризм у матриці соціально-економічного розвитку регіональних розмежувань, пропонуючи розуміння шляхів підкреслення його каталітичної ролі. Проведено ретельний аналіз взаємної динаміки між

каденцією та характеристиками розвитку сільського господарства та траєкторією розвитку агротуризму, з особливим акцентом на інноваційних парадигмах, стимулюючих імперативах та пов'язаних детермінантах. Розповідь розширює свою сферу діяльності, щоб підкреслити важливу роль агротуризму в реалізації багатофункціональності, притаманної сільському господарству. Водночас він формулює стратегічні імперативи, спрямовані на посилення цілющої ролі туризму з особливим наголосом на агротуризмі в рамках сталого та гармонізованого регіонального розвитку.

Ключові слова: туризм, агротуризм, турист, проблематика, соціально-економічний розвиток, міжнародний досвід.

Introduction. The imperative for the intensive development of the agricultural sector necessitates a nuanced consideration of ecological parameters in the formulation of any operational modality. Activities aligned with these parameters, contingent upon their capacity to engender a conducive environmental milieu, expeditiously propel progress towards the attainment of sustainable development objectives [1, p. 126].

Historically, tourism, as an economic enterprise, has co-evolved symbiotically with all facets of the economy, exerting a pivotal influence on the socio-economic metamorphosis of territories. Configured as a catalyzing factor for regional development, tourism as an economic activity domain harbors intricate potentials for multifaceted impacts. Regrettably, the exploration of these potentials remains largely nascent, with a dearth of comprehensive investigations into avant-garde practices. Agritourism, constituting a significant and intricate nexus of socio-economic, ecological, and multifarious dimensions within the tourism paradigm, assumes a critical role. In the Azerbaijani context, there is an exigency for fortified scholarly underpinning to augment the role of agritourism within extensive undertakings aimed at catalyzing the socio-economic progress of regions during the past two decades. Diverse determinants, including this imperative, accentuate the pertinence of augmenting the role of agritourism in the socio-economic development discourse.

The experience of developed countries underscores the potent influence of tourism as a formidable catalyst for economic development. Its pivotal contribution extends to the configuration of state budgets and the stabilization of trade balances. In a broader sense, tourism assumes an unparalleled mantle in facilitating cultural and economic concord as well as mutual understanding among nations. Consequently, the trajectory of tourism development emerges as a salient and pressing concern within the ambit of contemporary integrative paradigms.

The degree of problem elaboration. Agricultural tourism in the context of contemporary

globalization is considered one of the ways to achieve harmony between humans and nature [1; 4]. Issues related to agricultural tourism, as a sphere of economic development, simultaneously pose challenges in both social policy and economic projects [2; 5]. Attention to this sphere is justified by the international significance of agricultural tourism as a crucial factor in human capital formation [3; 6]. It is not coincidental that international research is conducted, the results of which serve as recommendations for any state interested in implementing sustainable environmental programs [7]. There is an intensive exchange of experiences [8; 9], and issues related to stimulating this development direction and adopting a comprehensive approach are under consideration [10; 11]. However, in Azerbaijan, this process is still at the early stages of its development, necessitating new research [8; 9].

The aim of this study is to identify the main types of agricultural tourism in Azerbaijan, assess their prevalence, and delineate directions for future economic and social planning while considering the nature of human capital formation.

Research methods involve defining the conceptual framework of the study and analyzing the experiences of relevant ministries and agencies in this field, leading to corresponding conclusions.

Main section.

Distinctive Features of the Management of Tourism and Sanatorium Resorts in Azerbaijan by Various Systems.

Tourism (originating from the French word "tourisme," meaning "travel" or "journey") represents the most widespread and mass form of recreational activity. The term "tourism" was first coined by V. Zhekmo in 1830 [2, p. 634]. Until recent times, the concepts of "tourism" and "tourist" in each country were uniquely defined [2, p. 634].

In our country, due to the diverse management of tourism and sanatorium resorts by various systems, the concept of a "tourist" has become confined to tourist trips and excursions, distinct

from the concept of "recreation" in sanatoriums and rest houses. Similar distinctions in types of recreation are observed in other countries. In the modern world, especially with the international development of tourism and the establishment of international tourism organizations, it is possible to conceive a unified understanding of the term "tourism."

