

Defining agritourism: A comparative study of stakeholders' perceptions in Missouri and North Carolina

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H I G H L I G H T S

- ▶ Examination of the meaning of agritourism across key stakeholders.
- ▶ “Agricultural setting”, “entertainment”, “farm” and “education” are key elements.
- ▶ Agritourism include staged or authentic agricultural activities.
- ▶ Activities offered in non-working farms were rejected as agritourism.
- ▶ Agricultural settings used for background purposes were rejected as agritourism.

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Agritourism is not a recent phenomenon; furthermore, it has considerably increased in the past ten years and is projected to continue growing in the future. Despite such growth, there is not a shared understanding of agritourism which is problematic as this creates confusion and lessens its appeal among consumers, further hindering communication and collaboration among stakeholders. Therefore, a study was conducted in 2011 to identify preferred definitional elements and types of agritourism activities across residents, farmers, and extension faculty in Missouri and North Carolina (U.S.). Results showed that “agricultural setting”, “entertainment”, “farm”, and “education” should be included in a good definition of agritourism. Respondents also agreed that agritourism includes staged or authentic activities carried out on working agricultural facilities. All stakeholder groups rejected to consider activities offered in non-working farms or where the agricultural setting only serves for background purposes as agritourism. Statistical tests showed significant differences on agritourism definitional elements and types across groups, results that are further discussed. Besides advancing the understanding of the meaning of agritourism, this study carries important implications for the practice of agritourism.

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1. Introduction

Agritourism is not a new phenomenon, it has been recognized world-wide since the early twentieth century (Busby & Rendle, 2000; McKenzie & Wysocki, 2002; Wicks & Merrett, 2003). A set of policies establishing specific guidelines, obligations, and incentives to assist and encourage farmers to diversify their entrepreneurial portfolio through tourism and hospitality services fostered the development of agritourism (Che, Veeck, & Veeck, 2005; Hegarty & Przeborska, 2005; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007;

Sonnino, 2004). For example, farmers from countries that are members of the European Union (E.U.) can access the LEADER program that offers grants for the promotion of rural development (Caballe, 1999; Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; European Court of Auditors, 2010, p. 100). In spite of lesser government support, agritourism has also emerged as an alternative economic activity among farmers in the United States of America (U.S.), although their occurrence is not evenly distributed throughout the country. For example, the state of Texas, largely known for its dude ranches, accounts for 23% of all farms that generate revenues from agritourism, followed by Kansas and Montana with less than 5% (USDA: NASS, 2007, p. 639).

Agritourism has rapidly increased in the U.S. during the past ten years with the number of farms making at least \$25,000 from agritourism activities growing approximately 90% between 2002

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and 2007 (USDA: NASS, 2007, p. 639). Such growth is suggested to be sustained in the upcoming years, mostly because of increasing tendencies of traveling as a family, shorter travels by car, multi-activity trips, and desire to help out local farmers and communities (Carpio, Wohlgenant, & Boonsaeng, 2008; Cordell, 2008). Illustrating this growth, farms' agritourism-related revenues have two-fold increased in the state of Missouri (MO) and almost six times in the state of North Carolina (NC) between 2002 and 2007 (USDA: NASS, 2007, p. 639). In spite of such growth, there is not a standard understanding of agritourism and several definitional inconsistencies are frequently acknowledged in the literature (Carpio et al., 2008; Nickerson, Black, & McCool, 2001; Phillip, Hunter, & Blackstock, 2010; Tew & Barbieri, 2012; Veeck, Che, & Veeck, 2006). In the U.S., such inconsistencies have been associated to the lack of legal frameworks and policies related to the development and marketing of agritourism (Carpio et al., 2008; McGehee, 2007) as opposed to other regions, such as in Europe, where agritourism definitions are legally bound to apply incentives or subsidies to their providers (Hegarty & Przeborska, 2005; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; Sonnino, 2004).

The lack of understanding and definitional inconsistencies of agritourism is problematic for several reasons. First, it challenges the creation of policies promoting the development or strengthening of agritourism (Colton & Bissix, 2005). Second, definitional inconsistencies of agritourism hinder the development of marketing strategies (Veeck et al., 2006), which in turn diminish the effectiveness of making this activity more accessible to the public. Finally, from an academic perspective, addressing inconsistencies and aiming the development of a shared definition of agritourism can help to develop a more uniform field of study, thus enabling more specialized contributions in the future (Phillip et al., 2010).

In response to these challenges, a study was undertaken in 2011 to unveil the understanding of agritourism among three stakeholder groups: providers (i.e., Farmers), current and potential consumers (i.e., Residents), and those assisting in maximizing the farmer/visitor dynamic (i.e., Extension Faculty). Taking into consideration different stakeholders' perspectives to develop a shared understanding of agritourism can lead to a more fluent communication, collaboration, and networking among stakeholders, as well as promote local empowerment and sustainability (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Cole, 2007; Ingram, Fry, & Mathieu, 2010). A shared understanding of agritourism that embodies key stakeholders perspectives can also facilitate its promotion among the public, technical diffusion among farmers, and furthering the development of related study fields such as rural sociology and tourism (Gil Arroyo, Barbieri, & Rich, 2011).

2. Literature review

Meanings are the representations of a given activity developed by every person according to their background and experiences (Coulson, 2001, p. 320; Sharpley & Stone, 2010, p. 304). Specifically, tourism meanings are directly related to the experience itself and are the result of any natural or social contact that takes place during a given experience (Coulson, 2001, p. 320; Greer, Donnelly, & Rickly, 2008). Thus, meanings can evoke an instant appeal or rejection of a certain activity or label (Gilbert, 2003). Tourism meanings are not static; they can vary according to specific contextual factors including time and place (Greer et al., 2008). Along these lines, the context surrounding agritourism stakeholders (e.g., their roles) can shape their meaning of this activity. Identifying different meanings is important to develop successful definitions of tourism-related activities, in which case it is imperative to incorporate meanings from the supply and demand sides because of their academic and marketing implications (Gilbert, 2003). Aiming to develop

a theoretical framework for evaluating stakeholders' meanings of agritourism, the following sections deconstruct several definitions of agritourism and present a discussion of the efforts put forth by Phillip et al. (2010) to construct a broad definition of agritourism. Such deconstruction–construction effort is intended to advance the body of knowledge and provide the foundation of the practice (Henderson, Presley, & Bialeschki, 2004) of agritourism.

