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TOURISM NETWORK**

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# 2023 National Extension Tourism Conference

Envisioning the Future of Extension in Tourism

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# NET 2023 Conference Proceedings

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## INTRODUCTION

The mission of the National Extension Tourism network (NET) is to integrate research, education, and outreach within Cooperative Extension and Sea Grant to support sustainable tourism. NET's work contributes to the long-term economic development, environmental stewardship, and socio-cultural well-being of communities and regions.

NET was formed in 1994, hosting its first conference in 1995. NET holds biennial conferences hosted in different regions of the US. The 2023 NET Conference took place in Milwaukee, Wis., September 24-27. The NET 2023 conference theme of "Envisioning the Future of Extension in Tourism" encouraged reflection on how the travel and tourism industry has been transforming in recent years and the role Extension can play in catalyzing future programming that serves diverse stakeholders' needs. Conference organizers strived to lower barriers to access for the 2023 conference and encourage new attendees and perspectives, all of which was made possible by the conference sponsors.

To increase access to the impactful work presented at the conference, NET is publishing its 2023 conference proceedings, which is its second compilation of conference proceedings. The intended audiences for the proceedings include Extension faculty and staff, researchers, tourism professionals, and practitioners who can benefit from the wide array of applied research and outreach programs presented in the proceedings. The second audience includes faculty and students in tourism and outdoor recreation-related academic programs who can benefit from having access to current applied research and programs that highlight how Extension and partners help address opportunities, issues and trends in tourism and outdoor recreation. The proceedings will be shared widely via the National Extension Tourism website as an open-source publication for faculty, students and practitioners.

This proceedings document contains nine submissions from the 2023 NET Conference. The first four submissions by Pashow et al.; Whitehouse, Hollas, and Chase; Entsminger and Schmidt; and Van Zyl, Du Plessis and Van der Merwe share recent findings from agritourism-focused research. The next two submissions by Arborgast et al. and Curtis focus on rural tourism. Rounding out the collection are three submissions by Savage, Szczytko, and Knollenberg; Bernard; and Peroff et al. that discuss work with different tourism and outdoor recreation audiences.

## AGRITOURISM

### A Worldwide Perspective on Regenerative and Sustainable Agritourism

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#### Keywords

regenerative, sustainable, agritourism, worldwide

#### Introduction and Background

Sustainability and regeneration are important concepts in agriculture, community development, and tourism. Combining all three, agritourism takes place when farms, ranches and other agricultural enterprises provide education, hospitality, entertainment, recreation and direct sales of farm products for visitors (Chase et al., 2018). The concept of agritourism has become a focal point for sustainability and regeneration in practice (Grillini, Sacchi, Streifeneder, & Fischer, 2023). However, the diversity of understandings and perspectives related to sustainability and regeneration complicates outreach and communication initiatives around these practices.

The concept of sustainability has been important to agriculture, tourism, and community development for over three decades, with the 1987 Brundtland report defining sustainable development (WCED, 1987). Research indicates that sustainability and agritourism have distinct linkages whereby agritourism can be an effective way to support sustainability in rural communities (Ammirato et al., 2020).

Regeneration has a specific meaning for natural systems that is distinct from sustainability. Over four decades ago, Robert Rodale, head of the Rodale Institute, described regenerative agriculture as, "one that, at increasing levels of productivity, increases our land and soil biological production base. It has a high level of built-in economic and biological stability. It has minimal to no impact on the environment beyond the farm or field boundaries. It produces foodstuffs free from biocides. It provides for the productive contribution of increasingly large numbers of people during a transition to minimal reliance on non-renewable resources" (Rodale, 1983). Rodale's description has contributed to recent interest in regenerative agriculture and has helped to promote regenerative practices around the globe (Giller et al., 2021).

Although the terms "sustainable" and "regenerative agritourism" are frequently used in practice, there is limited research systematically examining how these terms are applied in different contexts. The objective of this article is to explore the meanings and practices of sustainable and regenerative agriculture and agritourism around the globe. In the Methods section, we describe the formation of an international committee that is undertaking this work. The Findings and Discussion section shares the perspectives of the committee members and concludes with next steps for this initiative.



## Methods

On April 11, 2023, the Global Agritourism Network (GAN) was launched with 676 registered participants from 81 countries. During the launch, 10 subcommittee sessions were offered. The Sustainable and Regenerative Agriculture and Agritourism (SRAA) committee stood out by attracting 127 individuals with representatives from 6 continents. The committee members shared perspectives on the topic, illustrating the diversity of definitions and perspectives around the world. The main takeaway was that sustainable and regenerative agriculture, tourism, and agritourism are of global interest and concern.

At the end of 2023, the SRAA committee had over 300 committee members from over 75 countries. During that first year, the committee held a webinar on “Regenerative Agritourism Pathway for the Pacific Islands” online at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TV\\_HZnh\\_gig](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TV_HZnh_gig), sent out two newsletters, and held a committee meeting that focused on determining key values, goals, objectives, activities, outcomes, and differences between conventional, sustainable, and regenerative agriculture and agritourism. One of the key goals of the webinar, newsletter, and committee meeting is that committee members can see and share what is happening in sustainable and regenerative agriculture and agritourism worldwide. Although the committee members live in different parts of the world, have different climates, grow different crops, and have different cultures and lifestyles, they are all able to learn something from each other.

The input of the members is extremely valuable in order to provide a truly global perspective of sustainable and regenerative agriculture and agritourism. While the opinions are very diverse with many opposing and conflicting responses, this is to be expected when the members have such diverse world views and belief systems. What’s important for our committee is providing a safe and positive environment for people to express their views.

The key questions that were asked to the committee members were:

1. **What are some key values that support sustainable and regenerative agriculture and agritourism?**
2. **What are the key differences between conventional, sustainable and regenerative agriculture and agritourism?**
3. **What would you like the goals, objectives, activities and outcomes to be for the sustainable and regenerative agriculture and agritourism committee?**

Additional topics such as collaboration and goals were also discussed. The committee meeting was recorded, and notes were taken from the recording. This information was shared with all committee members after the meeting through the SRAA quarterly newsletter.

## Findings and Discussion

In this section, we present views of the SRAA committee via the transcript of responses to the questions below. The information is primarily presented as quotes transcribed from the recording and notes. Minor edits have been made for the sake of clarity and grammar.

### **What are some key values that support sustainable and regenerative agriculture and agritourism?**

Some of the key values that support sustainable agriculture and agritourism are meeting the needs of present and future generations, while ensuring profitability, and minimising social, cultural and environmental impacts. Young people do not want to get into farming, the returns are low for the efforts. So unless we have measures that make farming more viable sustainably

we will continue to have more intensive farming run by corporations and less family model farms. A transition to sustainable and regenerative agriculture needs to be affordable to farmers. There is also a need for subsidies and grants to do this, having clear policies and standards for this could help farmers to access support. Sustainable should now be the minimum requirement for agricultural production and agritourism. Regenerative doesn't replace sustainable, it builds on from it. Unless we have created an economic, socially and environmentally sustainable business then we cannot think about transforming to regenerative. Regenerative agriculture and agroecology are overlapping to variable degrees, ranging from cases in which regenerative agriculture includes all 10 elements of agroecology, to those in which regenerative agriculture is just a term used to "re-pack" conventional agricultural practices. Some of these values where regenerative and agroecology merge are: Human and social, co-creation and sharing of knowledge, collaboration not competition, synergies, cultural & food traditions, circular and solidarity economy, responsible governance. We shouldn't just focus on the practice-based applications of regenerative agriculture without addressing the root causes leading to the marginalisation of farmers.

### **What are the key differences between conventional, sustainable and regenerative agriculture and agritourism?**

It starts at the soil. Conventional agricultural practices often harm soil (short sighted, quick fixes, high inputs, GMO, monoculture). It is estimated that conventional farming currently accounts for about one-quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions and erodes 24bn tonnes of topsoil a year, according to EIT Food, a European Knowledge and Innovation Community. Sustainable agricultural practices seek to cause less harm to the soil (minimise inputs, sustain the environmental resources).

