

# **CENTER FOR PUBLIC ISSUES EDUCATION**

**IN AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

## **Final Report**

### **Florida Consumers' Perceptions of Agritourism Focus Groups**

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## For More Information

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## Suggested Citation

Stofer, K. A., & Rumble, J.N., & Anderson, S. (2018). Name of project. PIE2016/17-03a. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education.

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## Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

The development and implementation of these focus groups could not have been achieved without the help of several people. The contribution of the following individuals is greatly appreciated:

**Hallie Odell** – Undergraduate student/Research assistant, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication

**Libbie Johnson** – Extension Agent II, UF/IFAS Extension

**Mary Beth Henry** – Extension Agent II, UF/IFAS Extension

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## Executive Summary

Florida Consumers' Perceptions of Agritourism  
October 2017

### Introduction

Agritourism can provide consumers a way to re-connect with their local agricultural operations. While Florida agriculture and tourism are separately two of the state's largest industries, their intersection in Florida agritourism, that is, visits specifically to agricultural operations, has lagged behind other states. Some states with smaller numbers of agricultural operations have more agritourism operations than Florida. Florida specialty crop producers face competition from imports and threats to their agricultural operations from pests, labor shortages, and weather, among others. Agritourism can provide an alternate or supplemental source of revenue for these producers. Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services wanted to determine Florida consumers' awareness and preferences for participating in specialty crop agritourism to develop marketing and communication campaigns and support the growth of Florida specialty crop agritourism. The Center for Public Issues Education conducted 10 focus groups in five Florida cities (Pensacola, Jacksonville, Orlando, West Palm Beach, and Sarasota) to collect information on participants' specialty crop agritourism experiences and preferences.

### Findings

- Participants were not familiar with the term *agritourism*.
- Participants were not sure they had participated in agritourism, though many had.
- Participants were not familiar with agritourism in their local areas.
- Participants were enthusiastic about future agritourism visits.
- Participants want to visit agritourism sites with family and friends, or other social groups, and especially with children and out-of-town visitors.
- Participants wanted activities to be affordable, generally \$10-20 per person, though this could vary.
- Participants wanted activities within 1-2 hours drive.
- Participants mostly make a plan to visit agritourism venues, though some will visit spontaneously, especially if they see roadside signs.
- Participants wanted a mix of self-guided and guided activities.
- The most important amenities desired were clean, non-portable restrooms; shade or air-conditioning; and kid-friendly activities.
- Participants were interested in leisurely or moderately strenuous activities for the most part.
- Participants were interested in a range of agritourism activities, though some considered "smelly," dangerous, or controversial were not of interest to some participants.
- The opportunity to learn and just to have a new experience were the top reasons people visit agritourism venues.
- Participants wanted to learn about particular crops and products, including how to grow or raise their own, as well as history of agriculture and the area, contemporary issues such as hydroponics and genetically modified organisms, the source of food and products, and the environment in general.
- Participants had previously heard of agritourism opportunities by word of mouth or the Internet, but indicated they wanted to learn about them via local publications and television most frequently. This may be influenced by the overall age of focus group participants.



- Participants could not offer a better term than agritourism to describe the activities discussed, nor did they prefer options we offered such as *agritainment* or *farm/rural tourism*.

### Background

Consumers in general have become very disconnected from agriculture, with estimates suggesting only 2% live on farms today, down from nearly 30% in years past. Agritourism can re-introduce residents to local operations, while providing benefits to specialty crop producers, particularly economic benefits (Khanal & Mishra, 2014). Agritourism helps producers diversify and increase longevity while providing cultural and economic benefits to their communities (Brandth & Haugen, 2011). Agritourism can address labor shortages (Terry, 2014) and preserve heritage sites (LaPan & Barbieri, 2014). Agritourism is a growing business (Bondoc, 2009; Carpio, Wohlgenant, & Boonsaeng, 2008; Khanal & Mishra, 2014; Sznajder et al., 2009). In the five years from 2007-2012, both the number of agritourism operations in Florida and the revenue from them vastly increased (National Agricultural Statistics Services, 2014). The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services funded this study to better understand how to promote Florida specialty crops through agritourism.

This focus group study specifically explored:

- Participants' knowledge of agritourism in general and opportunities for Florida specialty crop agritourism in their local area;
- Participants' past participation in Florida specialty crop agritourism;
- Participants' reasons for past and potential future participation in Florida specialty crop agritourism;
- Participants' preferences for amenities and activities at Florida specialty crop agritourism venues;
- Participants' preferences for different terminology and locations of advertising promoting Florida specialty crop agritourism.

### Methods

Data for this report was collected through 10 focus groups held in five Florida metropolitan areas representing the five Florida Extension districts. The focus group locations were in Pensacola (Northwest), Jacksonville (Northeast), Orlando (Central), West Palm Beach (Southeast), and Sarasota (Southwest). Two focus groups were conducted in each of these cities in May and June of 2016. Participants were recruited through a third party research firm and were offered a monetary incentive. We spoke with a total of 76 participants in this study. Member checking at the conclusion of each focus group was used to ensure credibility of the findings. Detailed descriptions of the findings have been provided in this report to aid in the transferability of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The groups were analyzed using a constant comparison method to develop themes which have been identified in this report.