2.1. Deconstructing agritourism definitions

Definitions of agritourism are abundant in the literature, reflecting the ambiguity surrounding its meaning. Inconsistencies in agritourism definitions found in the literature relate to three issues: (1) the type of setting (e.g., farm, any agricultural setting); (2) the authenticity of the agricultural facility or the experience; and (3) the types of activities involved (e.g., lodging, education). A fourth ontological issue can be added related to the need of “travel” given the use of the word “tourism” (agritourism) in its label.

A major discrepancy of agritourism definitions relate to the type of setting where the activity occurs. Most studies state that agritourism must be carried out on a farm (Carpio et al., 2008; Ilbery, Bowler, Clark, Crockett, & Shaw, 1998; McKenzie & Wysocki, 2002) while fewer expand the setting to any type of agricultural setting, such as farms, ranches, nurseries, and others (e.g., Che et al., 2005; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). Furthermore, some studies have even included some types of off-farm facilities, such as farmers' markets, where produce and other farm products are taken away from the agricultural production setting to be sold (Wicks & Merrett, 2003; Wilson, Thilmany, & Sullins, 2006). Inconsistencies in the type of setting may be due to the different meanings used to define agricultural establishments, especially related to “farm”. For example, farms are officially defined in the U.S. as those that generate at least \$1000 worth of revenue from the production or sale of agricultural goods (USDA, 2009), thus comprising ranches, nurseries, among similar establishments. Meanwhile, the E.U. defines a farm as an agricultural holding, meaning “economic unit under a single management engaged in agricultural production activities” and which can also engage in non-agricultural activities (OECD, 2001). Similarly, Canada defines “farm” as any operation producing crops, livestock, poultry, animal products, or any other agricultural products (Statistics Canada, 2001). Thus, all three definitions allow for a broad interpretation of what an agricultural facility includes. At this point, it is worth mentioning that “rurality” as the agritourism setting is no longer a debatable argument since academic developments in the last decade have advanced to clearly separate “agritourism” from “rural tourism” (Colton & Bissix, 2005; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; McGehee & Kim, 2004).

A second commonly found disagreement surrounds the authenticity paradigm related to the agricultural facility and to the experience offered. As for the authenticity of the facility (working vs. non-working), McGehee (2007) for instance, based her agritourism development framework in the U.S. on Weaver and Fennell (1997)'s definition which explicitly excludes activities and experiences that are developed in non-working farms because they deem necessary the commercial aspect involved in this activity. Having a “working” agricultural setting is also mentioned in various North American (Lobo et al., 1999; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Nickerson et al., 2001; Tew & Barbieri, 2012) and European (Hegarty & Przeborska, 2005; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; Sonnino, 2004) studies, which is most likely linked to recognizing this activity as one form of farm entrepreneurial diversification (Barbieri, Mahoney, & Butler, 2008). Fewer studies in turn do not include such requirement, broadening the setting to any working or non-working agricultural facility (Carpio et al., 2008; Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005). Phillip et al. (2010) expanded the authenticity debate of agritourism by

incorporating MacCannell's (1973) "front" and "back" regions of authenticity by discriminating between providing the visitors an *indirect* experience of agricultural activities (e.g., through demonstrations, models) from a *direct* engagement in an agricultural process (e.g., harvesting).

A third definitional disagreement relates to the activities that agritourism comprises which is not surprising given the extent of inconsistencies related to its meaning. Such inconsistencies may be geo-political as they seem to be associated to government policies. For example, Sonnino (2004) included hospitality related services (e.g., lodging) when examining agritourism in Southern Tuscany (Italy) which is consistent with its inclusion in the Italian National Legal Framework for Agritourism granted in 1985. A study conducted in Israel also typified on-farm accommodations as an agritourism offer (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005) while a study in Australia explicitly excluded them (Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007). In North America, Barbieri and colleagues (Barbieri, 2010; Barbieri et al., 2008; Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Tew & Barbieri, 2012) have consistently included all hospitality services (e.g., lodging, food services, event programming) as part of the agritourism offer arguing strong synergies with the offer of recreational activities. Similar discrepancies also exist related to educational activities and agritourism. While most studies include a variety of educational activities as a form of agriculture-based recreation (McKenzie & Wysocki, 2002; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Tew & Barbieri, 2012), Barbieri et al. (2008) excluded the offering of classes, workshops, and seminars, suggesting that those educational activities comprise a distinct category of on-farm entrepreneurial diversification.

Finally, an ontological discussion surrounding the definition of agritourism could be added to the preceding debate in relation to the need of "travel", especially because the term "tourism" is embedded in the label most commonly used in the literature to depict this activity (agritourism). The World Tourism Organization defines tourism as "the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited" (WTO, 2001, p. 13), thus suggesting some sort of travel. However, none of the agritourism definitions reviewed refers to the need of travel, which can be related to the lack of a firm understanding of what travel entails, ranging from minimum distances such as the standard 50-mile one-way used in the U.S. (Theobald, 2005, p. 561) to the minimum of one overnight stay used in many other countries (WTO, 2001, p. 138). In line with such inconsistencies, some agritourism definitions may imply some sort of travel when mainly referring to farm-stays or entailing any type of accommodations (Hegarty & Przezborska, 2005; Sonnino, 2004), while other studies suggest that agritourism usually entails one-day visits in local communities (McGehee & Kim, 2004; Rich, Standish, Tomas, Barbieri, & Ainley, 2010).