Regenerative agricultural practices seek to regenerate the soil (no till farming, fertiliser management, cover cropping). Regenerative agriculture mixes Indigenous Knowledge Systems and practices such as crop rotation with hi-tech tools including sensors and apps. Regenerative really ties all this to the soil. It's all about protecting and regenerating the soil. Natural ecosystems are tied to farming, without pollinators we don't have a productive farm yet certain modern farm inputs are impacting our pollinators. Regenerative agriculture encourages best practices for farming and grazing that mitigate climate change by rebuilding soil organic matter and restoring degraded soil biodiversity—resulting in carbon drawdown and improvements to the water cycle and soil quality, while enhancing the wider ecosystem. Regenerative agriculture best practice encourages farmers to shift from monocropping (planting just one crop) to crop rotation management and intercropping systems. At their core, regenerative agriculture and farming practices seek to move away from a monocrop focus to a landscape approach, in which crops and grazing pastures rotate, biodiversity gets prioritized, year-round water and fertilizer use is considered, soil erosion is minimized and soil health is restored. This landscape approach involves looking at the entire ecosystem to identify systemic factors that impact crops—and then creating more holistic interventions. Regenerative can be about bringing local cultures into farming. Practices such as preserving heirloom seeds from previous harvests to use in following harvests. GMO is linked to inequality and unethical farming. It's also linked to high pesticide use. It's not about quick fixes, conventional agriculture is about solving problems with quick fixes and inputs but not thinking long term. Sustainable and regenerative takes time and patience.

Regenerative agritourism is differentiating itself in that a regenerative agritourism experience should be transformational. Regenerative agritourism experiences should equip the tourists with the knowledge to understand the difference between regenerative and conventional agriculture and provide a connection to regenerative farming. Should help to shift consumer behaviour to

purchasing more regenerative products, eating seasonal, eating local buying from farm gates and farmers markets. There is still a need to discuss critical issues such as the setting of agritourism, should we be ensuring that food security is considered? Cases of farms diversifying to agritourism and eventually the touristic side of the business takes over the farming activities. Are hot tubs and swimming pools, 5-star accommodation, hotels on farming land agritourism? Should it be more authentic with farming life? Are offsite activities agritourism? Such as farmers markets, festivals, technology-based activities. Should it just be centred on farming, or can it be value-added enterprises supporting local agriculture also?

Some key values that support sustainable and regenerative agritourism?

It should be transformational both for host and guest.

- Should be based on farms that are mitigating and adapting to the climate crisis
- Should be based on farms that are contributing biodiversity and nature.
- Should support smallholder and family farming models (not further enable corporate takeover of family farms and rural communities).
- Farmers must be respected, able to have quality of life; agritourism is to support better quality of life.
- Should support food and nutritional security not transition farmers from farming to touristic enterprises.

**What would you like the goals, objectives, activities and outcomes to be for the sustainable and regenerative agriculture and agritourism committee?**

The Committee needs a vision that shows the real potential for agritourism beyond economic contribution. We can literally re-educate the world to build a better food system globally through agritourism experiences. The people that grow our food should be respected, they should have a high quality of life and well-being. There are significant social and mental health issues for farmers because they have been significantly exploited, taken for granted or, worse yet, simply forgotten.

**Ideas for committee activities:** Presentations, webinars, 5-minute pitches, debate panels

**Case studies:** Of good sustainable and regenerative agritourism practices.

**Awards:** Restoring of pride in farming and cultural heritage systems, let's have awards for agritourism operators who are doing this?

**Collaboration:** Not just between the farmers and tourists, or government, institutions, businesses and donors but within the Global Agritourism Network regional committees and executive committees, they must speak to each other and share information. Collaboration not competition is key to sustainable and regenerative agritourism. All of the committees are intertwined, they will need to work together not in isolation. You cannot separate definitions and standards from sustainable and regenerative agriculture and agritourism, you cannot separate these two committees from the education committee or events, etc.

**Goals and vision:** The committee should aspire for all agritourism to be sustainable and regenerative; it needs to be the tool to educate farmers and consumers to change their farming and purchasing practices to make the changes we all need to make to reverse the crises we are facing. The committee should focus on looking at sustainable and regenerative agriculture and agritourism and breaking them down especially into topic areas. We are trying to improve not just sustain, figuring out what are those practices. How can we bring these sustainable and regenerative practices and share them as an agritourism experience? Sharing practices amongst



farmers and agritourism operators. Like farmers from the north could be learning from farmers in the south as in sustainable and regenerative practices.

### Conclusion

While progress has been made, there is much more to be done. The SRAA is still working as a committee to define sustainable and regenerative agriculture and agritourism. This is not something that can be rushed as many perspectives from around the world need to be considered to determine a clear definition that fits best with all committee members given the very dynamic and evolving nature of agriculture and agritourism. A final definition may not be perfect for all committee members but a definition that considers everyone is important. As the work continues, we invite anyone interested to join the SRAA committee by completing the membership registration form online at <https://agritourism.eurac.edu/gan/>.

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## Virtual, Hybrid and In-Person Extension Programming: An Evaluation of the Expected Outcomes of an International Agritourism Conference

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### Keywords

agritourism, Extension, programming, research, networking

### Introduction

Social capital, networking, and partnerships are integral to the viability of rural communities (Miller, et al., 2007), especially those that rely on urban-rural linkages such as agricultural and tourism activities (Fei, et al., 2020; Qu, et al., 2022). These networks and collaborations are a factor in the viability of agritourism entrepreneurship and the viability of small family farms (Karampela, et al., 2019; Schmidt et al., 2023; Nickerson, et al., 2001; Schilling, et al., 2012). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, creating and maintaining these networks has been more difficult for scholars and practitioners of tourism, agriculture, and food systems.

To address the need for improved collaboration during and after the pandemic, University of Vermont Extension hosted the inaugural International Workshop on Agritourism (IWA) in Burlington, Vermont, in 2022. The conference was originally planned as an in-person event scheduled to take place in 2020. However, the organizers decided to host a hybrid conference to accommodate those seeking to connect virtually as well as in person.

The hybrid event made attendance possible for people who were unable to travel to Vermont due to farm demands, geopolitical issues, finances, health concerns, and personal or work obligations. This paper outlines the results of a survey of conference participants, which helps us understand the effectiveness of virtual and in-person programs for strengthening international collaboration on agritourism research. Funded by the National Science Foundation, these results will inform future agritourism programming and offer insights for other interdisciplinary networks, especially those connecting agriculture, research, and extension.

### Methods

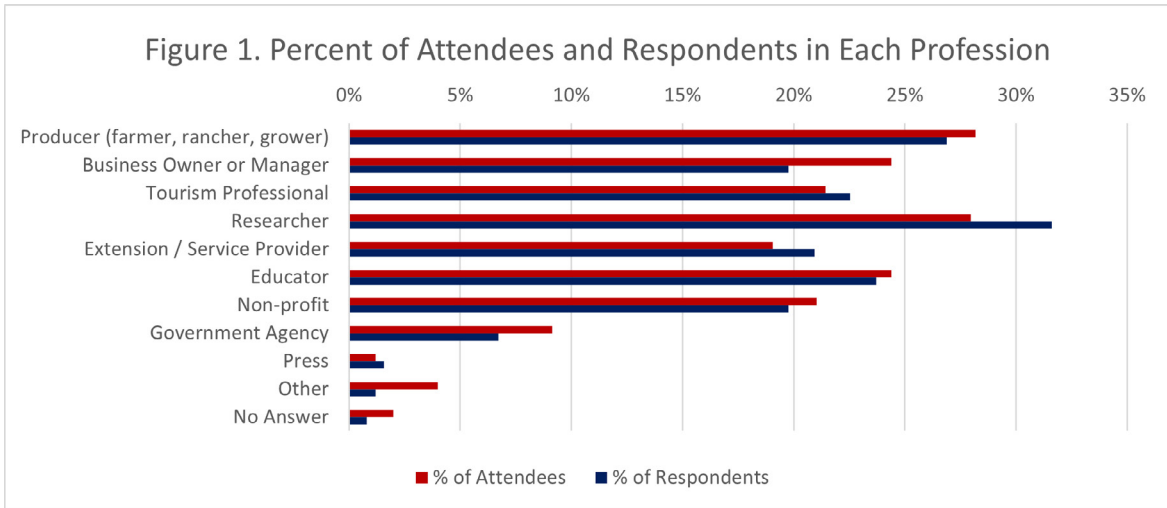
The conference was attended by 504 participants: 352 attended in person, and 152 joined online. To identify strategies that contribute to the sustained resilience of international collaboration, we surveyed IWA attendees immediately following the conference to ask what they expected to accomplish as a result of the conference and about their hopes for future collaboration. We used both quantitative and qualitative research methods to analyze survey responses and assess the effectiveness of virtual and in-person educational and networking events for the global agritourism community.