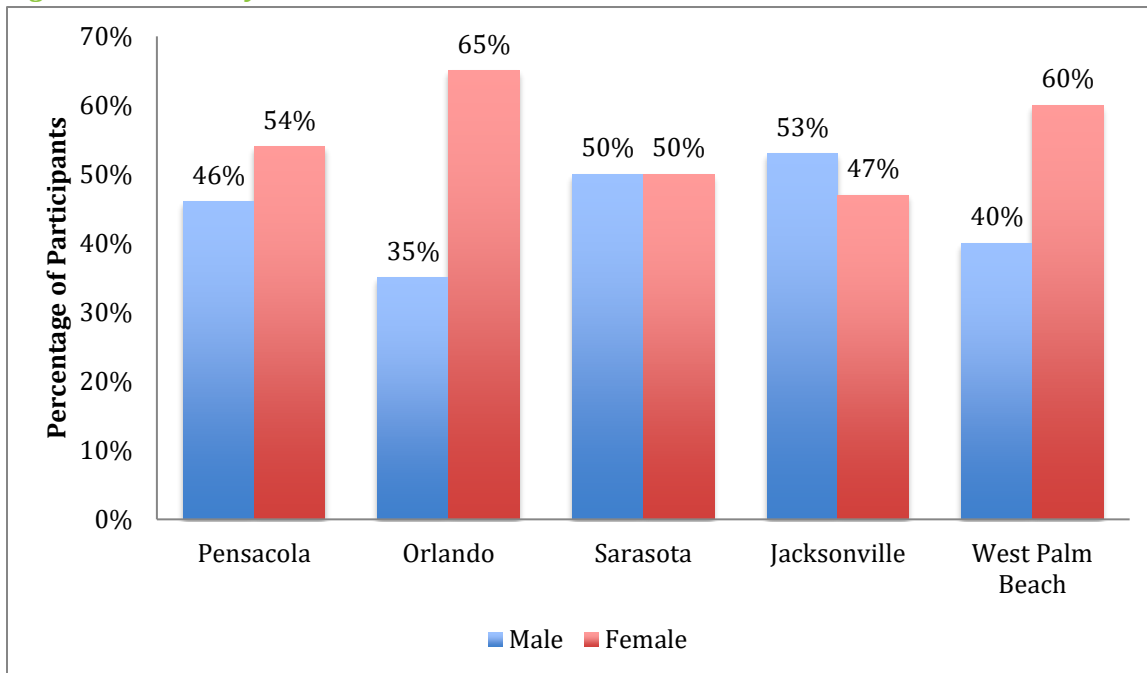
## Description of Participants

There was an average of eight participants in each of the focus groups and 76 total. Thirteen participants attended the two Pensacola focus groups, 17 attended in Jacksonville, 17 attended in Orlando, 15 attended in West Palm Beach, and 14 attended in Sarasota. A description of the demographics follows.

## Gender Representation

While overall, we had 45% male participants and 55% female, some locations had different gender splits. Figure 1 shows the percentage of males and females that are in each of the locations (Figure 1).

*Figure 1. Gender by Location*

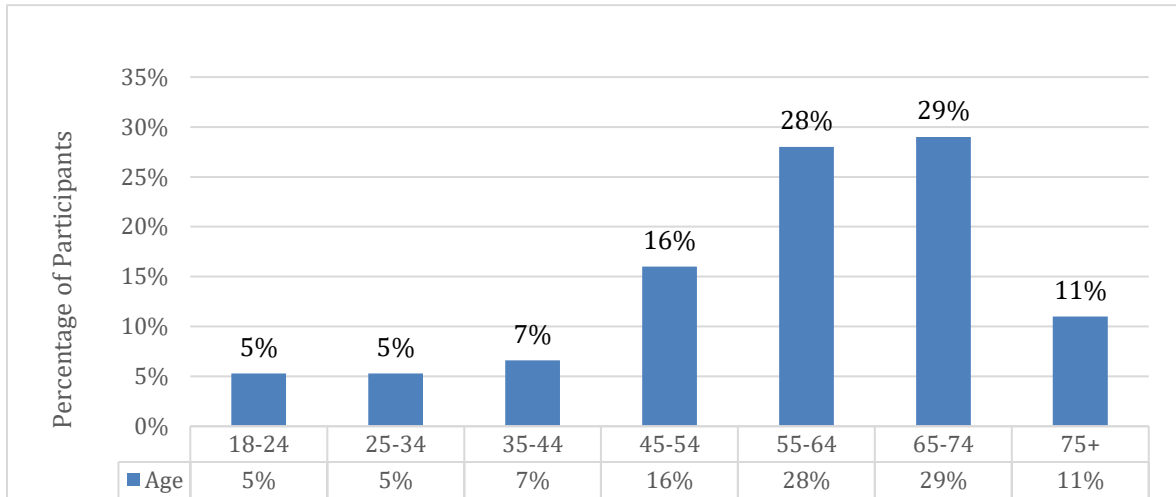


## Age of Participants Overall

Participants were asked to identify the age bracket they are included in. Twenty-nine percent of the participants fell between the ages of 65 and 74. Fifty-seven percent of participants were between the ages of 55 and 74. The youngest age groups of 18-24 and 25-34 each made up five percent of the participants (Figure 2).