2.2. Constructing a typology-based definition of agritourism

Inconsistencies related to definitions of agritourism motivated Phillip et al. (2010) to propose a definition of agritourism through the development of an activity-based taxonomy. Based on multiple definitions, the authors proposed that five types of agritourism operations could exist: (1) Non-Working Farm agritourism (NWF) refers to activities where the non-working farm only serves for scenery purposes (e.g., bird-watching on an old mill); (2) Working Farm, Passive Contact agritourism (WFPC) refers to activities that do not require great interaction between the visitor and the working farm site, allowing for farmers to continue their agricultural activities without having interferences (e.g., attending a wedding in a vineyard); (3) Working Farm, Indirect Contact

agritourism (WFIC) comprises activities that are more directly related to farm functions, although the contact with the visitor focuses more on the agricultural products rather than the practice of farming itself (e.g., enjoying fresh produce or meals on site); (4) Working Farm, Direct Contact, Staged agritourism (WFDCS) refers to activities through which visitors experience agricultural operations but through staged scenarios and predetermined tours (e.g., touring an operating cider mill); and (5) Working Farm, Direct Contact, Authentic agritourism (WFDA) refers to the direct participation of the visitor in agricultural activities in which often the recreational activity is the farm "profit" obtained in the form of labor in exchange for food and accommodations (e.g., harvesting berries or milking a cow).

Phillip et al. (2010) taxonomy-based definition of agritourism evidently advanced the scientific understanding of agritourism by conciliating different perspectives and smoothing out discrepant arguments. However, such a proposal also poses three main challenges that need to be revised for further validation. First, to the extent of our knowledge, this framework is academically rooted and emerged from compiling definitions available in the literature. This is problematic because it neglects the perspectives of other agritourism stakeholders. Also, because although the studies reviewed emerged from a variety of geographic areas including Europe (e.g., Italy, Greece, England), Asia (e.g., Turkey, Israel), Oceania (e.g., Australia, New Zealand) and the U.S., it does not account for the geo-political context of the study sites; and, it needs to be empirically tested on-the-ground. Second, if the "authenticity" (i.e., working) attribute of the farm is taken into account, the first agritourism category (Non-working Farm agritourism) would be tautological, as it may be recognizing a type of activity that excludes a sine-qua-non element of such type of recreation. Third, from an ontological perspective, this taxonomy-based definition disregards the role that travel may have in defining agritourism.

Challenges posit on Phillip et al. (2010) taxonomy-based definition of agritourism are not intended to diminish the framework. Rather, this study recognizes the worth of this work as a theoretical framework aiming at advancing the knowledge of agritourism by clarifying and classifying this form of recreation. However, the uncertainty of agritourism definitions, the challenges identified with the proposed definition, and the steady growth of this activity in the last decade, urges for empirically testing the aforementioned framework.

3. Study methods

Results presented in this manuscript are part of a larger research study that explored definitional elements, preferred labels, and perceived benefits of agritourism based on three key stakeholders' perceptions: Farmers, Residents, and Extension Faculty. This manuscript focuses on definitional elements and aimed to develop a shared definition of agritourism by addressing four objectives: (1) identify preferred definitional elements of agritourism; (2) examine levels of agreement related to the characteristics used to define agritourism; (3) contrast preferences of agritourism definitional elements across Farmers, Residents, and Extension Faculty; and (4) compare levels of agreement related to agritourism characteristics across Farmers, Residents, and Extension Faculty.

3.1. Study setting and sampling procedures

This study was conducted in the states of Missouri and North Carolina (U.S.). These states were selected because while sharing similar levels of agritourism development, they have different geographic and agricultural characteristics. In terms of agritourism development, both states share similar proportions of farms

offering agritourism activities at the national (MO = 2.5%; NC = 2.6%) and state (MO = 0.5; NC = 1.1%) levels; however, evidence suggests a consolidation of agritourism in both states as revenues of those farms offering recreational activities have at least doubled between 2002 and 2007 (USDA: NASS, 2007, p. 639). In terms of agricultural characteristics, both states have high ranks in national agricultural receipts (MO = 12th; NC = 8th) and in selective agriculture production. For instance, Missouri is the sixth national producer of soybeans and seventh for hogs and pigs; North Carolina is the first tobacco producer in the country and ranks second in poultry and eggs (USDA: NASS, 2010). According to the 2010 agricultural census, Missouri has 108,000 farms (average farm size of 269 acres) and its farmland accounts for 66% of the state's total land use and farms; whereas the farmland included in the 52,400 farms (average farm size of 160 acres) in North Carolina accounts for 28% of its total land use (USDA: NASS, 2010).

Three samples were targeted in this study: Farmers, Residents, and Extension Faculty. Electronic contact information of 797 Farmers involved in agritourism was obtained from the Missouri Department of Agriculture ($n = 193$) and the North Carolina Agritourism Networking Association ($n = 604$); both lists are considered to be representative of Farmers offering agritourism in both states. E-mail addresses from all 512 Extension Faculty affiliated to the University of Missouri – MU ($n = 186$) and North Carolina State University – NCSU ($n = 356$) were supplied by their Extension offices. Finally, two non-random panels of Residents from Missouri ($n = 444$) and North Carolina ($n = 675$) were purchased from a web panel marketing company; the sample size was determined based on the state population. Statistical analysis revealed that the samples from Missouri and North Carolina were comparable ($p > 0.05$) in key descriptive variables: Residents from both states had similar age, gender, and income distribution; a similar proportion of Farmers held off-farm employment and reported similar farm gross income; and a comparable proportion of Extension Faculty affiliated with both universities reported working directly with farmers and about half of them considered to be prepared to work with agritourism farmers. Taking into consideration the use of a non-random sample of Residents, caution is suggested to interpret or generalize results beyond this study.