### Findings and Discussion

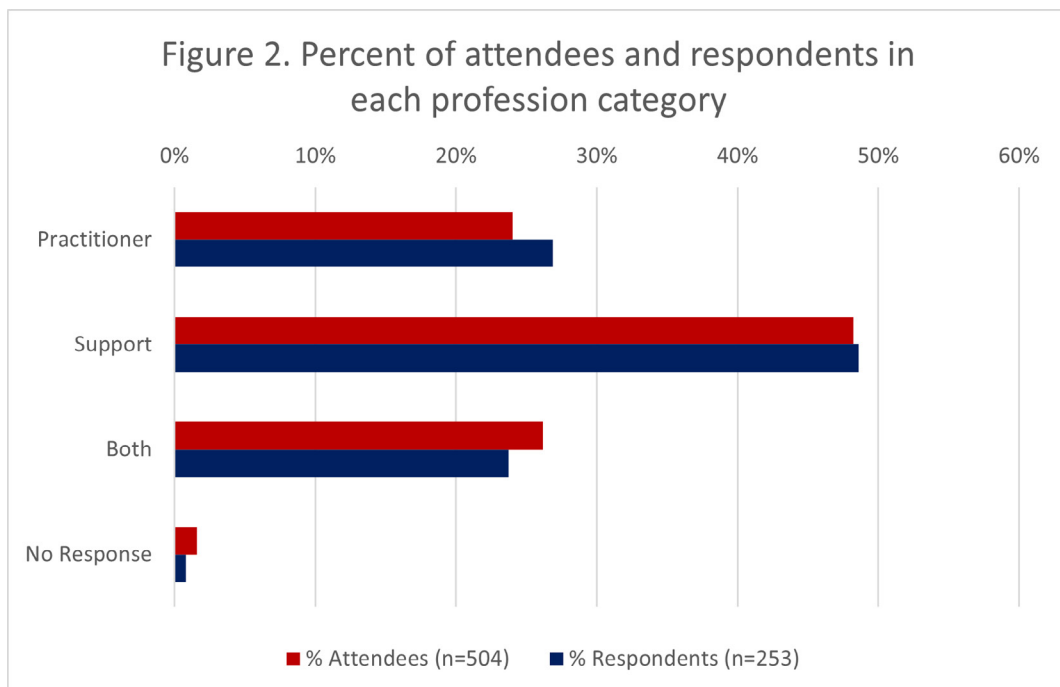
About half of the conference attendees (n = 253) responded to the post-conference survey. We asked respondents if they attended the conference in person, virtually, or both in person and virtually. Since only 3 people reported attending both in person and virtually, we have included them with the in-person group for this analysis.

### Respondent Profiles

Survey respondents were fairly representative of conference attendees in terms of profession (Figure 1). Business owners and managers were moderately underrepresented (24% of attendees compared to 20% of respondents) and researchers were moderately overrepresented (28% of attendees compared to 32% of respondents). There were also far more attendees (n=18, 4%) than respondents (n=3, 1%) who wrote in other professions that we were unable to assign to existing categories.

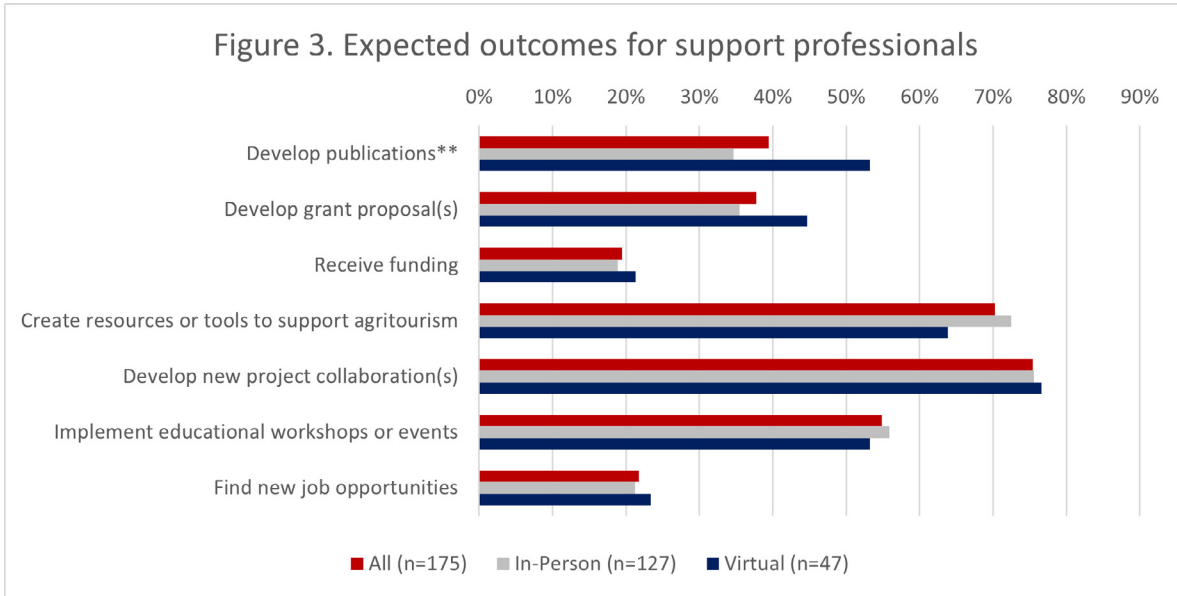


Because many people selected multiple professions, we created another variable that sorted attendees and respondents into three exclusive categories. We grouped those who selected producer, business owner/manager, and/or tourism professional in the “practitioner” category, and those who selected researcher, extension/service provider, educator, nonprofit, and/or government agency into the “support” category. We assigned those who selected professions falling into both buckets into a third “both” category. We reviewed all “other” write-in professions and sorted them according to whether they described working directly in agritourism or supporting agritourism professionals and activities. Here again, the survey is fairly representative of attendees (Figure 2).

