Agritourism and On-Farm Direct Sales Interviews: Report of Qualitative Findings

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Executive Summary

This report introduces the analysis of 23 semi-structured interviews as part of a three-year project focused on critical success factors in direct sales and agritourism on small and medium-sized farms. Before isolating success factors, researchers first analyzed responses related to how operators define and measure success, coding for forceful and reoccurring themes. The three main components of success for agritourism operators that emerged are broadly categorized as: financial goals, community-related goals, and personal/family goals**.** Researchers also coded for and found consensus among operators in relation to keys to success and barriers**.**

Keys to success include:

- excellent customer service
- partnerships and collaboration
- marketing and technology, and work ethic

Challenges include:

- liability and regulations
- managing visitors/issues with the public
- and external forces (weather, economy, US political climate).

These findings have important implications for future research as well as policies and programs aimed at supporting agritourism.

Introduction and Background

As small- and medium-sized farms worldwide struggle to remain viable, many farmers continue to look for alternative revenue sources to sustain their enterprises and support their communities. Agritourism, including direct-to-consumer sales on farms, has a rich history across the globe. Though not formally defined or recognized through policy in the US, agritourism is an increasingly popular diversification strategy and a growing income source for many farmers and ranchers (Busby & Rendle, 2000; Schilling, Sullivan & Komar, 2012; Whitt, Low & Van Sandt, 2019).

Across the US, rural communities have long been moving away from natural resource extraction-based economies to tourism- and service-based economies (Ashley, De Brine, Lehr & Wilde, 2007; Laville-Wilson, 2017; Yonk, 2020). Farm communities thus face a range of new and intensifying economic pressures. Many farms have sought to introduce additional revenue streams to their operations via diversification into direct-to-consumer sales, vacation rentals, farm tours, and other forms of agritourism (Kloppenburg, Lezberg, DeMaster, Stevenson, & Hendrickson, 2000). Small farms with an income diversification strategy on average report higher household incomes (Khanal & Mishra, 2014). In addition, renewed interest in food systems and local food has provided the opportunity for farmers to invite the general public to their farms, creating both educational and economic value (Chase & Gubinger, 2014; Martinez, 2010). More recent research suggests that agritourism supports local food systems and enhances direct-to-consumer sales not only by directly influencing tourists' purchasing behavior but also by promoting a broader interest in agriculture more generally (Brune, Knollenberg, Stevenson, Barbieri, & Schroder-Moreno, 2020).

While agritourism is increasingly popular, not all farmers are engaging in this pursuit. Research has shown that variations in comfort with risk and uncertainty, family context, styles of farming, management styles, and stewardship priorities all play into decision-making in the realm of farm diversification (Darnhofer & Walder,

2013). The most recent agricultural census data reports that agritourism operators are more likely to be women and are older on average. In addition, farms that already process or sell food for human consumption are most likely to participate in agritourism, as are farms and ranches with cattle and horses (Whitt, Low & Van Sandt, 2019).

This three-year project aims to identify critical success factors for agritourism operators and, using the results of qualitative and quantitative research, to create tools to help operators succeed at meeting stated goals. First, we sought to identify how operators define and measure goals for their agritourism operations and then we analyzed responses to the semi-structured interview questions for themes related to success factors and barriers in agritourism.

Farmers engage in diversification strategies including agritourism for a variety of reasons. Much of the existing literature on agritourism operators' motivations focuses primarily on economic benefits (McGehee & Kim, 2004; McGehee, Kim & Jennings, 2007; Nickerson, Black & McCool, 2001; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Schilling, Sullivan & Komar, 2012). In fact, recent US Census of Agriculture data show increasing revenue opportunities from agritourism: from 2012 to 2017, despite a small drop in the number of farms participating in agritourism, the income from agritourism and recreational services increased from $704 million to $949 million (USDA NASS, 2019). But studies also reference other social and personal motivations leading farms to engage in agritourism, ranging from personal interest to goals around consumer education, supporting family members on the farm, and enjoying companionship with visitors. Although these non-economic motivations have received some attention in past research, further study is needed to better understand myriad motivations for engagement in agritourism and how agritourism operators balance competing priorities (McGehee & Kim, 2004; Nickerson et al., 2001). This level of analysis can help to better meet farmer needs through adapting extension programming given operators' economic and non-economic motivations, and also guide further academic investigation into agritourism constraints and opportunities.

