

An aerial photograph of a lush green agricultural field, showing a series of parallel furrows or rows of crops that create a grid-like pattern across the landscape. The perspective is from directly above, looking down on the field.

Brief Eight.

Marketing Agritourism

8. Marketing Agritourism

A key focus of this study was marketing: how farmers across the country market their agritourism activities, what aspects of marketing are the most challenging, and what kinds of marketing assistance farms need. Analysis of survey and interview results found that almost all farmers struggled with marketing, and many expressed that they lacked the expertise, resources, or time to understand what marketing efforts effectively attract potential visitors.

The survey began the inquiry into marketing with a closed question about how farms marketed their agritourism activities to potential visitors. Two strategies were selected by the majority of respondents: social media pages (87%) and word of mouth (85%). The next most popular choices were print advertisements (38%), press coverage (37%), and collaboration with other local businesses (36%).

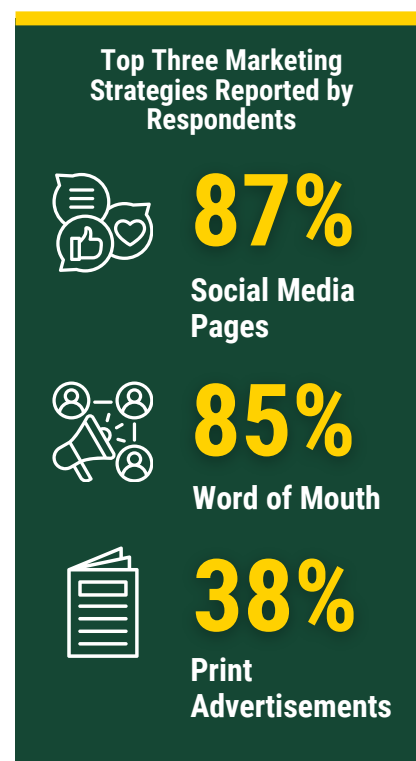
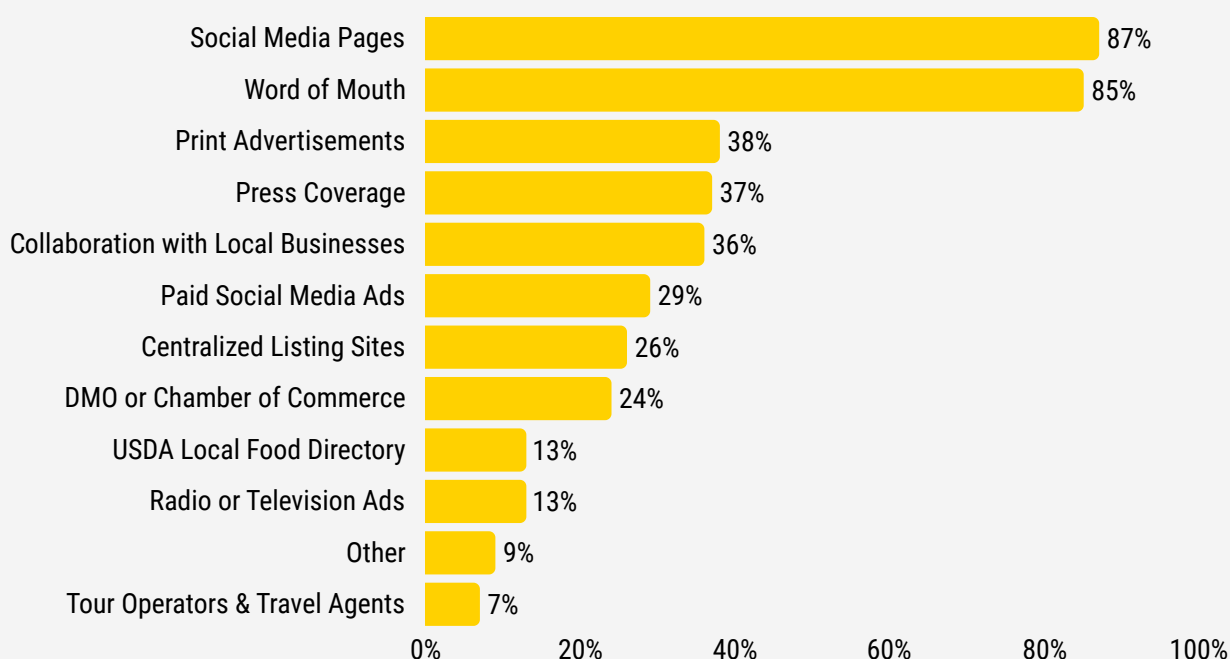