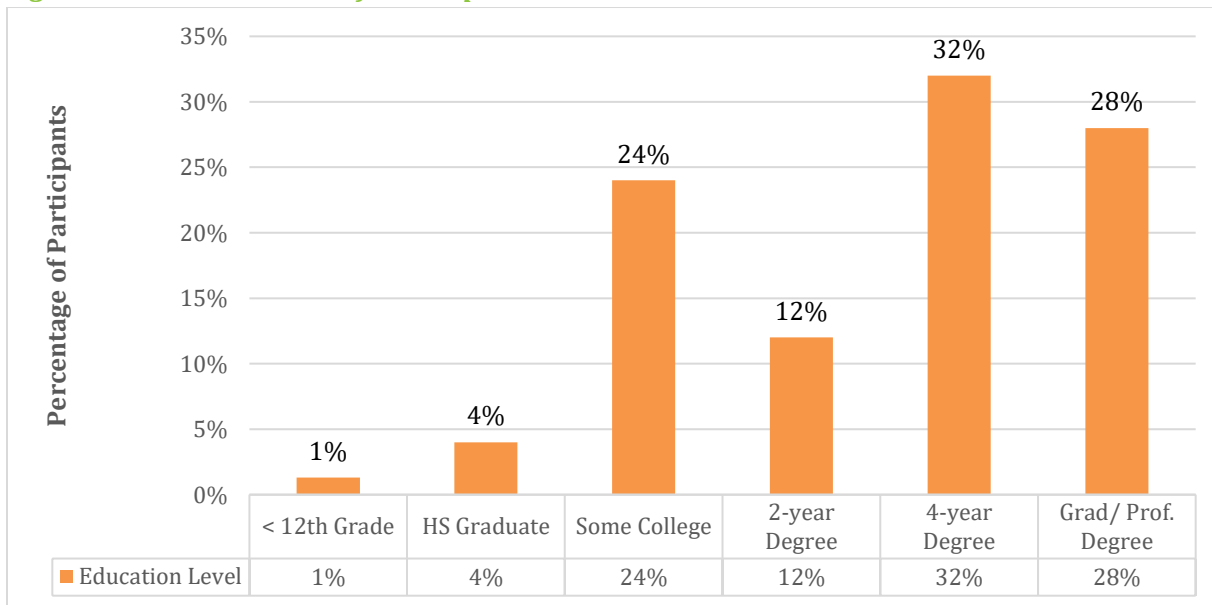
**Figure 2. Age of Participants**



**Education Level of Participants**

The participants were asked to identify the highest level of education they have completed. The Majority of the participants surveyed had obtained at least a 2-year college degree (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Education Level of Participants**

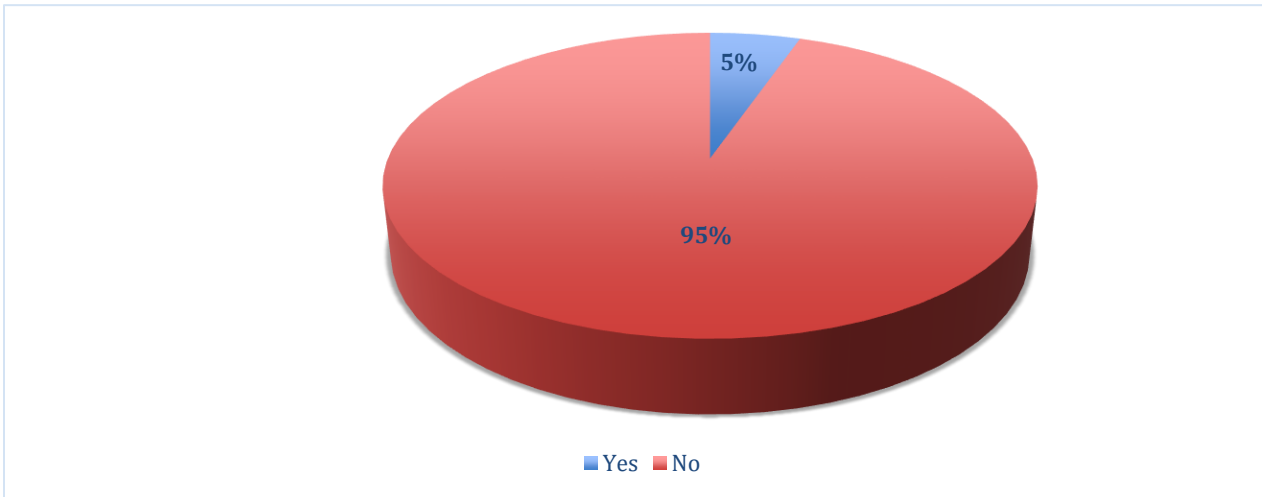


**Race/Ethnicity Representation**

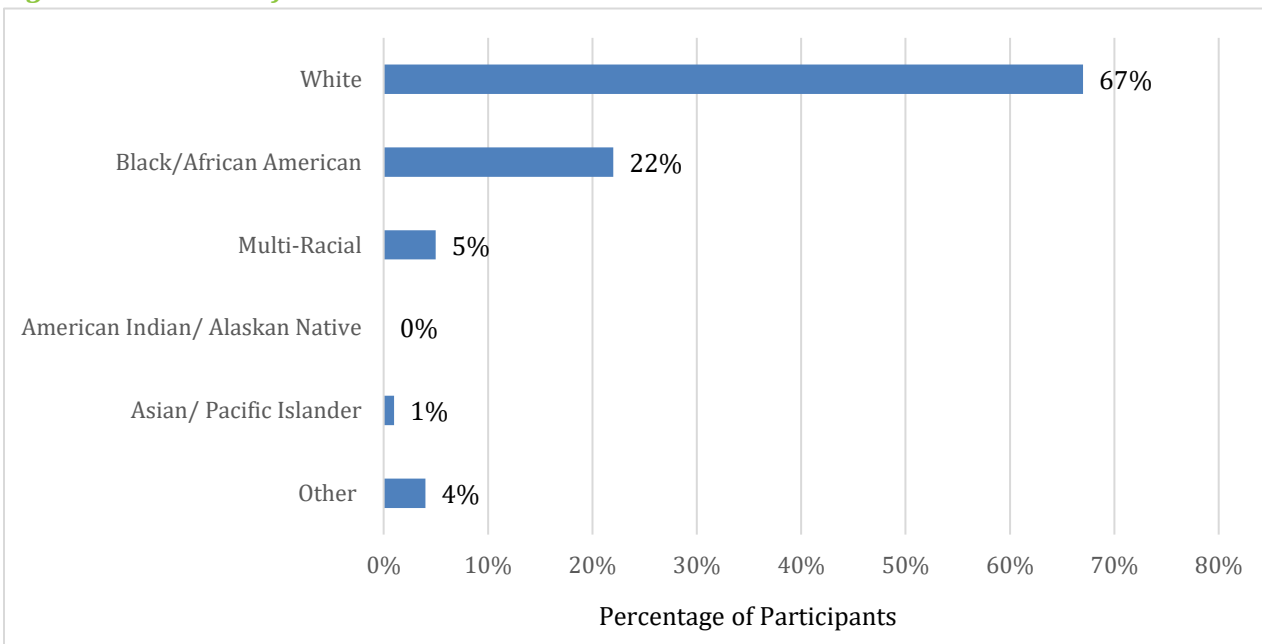
Five percent of the 76 participants identified themselves as Hispanic (Figure 4). Participants were also asked to select each of the races they identify with. Participants who selected more than one race were regrouped into the Multi-Racial category (Figure 5).