Defining agritourism

For this project we used Chase, Stewart, Schilling, Smith and Walk's (2018) conceptual framework for defining and categorizing agritourism and direct sales activities. This framework organizes agritourism activities into core and peripheral activities based on where they take place (on or off the farm) and the degree to which they are directly related to agricultural activities (Figure 1). According to the framework, "core activities take place on a working farm or ranch and have deep connections to agricultural production" while "peripheral activities lack a deep connection to agricultural production, even though they may take place on a working farm or ranch" (p. 17). For example, core activities include product sales and experiences such as farmstands, u-pick, farm tours, overnight stays or farm-to-table meals. Peripheral activities include off-farm farmers markets, weddings, music events or outdoor recreation. The framework also organizes activities into five main categories: education, direct sales, entertainment, outdoor

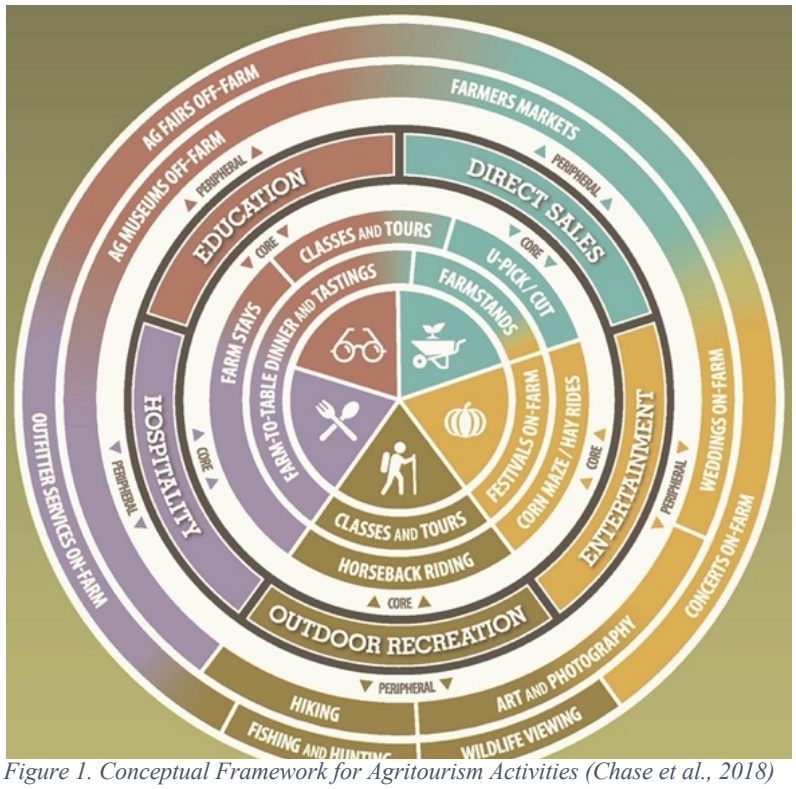

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Agritourism Activities (Chase et al., 2018)

recreation, and hospitality. For the purposes of this study, agritourism includes but is not limited to all core and peripheral agritourism activities taking place on farms, in all categories, as defined in Figure 1. Off-farm sales and experiences are not included.

Motivations and goals for agritourism operators

There is a wealth of literature examining motivations for diversifying into different types of agritourism across many different geographies (recent studies are summarized in Table 1). In one of the earliest studies relating to motivations for agritourism, Nickerson et al. (2001) examined motivations for diversification by Montana ranchers based on 11 categories and then clustered them into social reasons, economic reasons and external influences, concluding that operators were primarily motivated by economic reasons, though social reasons were a strong second. Other studies have since found support for this general conclusion, suggesting that income generation is a primary motivator for agritourism development (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009; Brelik, 2011; Khanal & Mishra, 2014; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). In a more recent assessment of the current state of agritourism research in the US, Rozier Rich et al. (2016) conclude, "Four of the [nine definitions of agritourism used by researchers] incorporated an income component either as a means of income generation and/or as an economic activity. This is worth noting because it is often assumed farmers engage in agritourism endeavors as a means to supplement farm income" (p. 4). Thus, for small farms who feel increasing financial pressure and "struggle to remain economically viable in the face of changing global markets, urbanization pressures, structural changes in the food retailing system, and perpetual vagaries of weather, diseases, and pests, "agritourism is a noteworthy coping strategy" (Schilling et al., 2012, p. 200). See Table 1 below for a summary of recent literature on agritourism operator motivations and goals in the US.