Tourism significantly influences various sectors of the economy, primarily affecting transportation, communication, commerce, construction, agriculture, and the production of agricultural products. The expansion of service sectors in tourism implies the creation of new businesses, contributing to the rise in socio-economic prosperity. Tourism manifests itself as a complex and multifaceted socio-economic phenomenon. Tourism services involve travel for recreational, business, educational, and other purposes, representing a form of organized movement. The analysis of contemporary trends in tourism development reveals that the impact of political, economic, and social factors, coupled with the application of new advertising and information technologies, leads to a surge in tourism development in advanced countries. Both domestic and international tourism are rapidly advancing.

Types of Tourism

Within the realm of tourism, an array of classifications emerges based on diverse objectives. The delineated typologies are elucidated as follows: excursion, recreation, health, science or congress, business, ethnic or nostalgia tourism, adventure, agritourism, ecotourism, religious, space, education, shopping, sports, and specialized [3, p. 22].

1. Excursion Tourism: Principally oriented towards the provision of intellectual satisfaction and the cultivation of interest, excursion tourism entails acquainting oneself with the natural, cultural-historical assets, museums, theaters, and indigenous traditions of a given country or region.

2. Recreation Tourism: Predominantly pervasive, recreation tourism serves as the most extensive form, seeking to facilitate the restoration of physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It encompasses activities such as entertainment, cultural events, sports engagements, and participation in championships and competitions.

3. Health Tourism: This variant involves leveraging natural therapeutic elements within resorts and specialized clinics, incorporating contemporary technology and medical advan-

cements for diagnostic, preventive, and medical services.

4. Science or Congress Tourism: Centered on participation in congresses, symposiums, and events, science or congress tourism amalgamates travel with intellectual and professional pursuits.

5. Business Tourism: Concerned with international and bilateral assemblies addressing trade, scientific-technical cooperation, and participation in exhibitions, fairs, conferences, congresses, and symposiums.

6. Ethnic or Nostalgia Tourism: Encompasses visits to relatives or journeys to ancestral homelands, focusing on cultural and familial roots.

7. Adventure and Extreme Tourism: A specialized form entailing visits to exotic locales and engagement in extraordinary activities, such as surfing, diving, safaris, etc.

8. Agritourism: Designed for individual or group travel to rural dwellings, agritourism offers recreational experiences, facilitating an understanding of rural lifestyles, local traditions, agricultural systems, and environmental management.

9. Ecotourism: A mode of exploration aimed at the utilization of natural and cultural attractions, contributing to environmental conservation.

10. Religious Tourism: Involves travel for the purpose of participating in religious ceremonies or rituals.

11. Space Tourism: Signifying the most financially elevated form, space tourism witnessed its inauguration in 2001 when Dennis Tito undertook space travel by paying \$20 million.

12. Education Tourism: Encompassing travel for educational pursuits, either individually or in groups, to specific regions or countries.

13. Shopping Tourism: Pertaining to travels undertaken for diverse shopping purposes in specific regions or countries.

14. Sports Tourism: Encompassing individual or group tours, sports tourism centers on participation in sports events such as competitions, championships, and the Olympics.

In recent years, agritourism has emerged as one of the most promising and dynamically developing types of tourism worldwide. The development of any activity sector has been envisaged to address the economic and social problems of the territory. The development process of rural tourism combines the interests of three main participants: consumers, entrepreneurship in rural tourism, and the

interests of municipalities that are developing this type of activity [4, p. 216].

The main objectives of municipalities in the development of agritourism are as follows:

Reducing tension in rural areas through alternative employment opportunities for the population.

1. Increasing tax revenues to the budget associated with the creation of new jobs.

2. To achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the resolution of a range of organizational and economic issues is required.

1. Resource Aspects of Agritourism Development:

- Ecologically clean areas;
- Residential facilities in rural areas;
- Nutrition with ecologically clean agricultural products;
- Transportation services, good road network;
- Historical-architectural sites, natural monuments, landscapes, art, traditional rural activities, etc.

2. Legal Framework for the Development of Agritourism.

3. Administrative Infrastructure for the Development of Agritourism.

4. Information Support for Managing the Development of Agritourism.

5. Financing the Development of Agritourism.

The Development of Agritourism in Azerbaijan

In recent years, reforms implemented in Azerbaijan have contributed to the development of the economy. The tourism industry has played a significant role in achieving these successes. Substantial efforts have been made in Azerbaijan in recent years to promote the rich cultural heritage and natural beauty of the country globally. Today, conditions have been created for the development of not only general tourism but also agritourism in Azerbaijan.