3.2. Survey instrument and development

Based on the literature reviewed (Busby & Rendle, 2000; Hegarty & Przeborska, 2005; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; McKenzie & Wysocki, 2002; Phillip et al., 2010; Sharpley, 2002), a survey instrument was developed to address study objectives. For the purpose of this manuscript, the instrument collected preferences on words commonly used in agritourism definitions (e.g., farm, agricultural setting), perceived role of “travel” in defining agritourism, and levels of agreement with characteristics used to define agritourism (working facility; type of contact; and authenticity). Specific agritourism information pertaining to each sample was collected as follows: (1) The survey queried Farmers about the size (acreage, gross sales) and location of the farmland, the number of visitors received, and the extent of their agritourism activities (e.g., how long they have been receiving visitors); (2) Residents were asked about their recent participation in agritourism activities and their willingness to visit a farm for recreation in the future; and (3) Extension Faculty were inquired about the nature of their work with farmers and with those offering agritourism. The survey also collected demographic information (e.g., age, gender) from all three stakeholder groups.

All three versions of the questionnaire were pre-tested by graduate students and faculty members at both universities to ensure instruction clarity and face validity of the questions. The

questionnaire was administered online because of its multiple advantages especially related to time (e.g., data entry) and cost efficiency (Shannon & Bradshaw, 2002). To simplify data collection among multiple samples, three survey versions (one per sample) with individual URL addresses were developed; all versions had identical face format (e.g., heading, color choice, number of questions per screen), instructions, and wording except for specific sample related questions as previously explained.

Given the different nature of the samples, two survey protocols were followed. First, a modified Tailored Design Method (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009, p. 512) was employed with Farmers and Extension Faculty who were invited to participate in the survey by an email detailing the study purpose, privacy, and confidentiality procedures. Four reminders were sent to Farmers and Extension Faculty, frequency was decided upon by the pace of responses received. The chance to win one of two gift cards (fifty-dollars each) was offered to Farmers and Extension Faculty as an incentive to increase participation. The second protocol, applied to the non-random panel of Residents, was carried out by the marketing company contracted for recruiting participants. For this sample, key study information (e.g., study purpose, privacy and confidentiality procedures) was included in the survey landing page and no incentives were offered for their participation. Data collection spanned between January and April 2011. The survey produced 1275 valid responses: 252 from Farmers representing a 36.8% adjusted response rate (MO = 43.2%; NC = 34.7%); 155 from Extension Faculty representing a 30.3% response rate (MU = 36.6%; NCSU = 26.7%); 868 from Residents' panel responses (MO = 355 and North Carolina (NC = 513).

3.3. Statistical analysis

Descriptive analyses were conducted to develop a socio-demographic profile (e.g., age, gender) of respondents as well as to describe their type and level of agritourism engagement (e.g., past participation in agritourism for Residents; number of visitors for Farmers; relationship with agritourism farmers for Extension Faculty). Descriptive statistics were also conducted to identify preferences in definitional elements and characteristics of agritourism. Then, a series of chi-square tests were performed to compare preferences on definitional elements of agritourism while analyses of variance (ANOVA) was used to contrast levels of agreement on the characteristics of agritourism across Farmers, Residents, and Extension Faculty ($p < 0.05$). Post-hoc pair-wise comparisons were then conducted with any significant ANOVA (Tukey's test) and chi-square results.

Definitional elements of agritourism were examined through dichotomous variables representing the 11 words most commonly used in the literature to define agritourism: “agricultural setting”, “education”, “farm”, “ranch”, “travel”, “working”, “entertainment”, “agriculture”, “farming”, “recreation”, and “visitors”. Given that these words emerged from the extant literature, they were not defined in the survey instrument; rather a self-definitional approach was used (Mannell, 1999) so participants were free to interpret those words based on their own meanings and representations. Contentious characteristics of agritourism (e.g., working facility; authenticity) were assessed on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Completely Disagree; 5 = Completely Agree) through Phillip's et al. (2010) five-category taxonomy: (1) Non-Working Farm agritourism – “Non-Working” (NWF); (2) Working Farm, Passive Contact agritourism – “Passive” (WFPC); (3) Working Farm, Indirect Contact agritourism – “Indirect” (WFIC); (4) Working Farm, Direct Contact, Staged agritourism – “Staged” (WFDCS); and (5) Working Farm, Direct Contact, Authentic agritourism – “Authentic” (WFDA).

4. Results

4.1. Respondents' socio-demographic profile and their engagement in agritourism

The majority of Residents who responded to the survey were female (57.9%) and averaged 46 years old; a relatively large proportion (28.9%) indicated to only have high school studies which is consistent with the 27.7% who were low income households making less than \$25,000 a year; only 17.7% were making \$75,000 or more (Table 1). Responding Farmers were mostly female (58.8%) and in their mid-adulthood ($M = 53.7$ years old) which is consistent with the aging trend among American farmers; about half (48.0%) worked exclusively on-farm; most (53.2%) received less than \$50,000 gross sales in 2010. Responding Extension Faculty were almost evenly distributed gender-wise (female = 51.3%; male = 48.7%) and averaged 45 years old; most were state/county extension directors (61.3%), followed by extension specialists (29.0%).

Most Residents (52.0%) had never visited an agritourism farm in the past, while the remaining respondents had visited one in the last three years (24.2%) or more than three years ago (23.8%; Table 2). Importantly for the continuous development of agritourism, over a third of responding Residents (36.4%) considered it

Table 1
Respondents' demographic profile.