Table 1. Recent literature on agritourism operator motivations and goals in the US

Study	Date	Methods	Subject Focus	Key Findings
Halim, Barbieri, Morais, Jakes and Seekamp	2020	Mixed qualitative methods	Female agritourism entrepreneurs in North Carolina	Themes constituting women's self-definition of success: being constantly on the move, ensuring customer satisfaction, having family support, creating broad impact, gaining recognition and respect, securing financial sustainability, pursuing happiness, debating the work-life balance, and perpetuating the family farm
Chiodo et al.	2019	Case studies	Agritourism operators in mountainous regions in the US, Brazil, Italy, France	Top motivations: creativity and innovativeness, social interaction, awareness about farm operations, support local producers, income generation, autonomy, contribute to the local economy, environmental conservation
Khanal and Mishra	2014	Analysis of NASS census data	US farmers	Income influences diversification strategies among small farms

Other studies have pointed out other motivations beyond income. Several studies have found agritourism income to be small in comparison to total farm income, highlighting the importance of non-monetary goals of agritourism such as personal goals, employment opportunities for family members, social interaction with guests and educating the public about agriculture (Schilling et al., 2012; Tew & Barbieri, 2012, Busby & Rendle, 2000). Hansson et al. (2013) looked at motives for starting ventures outside of conventional agriculture among farmers in Sweden and assessed family farm roles in influencing these motivations. They found operators have two underlying motives: business development to reduce risk and use idle resources, and business development for social and lifestyle reasons, noting that their findings differed from previous studies "both in respect to the number of underlying motives and the nature of these motives" (p. 247). The authors conclude that considering disaggregated motives outside of a broader family or firm context may fail to fully

capture operator goals. Diversification, they argue, can be better be understood by considering “more overarching motives related to the management and development of the business and the situation of the farmer and his/her family” (p. 248). Ainley and Kline (2014) similarly advocate for more exploratory research methods that “fully appreciate the complex intertwining of multiple factors underlying the phenomenon [of agritourism]” (p. 405).

Additionally, Telfer (2002) examines agritourism in an Indonesian community using Marcia Nozick's list of principles of sustainable community development. He finds that while agritourism does not always meet the goal of economic self-reliance, it is a powerful tool for community control and building culture within the community. Others find that agritourism can serve as a tool for farmers to resist urban stereotypes and regain control over their own representation among non-farmers (Nazariadli, Morais, Bunds, Baran & Supak, 2019).

Review of the existing literature thus suggests that while quantitative research has been instrumental in creating a blueprint for understanding why US farmers are embracing agritourism, there is an opportunity to probe deeper and “add flesh to the bones of what is currently understood [about agritourism motivations]” (Ainley & Kline, 2014, p. 405) using more interpretive, qualitative methods.

A second gap in the literature is the limited geographic scope of most US agritourism research. While there are several national agritourism studies in Europe, Canada, and South America, very little agritourism data exists on a national or multistate level in the US. Rich et al. (2016) note: "While three national surveys exist which provide insight into agritourism or farm visits…the focus of these studies was not agritourism; rather agritourism was a small component. In order for valid comparisons and generalizations to be made agritourism-focused survey data at a national scale is greatly needed" (p. 4). Our multistate research project builds on previous research at the state level, while also providing much-needed insights into common themes that emerge when considering the multitude of other factors that influence farm decision-making based on geographic region.

Applied Research Methods

The sample used for this study was obtained from a larger selection of farmers and ranchers engaged in agritourism and direct sales. Key informants collected information about the sample subjects from five states: Vermont, Minnesota, California, West Virginia, and Oregon. These states were chosen due to growing ongoing interest in agritourism and direct sales by farmers in those states and the expertise of the key informants whose work in agricultural extension and tourism uniquely positioned them to provide a comprehensive list of subjects.

From a list of 80 farmers and ranchers compiled via the criterion sampling method, six were selected from each state using a maximum variation sampling method (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). This sampling method was chosen because criterion selection yields information-rich data from which researchers can deeply learn about farmer and rancher experiences, while maximum variation sampling ensures that a wide variety of experiences are explored and represented (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Polkinghorne, 2005). Farmers and ranchers were organized by geographic location within each state, agritourism and direct sales activities, farm size, number of years in business, agricultural products, race, and gender. Based on the literature on firm characteristics and business performance, geographic region diversity was prioritized for selection, then race and gender, then agritourism and agricultural offerings (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008).