Agritourism holds a special place in the world of tourism. The number of people seeking relaxation in quiet, green rural areas, away from noisy urban centers, has been steadily increasing. The landscapes, climates, balneological properties, historical-cultural, and other factors of rural areas are valuable forces influencing the physical and spiritual recovery of individuals. There is a significant desire among both locals and international visitors to live and relax in simple rural homes. Tourists not only want to experience rural life but also expect a certain level of service.

Azerbaijan has 4,253 rural settlements, the majority of which are located in green valleys or mountainous areas. Therefore, there are ample opportunities for the development of agritourism in the country.

In Azerbaijan, transforming tourism into a highly lucrative sector of the economy, creating sustainable and competitive modern tourism complexes that meet social and ecological requirements, and ensuring the opening of new businesses in this sector are essential goals in the direction of the non-oil sector's development.

Agritourism is a valuable resource for rural economies, providing additional income for both new businesses and rural residents. Countries with high tourism potential, benefiting from the development of this sector, attach great importance to agritourism among various types of tourism. The attraction of tourists in the direction of exploring the nature, history, traditions, and customs of remote areas and villages contributes to the engagement of local populations, the sale of products produced by rural residents, and overall development.

Despite ongoing efforts towards the development of agritourism in Azerbaijan, there are still challenges to be addressed.

In regions where hotels and recreation centers operate, challenges in organizing their activities effectively result in a seasonal operational model, making the retention of permanent staff problematic. The recurrent recruitment of seasonal workers for each operational phase negatively impacts service quality. Concomitantly, the insufficiency of adequately trained personnel at the vocational technical education level poses a critical concern. Professions such as waiters, bartenders, service staff, doormen, chefs, etc., do not necessitate a bachelor's degree. Despite recent initiatives like the establishment of the "Tourism and Hotel Management" Vocational Center in Gabala and ongoing efforts to create a pilot vocational school in Ismayilli, the inadequacy of such endeavors remains a pressing issue. The primary challenge lies in the scarcity of teachers proficient in these vocations, emphasizing the imperative need for their initial training.

An instrumental measure for promoting rural tourism and disseminating information about nature and residential accommodations to consumers could be the establishment of an internet portal named "Rural Tourism." Utilizing the internet allows not only the dissemination of information regarding selected rural dwellings but also affords the opportunity to impart

insights into the natural and cultural traditions associated with rural locations.

Effectively organizing the leisure activities of participants in this form of tourism necessitates augmenting additional services provided by local residents. Mass events encompassing horse races, excursions, rural product fairs, festive occasions, ecological tours, sports events, culinary affairs, among others, can be instrumental in achieving this objective. By considering these elements, the formulation of a comprehensive tour package for rural tourism becomes a plausible prospect.

Motivating rural youth in various regions to explore new professions and specialties such as agritourism, photography, and green tourism operatorship holds the potential to actualize their inherent capabilities, engender new economic ventures, and ensure local employment and income. The development of agritourism in regions can significantly contribute to the socio-economic advancement of villages and rural residents, aligning with the objectives set forth by the state in this particular domain. The propitious geographic conditions, rich natural landscapes, deep-rooted traditions, and cultural hospitality collectively create a conducive environment for fostering the growth of rural green tourism in Azerbaijan.

Rural tourism, in essence, transcends mere accommodation provision for tourists in rural settings; it strives to address multifaceted issues for both tourists and local communities. Consequently, the cultivation of rural green tourism has the potential to ameliorate various challenges within the region. The substitution of urban environments with rural settings can expedite the process of migration from cities to villages, augment the income of rural inhabitants, contribute to the enhancement of their socio-economic conditions, and facilitate the conversion of revenue from rural green tourism into domestic investments for rural agriculture. This, in turn, fosters the development of novel professions and specialties among villagers, partially mitigates the unemployment predicament, and stimulates the expansion of the restaurant, cafe, and cafeteria sector, thereby providing culinary services to tourists in rural locales.

In the pursuit of fostering the development of rural green tourism in Azerbaijan, institutions with specific mandates have the potential to effectively contribute to the deliberate, sequential, and systematic implementation of activities within the identified domain. Presently,

this sector harnesses only a marginal fraction of the available resources. It is imperative to prioritize initiatives such as organizing awareness campaigns targeted at assured young families and youth in rural communities, disseminating novel methods and tools for advancing rural green tourism, and cultivating the cultural aspects of rural green tourism in regional contexts.