Demographic characteristics	<i>n</i>	Percent
Residents		
<i>Gender (n = 855)</i>		
Male	360	42.1
Female	495	57.9
<i>Age (n = 856)</i>		
Mean (in years)		(46.4)
<i>Education level (n = 849)</i>		
High school graduate	245	28.9
Some college or technical degree	336	39.5
Four-year college degree or more	268	31.6
<i>Household income (n = 848)</i>		
Less than \$25,000	236	27.7
\$25,000–\$49,999	296	34.9
\$50,000–\$74,999	167	19.7
\$75,000 or more	149	17.7
Farmers		
<i>Gender (n = 245)</i>		
Male	101	41.2
Female	144	58.8
<i>Age (n = 235)</i>		
Mean (in years)		(53.7)
<i>On and off farm employment (n = 246)</i>		
Work off farm only	3	1.2
Work on farm only	118	48.0
Work on and off farm	119	48.4
Do not work either on or off farm	6	2.4
<i>Gross farm sales in 2010^a (n = 237)</i>		
Less than \$10,000	54	22.8
\$10,000–\$49,999	72	30.4
\$50,000–\$249,999	74	31.3
\$250,000 or more	37	15.6
Extension Faculty		
<i>Gender (n = 152)</i>		
Male	74	48.7
Female	78	51.3
<i>Age (n = 146)</i>		
Mean (in years)		(45.1)
<i>Position (n = 155)</i>		
State/county extension director	95	61.3 ^a
Extension specialist	45	29.0
County extension agent	18	11.6

^a Percentages sum to more than 100% as respondents were able to select multiple categories.

Table 2
Respondents' agritourism profile.

Stakeholders' characteristics	<i>n</i>	Percent
Residents		
<i>Past participation (n = 868)</i>		
Have never visited an agritourism farm in the past	451	52.0
Have visited an agritourism farm in the past 3 years	209	24.2
Have visited an agritourism farm more than 3 years ago	206	23.8
<i>Likelihood of participation in the next year (n = 858)</i>		
Very unlikely	129	15.0
Unlikely	159	18.5
Undecided	258	30.1
Likely	206	24.0
Very likely	106	12.4
Farmers		
<i>Currently offering agritourism (n = 252)</i>		
Do not offer agritourism on their farm	20	7.9
Have offered agritourism for two years or less	29	11.9
Have offered agritourism for 3–9 years	106	42.4
Have offered agritourism for at least 10 years	94	37.8
<i>Importance of agritourism for farm operations (n = 232)^a</i>		
Very unimportant for their operations	35	15.1
Unimportant for their operations	6	2.6
Do not affect their operations	18	7.8
Important for their operations	48	20.7
Very important for their operations	125	53.8
<i>Visitors received in 2009 (n = 229)^a</i>		
Less than 100 visitors	44	20.6
100–499 visitors	57	26.5
500–1999 visitors	35	16.4
2000–9999 visitors	47	22.0
10,000 visitors or more	31	14.5
Extension Faculty		
<i>Current work with farmers (n = 155)</i>		
Do not work directly with farmers	36	23.2
Work with farmers offering agritourism activities	87	56.1 ^b
Work with farmers planning to offer agritourism activities	78	50.3
Work with farmers who do not offer agritourism activities	32	20.7
<i>Preparedness on agritourism advisement (n = 118)^c</i>		
Do not feel prepared to advise on agritourism related issues	55	46.6
Feel prepared to advise on agritourism related issues	63	53.4

^a Only include those currently offering agritourism ($n = 232$; 92.1%).

^b Percentages do not sum up to 100% as respondents were able to select multiple categories.

^c Only includes those who work directly with farmers ($n = 119$; 76.8%).

likely or very likely to visit an agritourism farm within the next year. However, results suggest that further outreach and target marketing efforts are needed to attract more visitors to agritourism farms in both states as 33.5% considered it unlikely or very unlikely to engage in this form of recreation in the near future.

This study captured Farmers' perceptions from a range of agritourism operations in terms of longevity (newly to well-established) and number of visitors (small to large). A small proportion (11.9%) of responding Farmers started their agritourism business within the last two years, 42.4% between three and nine years, and 37.8% at least 10 years ago. These results confirm that agritourism is not a novel strategy developed to increase farm revenues (McGehee, 2007; Tew & Barbieri, 2012; Veck et al., 2006), nor that it is developed as a temporary measure to offset dwindling agriculture related income. Three-quarters (74.5%) of those receiving visitors on their farms consider agritourism as important or very important for their farm operations; such positive outcomes are consistent with the great increase of farm revenues derived from agritourism related activities reported nationwide in the last years (USDA: NASS, 2007, p. 639). A fifth (20.6%), received less than 100 visitors in 2009, 42.9% received between 100 and 2000, and 36.5% received over 2000 visitors in 2009.

Most responding Extension Faculty work directly with farmers offering (56.1%) or planning to offer (50.3%) agritourism activities. These findings suggest the role of Extension Faculty in advising and

transferring knowledge for agritourism development should not be underestimated, especially because farmers interested in incorporating innovative practices prefer to seek information and be assisted by Extension agents (Barbieri & Valdivia, 2010). However, it is also important to recognize that Extension Faculty may need to reinforce their own knowledge in several aspects related to agritourism development (e.g., liability and insurance, market trends) as slightly over half of them (53.4%) considered to be properly prepared to advise on agritourism related issues.

4.2. Preferred definitional elements of agritourism

Among the 11 definitional elements examined “agricultural setting” was the one that most respondents (76.2%), from all three stakeholder groups, agreed should be included in a good definition of agritourism, closely followed by “entertainment” (72.1%) and “farm” (71.5%; Table 3). “Education” (64.7%), “working” (55.8%) and “visitors” (53.2%) were also words that at least half of all respondents perceived as definitional elements of agritourism. Worth noting, the rank of definitional words within each sample was slightly different, although “agricultural setting” was the most preferred across all samples. In order, the second and third preferred words were “entertainment” and “farm” among Residents, “education” and “farm” among Farmers, and “education” and “entertainment” among Extension Faculty. Although agritourism can be understood as the result of blending agriculture and tourism activities, only a small proportion of respondents considered that “agriculture” (31.2%) or “travel” should be included when defining this type of activity. A minor proportion of respondents ($n = 4$; 0.3%) wrote in additional words that they considered necessary to include when defining agritourism (e.g., “animals”, “experience”, “family”; and “fun”); these words were no further examined because of their overall low occurrence.