We used email communication to recruit farmers and ranchers within their assigned state. To participate, a person had to be 18 years or older and identify as an agritourism operator. Participants were offered a $50 incentive for their time and participation. Potential participants were sent three invitations to participate.

Recruitment continued for four months until we obtained at least three interviews per sampled state and at least 20 interviews total.

Sample information

Of the 23 interviewees included in this study, six are operators in Vermont, five in Oregon, five in California, four in Minnesota and three in West Virginia. The discrepancy in the number of interviewees per state is due to the relative ease or difficulty with recruitment in each state due to time constraints during agricultural growing seasons.

Given our study's focus, we only interviewed operators who work on farms or ranches classified as small or medium by USDA standards; 57% of farms and ranches were small and 43% were medium-sized. Sixty percent of interviewees were women, though the majority operated their farm as a family unit. Many different farm products were represented in our sample, from diversified livestock and dairy to diversified crops and value-added products.

Interviewee responses were categorized based on the conceptual framework developed by Chase et al. (2018). Eighty-seven percent of farms and ranches offered direct sales, 83% offered education, 48% offered hospitality, 26% offered outdoor recreation and 87% offered entertainment. All farms and ranches offered at least two agritourism activities, 78% offered more than two activities, and 39% offered four or more agritourism activities.

Interview strategy

The authors scheduled interviews with respondents in advance. The semi-structured interviews took place over the phone and lasted 60-90 minutes. The interviews contained 16 open-ended questions. See Appendix B. for interview protocol.

Analytics strategy

Two team members initially conducted a thematic analysis of the first three interviews. We used constant comparative methods to identify themes in the data inductively. We used Braun and Clarke's (2006) hallmark thematic analysis method to code themes within and across interviews. We used Owen's (1984) criteria of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness to generate initial codes, within interviews, as well as across interviews.

After coding the first three interviews separately, the author and second researcher met to discuss, refine and collapse codes. Codes were entered into the NVIVO software and analyzed for intercoder reliability using a Kappa coefficient. Codes with a Kappa coefficient less than 80% were reviewed and re-coded until consensus was met. The authors coded the rest of the interviews independently, continuing the process by adding new codes where needed, re-coding previous interviews with new codes, and refining codes as the process continued.

Based on the emergent themes, we focused on five specific questions related to decision-making in agritourism and then specifically on one question focused on defining and measuring success in agritourism. The answers to this question served to illuminate participant motivations and goals for agritourism.

We also focused on two questions related to keys to success in agritourism and barriers and risks associated with agritourism. The answers to this question are summarized and coded in Table 2 in Appendix A.

Results

Defining success

> *So I think that measure of success, it can come in very different forms, but probably if somebody is losing money, they're not gonna be able to sustain it. So that might be the number one question, but then I think there are other factors that play into it significantly.*
>
> *–West Virigina, diversified livestock farmer*

In order to understand key success factors in agritourism, we first sought to identify how agritourism operators define and measure success. As expected, based on previous literature, financial goals were a forceful and recurring theme. However, they were closely intertwined with two other types of goals: community-related goals, and personal and family goals. Also, we found that themes were fairly consistent throughout different parts of the country and different types of agritourism operations.

Financial goals

All participants discussed the importance of financial profit; however, the importance of agritourism enterprises' financial solvency exists on a wide spectrum. For some, agritourism is not the main income source for the farm but occupies another vital role. For others, agritourism and direct sales are the sole sources of income and occupy a prominent spot on an income statement. Regardless of an agritourism enterprise's overall financial contribution, almost all participants agreed that it was crucial for these enterprises to at least pay for themselves. One farmer from California summarized it as follows, "I think that measure of success, it can come in different forms, but if somebody is losing money, they're not going to be able to sustain it." A rancher in Oregon confirmed, "Obviously, money, it has to pay its way. Everything we did in value-added could never threaten the resources base. It had to enhance it." Participants acknowledged that while money was not always the top priority, losing money on a venture is not tenable.

Even among those farmers for whom agritourism is considered very important financially, agritourism decisions do not always match professed goals. For example, a flower farmer in Oregon told us, "I think if it's sustainable for us, it's gotta be economically sustainable." She explained how they run a tour train through their fields for people who have difficulty walking. "And it costs us money to run. But the personal touch for those…you know, it costs them five bucks to ride it and it's a half-hour tour. But it's that personal touch and being able to talk to them; it's not economically sustainable. But I always insist that we keep doing it because of that personal touch, and you know, talking to people." Thus, for some participants, exceptions are made and financial goals are deprioritized in favor of other community or family-related goals.