**Figure 4, Hispanic/Latino Ethnicity**



**Figure 5. Race Identified**

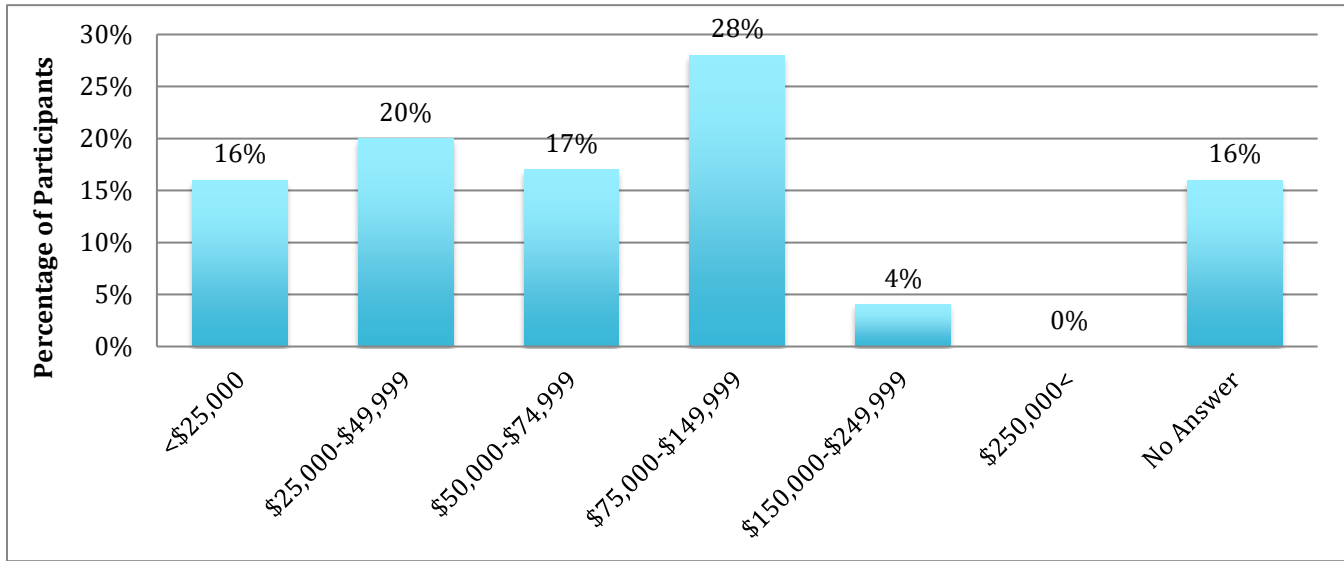


**Total Family Income of Participants**

Next, participants were asked to disclose their total family income for 2015. This income amount should include all sources of income and should be before taxes. Sixteen percent did not respond to the question and none of the participants made over \$250,000 (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Total Family Income



## Results

Overall, participants were interested in affordable activities and those that would be comfortable in the Florida weather. Throughout the focus groups, they emphasized how unfamiliar they were with both the word agritourism and the breadth of agritourism. They consistently suggested better advertising.

Two consistent themes running throughout the focus groups were variety and control. Participants time and time again wanted a variety of activities at an individual operation or across the industry in order to satisfy the diverse groups of people with whom they visit, or even their own diverse interests.

“I think Judy’s touched on the importance of the ongoing, every year school children. That’s an ongoing need for a facility that has a broad array of agricultural activities. Then you also have the tourists that you [want to] get those—for the people traveling through our state, and the locals. It’s not a one-size-fits-all. It’s the permanent fixture of the ranch, that’s a farm, that’s a petting zoo. It’s also the seasonal, sporadic locations in what’s happening.” (Orlando)

They also wanted control of their exploration at the venue and the ability to pick the types of activities in which they participate, how, and with whom. These themes will be explained in more detail in particular sections below.

## Background in Agriculture

We began by asking participants to describe their knowledge of agriculture and how they gained that knowledge, that is, their experience with agriculture. Many participants felt they knew little about agriculture. They reported a wide variety of experience, including education; industry; community background based on where they lived; travel; personal farming or gardening; family, friends, or heritage; and simply as consumers.

## Sources of Knowledge

Among participants, the majority of agricultural knowledge came from parents, grandparents, and family or community tradition. Only a small portion of participants mentioned any formal or informal agricultural education (agriculture classes in high school or college, 4-H, or FFA) or any work with local extension offices.



Gardening and victory gardens contributes to most of the knowledge the participants had of agriculture. Even those who lived or worked on a farm mentioned also growing food in a backyard garden both as a child and as an adult.

### Education

Education played a role in some participants' agricultural background, in both formal and informal settings. Formal education revolved around FFA programs and agriculture classes. Informal education came from many sources. 4-H and other clubs gave participants experience, as well as seeing products at the supermarket, reading, and television. Television provided agricultural information through documentaries, news, and commercials.

### Industry

Some participants did live on a farm or work in the agriculture industry at one point or another. Some participants worked on a farm that they did not own. There were also a small portion of participants who had a job related to or in contact with the agriculture industry, such as at the Farm Bureau.

### Community

Some influence on experience and knowledge came from where participants lived. While some participants *did* grow up on a farm, others either lived previously or currently in a rural area, but not directly on a farm. Living in urban communities, according to some of the participants, limited their access to agricultural experiences.

Moving also had an impact on knowledge of local agriculture, since climate, culture, and commodities change. Participants who had lived in other states mentioned the effect that heat, humidity, different soil, and insects had on their ability to grow food after moving to Florida. Participants from other states often regarded gardening in other states as a much easier task.

### Travel

Participants also gleaned knowledge and experiences from travel. Many participants visited farms of friends and relatives, or traveled with family to pick crops. Other travel-related experiences included agritourism opportunities such as vineyards, u-picks, farmers markets, and open houses.

### Family and friends

Family background and heritage was another factor in agricultural knowledge. Participants learned from parents, grandparents, "my grandfather had a huge garden...I guess I got my green thumb from him" (Pensacola participant), as well as cultural backgrounds, "growing up Italian we had a farm since time immemorial" (Sarasota participant).