Residents, Farmers, and Extension Faculty have different perceptions of some definitional elements of agritourism. Most respondents felt that “agricultural setting” should be included in a good definition of agritourism, with the proportion significantly higher among Farmers (83.7%) and Extension Faculty (83.2%) as compared to Residents (72.0%; $\chi^2 = 20.096$, $p < 0.001$). As expected, a significantly larger proportion of Farmers reported an agritourism definition should include the terms “farm” (79.0%; $\chi^2 = 9.747$; $p = 0.008$) and “working” (69.0%; $\chi^2 = 24.283$, $p < 0.001$) as compared to Residents (69.1%; 51.5%; respectively) and Extension Faculty (68.4%; 54.8%, respectively). These results suggest that

Table 3
A comparison of preferences definitional elements of agritourism among residents, farmers and extension faculty.

Definitional elements	Percentages ^a				χ^2	p-Value
	Overall ($n = 1273$)	Residents ($n = 868$)	Farmers ($n = 250$)	Extension ($n = 155$)		
Agricultural setting	76.2	72.0a	83.7b	83.2b	20.096	<0.001
Entertainment	72.1	69.6	75.8	76.1	5.465	0.065
Farm	71.5	69.1a	79.0b	68.4a	9.747	0.008
Farming	67.5	67.7	65.5	65.8	0.535	0.765
Education	64.7	55.8a	83.7b	80.0b	85.699	<0.001
Working	55.8	51.5a	69.0b	54.8a	24.283	<0.001
Visitors	53.2	44.9a	76.2b	59.4c	79.829	<0.001
Recreation	42.1	37.3a	50.8b	52.9b	23.655	<0.001
Ranch	38.8	36.3	42.5	44.5	5.756	0.056
Agriculture	31.2	25.1a	42.9b	44.5b	43.860	<0.001
Travel	20.1	19.0	21.0	23.9	2.200	0.333

a,b,c Any two values with different online letters were significantly different in post-hoc pair wise comparisons.

^a Percentages sum to more than 100% as respondents were able to select multiple categories.

agritourism stakeholders perceive that agritourism could be undertaken in any type of agricultural setting, including but not limited to farms, negotiating a major discrepancy in the literature (Carpio et al., 2008; Che et al., 2005; Ilbery et al., 1998; McKenzie & Wysocki, 2002; Tew & Barbieri, 2012; Wicks & Merrett, 2003; Wilson, Thilmany, & Sullins, 2006, p. 7). Along these lines, all three samples leaned toward “working” as a definitional element, thus resolving inconsistencies related to working (Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; Nickerson et al., 2001) or non-working (Carpio et al., 2008) facilities as permissible settings for agritourism.

Results also shed light on academic discussions related to the types of activities typified as agritourism, specifically concerning educational activities (e.g., Barbieri et al., 2008; McKenzie & Wysocki, 2002). A large proportion of Farmers (83.7%) and Extension Faculty (80.0%) stated their preferences toward including “education” in agritourism definitions, proportions that were significantly higher than among Residents (55.8%; $\chi^2 = 85.699$, $p < 0.001$). These results suggest that educational activities (e.g., on-farm classes, educational tours apprenticeships) offered to visitors in working farms are also perceived as agritourism. With no statistical differences across them, most respondents also considered that “entertainment” (Residents = 69.6%; Farmers = 75.8%; Extension = 76.1%) and “farming” (Residents = 67.7%; Farmers = 65.5%; Extension = 65.8%) as terms to be included in a definition of agritourism.

Including the term “visitors” in an agritourism definition was significantly different across all three samples ($\chi^2 = 79.829$; $p < 0.001$), with Farmers (76.2%) having the highest preference, followed by Extension Faculty (59.4%) and Residents (44.9%); Farmers’ strongest preference for such term is not surprising taking into consideration the importance of visitors for the farm operation as previously presented. Most Farmers (50.8%) and Extension Faculty (52.9%) considered that “recreation” should be included in a definition of agritourism, proportion that was significantly larger than among Residents (37.3%; $\chi^2 = 23.655$, $p < 0.001$). None of the samples perceived “agriculture” (Residents = 25.1%; Farmers = 42.9%; Extension = 44.5%) as a relevant definitional element of agritourism, being perceived even significantly less relevant among Residents ($\chi^2 = 43.860$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, although with no differences across samples, a small proportion of respondents considered “ranch” (Residents = 36.3%; Farmers = 42.5%; Extension = 44.5%) and “travel” (Residents = 19.0%; Farmers = 21.0%; Extension = 23.9%) as terms to be included in an agritourism definition. Although results for “ranch” should not be considered conclusive as they may be related to an overall low use of such word in Missouri and North Carolina, insights related to “travel” are important as they settled the ontological discussion of whether agritourism should include some sort of travel as its label suggests.

4.3. Assessing an agritourism typology

Most respondents agreed or completely agreed with three out of five of Phillip et al. (2010) types of agritourism, in order: (1) “Working Farm, Indirect Contact – WFIC” (73.3%; $M = 3.9$); (2) “Working Farm, Direct Contact, Staged – WFDCS” (70.4%; $M = 3.9$), and (3) “Working Farm, Direct Contact, Authentic – WFDCA” (66.1%; $M = 3.8$; Table 4). Similar ranking orders were obtained among Residents, Farmers, and Extension Faculty, although Farmers reported less support for the authentic operations (WFDCA; $M = 3.4$). Consistently, respondents showed low levels of agreements, around the neutral point, for those activities offered in non-working agricultural facilities (“Non-Working Farms” – NWF; $M = 3.1$) or those in which the working facilities merely serve for landscaping or background purposes (“Working farm, Passive Contact” – WFPC; $M = 3.0$).