Community-related goals

A second emergent theme relates to goals focused on education and community leadership. Participants told us a major way they define success is in their roles as educators. They see themselves as intermediaries between the general public and the "private" world of agriculture. As public figures, they consider themselves advocates for and teachers of their version of agriculture and direct connection between consumers and food sources.

Participants also found that the connection between their farms and consumers differs among generations. A farmer in West Virginia explained, "The older population, it brings back memories from their childhood of, you know, doing something with their grandparents. And then you have the younger population, or millennials, that might not have been familiar with that, but they're really trying to get connected to their food source." Another farmer, in California, told us about how their farm connected with school groups over time, "Success for us was in the return of schools. We have many schools that have been coming for 10 years." She explained that they worried the school groups wouldn't have funding to come back during an economic downturn. "Most of schools, they cut all the other field trips, but they kept coming to our farm. So, our school business remained the same…To me, the success is that people found us and came back to us, I think. That makes us feel good."

Farmers also observed a US population increasingly disconnected from their food sources, fewer farmers who are integrated with the non-farming community, a decreasing number of farmers in general, and increased public concern about food safety and agricultural practices. One rancher in Oregon told us:

This recognition of their visibility also came up regarding the theme of community leadership. Participants told us about seeing themselves as community leaders both for the public and for other farmers. They talked about being models for other farmers in their region and the benefits of building relationships with people in their community. A diversified vegetable grower in Minnesota told us about the advocacy role that comes with being a public-facing business. "The path we're taking is very public. It's not like we're hiding in the corner and growing vegetables…which I think is good because you can advocate then for farms and say 'Well, come up.' And you can see how much work it is, and just bring farms and farming to the front of people's minds. Because honestly, there are people in this area that do not believe you can even grow anything up here, which is absurd." In this leadership capacity, participants find value and meaning in engaging with visitors, and agritourism becomes more than a financial diversification mechanism.

Personal and family goals

The third significant thematic category that emerged concerned personal and family goals. For all the participants, quality of life is important, consistent with past research (Chase et al., 2013). Participants talked about minimizing burnout, spending time with and finding employment for family members, and getting to enjoy what they do. They emphasized making strategic decisions about what enterprises to engage in, and trying

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It's more than profits. It's really important today if you have the attitude to do it, it's really important to open your door to people who aren't in farming and ranching, to help them see the truth about the good work that farmers and ranchers do. You need to school yourself about GMO conversations, predator conversations, pesticide conversations, all the issues that people that don't know about ag, they're frightened by. It's really important that the voice of the ranchers and farmers, real people that do the work, be heard by the majority of people who aren't. We're less than 2% of the population. We don't even count on the census statistics, you know, so how are people gonna know if they don't come out and see you?

–Oregon, diversified livestock farmer

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to enter into partnerships wherever possible to share responsibility. On family farms, minimizing stress and family conflict is important. For some, agritourism facilitates these goals by allowing them to remain on the farm to live and work. A maple sugar-maker in Vermont explained how agritourism allowed him and his wife to homeschool their children: “My wife, she’s like ‘When my kids were sick, I got to take my hand on his forehead, and check on him every hour, and give him a kiss on the forehead. I got to see all that instead of hearing it from daycare.’” A livestock farmer explained how, despite initial challenges, having visitors to a cabin on their farm allows them to remain working on the farm: "There was a time, especially when we hadn't really figured out Airbnb to a smooth degree, where I was just constantly attending that house that I was really resentful of. But then I keep reminding myself, 'Well, it's either this or find a job off-farm.' So, this is my job.”

Another underlying theme related to quality of life revolves around the concept of customer interaction and feedback. For many operators, having visitors to their farms breaks up rural isolation and provides positive encouragement. A dairy farmer told us, "You know, you can laugh, but one form of measurement [of success] is the hundreds of Christmas cards that we get here every year." Similarly, a grower in West Virginia explained, "It's rewarding to just have people come and see the farm. And it is both, of course, fiscally rewarding because they give you money for it, but to see the way they interact and hear positive things that they say about the farm is nice because it just kind of reinvigorates your purpose. It's affirming, and it’s an ego boost.” While not all participants live in rural areas, agricultural work often demands long hours without much financial compensation or cultural prestige. For many agritourism operators feeling appreciated and valued is a considerable benefit of opening their land and businesses to visitors.