Figure 10. Marketing Outlets Used by Survey Respondents



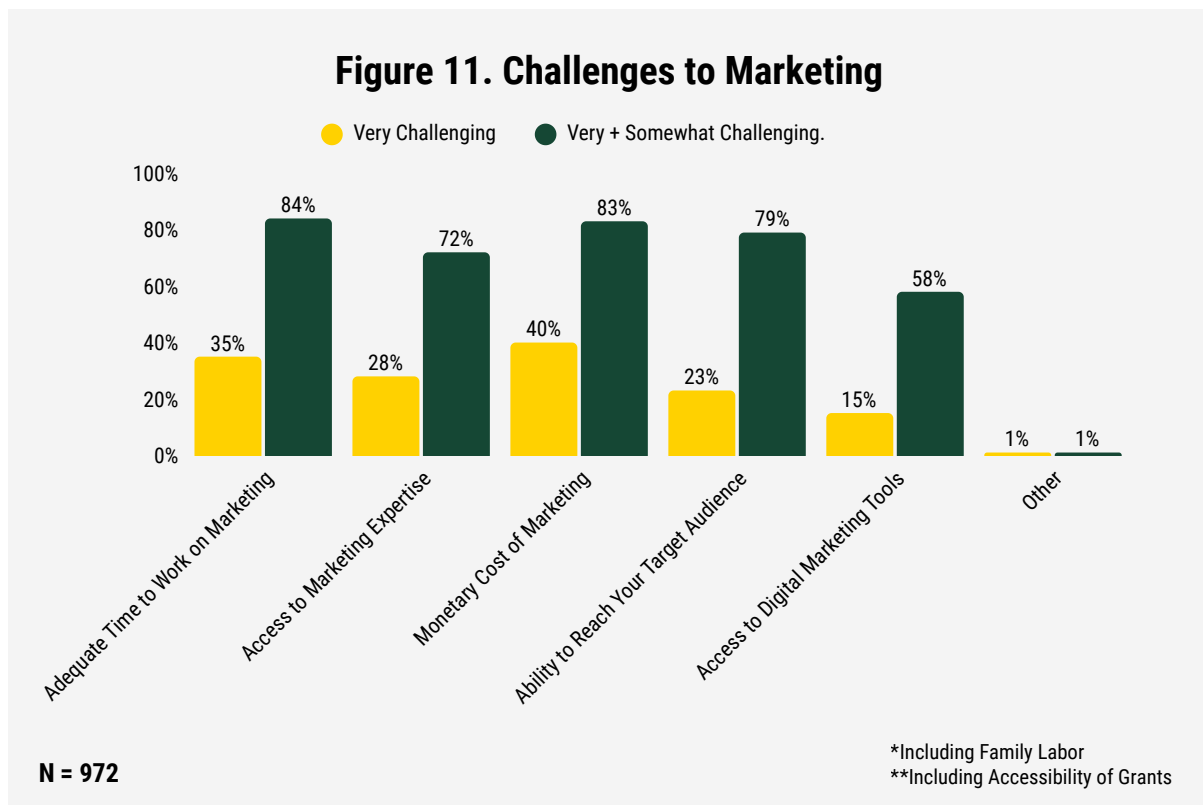
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*And Other Financial Resources for Agritourism
**Resource Materials for the Public on Where to Find Agritourism Experiences

Note. Themes in the write-in responses included: website and searchability of website on Google; email lists & email newsletters; and events.