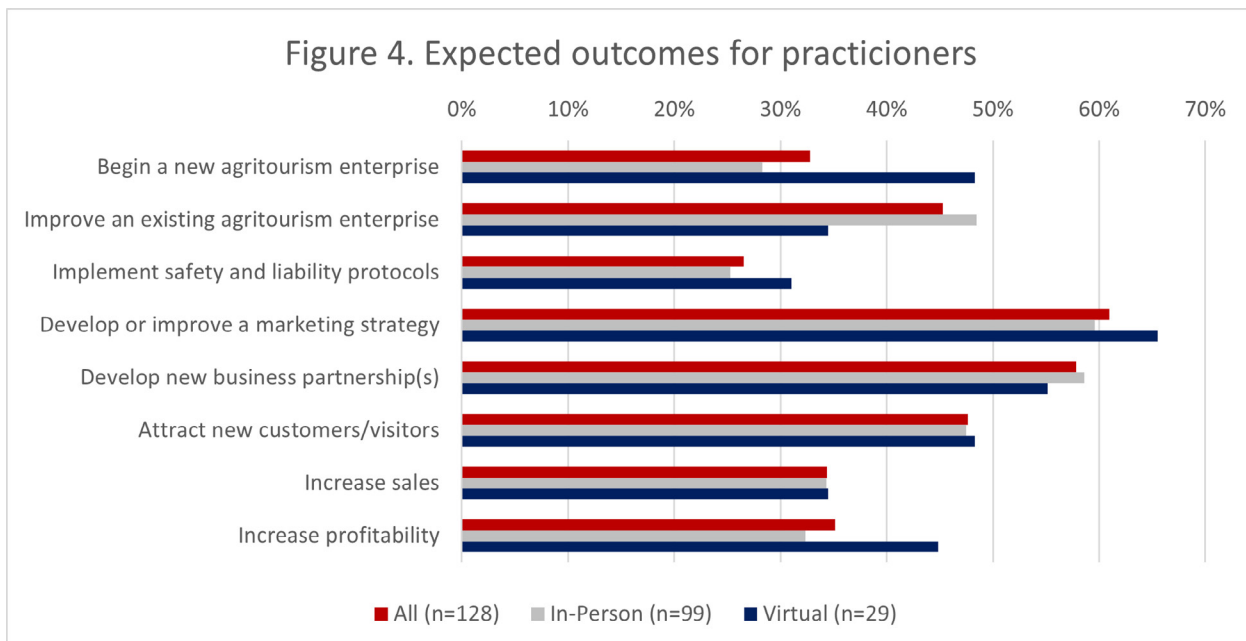


### Expected Outcomes from Attending the International Workshop on Agritourism

The large majority of support professionals anticipated that they would create new resources or tools to support agritourism (n=123, 70%) and develop new project collaborations (n=132, 75%). A little over half (n=96, 55%) said they would implement educational workshops or events. In-person and virtual attendees differed in only one category: significantly more virtual attendees (p < 0.05) planned to develop publications as a result of the conference. Further analysis using a binary logistic regression demonstrated that this was because 68% of virtual responding support professionals were researchers, compared to 36% of in-person responding support professionals (Figure 3).



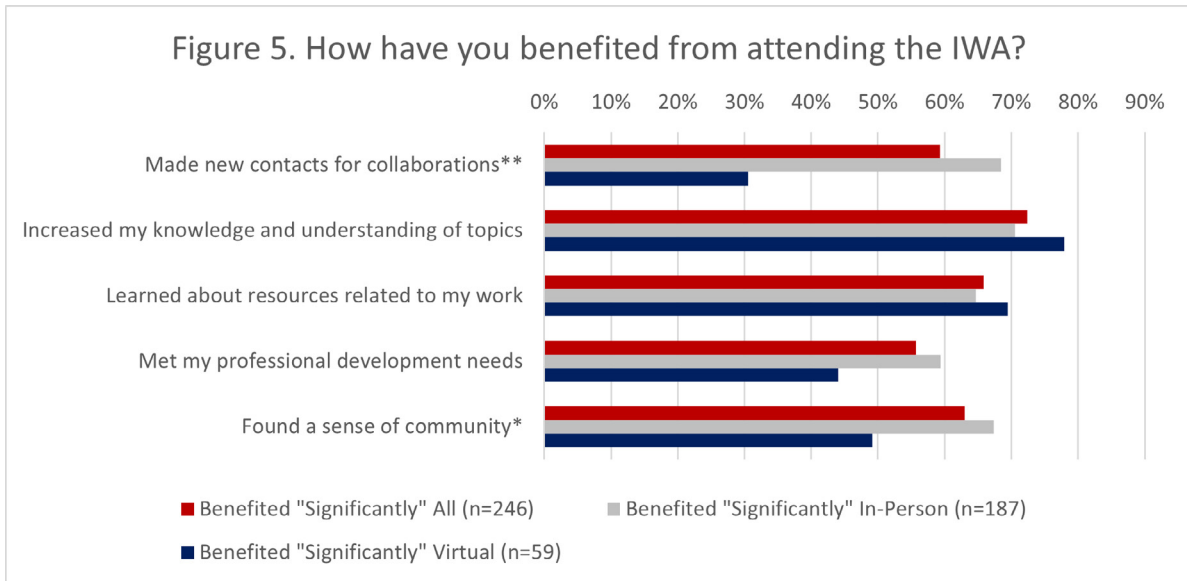
Most practitioners (n=140) planned to develop or improve a marketing strategy (n=78, 61%) and develop new business partnerships (n=58%). Just under half also anticipated that they would improve an existing agritourism enterprise (n=58, 45%) and attract new customers or visitors (n=61, 48%). There was no statistical difference between in-person or virtual attendees for any of the anticipated results (Figure 4).



### Expected Benefits from Attending the International Workshop on Agritourism

Respondents were also asked how they benefited from attending the IWA in both open and closed response questions. The closed question listed five possible benefits and asked respondents to rank their degree of benefit using the following options: Not at all, Somewhat, Significantly, and Not Applicable. The closed question also included an option where respondents could write in a benefit and rank it on the same scale. All but six (n=246) survey respondents answered the closed question.

We compared responses of in-person and virtual attendees to assess if there were any differences in the benefits they reported on the closed question. Because a large proportion of respondents reported at least some benefit in each category, we narrowed our analysis to whether a respondent reported “significantly” benefiting. Our findings are graphed in Figure 5.



Chi-square tests of attendance type with the number of respondents who supported “significantly” benefiting in each category suggest that respondents who attended in person reaped more benefits related to networking and connection. In-person respondents were more likely to report “significantly” benefiting by making new contacts for collaborations ( $p < 0.0001$ ) and finding a sense of community ( $p < 0.05$ ). There was no difference between virtual respondents and in-person respondents for the questions related to educational benefits (“increased my knowledge and understanding of topics” and “learned about resources related to my work”) or for whether the conference met their professional development needs.



## Conclusions

Our findings indicate that a hybrid approach to agritourism programming may be the best practice when possible. Virtual events and virtual attendance at hybrid events make programs more accessible and can widen their geographic reach. Virtual attendance is also highly effective for building knowledge and meeting attendees' professional development needs. However, we found that those who attended the IWA in person were significantly more likely to say they benefited by making new contacts and finding a sense of community. They also mentioned networking and community-related benefits more often in their open responses.

In conclusion, we must assess the different advantages of virtual and in-person modes as we develop programming for education, outreach, and connection. For this study, we investigated a topic in a context highly relevant to Extension: a global community of farmers, researchers, extension professionals, and others working in agritourism. Our findings suggest that virtual programming makes events more accessible and can be just as effective for providing education and professional development. However, in-person connections remain important for networking and community building. The results of our analysis are contextual and relevant for the specific conference studied. Further research examining additional events is needed to better understand the benefits and challenges of virtual gatherings compared to those in-person in a variety of different contexts.

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## Setting the Course for a Sustainable Agritourism Future: Recommendations for Extension and Support Organizations via a National Survey

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### Keywords

support organizations, entrepreneurial ecosystem, survey, challenges, development

### Introduction

The support ecosystem for agritourism is the set of organizations that regulate and/or provide support to agritourism operations, as well as the laws and regulatory framework that influence the environment (positively and negatively) in which agritourism operators make decisions. (c.f. Schmidt et al., 2022; Fernandes & Ferreira, 2022; Stam & Van de Ven, 2021) Direct support may include providing funding or technical assistance, coordination, and advocacy. The support ecosystem includes various players, such as local government bodies, Extension services, producer associations, and tourism organizations. Regulating agritourism businesses can involve federal, state, and local government agencies. The support ecosystem continually adapts to changing perceptions, customer demand, and regulatory measures. Understanding perceptions of support ecosystem players provides useful insight on issues facing agritourism and identifies ways to strengthen the ability of support organizations to serve agritourism operators.

We conducted a survey to gain insights into the assistance provided to agritourism operators by regulatory and support organizations. The wider project objective is to understand the operational environment of these organizations, the types of support available to agritourism operators, and their specific needs. In this article, we report preliminary findings from a subset of survey questions which asked about challenges to developing agritourism and key features of agritourism environments. We then identify a number of implications these hold for support organizations, including the national Cooperative Extension System.

### Data and Methods

To develop the survey, a Delphi method was employed (Burkard et al., 2005; Hughes & Preski, 1997); 33 agritourism experts in the United States, consisting of academic researchers, extension professionals, producer organizations, and lawyers, were asked about the key players in the agritourism support ecosystem and their functions. Using these key informant results and available literature, the research team developed the national agritourism support organization survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed virtually to support organizations from mid-August to mid-October, 2023. Convenience sampling was employed. A list developed by the research team was sent invitations to participate and asked to share the survey with support organizations in their networks. In total, 187 questionnaires were completed.