### Personal farming or gardening

Participants mentioned a great deal of experience on their own farms or gardens. Victory gardening, citrus trees, livestock, and specialty crops were mentioned. Some participants gained an interest over food supply concerns, such as wanting organic, pesticide-free produce and liking "the idea of a victory garden, and would like to see many, many more people growing their own food" (Orlando participant).

### Consumption

Some participants acknowledged their role in agriculture as a consumer, stating things such as, "I'm rather limited as well. Agriculture [makes me] think about my produce at the farmer's market" (Jacksonville participant).



## **Familiarity with the term “agritourism”**

Participants were mostly unfamiliar with the term “agritourism,” with many reporting they had never heard the term before. Those that had heard of it primarily felt they had limited familiarity with the term.

### **Agritourism definitions**

We asked participants to offer their thoughts on the definition of agritourism before providing them the legal Florida definition in the state statute. Participant answers ranged from simply “going out in nature” (Orlando participant, group 2) or “visiting a farm” (Orlando participant, group 1) to more complex “An attraction that draws people into a certain area that has to do with agriculture” (Orlando participant, group 1) or “using agriculture to draw tourists” (Pensacola participant). Others suggested that agritourism was “a really fun way to learn about farms. Something that everybody should take part in” (Pensacola participant). An additional two Pensacola participants mentioned they thought the term was self-explanatory.

## **Interest in agritourism**

### **Agritourism examples**

Participants mentioned both general and specific examples of agritourism that they had heard of or visited throughout the focus groups. There was a variety of answers across the focus group locations, both from Florida and throughout the United States, plus some international destinations. Several groups compared agritourism to Disney or Gatorland. Some of these were responses to particular prompting from the moderator, others were spontaneous mentions.

### **General types of agritourism**

The most frequently mentioned types of agritourism were u-pick/u-cut; festivals and fairs; wineries, vineyards, and breweries; working farms and ranches; mazes; farm stands and farmers markets; and equestrian-related operations. Other mentioned examples are:

- Fishing, including a fish-a-thon
- Livestock show and rodeo
- Garden, or historic museum with a garden
- Historic demonstrations
- Bull riding
- Petting Zoo
- Hay Rides
- Hunting
- Bus Tours
- Wildlife
- Lessons from a master gardener
- Canning
- Flower trials
- Slaughter
- Parks
- Observing operations: “We went on an agritourism trip with the Tropical Fruit Club to Panama, and again to Costa Rica to see how they grow bananas and how they drink coffee.” –Orlando participant
- Forestry operations



• Participants also listed as agritourism a few activities that are more strictly ecotourism: River rafting, Safari, alligator wrestling. Finally, one participant each (except Disney which was mentioned by multiple participants) mentioned activities that may or may not be strictly agritourism: CSA, “companies that offer a service to do agriculture at your house”, “Silver springs radio”, “working on a plan-ag proposal”, an open house at school, Disney/Epcot, community garden, and Girl/boy scout camps.

### *Specific Agritourism operations mentioned*

Several participants could recall specific agritourism sites though not always by name. Disney/Epcot, Gatorland, Dakin Dairy, Myakka State Park (Sarasota only), Selby and Leu Gardens, and celery fields (Sarasota only) were mentioned by more than one group.

### *Activities of mixed interest*

Most of the activities mentioned were met with enthusiasm by the majority of group members. Some activities that specifically turned off some members of the groups were:

- Slaughtering, though one group mentioned butchering might be okay, and another participant suggested they would take their kids to see chickens sacrificed;
- Activities involving snakes;
- Smelly activities, specifically pig farms;
- Alligator farms and alligator wrestling;
- U-Picking cotton or tobacco, described by participants in one Jacksonville group as backbreaking work. In West Palm Beach, one participant did not want to pick okra because “It’s prickly.”
- Trail rides. While many people were interested, interest in the mode of transport varied, for horseback or motorized vehicle such as motorcycle or all-terrain vehicle. Some participants were not interested in horseback but would go walking on trails. A few were not interested at all.
- Crop mazes. Many people were interested, though a few expressed that they might find them too difficult or get stuck. One West Palm Beach participant said, “If I could scream and someone would come get me I would do it.”

A few people were not as interested in general activities involving flowers, plants, or the growing process, but they were interested in food. For example, a man from Orlando said: “[If] we can go the Zellwood Corn Festival or the Flower and Garden Festival. I’m going for the corn. I’m just not a flower and grow plants kind [of] guy.” In West Palm Beach, 2 participants did not want to do anything with livestock; one of those particularly mentioned hogs and pigs. A third participant was not interested in seeing cattle, though agreed they would watch if someone else milked a cow. The first participant in this discussion to mention livestock clarified “just gators and livestock [are a no]; I’d be interested in cattle. I’d like to milk a cow,” after the third person mentioned cattle.

### *Familiarity with local operations*

One-fifth of participants responded that they were not familiar with local agritourism opportunities, and 15% reported vague familiarity with opportunities. Of the all focus groups, Orlando participants reported the fewest number of people “not familiar” with local opportunities, with only one participant indicating that, although four participants described themselves as vaguely familiar. Seven participants across the two West Palm Beach focus groups felt they were not familiar with local opportunities. One group of Pensacola participants only reported familiarity with markets.



Local farms were the most familiar to all participants, with participants from 8 of the 10 groups reporting some familiarity (one Pensacola group and one Sarasota group had no respondents report familiarity with local farms). A few of the participants reported familiarity with each of these: markets, nature trails, festivals, and gardens. Local wineries were only familiar to two participants in Orlando and historical parks were mentioned by three participants in Orlando.

### **Call for more activities or better awareness**

All groups felt positively about having more agritourism opportunities or at the least, better awareness of existing activities. Some expressed regret that opportunities near them seemed closed off, saying, "I think most Florida agribusiness, just thinking of it, it seems like most of it is kind of like a closed production. The oranges. I mean, it's just business. They've got big fences. They have, "Stop." If you go down to Lake Okeechobee where they do the sugar, I mean, I can't imagine having buses going out there and going, "This is how we do sugar." It just seems like it's an industrial complex. Agricomplex. It's not a place to have a lodge or anything like that to go spend a weekend among the sugar cane, or the oranges, or—opposed to Sonoma Valley when all of that romantic stuff is going on out there with grapes. It's just kind of like agribusiness here just seems to be business as usual" (Sarasota participant). Several also reported that they did not know of operations near them, with one saying there were "none" in their county.