Critical Success Factors

In addition to the previously mentioned themes regarding motivation and goals, farmers and ranchers engaged in agritourism highlighted the following key success factors:

Excellent customer service

Over 50% of respondents identified providing excellent customer service as a key success factor in agritourism. Within the category of excellent customer service, other sub-themes emerged, such as ensuring courteous and knowledgeable staff, having a clean and visually appealing property, offering high quality products and experiences. A diversified vegetable farmer in California explained, “It’s really making the customer experience a pleasant, memorable one. We really work with our employees. It is customer service, you gotta be accommodating, you gotta be helpful, you gotta be this and that. And I think the farm itself really sells itself, so the more hands-on things you can get them to do makes it that much more memorable.” The concept of the farm selling itself is notable and was echoed by other agritourism operators. This suggests that the demand for agritourism is high and that successful agritourism operators focus on ensuring a high-quality product and

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A lot of hard work, you have to put your time in. You have to have a good commodity. Our pumpkins, we always take pride in having the best ones out on display…We have great staff. We really work with our staff on good customer service and the staff needs to be knowledgeable, because if somebody asks if our pumpkins are organic, they have to know how to answer that question.

–California, vegetable grower

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experience for visitors over marketing to convince visitors to engage in agritourism in the first place. Another vegetable grower in California offered:

Partnerships and collaboration

A second forceful and recurring theme involves partnerships and collaboration, among farm workers and owners, between farms and other businesses, and between farms and outside resources such as Extension and nonprofits. A diversified livestock farmer in Oregon told us, "And what are the key factors of success? Relationships. And that's from the processor throughout the supply chain. Without them, you don't have a product. They are absolutely key. And then the customers, which are your wholesale customers, like your chefs and restaurants, you have to protect those relationships. You have to make their job easier." Agritourism operators stressed that they don't see other agritourism businesses as competition; they recognized the value they created by bringing visitors to their region and bringing visibility to agritourism as an industry. As one winery owner in California put it, "Teamwork is important, and then us working as a team, and customer service. Those are my biggest key factors."

Marketing and technology

A third theme relates to marketing and technology. Within this category interviewees cited technological proficiency, targeted marketing, and social media platforms as instrumental to success in agritourism. Operators cited different tools as helpful—from Facebook, to Instagram to email marketing. One diversified livestock owner told us:

> *And I can say a lot of bad things about Instagram and my desires to not be on it, but we would not have as reliable a way to sell our products and experiences without it. I mean I would say that every single one of our sales has come from that. And I can't even think of one that... Because people aren't stumbling down [our road] and finding [our farm], you know? We have to scream that we're there.*
>
> *–Vermont, diversified livestock farmer*

Agritourism operators also expressed a desire to have co-operative marketing to create awareness around agritourism in their region. Social media has drawbacks as well—some producers expressed frustration with the lack of control over online reviews and the need to keep up with constantly changing platforms.

Work ethic

A final theme tied to success in agritourism relates to work ethic. Work ethic subthemes ranged from skillful management of many types of jobs to perseverance to passion, drive and determination. Interviewees stressed that though demand for agritourism is high, it is a time- and resource-demanding job.

Barriers and Challenges

Liability and regulations

The majority of interviewees cited liability and regulations as the biggest barrier to success in agritourism. In particular, interviewees said continually changing regulations, variations by county and region, and lack of a centralized source of information were a major barrier to their agritourism enterprises. A farmer in California explained that they want to be compliant but struggle to find out rules they need to follow:

These regulations can change at any moment. So it would be nice for landowners, there would be a place where that could be updated where they wouldn't be breaking any rule.

–California, aquaponic farmer

Interviewees emphasized the importance of liability insurance to protect the farm when inviting visitors. Availability of comprehensive liability insurance seemed to vary from region to region. Most participants in Vermont and Minnesota found it fairly straightforward to find liability insurance, while participants in West Virginia, California and Oregon had mixed success.

External forces

The second recurring theme regarding challenges centered around "external forces", such as weather, changes in the economy, and the US political climate. A quarter of interviewees cited one of these issues as a challenge to their agritourism operation. The California farmer quoted above commented that, while agritourism is at the whim of federal and state policy, he also hopes that on-farm experiences will help inform consumers on a political level:

[Agritourism] brings knowledge on the part of our guests, their understanding of California farming a little better, and maybe that will help them support agriculture in the future through their votes and when they talk to other people in the city. Because a lot of political decisions are made from the city because that's where the population lies. And then whereas the decisions affect the whole state.