**Results**

To build an understanding of broad areas where interventions within agritourism ecosystems may improve conditions, the research team asked support organization players to rate the degree to which they believe different community assets challenge agritourism development in their region. The set of assets presented to respondents was based on the Community Capitals Framework. (Emery & Flora, 2021; Flora, 2019) The CCF provides a conceptual structure that is well established within community and economic development work. For our purposes, we included an eighth asset class: market conditions. This allowed the research team to specifically capture a facet of agritourism ecosystems frequently discussed as being of concern.

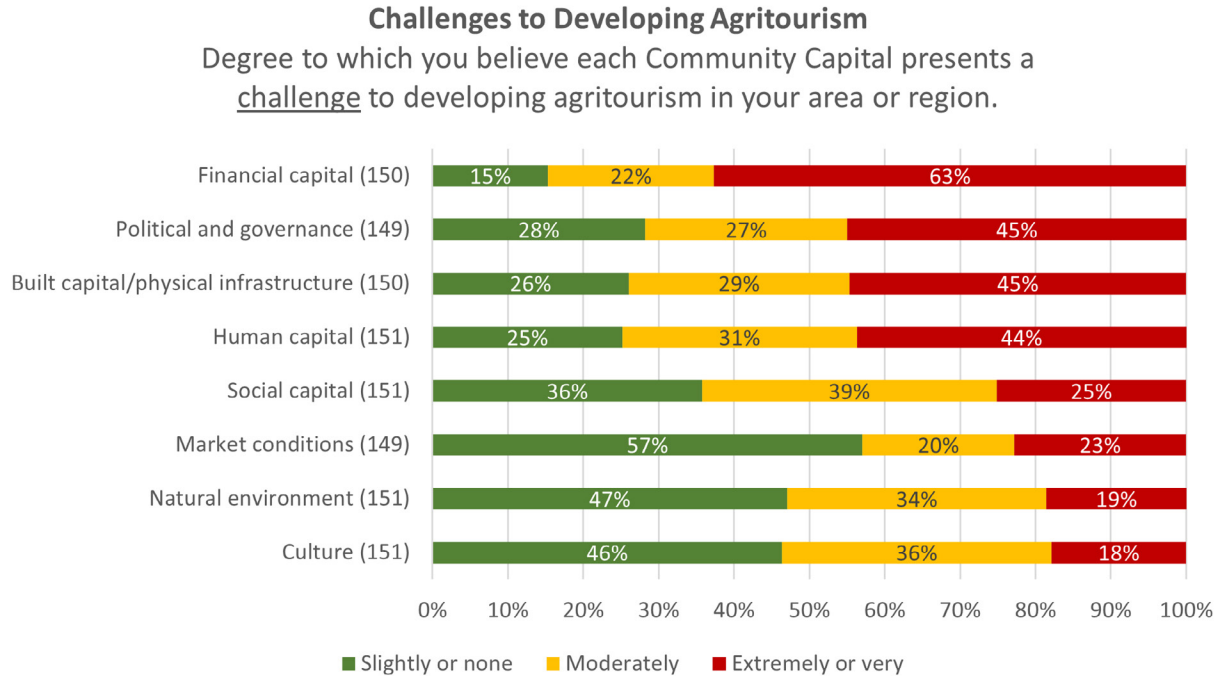


Figure 1. Challenges to developing agritourism proportional frequency of ratings

Respondents rated each capital from 1, “not challenging at all,” to 5, “extremely challenging.” They were provided with the asset category name as well as examples within that category. Figure 1 presents the proportion of responses received grouped into three categories, with the two lower and two upper ratings combined. Results indicate that financial capital is perceived by support organizations as most challenging to efforts at developing agritourism in a region; 63% of the 150 responses indicated it as either “very” or “extremely” challenging. This is followed by political capital and governance, built capital/physical infrastructure, and human capital as the second through fourth most challenging. Notably, market conditions is the least challenging community capital, with more than half (57%) of respondents indicating they view it as not challenging or slightly challenging to agritourism development in their region or area.

Importantly, other survey questions go into greater detail on a number of these capitals. Here, we provide findings and recommendations that touch upon political, built, social, and cultural capital and market conditions. Given the complexity of financial capital environments, we leave this asset area to be discussed via a separate publication dedicated solely to this topic. Additional elements on social, cultural, and human capital are also omitted, to be discussed at length in future work.

### Regulatory Landscape

Degree to which policies create challenges for agritourism businesses in your area.

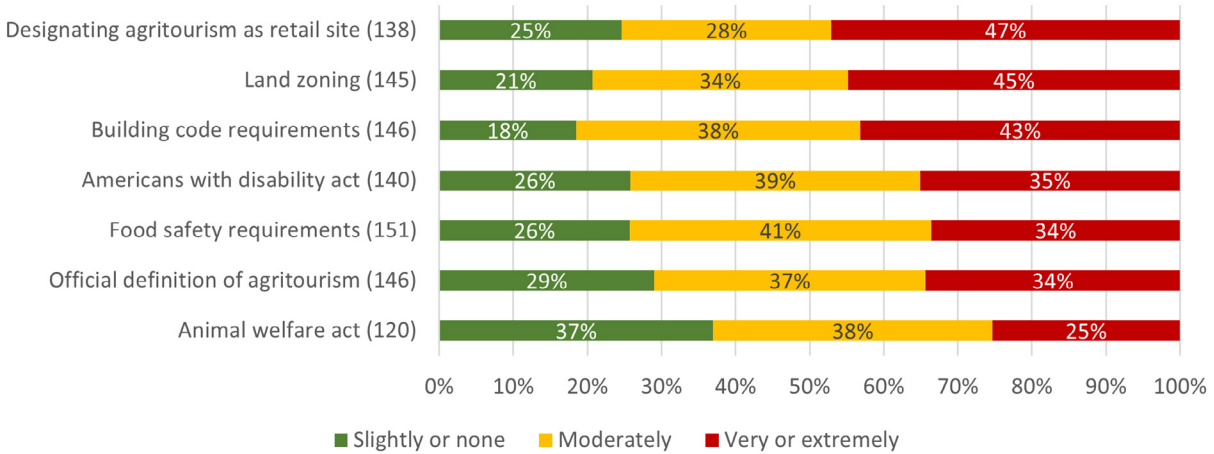


Figure 2. Regulatory landscape proportional frequency of ratings

Related to political capital and governance, respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they believe various policy issues challenge businesses engaged in agritourism activities. The policy issues presented are those that have consistently arisen in the research literature and educational and advocacy programming environments. Ratings were conducted on the same scale utilized for the community assets, with 1 being “not challenging” and 5 being “extremely challenging.” Figure 2 presents the proportion of responses in three combined categories.

The policies of *designating agritourism as retail sites, land zoning, and building code requirements* we indicated most frequently as very or extremely challenging. A substantial proportion of respondents indicated that these three issues were moderately challenging; when considering “moderate,” “very,” and “extremely” responses together, *building code requirements* is the policy seen as most challenging for agritourism operations by support organization players. Notably, each of these three policy areas is typically regulated and enforced at the local level, making education about understanding, navigating, and complying with building codes difficult to accomplish at scale. In addition, one should consider the financial costs and associated barriers businesses may face in conforming with codes.

Respondents were also asked to evaluate several features of their area or region’s agritourism environment from 1, “far too little,” to 5, “far too much.” (See Figure 3.) This included an item about their area’s general policy and regulatory environment. A plurality of respondents (48%) indicated that they felt policies and regulations in their local agritourism environment were “neither too much nor too little” – which we term here as “just enough” for ease of reference. Some 27% of respondents felt there was slightly or far too much policy and regulation related to agritourism in their area or region.

This agritourism environment scale also included items which help us understand market conditions and social and cultural capital. The condition respondents felt was most lacking (slightly or far too little) within their environments was agricultural producers’ interest in agritourism (44%). Also of note is the proportion of respondents (42%) indicating that the variety of products made and highlighted within their local agritourism environment was slightly or far too much. We interpret this as an indication that over-saturation with competing products and

experiences – which may also include those items perceived as not legitimately within the scope of agritourism – may be perceived by support organizations. Conversely, however, demand from visitors/customers is likely strong, with most respondents (53%) rating this as just enough. Similar proportions also rated items related to access (proximity to customer base and ease of access to visit farms) as just enough, both of which have implications not only for market conditions and social and cultural capital, but also for built capital and infrastructure.