Others felt there were some activities that they could not do too many times, so they were seeking unusual or new experiences. When asked if she would visit for a specific crop, one participant answered, "No, doubtful. It has to be more stuff than just that... an apple farm that has an apple cider press. We would always go there but my incentive was doughnuts at the end. It was fun to watch it be made but after the fourth or fifth time, it's like, "Okay, I get it, doughnuts" (Orlando participant).

### **Agritourism visit decisions**

We asked participants to describe how, why, and with whom they decide to visit an agritourism venue or event.

#### **How they decide to visit**

We asked participants whether they visited an agritourism venue or event after planning or on a spontaneous basis. For those who answered spontaneous, we asked what made them choose to visit spontaneously.

#### **Planned vs. spontaneous**

Participants were split on planned versus spontaneous visiting. Some of respondents said they planned visits, 10% would visit spontaneously, and 30% said they did both. Many who said they needed to plan mentioned family involvement, often kids, that required them to plan, or the distance required to travel.

#### **Why they stopped for spontaneous visits**

Most participants said that signs would entice them to visit spontaneously, generally signs that alerted them when they were in the area of the operation or event. These participants indicated spontaneous visits occurred mostly when in transit when they had time, and when it enticed them to see something new and change their mind right away. Most discussions of the type of experiences that were spontaneous were u-pick operations in the examples participants gave. One consideration mentioned for spontaneous picking was the need to have a cooler or way to keep the product fresh if participants were far from home. Some participants mentioned an emphasis on signs that said "today" as an impetus for stopping, such as signs that might say, "Hay ride today or pick blueberries today" (Sarasota participant).



### **Who they visit with**

While many participants mentioned family, especially kids, and friends as the people with whom they are most likely to visit an agritourism site, others visit alone or with other adults, church, or community groups. In particular, several participants mentioned out of town visitors as a reason/motivation to visit agritourism sites in the local area.

### **Reasons for visiting**

Top reasons for visiting were entertainment or an experience, especially novel and unusual experiences, and the opportunity for learning. "I have four and five-year-old nephews [and] I'm always looking for things to do with them. They're pretty adventurous. They're just pretty up for almost anything" (Jacksonville participant). Another reason mentioned by many participants for visiting was to enjoy nature, relax, and have a different perspective from the everyday, such as, "get grounded, unwind, [and] get a balance to the technical world that we live in" (Pensacola participant). A few participants also mentioned health, including an opportunity for exercise. Also frequently mentioned as a reason for visiting was nostalgia.

However, participants split on whether they would travel or take a vacation primarily to participate in agritourism, though most agreed they would be interested in participating in agritourism while on vacation. When asked specifically in another question if they look for agritourism while on vacation, some respondents said yes while others said they were unsure or did not look for agritourism while on vacation.

### **Motivations for visiting and Value derived from a visit**

We asked participants several questions about what would motivate them to visit and what value they got out of participating in agritourism opportunities. The particular crops and food in general were also important motivators. Several would also go because it was affordable, to support their community, or to get inspiration for their own gardens. A few mentioned agritourism or agriculture as contributing to protecting what we have, preventing the loss of land, or general stewardship of the land.

Reasons people would not want to visit included having to work, not wanting to see animal abuse, and upsetting killer bees' nests or other dangers such as snakes.

### **Value of the social atmosphere**

Many participants valued spending time with family and sharing their experiences at an agritourism venue. Some also wanted to meet new people and indicated they might, for example, use it as an opportunity to discuss wine with strangers. Learning was also an important reason to have socializing at agritourism venues.

### **Value of education**

One value that was discussed at length through several questions was the value derived from the educational aspects of agritourism visits. Overall, most participants felt they wanted the opportunity to learn from agritourism opportunities, though a few felt there were times when they would just want to enjoy the atmosphere and/or be completely left alone, "Like [when] department store shopping ... leave me alone until it's time for me to ask a question" (Orlando participant). They particularly did not feel it was necessary to have a program or someone to talk to learn at U-pick operations. This is discussed in more detail in the section on the importance of talking to owners or workers below.

### **Importance of talking to owners or workers at an operation**

Participants valued the opportunity to talk to the owners or workers at an operation. Some reasons they cited were to gain an understanding about "the type of person that would [want to] do something like that for a career"





(Jacksonville participant), learn the history of the farms that have been in families for many generations, to get firsthand knowledge of “all the ins and outs and ups and downs and they talk to you about sourcing. What they’re using, what techniques, where is it coming from” (West Palm Beach participant).

### *Importance of self-exploration vs. programs or presentation*

Participants were split on the idea of wanting activities to be self-guided or led by someone. Several stressed the importance of having both and providing choices. “I would say it’s very important to have time alone maybe after the explanation or if it’s like a—you see something and there’s somebody there and you walk a little bit by yourself, you can sort of take it in, you can take your time. You’re not [doing] a timed type thing. You can enjoy it at your own pace” (Jacksonville participant). Some participants felt structured tours in particular were limiting and likened them to “forced marches” (Orlando participant) in some cases. Another felt that lecture-style programs might take away from the entertainment value, “people have in their head fun and they would then say, “We’re [going to] have an hour or 30 minutes about education on agriculture,’ maybe ... just to sit down and [listen], I think it will be kind of hard” (Orlando participant).

However, some participants felt wandering around unguided might not be interesting or even safe if one was not familiar with the facility. In particular, one participant noted it would be difficult to know what was relevant to look at. Others were concerned self-guided exploration would not be as educational. “I could step on some locally poisonous plant and not know it,” stated one Sarasota participant.

Participants thought programming would be especially important for children, in which case it should be hands-on and based on activities such as cooking demonstrations.