--California, aquaponic farmer

Several operators also commented that because their businesses depend on visitors coming to the farm inclement weather can be a limiting variable, however challenge is common to farmers in general.

Managing visitors and other issues with the public

Finally, managing visitors and other issues with the public was another difficultly cited by the respondents. Agritourism operators face a learning curve in terms of providing a pleasant visitor experience while also protecting their property and themselves from liability. While many operators appreciate the opportunity for leadership, the public facing nature of agritourism can also put operators in a vulnerable position and expose them to criticism or judgment from neighbors and other community members. A grower in Oregon described the trade-off in this way:

I guess if a person is into [agritourism], there's the notoriety, you get to be known in the community. There's some drawbacks to that also because it does increase your public profile… All of a sudden instead of, you know, I'm not anonymous anymore, you know, when I'm in my local community. I have to be careful, sometimes I'd better not, you know, have that drink or I better not do this, I better not do that.

–Oregon, diversified fruit and vegetable grower

Conclusion and Next Steps

Much of the existing literature on the motivations of producers engaged in agritourism in the US focuses on potential economic benefits, with the underlying assumption that farmers and ranchers in the US are primarily concerned with making money. The results show that, at first glance, financial considerations are indeed a key motivator when assessing diversification into agritourism, consistent with some previous findings. However, when probed more deeply, participants suggested that on-going participation in agritourism provides many non-financial benefits, some of which are equal to or even take priority over financial goals. Through this lens, for many operators, an agritourism enterprise's profitability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for engaging in agritourism.

These findings mirror and build upon the results of work by McGee and Kim (2004) who report the top three motivations for agritourism as 1) gaining additional income, 2) fully utilizing resources and 3) educating the consumer. Findings are also consistent with Nickerson et al. (2001) who find income and resource utilization as primary motivators, followed by coping with the variability of agricultural livelihoods. The non-financial themes related to running an agritourism business that most clearly emerged from this study centered on community building and engagement, consistent with recent literature on agritourism and motivations (Chiodo et al., 2019; Halim et al., 2020).

Many of the personal goals related to some level of community interaction, as was observed by Telfer (2002) and Nazariadli et al. (2019). Our results suggest that for our study participants, agritourism provides a level of transparency that allows them to control the narratives regarding their businesses better and allows community members to participate in the agricultural process, thereby gaining further community control. Agritourism also aids in building community culture around food, the natural environment, and cultural heritage. Community

building is important not only for its own sake, but also for improving relationships and increasing understanding between non-farmers and farmers.

With this framing in mind, the results are broadly applicable and add to a growing body of work that can be used to help agritourism operators succeed. Accurately identifying farmer motivations and goals can help provide better outreach programming and support for producers, and more accurately steer the focus of future academic research. Though a recent study suggests that there are topics which agricultural extension agents are failing to fully meet farmer needs (Ferreira, Morais, Szabo, Bowen & Jakes, 2020), research shows that when agricultural educators have a greater understanding of the diversity of farmers' perceptions, understandings, and actions, they are "more likely to succeed in supporting farmers' application of knowledge and skills, resulting in improvements to farming practices and production" (Eckert & Bell, 2005, p. 8). This study sought to capture the depth and breadth of farmers' motivations, and critically highlights the role of community engagement and leadership of agritourism operators alongside financial viability goals. For those working to support farms that might benefit from engagement in agritourism, this broader community development lens or toolkit is more likely to engender success for both producers and consumers.

In addition, these interviews illustrate the diversity of opportunities and challenges facing agritourism operators across the US. Most interviewees feel there is a potential for growth and success in agritourism despite impediments. Next steps include using these findings to develop a national agritourism survey focused on collecting information from a larger number of agritourism operators across the country. Additionally, findings from this report can be used to develop and disseminate resources for farmers looking to engage in or improve agritourism businesses.

Appendix A. Summary of interviewee demographics and keys to success, barriers and risks associated with agritourism.