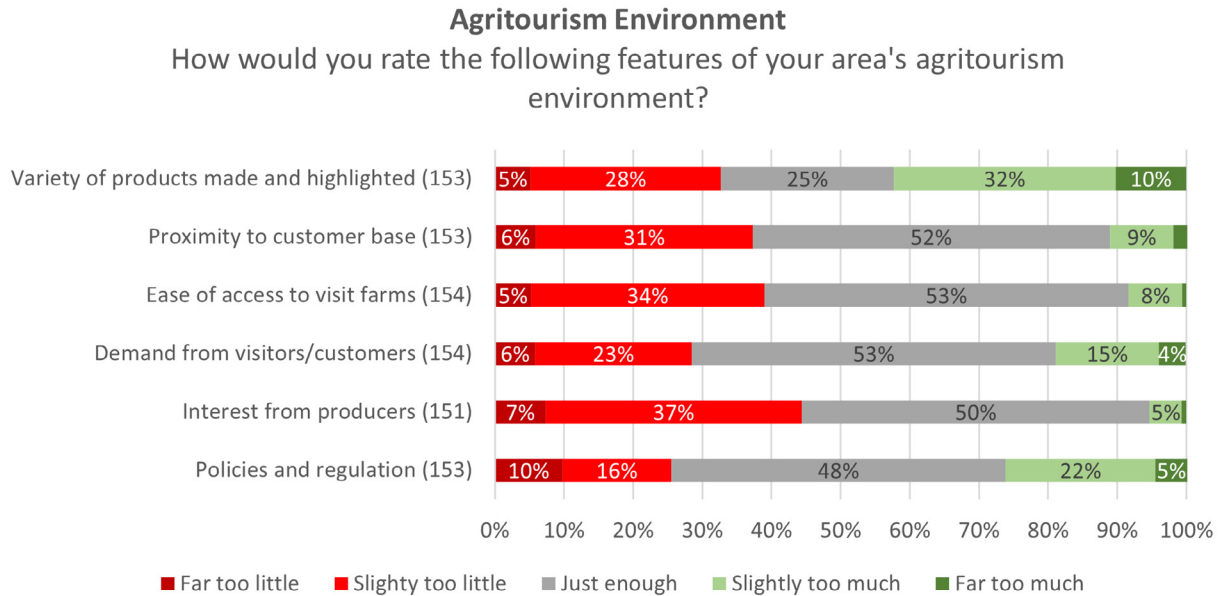


Figure 3. Agritourism environment agritourism proportional frequency of ratings

The topic of *built capital and physical infrastructure* was also touched upon via a question on the tourism destination. This scale asked respondents to rate elements of the wider environment in which agritourism within their region operates. Figure 4 presents the results of this question, with items rated on the same too-little-to-too-much scale. Results indicate that wider destination amenities which complement agritourism are more likely to be under developed than over developed, with all items having greater proportional frequency of responses within the “too little” end of the scale than the “too much.” Standouts were *dining and nightlife availability* and *lodging availability*, for which 54% and 49% of respondents, respectively, indicated there was too little in their destination(s). *Outdoor recreation opportunities* are the most well-developed physical assets within agritourism communities, with 67% of respondents rating this item as just enough.



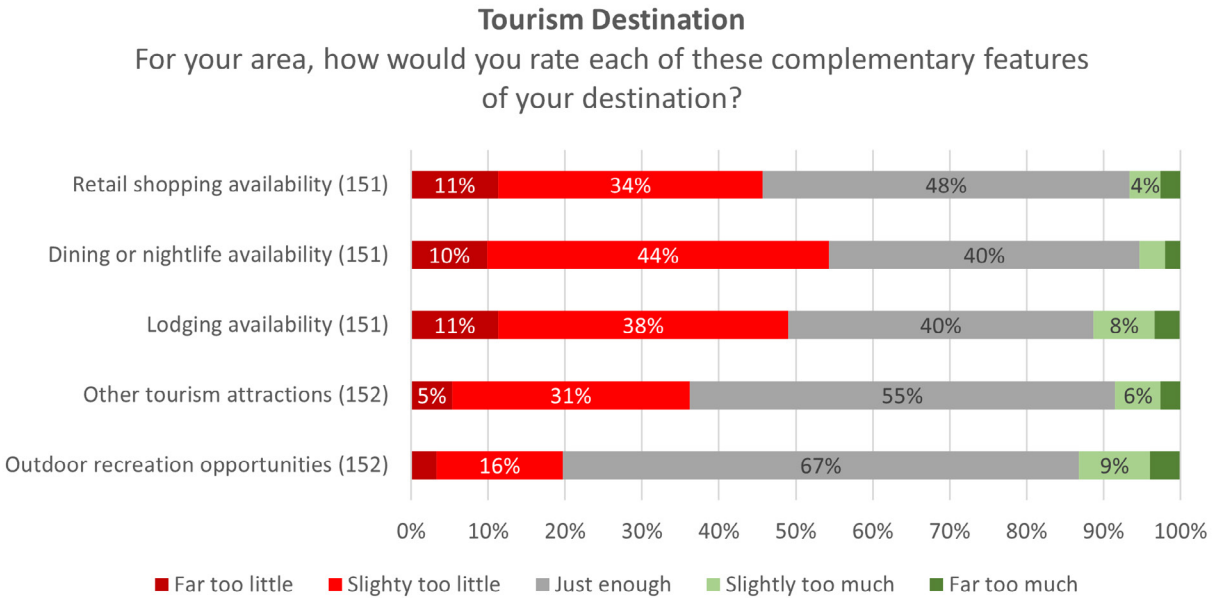


Figure 4. Tourism destination proportional frequency of ratings

### Implications

Findings from our national survey of agritourism support organization players provide insight about investments within the U.S. agritourism ecosystem that may address gaps and positively impact the entrepreneurial environment in which agritourism operations are founded and grown. Priority recommendations based on our findings we feel are most critical include:

- developing tools and programs that help agricultural producers build agritourism enterprises within their operations, including sustainable business models, value propositions, and necessary managerial and technical business skills;
- encouraging innovative approaches that foster the establishment of rural dining, nightlife, and lodging establishments on- or off-farm within agritourism destinations;
- continuing to support the development and sustainable maintenance of outdoor recreation opportunities within agritourism destinations;
- investing in rural infrastructure, particularly transportation and telecommunications, to improve ease of access for customers;
- enhancing knowledge of policy and regulatory impacts on agritourism ventures and identifying the role policy harmonization across jurisdictions and technical assistance programs for operators may have on navigating the regulatory environment;
- providing technical assistance that improves support organization and producer capacity to seek financing and regulatory changes that streamline financial program access.

### Conclusion

Knowledge gained via our study about key community assets available and challenges faced within the agritourism ecosystem of the U.S. has allowed us to set an initial course of action that holds promise to build a more sustainable and successful future for the sector. Support organizations within this ecosystem are critical catalysts for this success and promoting sustainable agritourism growth within localities, regions, and the nation. Recommendations contained within this preliminary assessment are most likely to be implemented by these support

organizations – including the Cooperative Extension and Agricultural Experiment Stations of the Land-Grant University Systems. Further work that can build understanding of financial capital issues within the agritourism ecosystem is needed, and will continue with this project team and others. So too must our community of practice continue to build knowledge of the networks and structures among actors within the agritourism ecosystem so that macro-level interventions at the national and state region and improve the ability of agricultural producers to access the benefits of programs which support them in developing and growing their ventures.

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## Support Required to Develop and Manage an Agri-Tourism Business in South Africa: A Case of the Western Cape

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### Keywords

agri-tourism, South Africa, support, sustainability



Figure 1. Map and flag of South Africa (News Desk, 2020)

### Introduction/Background

South Africa (SA), located at the southern tip of Africa, boasts a remarkable richness in wildlife, landscape, and culture (Lowe, 2019). The country is divided into nine provinces, each with its own executive council, premier, and legislature (South African Government, 2019). Key economic sectors in the country include mining, transport, energy, manufacturing, tourism, and agriculture. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism's contribution to the local GDP surpassed that of agriculture, reaching 3.7% (Statistics South Africa, 2023). This emphasis on tourism development is based on the 1996 White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa, published by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (1996). This policy framework recognized the potential for a strong economic linkage between tourism and agriculture.