Table 4
Levels of agreement with different definitional types of agritourism.

Types of agritourism ^a	n	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Completely agree	M ^b	SD
All respondents								
Indirect (WFIC)	1271	2.4	7.7	16.6	46.4	26.9	3.9	1.0
Staged (WFDCS)	1270	2.3	9.7	17.6	41.4	29.0	3.9	1.0
Authentic (WFDCA)	1270	3.4	8.7	21.7	32.8	33.3	3.8	1.1
Non working (NWF)	1273	9.2	24.0	24.7	31.3	10.8	3.1	1.2
Passive (WFPC)	1275	8.2	29.6	28.7	26.1	7.4	3.0	1.1
Residents								
Staged (WFDCS)	867	1.5	6.0	18.1	43.4	31.0	4.0	0.9
Authentic (WFDCA)	865	2.2	4.7	21.6	32.9	38.5	4.0	1.0
Indirect (WFIC)	867	2.1	6.1	17.9	46.1	27.8	3.9	0.9
Non working (NWF)	867	9.2	23.9	27.2	30.0	9.7	3.1	1.1
Passive (WFPC)	869	8.6	29.6	30.7	24.1	7.0	2.9	1.1
Farmers								
Indirect (WFIC)	249	3.2	10.4	14.9	43.0	28.5	3.8	1.1
Staged (WFDCS)	248	4.4	18.1	20.2	30.6	26.6	3.6	1.2
Authentic (WFDCA)	250	7.6	16.8	23.2	30.4	22.0	3.4	1.2
Non working (NWF)	251	10.4	24.3	19.1	30.7	15.5	3.2	1.3
Passive (WFPC)	251	8.0	26.7	23.1	31.9	10.4	3.1	1.2
Extension Faculty								
Indirect (WFIC)	155	2.6	12.3	12.3	53.5	19.4	3.8	1.0
Staged (WFDCS)	155	3.2	16.8	11.0	47.7	21.3	3.7	1.1
Authentic (WFDCA)	155	3.2	18.1	20.0	36.1	22.6	3.6	1.1
Non working (NWF)	155	7.1	24.5	20.0	39.4	9.0	3.2	1.1
Passive (WFPC)	155	6.5	34.2	26.5	28.4	4.5	2.9	1.0

^a Based on Phillip et al. (2010) agritourism typology.

^b Scale ranged from “1 = completely disagree” to “5 = completely agree”.

Study samples had significant different levels of agreement with three out of the five types of agritourism (Table 5). Agritourism involving indirect contact in working farms (WFIC) had a high level of acceptance among all samples with no differences across them ($M_{residents} = 3.9$; $M_{farmers} = 3.8$; $M_{extension} = 3.8$), results confirming that the nature of contact (direct vs. indirect) between visitors and agriculture is not relevant in defining agritourism (Sonnino, 2004). Residents had significantly stronger perceptions than their counterparts for defining agritourism entailing a direct contact with agricultural activities, either staged (WFDCS; $M_{residents} = 4.0$; $M_{farmers} = 3.6$; $M_{extension} = 3.7$; $F = 17.768$, $p < 0.001$) or authentic (WFDCA; $M_{residents} = 4.0$; $M_{farmers} = 3.4$; $M_{extension} = 3.6$; $F = 35.379$; $p < 0.001$) offered in working farms. Therefore, the authenticity of the experience does not appear to be relevant for defining agritourism, especially among Residents, although Farmers preferred staged activities. Such reluctance may be associated with sanitary and/or safety concerns which represent a major issue among agritourism providers. Being primarily agricultural facilities rather than tourist ones, visiting farms can inflict risks to the farm production (e.g., damaging crops, transmitting diseases to farm animals) or to visitors, situations that providers prefer to avoid.

Table 5
A comparison of levels of agreement with different definitional types of agritourism across residents, farmers and extension faculty.

Types of agritourism ^a	Scale mean ^b			F	p-Value
	Residents (n = 869)	Farmers (n = 251)	Extension (n = 155)		
Indirect (WFIC)	3.9	3.8	3.8	2.293	0.101
Staged (WFDCS)	4.0a	3.6b	3.7b	17.768	<0.001
Authentic (WFDCA)	4.0a	3.4b	3.6b	35.379	<0.001
Non working (NWF)	3.1	3.2	3.2	1.140	0.320
Passive (WFPC)	2.9a	3.1b	2.9	3.050	0.048

a,b,c Any two values with different online letters were significantly different in post-hoc Tukey pair wise comparisons.

^a Based on Phillip et al. (2010) agritourism typology. Typology in descendent order based on overall mean (see Table 4).

^b Scale ranged from “1 = completely disagree” to “5 = completely agree”.

According to Schilling, Marxen, Heinrich, and Brooks (2006), about half (48%) of agritourism providers in New Jersey (U.S.) limited the contact of visitors with agricultural products to mitigate sanitary related problems. Liability related issues may be another reason why Farmers prefer staged over authentic experiences.

Low acceptance for defining those activities offered on Non-Working Farms (NWF) as agritourism were found with no statistical differences across samples ($M_{residents} = 3.1$; $M_{farmers} = 3.2$; $M_{extension} = 3.2$). Although Farmers had higher acceptance than their counterparts ($M_{farmers} = 3.1$; $M_{residents} = 2.9$; $M_{extension} = 2.9$; $F = 3.050$; $p = 0.048$) to considering agritourism as those activities offered on working farms involving passive contact (WFPC), still their perceptions were close to neutrality. Rejecting to consider agritourism as activities offered in non-working agricultural facilities or those in which the working facility merely serves for landscape or background purposes, not only reassures the true meaning of a working facility, but also endorses the line of thought portraying working agricultural facilities as an essential part of the agritourism experience (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Hegarty & Przezborska, 2005; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; Lobo et al., 1999; McGehee, 2007; Nickerson et al., 2001; Sonnino, 2004; Tew & Barbieri, 2012).