A strategic redirection of the focus of local governmental bodies towards the advancement of rural green tourism and the establishment of corresponding infrastructures could prove to be a highly effective approach. The creation of pertinent vocational courses in regions to facilitate the development of local human resources among assured young rural residents and support their engagement in emerging professions related to rural green tourism is a critical endeavor [9].

For the initial maturation of rural tourism in Azerbaijan, the establishment of a robust infrastructure is paramount. This encompasses the renovation of rural houses and ensuring that transportation routes are in optimal condition, enabling tourists to access their chosen destinations conveniently, whether by vehicle or on foot. Additionally, meticulous attention to hygiene standards is essential. Collaborative efforts between municipalities, tourism institutions, and executive bodies are indispensable in order to realize the full potential of this sector, generating benefits not only for rural agriculture but also yielding additional income and employment opportunities in rural areas.

Rural tourism proves to be more cost-effective for local residents, given that foreign tourists seldom exhibit a preference for rural accommodations. This predilection is primarily attributable to the absence of standard communal facilities in rural houses. Predominantly, issues such as suboptimal footpath-bath conditions and interruptions in gas and electricity supply emerge as impediments. Moreover, the reluctance of rural communities, utilizing their homes as tourism objects, to invest in air conditioning exacerbates this trend, especially in consideration of the climatic variations in mountainous regions.

The principal rationale behind the disinterest of foreign tourists in rural accommodations is linguistic barriers, as language-related challenges impede effective communication with hosts. Conversely, local tourists often appreciate the boundless hospitality extended by rural hosts.

The underdevelopment of agritourism in Azerbaijan can be attributed to a lack of market competition. The absence of a competitive landscape allows operators of tourist facilities to autonomously dictate prices. The nascent status of agritourism inhibits local communities from showcasing their craftsmanship to tourists, vending artisanal products, and acquainting tourists with local historical monuments. Strategic development of agritourism has the potential to address a myriad of socio-economic challenges [8].

The primary sources conducive to the evolution of rural ecotourism primarily emanate from small-scale private horticultural and livestock enterprises, which are adequately prevalent within our nation. Typically, these diminutive farms encapsulate the distinctive national culture of agricultural flora and fauna, employing conventional methodologies in their operations. It is precisely these unique attributes that exert a considerable allure on foreign ecotourists. Conversely, within the framework of the national educational tourism development plan, an essential prerequisite involves acquainting individuals with the historical utilization of the country's agricultural resources.

Beyond the rich cultural and historical legacy present in Azerbaijan's traditional agricultural regions, another pivotal determinant for agritourism program development lies in the realm of national hospitality and cuisine. The establishment of contemporary rural guesthouses and eco-agricultural facilities, aligned with modern technologies, serves as the propelling force behind such initiatives. Currently, this trajectory stands as one of the most dynamically advancing domains in the international recreation business [8].

International experiential insights into agritourism development underscore the pragmatic commercialization potential of virtually any sphere involving the traditional use of nature. Within the context of our nation, the praxis of labor ecotourism, exemplified by the collection of medicinal plants and exploration of various ancient artisanal disciplines (such as pottery, blacksmithing, and woodworking), can be organized, contributing substantively to the dynamic growth of this sector.

In this context, it is imperative to underscore the relatively less salient function of agritourism proposals: the pragmatic establishment of an exhaustive spectrum of diverse forms of local employment in rural areas essentially "de novo." It is widely recognized that, frequently,

agricultural regions exhibit a rather confined employment structure, inducing an inevitable migration of skilled youth to urban locales. In the context of agritourism program development in rural areas, myriad diverse job opportunities manifest, consequently generating a heightened demand for local young denizens. The influx of foreign tourists necessitates the acquisition of proficiency in foreign languages, exerting an influence on labor reservoirs and economic diversification in the region.

Presently, in various regions of Azerbaijan, including villages, services pertinent to accommodation and catering for tourists are available; however, these services lack consistent quality. The cultivation of tourism incentives among residents in rural areas contributes to the augmentation of the local population engaged in tourism, fortifying service infrastructure in rural tourism, enhancing the quality of tourism services in rural domiciles, and buttressing factors conducive to the economic development of alternative forms of tourism and regions [9]. The development of rural tourism can lead to the cultivation of individual entrepreneurship incentives, the development of communal services in rural areas, and an augmentation in the employment of the population, particularly women.