While already a significant part of South Africa's economy, agriculture has recently demonstrated significant growth. In the second quarter of 2023, agriculture emerged as the fastest-growing sector in the South African economy (Campbell, 2023). Both tourism and agriculture are recognized as vital sources of job creation. The Western Cape Province illustrates this well, with an estimated 206,000 direct tourism employees in 2016 (Nortjé, 2020) alongside 186,997 agricultural employees in 2017 (Ngcobo, 2017).

The amalgamation of tourism and agriculture is also known as agri-tourism, or farm tourism (Van Zyl, 2019). While gaining popularity internationally, agri-tourism research is still developing in South Africa (Grillini et al., 2022; Rauniyar et al., 2021). Within a South African context, Saayman and Snyman (2005) define agri-tourism as a form of tourism in a rural setting. A recent Google Trends (2024) analysis for the period 2019-2023 revealed "rural tourism" (48%) as the most frequent search term related to agri-tourism in South Africa, followed by "farm tourism" (31%) and "agritourism" (21%). In recent studies, Van Zyl (2019) defines agri-tourism in South Africa as any activity/attraction that entices tourists to visit a working farm for educational purposes, enjoyment, or involvement in daily farm activities. It is important to distinguish agri-tourism from nature reserves managed by government entities such as CapeNature, which fall outside this definition.

South African agri-tourism research has boomed in recent years, with a growing body of literature exploring this diverse industry (Van Zyl et al., 2024). Farm stay, farm tours, hunting, wildlife view and photography, hiking trails, and fishing are particularly popular activities offered by agri-tourism businesses (Van Zyl, 2019). In fact, a nationwide study of farm stay by Rogerson and Rogerson (2014) found that a significant number (73%) offer additional experiences and products beyond accommodation. Research efforts have further delved into specific agri-tourism sectors, including farm stay (Pillay & Rogerson, 2013; Rogerson, 2012; Van Niekerk, 2013), wine tourism (Ferreira & Hunter, 2017; Ferreira & Muller, 2013), and game farms/hunting tourism (Giampiccoli et al., 2013; Pienaar et al., 2017). Rogerson and Rogerson (2014) highlighted economic benefits of agri-tourism for small towns, while Van Zyl and Van der Merwe (2021) identify economic advantages and culture and heritage preservation as key motivators for farmers to participate in agri-tourism.

The transition from a traditional agricultural enterprise to including agri-tourism activities may be challenging. To navigate these complexities, many farmers seek support and information through membership in relevant organizations (Li & Barbieri, 2020). While Çetin (2015) argues that government support is essential for agri-tourism success, Yang (2012) found that not all countries provide government support for agri-tourism farmers. Unfortunately, South Africa faces several obstacles in this area, including the absence of government resources specifically allocated to agri-tourism, an absence of comprehensive policies addressing its unique needs, and limited support from non-government organizations for these farmers (Chikuta & Makacha, 2016; Van Zyl, 2019).

## Methods

Employing a qualitative research approach, the study utilized semi-structured interviews with 33 participants (farmers) actively engaged in agri-tourism on their farm. These participants were identified through an internet search targeting diverse agri-tourism activities and geographical locations within the Western Cape Province. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants specifically from the Western Cape Province, chosen as the study area due to its unique characteristics. The province was selected based on various reasons: the high concentration of agri-tourism offering within the province (Van Zyl & Saayman, 2019), its well-developed tourism sector (Tibane, 2020), the presence of numerous top tourist attractions (Hastings, 2020), and its popularity among international visitors (Western Cape Government, 2019).

Drawn on a comprehensive literature review, the interview questions centered on the development of participants' agri-tourism businesses and the diverse range of support available within the Western Cape Province. The discussions also explored the resources participants utilized during the initial stages of establishing their agri-tourism ventures. Data was analyzed

utilizing the six steps of Creswell (2009). The data were prepared, manually coded, and finally analyzed and compared to existing literature. Results yielded four key themes.

### Findings

Twelve of the 30 participants who contributed to these results did not report receiving any support during their agri-tourism development stage. Despite the lack of external assistance, many expressed satisfaction with their independent establishment and growth. These participants did not exhibit a desire for additional support. However, their narratives did reveal challenges associated with accessing support, including overly complex application processes, limited accessibility to resources, and perceived mismanagement of support programs.

#### Participants stated:

*"I haven't used any of those and I feel there is just a lot of red-tape involved in it. I've done everything myself. I've financed everything myself. In fact, I didn't even borrow any money"* – P04

*"It depends on what they want in return. It is not worth it to us"* – P09

However, some participants who didn't receive support expressed that receiving assistance may have been beneficial. For instance, P05 & P12 indicated a preference for non-government support, particularly for aspects related to the tourism side of their business, rather government intervention. Financial aid was also mentioned as a potential area of interest.

#### Participants stated:

*"Definitely, any support of any kind can only be positive"* – P08

In contrast, the remaining twenty participants acknowledged receiving some form of external support, with government sources being most prevalent. Based on their responses, three main support structures were identified: local tourism offices, CapeNatures and other tourism organizations.

#### Local Tourism Office:

Eight participants benefited from membership at their local tourism offices. These offices played an active role in marketing and promoting their farms and agri-tourism activities.

#### Participants stated:

*"We actually tried from the beginning to join the tourist office in town and be part of everything there. We pay our membership fees."* – P12

#### CapeNature:

Six participants specifically cited support from CapeNature, the provincial organization responsible for wildlife management, hunting regulations, and conservation efforts. These farms, with a focus on wildlife and hunting, faced rigorous regulations governing various aspects of their operations. Examples include obtaining annual permits and managing tourist interactions with animals.

#### Participants stated:

*"The information body that you approach is Cape Nature in this province. They have a certain set of rules. We also need a yearly inspection. They would look at your facilities; they would look at your fencing, your safety plans, your management plans. They would advise or approve it."* – P03



### Other Tourism Organizations:

The remaining six participants mentioned engagement with various other tourism organizations, predominantly within the wine sector. While the wine sector is subject to extensive government regulations, numerous independent organizations offer support in areas like training, financing, information dissemination, and marketing for wine farms. Examples include CATHSSETA (Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Sector Education and Training Authorities), VinPro, WTSA (Wine Training South Africa), WOSA (Wines of South Africa), and WESGRO (Western Cape Tourism, Trade and Investment Promotion Agency).

### Participants stated:

*"I think it is necessary that you belong to a tourism body. If you are in wine, just to make marketing bigger, awareness of the district."* – P14

*"No, it will change the entire identity of the farmstall. This is unique to the [farm owner and his wife], you will not find [another] farmstall like this."* – P13

The four identified themes all contribute significantly to understanding if and what kind of support is needed for agri-tourism farmers. However, it is crucial to consider these findings within the context of each farm's primary agricultural activity.

### Discussion

This study revealed two main types of support for agri-tourism farmers: financial and marketing assistance. While government organizations emerged as the primary source of external support, non-governmental organizations also offered valuable assistance to agri-tourism farmers.

Given the current absence of a dedicated regulatory body for agri-tourism in South Africa, the first critical step is to develop a comprehensive policy or set of guidelines. Both government and non-government organizations should actively collaborate in this process and invest substantially in the future development of agri-tourism. Initiatives such as financial and educational programs could assist farmers in establishing and managing their agri-tourism business effectively. Additionally, promoting access to diverse forms of external support from both government and non-government organizations could incentivize more farmers to consider entering the agri-tourism sector.

There are, however, certain limitations to this study. Firstly, the selection of the Western Cape Province, while based on sound reasoning, restricts the generalizability of the findings to other regions. Secondly, the sampling method excluded agri-tourism businesses without any online presence, potentially limiting the representativeness of the sample. Future research within a South African context should address these limitations by replicating this case study in other provinces. Furthermore, exploring marketing strategies that target both local and international tourists could be valuable. Finally, investigating the specific needs of agri-tourists would provide valuable insights for farmers seeking to enhance their agri-tourism offerings through potential additions and modifications.