Challenges

Challenges to marketing were near universal: the majority of respondents cited at least some degree of challenge in all of the categories we offered. The most commonly reported challenge overall was having adequate time to work on marketing (84% rated “very” or “somewhat” challenging), and the issue rated “very challenging” by the greatest number of respondents was the monetary cost of marketing (40%), which also came in second overall. This is consistent with our finding that the twin restraints of time and money were the central challenges reported by farmers, as explored in [Brief #6](#).



Note. Write-in responses rated “very challenging” included: knowledge of and facility with digital tools; a shifting marketing landscape; and knowing what strategies successfully attract guests.

In interviews and in open responses to the survey, farmers were unsure about how best to reach visitor segments of interest:

- “Marketing is a big challenge...we are 20 minutes away from a large city and it is hard to know how best to reach that audience and get them to make the drive.” — Survey Respondent
- “The marketing that we’ve been doing doesn’t seem to be working any more. Perhaps post-Covid, people have a greater selection of things to do? Or have the social media outlets changed their algorithms? Or have people already visited once and don’t think they need to go again?” — Survey Respondent

“That’s a real challenge, for me to keep up with where [young people] are looking for information.”

Interviewee



Some interviewees had family members with marketing expertise and felt like they did know where to direct their efforts. Yet, as the second quote indicates, in-house marketing expertise did not insulate operators from the barrier of cost.

“I can dig back into Google, and I can look and see what the searches are for... our daughter knows those tags to put on things, and so she’s real good about that.”

Survey Respondent



“We both have marketing backgrounds as well, so we really know what to do. We are in the process of trying to find funding for that, because it just gets so expensive.”

Survey Respondent



Supports

The top requested supports by survey respondents are summarized in **Brief #6**. Of these, three of the top five were related to marketing: social media marketing & management (54%, second place); marketing plan development (44%, fourth place); and information about product and consumer trends (40%, fifth place).

Farmers elaborated on marketing support needs in open responses to the survey. Several expressed wanting to hire outside help, but did not have the funds.

“Having an online product shop has been helpful but difficult and time consuming to maintain. I feel like marketing/selling is another full time job in addition to the full time job of farming. Hiring someone to farm to allow time to market/sell has cost more than the additional sales revenue generated.”

Survey Respondent



“Marketing/advertising is my weakest area. I have done better each year but still need to improve more. There have been people that have helped out and given advice. We are not to the point of being able to hire someone with these skills yet.”

Survey Respondent



“We need a website to promote what we do but the cost are hard to justify and to manage a website takes a lot of time. We’d love to hire this out.”

Survey Respondent



Photo Courtesy of Lakota Youth Development

But two farmers emphasized that marketing expertise without knowledge of agriculture was unhelpful:

“I’ve had folks offer to help me with [social media marketing], but they want me to ‘send them content,’ well what good is content without context? You don’t know who that ewe is or why this photo is precious or why this moment is special... It’s about sharing that experience with people that makes it special, not just the photo.”

Interviewee



“We have looked into bringing an outside person... to handle the social media and marketing, but it is very difficult to find someone that has enough of a background in agriculture to be able to hand this area over to.”

Interviewee



In summary, farmers need access to free or low-cost marketing advice from experts who understand agriculture to help them direct their limited time and funds where it is most effective. Extension offices, state departments of agriculture, and state departments of tourism are all appropriate homes for this technical assistance, and we encourage states to coordinate internally to ensure that this expertise is available. As one farmer stated, “there seems to be a common thread over the past few years of agritourism operations like ours noting that they desperately need help with marketing, but so far no state organization has offered to provide these services.” Read onto **Brief #9** to learn about how research and outreach professionals can work with farmers to study what marketing methods work best for different activities, locations, and types of visitors.