Facilitating the rural populace in the advancement of rural tourism in the regions, making appearances in local TV and media to dispel certain stereotypes, and continuously elucidating the material and ecological advantages of rural tourism to them are indispensable. The host's hospitality, interior design, neutral paint colors in rooms, the cleanliness of the yard, and, especially, the cleanliness of auxiliary rooms carry paramount significance [1].

In rooms where tourists stay, additional bedding sets, towels, and the like should be available. Their rest should take place in tranquil conditions. The stability factor is also linked to the pricing policy of the guesthouse. Altering the prices of services in the middle of the season is highly undesirable, as it poses considerable challenges for tour operators to conduct reliable pre-arrangements.

In the context of rural tourism, potent advertising and extensive organizational initiatives are not imperative. All prerequisites preceding tourist arrivals – pristine, unpolluted climates, abundant water resources, verdant landscapes, well-maintained rural infrastructures, scenic panoramas, and the entirety of social

infrastructure akin to urban settings – constitute inherent assets. Consequently, fostering domestic tourism through the avenue of rural tourism in the future, culminating in the attainment of contemporary service benchmarks, may also elicit an inclination among international tourists towards these locales. Despite sporadic conflicts during this juncture, such occurrences would not engender adverse publicity detrimental to the nation's image. This underscores that countries garnering substantial currency revenues from tourism have previously undergone experiences with domestic tourism, such as rural tourism, and presently exhibit robust potential across diverse tourism realms.

To realize desired outcomes in rural tourism development, it is imperative to disseminate knowledge among the rural populace in this direction. In this context, scrutinizing the experiences of global nations (USA, France, AFR, Great Britain, Denmark, Spain, Italy, China, Japan, etc.) in advancing agritourism assumes paramount importance in propelling agritourism within our nation. International experience underscores the pivotal role agritourism plays in sustained socio-economic and cultural development across local communities, rural and regional domains, and the nation as a whole. Countries with well-established agritourism practices routinely convene conferences and seminars to delineate the development trajectories of rural tourism, ensure service diversification, surmount emerging impediments, and facilitate knowledge exchange [11].

Conducting training sessions to welcome tourists, orchestrating services effectively, offering supplementary amenities, and guaranteeing a serene and comfortable sojourn for tourists assumes significance. Rural tourism transcends being merely a business type; it embodies a facet of public diplomacy. Tourists eschew sequestered stays in hotels; rather, they aspire to establish connections with local denizens, acquaint themselves with local lifestyles, and partake in regional traditions. Consequently, hosts should propagate the country's genial image to foreign tourists and cultivate robust internal relationships with visitors hailing from disparate regions.

Thus, every unequivocal indication underscores that the cultivation of agritourism should be an inherent and indispensable component of Azerbaijan's regional development prospects in contemporary times.

Conclusion. Azerbaijan's tourism sector confronts several challenges, and herein lie proposals for their amelioration:

1) A noteworthy predicament within the country's tourism sphere is the inadequate exposition of its affluent natural and geographical milieu. Effectively acquainting stakeholders with Azerbaijan's propitious natural and geographical attributes emerges as a pivotal determinant for fostering tourism growth;

- 2) Human resource conflicts;
- 3) Paucity of tangible resources;
- 4) Elevated costs at tourist destinations;
- 5) Feeble digitization of tourism services;
- 6) Disunity in tourism development;
- 7) Fragility in state-private sector affiliations;

In light of these circumstances, the ensuing recommendations are proffered:

1. Tourism entities should engage in systematic research endeavors, delving into and scrutinizing rural domains with the overarching goal of ensuring the sustained progression of rural tourism.

2. Establishing hygienic zones where denizens of rural locales can market their wares is imperative.

3. Equipping rural youth with foreign language proficiency is essential to facilitate enhanced communication.

4. A focus on the augmentation of transportation and communication infrastructures is imperative.

5. Strategic investments should be channelled into diverse domains to underpin the advancement of rural tourism.

6. A spectrum of products must be introduced to guarantee the resilience of rural tourism.

7. The scope of international collaboration in workforce training ought to be broadened.

8. Drawing insights from the experiences of other nations, accentuating local preferences and creativity should be underscored, and so forth.

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