5. Concluding remarks

Given that meanings are critical to determining the appeal of a particular activity among consumers (Gilbert, 2003) and the current uncertainty surrounding the meaning of agritourism, this study assessed stakeholder's preferences for definitional elements and types of agritourism. Study results suggest that a conciliatory definition of agritourism that captures stakeholders' perspectives should include staged or authentic agricultural activities or processes occurring in working agricultural facilities either for “entertainment” or “education” purposes. Based on respondents' preferences, results also suggest that a shared definition of agritourism that could be suitable to use in its further development and promotion would be: “Farming-related activities carried out on a working farm or other agricultural settings for entertainment or education purposes”.

This study carries some limitations that need to be accounted for. The non-random nature of the Residents' sample, along with their large proportion of employed individuals most likely associated to the economic crisis in the U.S. during the time of the study, suggest that additional caution should be placed to generalize results related to consumers' preferences. The use of an electronic survey may have represented a limitation to target Farmers taking into consideration the overall aging population of farmers, thus reduced unfamiliarity with this kind of tool, or among those with limited internet access especially if located in remote rural areas. Finally, in an attempt to increase readability, reduce any kind of bias, and to encourage a self-definitional approach in which participants had the freedom to construct their own meanings (Mannell, 1999), the survey included a very simplistic definition of agritourism (i.e., "visiting a farm for recreational purposes"). In doing so, it is possible that the omission of key definitional terms (e.g., "leisure") may have portrayed this activity inaccurately especially among Farmers and Extension Faculty. Although the study was designed to capture two states (Missouri and North Carolina) representing different agritourism realities, caution is advised to extrapolate results beyond both states. Other regions with different characteristics (e.g., agricultural context; landscape composition; more specialized agritourism offer) may influence preferences of their stakeholders, who thus may have a different understanding of the meaning of agritourism.

Despite the outlined limitations, results from this study carry important implications for the study and practice of agritourism. Results help to smooth differences related to definitional elements and uncertainty surrounding the meaning of agritourism encountered in the literature (Busby & Rendle, 2000; Carpio et al., 2008; Colton & Bissix, 2005; Keith et al., 2003, p. 6; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007). The strong inclination for the terms: "agricultural setting", "entertainment", "farm" and "education" across Farmers, Residents, and Extension Faculty suggest that these three stakeholders have a shared understanding of the meaning of agritourism and what this activity entails. Although having a shared understanding of agritourism is certainly a good starting point to continue the scientific and educational development of agritourism, it is also imperative that a collective definition is incorporated into promotional and outreach materials to accurately depict what farmers are offering and what visitors are expecting to experience (Sharpley & Stone, 2010, p. 304).

Study results suggest that activities offered on non-working agricultural facilities or those in which the setting is only used for landscape purposes (e.g., weddings, corporate retreats) should not be promoted as agritourism to avoid further confusion and allow a more fluent dynamic among stakeholders. This study also provides further insights on the types of experiences visitors (and potential visitors) seek. For instance, results suggest that visitors are equally interested in experiencing authentic as well as staged activities, results that facilitate the agritourism development as Farmers can opt to offer a range of activities based on their agricultural needs and resources. Taking into consideration that authentic experiences have been suggested to maximize visitors' level of enjoyment (Asplet & Cooper, 2000; McIntosh, 2004), future studies should examine whether such effect is also applicable in agritourism experiences. Although to a lesser degree, Farmers also recognized agritourism as providing staged activities, which is not surprising as staging the tourism experience or destination is frequently used to make the experience more appealing, deliver a desired message (e.g., for education purposes), or to provide a unique and special character (Urry, 1992). Thus, staging agricultural activities can provide visitors with a "gaze" of the farming lifestyle without interrupting or disturbing daily agricultural practices.

Taking into account the strong preference among current and potential visitors (Residents) and dislike among providers (Farmers) for experiences involving direct and authentic contact with agricultural activities, it would be advisable to take some actions on-the-ground so the demand for agritourism is not affected by the unavailability of those experiences on the farm. For example, Extension Faculty could develop interpretation activities to be implemented on farms to educate visitors about sanitary and safety issues. Extension efforts could also be placed in transferring knowledge to Farmers to reduce sanitary and safety problems when offering agritourism activities. Finally, further effort is needed to negotiate liability issues (e.g., increased insurance prime) applicable to agritourism.

In addition to advancing the understanding of agritourism meanings, this study also sheds light toward future research. The partial acceptance of the agritourism typology proposed in the literature (Phillip et al., 2010) may suggest that agritourism typologies may not be universal, but rather restricted to a specific geographical/contextual locality. Thus, the replication of this study at a greater scope (e.g., North America, Europe, Oceania), and especially aiming at including destinations that tend to capture international agritourists, such as Texan dude ranches or Californian vineyards is advisable. Along these lines, it is also recommended to broaden this study to include perspectives of other social actors of the agritourism sector, such as government agencies and local rural businesses, to acknowledge their voice in future agritourism development. Taking into consideration that respondents were given a somewhat restrictive list of possible definitional elements to explore the meanings of agritourism, future studies could consider employing qualitative methods of inquiry, such as face-to-face interviews or focus groups, to enable a more insightful construction of a shared understanding of agritourism.

Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary material related to this article can be found at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.12.007>.

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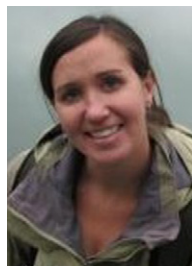
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