### *Importance of handouts*

Some participants wanted printed handouts, either to use at the venue and return, or in a few cases, to take home for later reference or to share with others. The handouts could cover specifics on production processes or the commodities produced. Most participants were interested in some sort of follow-up material that was not necessarily printed, including seeds and plants, products they could purchase, or simply online information.

### *Importance of learning about crops or products*

Participants wanted to learn about specific crops and products, with a variety of specific topics they would be interested in:

- Food production
  - Farming practices: organic vs. conventional in general, hydroponics, conventional breeding and GMOs; the role of insects; and pesticides and fertilizer use in particular
  - Process of growing and the growing season
  - Production processes such as working on a dairy farm or cattle ranch, juicing operations, and the sourcing of elements in the production process
- Source of their food
  - Fresh vs store-bought;
  - How food goes from farm to table
  - Locally grown vs imported
  - What crops are native



- History of particular crops and products
- Skills to take home
  - How to start raising vegetables and fruits in your yard or community
  - How to grow particular crops in their local area, including pesticide or fertilizer use, appropriate varieties and water amounts, timing of planting and harvesting, and how weather and soils affect crops
  - New ways to grow crops, such as in raised beds or containers

### ***Other topics people expect to learn about***

Participants mentioned wanting to learn both knowledge and skills when visiting agritourism sites. Some of the main types of knowledge, in addition to specifics on crops and products, they wanted to learn about included:

- History of the area, particularly as related to agriculture
- Health
  - Medicine
  - Nutrition
  - Food Safety
- Animals as well as plants
- Ecological conditions and the environment in general

### ***Skills***

Participants also expressed a desire to learn skills related to food production and selection, as well as trying more farm-based skills, such as shearing sheep or milking cows. These answers varied more, but in general, people were interested in:

- How to grow their own fruits and vegetables
- How to raise animals
- How to select ripe fruit and vegetables and products in season

### **Sources of local information**

We asked participants to describe both how they have found information previously about agritourism opportunities as well as how they would like to learn about opportunities in their area. An additional question asked about how they look for information while on vacation. Responses here can be compared to suggestions for advertising discussed later, which sometimes included suggestions on areas and ways to advertise.

### **Previous information about agritourism**

Participants reported they previously heard about agritourism opportunities via:

- Internet
- Word of mouth
- Newspaper
- Social Media



- TV
- Signs
- Printed ads
- Organizations
- Radio

### Preferences for local agritourism information sources

However, participants reported they would like to hear about local agritourism opportunities via:

- Local publications
- Television
- Social Media
- Word of Mouth
- Internet
- Signs
- Email
- No preference

### Preferences for agritourism information sources while traveling

While traveling, participants reported they would like to hear about agritourism opportunities via:

- Brochures
- Word of mouth
- Internet
- Magazines
- Signs
- Television
- Social Media
- Exploring

### Descriptions of agritourism and experiences

We asked participants to describe what they desired as characteristics of an agritourism activity. We asked about the intensity, particularly physical intensity, of the experience; the amenities needed; the cost; the distance; and what they would consider the perfect agritourism activity.



### Intensity

When the participants were asked to describe the intensity of the activities they would be interested in, most responses were either light or moderate; very few participants were interested in strenuous activities. "I'd stop before it was physically taxing," said one Sarasota participant. Other factors that influenced the intensity were the weather and the age of the participants. Some participants were interested in more intense activities if the reward was commensurate, as when one said, "very intense if very rewarding," (Pensacola participant), or "If it's a situation like a fair or something like that, the agricultural part of the fair and stuff like that ... I'd be there for hours just going through everything, checking everything out" (West Palm Beach participant). Again, participants were also interested in either having a variety of activities with different intensity, or the ability to make the experience as intense as one wanted, for example, when at a festival and choosing what to do.

### Location and Access

Participants wanted the sites to be easy to get to, but out of the way, away from the city. They thought good directions or signs would accomplish this. They did not feel that public transportation was necessary, as the vast majority would travel by individual vehicle.

How far they were willing to travel varied among locations and groups. Some of the participants were willing to travel "unlimited" distances within the state, though most of them were participants in one Sarasota focus group. Other participants were willing to drive up to one to two hours away. A few participants indicated they would travel out of state. A small group of people, particularly from one Orlando group, indicated "it depends."

### Cost

Although the majority of the participants said "it depends" when asked how much they were willing to pay per person for agritourism activities, other participants indicated they were willing to pay \$10-20 per person. Only a few participants were willing to pay \$30-50 per person. As described later, affordability was a key amenity or feature of the perfect agritourism activity.

### Amenities

The most popular amenities mentioned by participants were clean, non-portable restrooms. Many participants also mentioned shade, or in a very few instances, air conditioning; water/beverages; food; and places to sit and/or picnic areas. Also important to many participants were kid-friendly activities. Other spontaneous mentions not prompted by the moderator were an area to clean up shoes/people after muddy activities, cell service and access to Wi-Fi, recycling, fitness/movement ability, and first aid kit/safety assurance.

### Food

Participants were interested in several amenities related to food. Many agreed food for purchase would be nice, though it was not specifically asked whether this was prepared food for consumption on site. Some wanted to be able to bring in their own food to picnic. We did ask specifically about products for purchase, which was met with general enthusiasm from participants. Having samples of products was also popular. All participants agreed that the food and products needed to be fresh, noting "that's probably the main reason you're going there" (Jacksonville participant).

### Parking

We asked several questions about parking, including whether parking needed to be paved, how much parking was needed, and how far the participants would be willing to walk to the venue from parking. Paved parking was desirable but not necessary, except in the case of physical accessibility for some older participants or those with different abilities. Three participants in West Palm Beach wanted free parking. The distance from parking to the



venue was important, but there was no consensus of the distance people would travel. Some were willing to walk up to a mile, others much less, especially in the heat. A few participants offered the idea of a shuttle of some sort if the parking was distant and/or it was hot or sunny; another group emphasized whatever the distance, there needed to be good directions or signage to get to the venue. As for the amount of parking offered, participants generally agreed that parking needed to be ample or adequate for the crowd, without adding further details.