State	M/F	Farm Type	Main Offering(s)	Keys to Success	Barriers/risks
CA	F	Wine	Direct sales, Lodging/Hospitality, Entertainment	Partnership and collaboration (teamwork), excellent customer service	Cash flow
CA	M	Diversified veg.	Direct sales, Education	Excellent customer service	Liability, regulations
CA	F	Livestock	Direct sales, Education	Marketing and technology (technological proficiency)	Liability, regulations, location, cash flow
CA	F	Diversified veg.	Direct sales, Education	Work ethic, excellent customer service (good product)	Regulations
CA	M	Aquaculture	Education, Lodging/hospitality	Excellent customer service (meet expectations), business planning	External forces (tourist decline due to political climate in US), liability, regulations
MN	F/M	Livestock	Direct sales, Education	Marketing and technology (targeted marketing), business planning, learning from experience, partnership and collaboration	Infrastructure, external forces (weather)
MN	F	Diversified veg.	Direct sales, Education, Entertainment	Work ethic (skillful management of many types of jobs)	Regulations, liability
MN	M	Diversified veg.	Direct sales, Education, Entertainment	Authenticity, excellent customer service (genuine enjoyment), marketing and technology	None specified
MN	F/M	Berry	Direct sales	Excellent customer experience	Regulations, external forces (weather)
OR	M	Diversified veg., orchard, tree nuts	Direct sales, Education, Events	Excellent customer service (liking people)	Labor, external forces (weather, economy)
OR	F	Herbs/nursery plants	Direct sales, Education	Community support (word of mouth)	Managing relationship with community (neighbors complaining), external forces (weather)
OR	F	Livestock, fiber	Direct sales, Education, Outdoor Recreation	Work ethic (perseverance), business planning, partnership and collaboration (strong relationships)	None specified

OR	M	Diversified veg.	Direct sales, Education	Partnership and collaboration (have customers be your advocate and build strong customer relationships)	Labor, regulations
OR	F	Flowers	Direct sales, Education, Entertainment	Excellent customer service (cleanliness and safety), marketing and technology	Regulations
VT	F	Dairy	Direct sales, Lodging/Hospitality	Excellent customer service (high quality product, cleanliness), partnership and collaboration (agency of ag., local community), marketing and technology	Competition from other agribusinesses
VT	M	Maple syrup	Direct sales, Education	Work ethic, partnership and collaboration	Liability, regulations, external forces (weather)
VT	F	Livestock	Direct sales, Lodging/Hospitality, Entertainment	Marketing and technology	Location, managing visitors (keeping farm attractive for visitors)
VT	F	Diversified veg.	Direct sales, Entertainment	Excellent customer service (high quality events with high quality staff and product)	Liability, regulations, marketing
VT	F	Livestock	Direct sales, Education, Entertainment	Excellent customer service (high quality experience, beautiful, clean home)	Regulations
VT	F	Orchard	Direct sales, Education, Entertainment	Excellent customer service, marketing and technology	Regulations, managing visitors (destruction of property/farm), liability
WV	F	Dairy	Direct sales, Education	Work ethic (passion, drive, determination)	Liability
WV	F	Berry	Direct sales	Location, excellent customer service, partnership and collaboration	Liability, managing visitors (destruction of property/farm)
WV	F	Diversified veg, maple	Direct sales	Partnership and collaboration (clustering)	Time management, labor

Appendix B. Interview protocol

1. Let's start with a little bit of history about your farm or ranch.

2. Our project is focused on 5 categories of agritourism:
   - Direct sales (e.g. on-farm sales, farmers markets, CSA, U-pick, etc.)
   - Education (e.g. classes, workshops, student visitors)
   - Hospitality (e.g. camping, airbnb/bnb, lodging/other rentals, retreats, farm-stay or guest ranch)
   - Outdoor recreation (e.g. hunting, fishing, horseback riding, biking, hiking, skiing)

- Entertainment (e.g. music, events, weddings).

Can you tell me about what kinds of visitors you have on your farm or ranch?

3. How has your use of those five categories of agritourism changed over time?

4. What key lessons have you learned about agritourism? When you first started in agritourism, what do you wish you knew then what you knew now?

5. How important is agritourism to your farm or ranch?

6. How do you define and measure “success” in agritourism?

7. In what ways does agritourism bring other benefits?

8. What are the key factors to success in agritourism that you have identified?

9. What are the risks associated with agritourism and how do you have adapted to those risks?

10. What infrastructure or resources are needed for success in agritourism? How does your management change with agritourism use?

11. What external resources contribute to or inhibit success in agritourism?

12. To what extent does agritourism contribute to your quality of life?

13. How does your farm connect with your local community? Tourists and visitors from other places?

14. To what extent are agritourism activities profitable?

15. What advice would you have for farmers or ranchers interested in bringing agritourism to their farm or ranch?

16. What role do you think agritourism plays in 'sustainable development'?

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