### Perfect Agritourism experiences

When the participants were asked to describe what a perfect agritourism experience would be, many described things related to the amenities already mentioned. The top reasons involved variety of experiences, learning opportunities, farm to table food, and good weather. Also important were affordability, the involvement of kids in activities, novelty, fun, and animals.

### Future interest

Participants indicated overall general interest in many of the activities they were learning about, with the exceptions noted above in smelly or potentially dangerous or disturbing activities. Many were interested in a variety of activities that they had not heard about previously.

### Agritourism vs other leisure activities

Due to time constraints, we asked only four groups (both groups in West Palm Beach, one each in Pensacola and Sarasota) whether their behaviors at agritourism activities differed from other leisure activities, and if so, how they differed. Responses to this question were quite mixed. Pensacola participants generally said there was no difference. One Sarasota participant said they felt “more in the flow” when participating in agritourism. One West Palm Beach group had a few participants that indicated they would expect to learn something at agritourism where they might not with other leisure activities. Some in the other West Palm Beach group felt that younger people especially would see agritourism as more akin to work, especially in the context of U-Picks. Another concern from one member of this group was the number of people living in the city and the location of most agritourism in the country, indicating that it was less likely people in the city would participate in agritourism in general due to a lack of awareness in part.

### Promotions and use of Agritourism terminology

Different ways to promote agritourism in Florida were discussed throughout the focus groups. In particular, towards the end of the discussion, we asked about the appropriateness of the word *agritourism*. The majority (60%) of participants thought the average person was not familiar with the term *agritourism*. Participants were split on whether the term is the best to describe the sorts of activities we had discussed: 40% agreed, 30% said no, and 30% had no response. One-fifth reported they could not think of a better term, regardless of whether they thought agritourism was appropriate. Other suggested terms included:

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Agritouristic    | Meet What You Eat |
| Agri-exploration | Working farm      |
| Farm Tourism     | Save the planet   |
| Rural Tourism    | Fun with foods    |
| Agro at home     | Natural tourism   |
| Land use tourism |                   |



**Alternative terms**

We asked participants about several alternate terms compared to agritourism. We gave them three different colored cards to use to vote on other potential terms compared to agritourism. We gave them another term that could be used to represent these types of activities and asked them to use the cards to tell us if the term represented the activities worse (red), better (green) or the same (yellow) as the word agritoursim. The prompt we used was, "What do you think of the term (insert term here) as a label for these types of activities as compared to agritourism?"

There was no term that was a consensus better choice, though *agricultural tourism* was considered better or the same by most participants (Table 1).

**Table 1. Alternative Terms**

	<b>Better</b> %	<b>Same</b> %	<b>Worse</b> %
Agricultural Tourism	34	57	9
Agritainment	8	9	83
Agrotourism	5	48	47
Farm visit	47	30	23
Farm tourism	43	30	26
Farm-based tourism	48	24	28
Rural tourism	10	15	75
Vacation farms	29	20	51

We also asked what words participants would use to describe agritourism activities. No words were more popular than others, so the full list is here, in no particular order:

- Agritourism (4 people)
- Natural
- Peaceful/relaxing



- Alligators
- Aboriginal
- Wholesome
- Fun and family activity/fun
- Healthy
- Down-home
- Meet What you Eat
- Farm tour
- Land use tourism
- Flora and fauna
- Tour and Learn/educational/Educated on Vegetables
- Nature's Bounty
- Join us for ...
- Adventurous
- Festival
- Performance
- Unique
- Interesting
- Food for Thought
- Local experience
- Exploration

### Closing Thoughts

The final questions asked participants to summarize their thoughts on agritourism after the discussion, including providing final tips for operators. Overwhelmingly, people mentioned need for more and better advertising, discussed in the next section further.

Many participants felt they had learned a lot about agritourism just from the discussions, resulting in a broader definition in their minds of the types of opportunities available. They also felt they recognized more availability in their area than they had before attending. Several said they were inspired and ready to go to an agritourism



opportunity. They felt there was room for growth and were interested in seeing more agritourism, or having better awareness of the existing opportunities in their area. A few noted the difference with pure entertainment venues, noting agritourism's learning opportunities or the lack of association with profit for agritourism operations. Finally, some participants wanted to see more emphasis on agritourism for kids or even all Floridians to recognize the importance of agriculture. As one said,

“Maybe when we get to really put agriculture as something that it's very important and maybe gave more information about it before start something about it because maybe a lot of people think it's-- a lot of people want to be a doctor, lawyer, name it but nobody want[s] to be in agriculture. They think I'm going to be doing that pineapples or vegetables...they think it's something not good in the society. Maybe just picture agriculture and it's a really important matter and it's not something that is going to be denigrated because maybe a lot of people don't see it that way“(Orlando participant).

### Need for advertising

When asked what they would tell operators in 15 seconds or less, more than half the answers involved better advertising. As one said, “Florida. It's not just beaches” (Sarasota participant). Most suggestions were not specific places to advertise, but a number of participants did suggest online advertising, particularly social media and specifically Facebook and Meetup.com. Other specific suggestions were the library, tourism center, Chamber of Commerce, and at Extension offices.

There were also suggestions about how to advertise. One participant suggested changing advertising seasonally due to the different audiences of tourists and year-round residents. One Jacksonville group suggested coming up with a sort of buzzword billboard campaign, “You put the word on some billboards and [drivers] would look it up and try to figure out what it was.” The other Jacksonville group suggested emphasizing the affordability of the opportunities, especially compared to costs for theme parks. Another suggestion was to emphasize the experiential nature of the opportunities, and one said they need to “simplify what they're about so more people can understand” (West Palm Beach participant).

### Tips for individual operators

Other tips for individual operators were to be authentic and passionate and to gear offerings toward particular audiences, especially families, kids, and schools. One participant suggested offering a membership for repeat visitors, similar to museums. One Sarasota participant wanted a program “that identifies the special--a greater appreciation of the relationship between the animals that exist in Florida and the beauty of the land and the beaches.”





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