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## RURAL TOURISM

### The West Virginia Sustainable Rural Tourism Webinar Series

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#### Keywords

Extension education, sustainable tourism, rural tourism, destination management

#### Introduction/Background

Rural destinations face considerable challenges as they work to promote economic prosperity through tourism, including limited funding for marketing and development, limited capacity, and perhaps most importantly balancing the competing objectives of increasing visitation while simultaneously managing growth and maintaining a sense of place (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). In many rural areas, convention and visitor bureaus (CVBs) are the primary and often sole destination marketing/management organization (DMO). While marketing remains their primary role, literature and best practices advocate for DMO's increased attention to coordinating the development of the destination's tourism product base and managing the tourism system in a way that is sustainable and equitable for the diversity of stakeholders.

The Destination NEXT Futures Study provides data and insights that could serve as a strategic roadmap for the next generation of destination organizations. The 2023 study makes it clear that destination organizations are evolving as community leaders and reinforces the accelerated expansion of destination organizations beyond destination marketing to destination development and management. Where once DMOs were tasked solely with a marketing approach to tourism, there is a recognized need to move towards a management role that includes adapting to technological changes, managing tourist expectations, mitigating impacts, confronting new avenues of competition, recognizing creative partnerships, and finding new measures of success (Gretzel et al., 2006).

This is exacerbated by limited training, research, and capacity to assume expanded roles. While West Virginia's scenic highways, mountain vistas, and outdoor recreation have long provided tourism opportunities for the state, the pandemic, coupled with remote work options and a new national park, has elevated the interest from visitors to the Mountain State. With that enhanced interest comes opportunities and the need for an increased emphasis in helping to ensure communities are equipped with resources and knowledge to sustain those tourism opportunities long term. Through partnerships and collaboration, West Virginia University Extension has been working to enhance rural tourism opportunities.

To help community members, tourism operators and other leaders better understand the principles of sustainable rural tourism and discuss application opportunities in West Virginia, West Virginia University Extension experts hosted a yearlong monthly webinar series to provide participants with knowledge and resources to incorporate sustainable tourism principles into their

communities throughout the state. The “Sustainable Rural Tourism” webinar series illustrates basic principles and demonstrates how individuals can apply them collaboratively to further enhance the future of tourism in West Virginia and their local community and destination.

**Methods**

WVU Extension faculty developed the Sustainable Rural Tourism webinar series to help practitioners learn and share best practices using interactive and engaging discussions. Sessions were designed to illustrate basic principles of sustainable tourism and demonstrate how individuals can apply them collaboratively to enhance tourism in West Virginia. Academic research, Extension outreach, and the experiences of industry leaders illustrate concepts and showcase examples from across the state.

The theoretical framework for the webinar series and practical applications from local tourism leadership were established and highlighted in research conducted by Eades and Arbogast (2022) to better understand rural destination management innovation and collaboration in Appalachia and opportunities for Extension. The research outcomes made it clear that industry leaders needed more formal training in sustainable destination management to fully grasp the economic, social, and environmental aspects and impacts of tourism, and reinforced a role for Extension as a convener, network builder, and conduit between academic research and the lived experiences of destination leaders.

The WVU Extension team partnered with Don Anderson, Executive Partner of the Destination Consultancy Group and founder of the Certified Destination Management Executive (CDME) Program to adapt the destination management framework utilized by the CDME program for rural destinations (see Figure 1). Don offered his time as an advisor and guest speaker for the webinar series gratis to support us in helping rural destinations understand the principles of sustainable destination management.

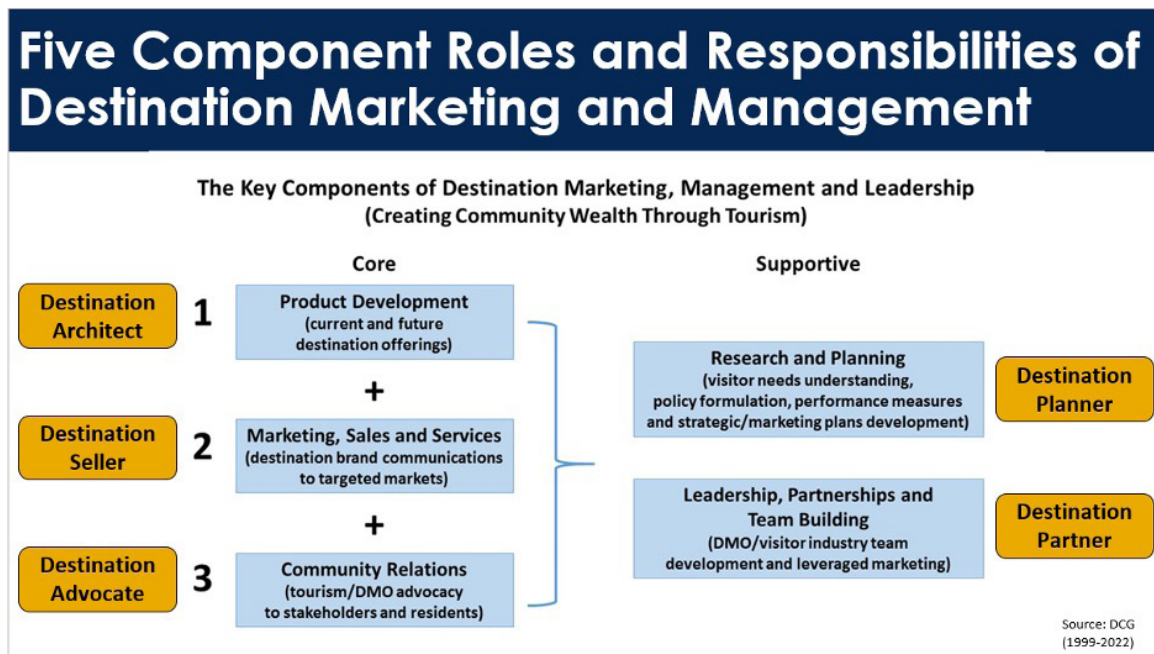


Figure 1. Destination Management Roles and Responsibilities

The team delivered twelve monthly Zoom/web-based educational sessions during 2022. Archived presentations are available on YouTube. Presentation slides, notes, and other related materials were shared with participants and posted to the WVU Extension website (<https://extension.wvu.edu/community-business-safety/tourism-hospitality/sustainable-tourism>). Sessions lasted one hour and included both theoretical grounding using a lecture format and content from guest speakers to illustrate how sustainable tourism practices are implemented. Guest speakers drew on examples from across the state while engaging participants in interactive discussions. Speakers included university faculty, community economic and tourism development partners, rural destination stakeholders, and industry leaders from the state, region, and nation focusing on topics such as asset-based frameworks, building capacity through participatory approaches, destination management, using data for informed decision-making, local and regional planning, resource acquisition, and practical approaches for application and implementation (see Figure 2).

## 2022 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM WEBINARS

January 31, 11 a.m.

*Intro to Sustainable Rural Tourism Development*

February 28, 11 a.m.

*Sustainable Rural Tourism and West Virginia: Lessons Learned*

March 28, 11 a.m.

*Marketing vs. Management*

April 25<sup>th</sup> 11 a.m.

*What is a Destination Management Organization?*

May 23, 11 a.m.

*The Role of Extension and Non-traditional Stakeholders*

June 27, 11 a.m.

*Leadership and Capacity*

July 25, 11 a.m.

*Making Informed Decisions – Tourism Area Lifecycle Model and Destination Assessments*

August 29, 11 a.m.

*Making Informed Decisions – Understanding Secondary Data and Collecting and Interpreting Primary Data*

September 26, 11 a.m.

*Product Development: Participatory Planning and Action Using GIS and Participatory Design*

October 31, 11 a.m.

*Product Development: Comprehensive Planning and Tourism*

November 28, 11 a.m.

*Product Development: A Tourism Master Plan – What, How, Why*

December 19, 11 a.m.

*Sustainable Rural Tourism: Funding Tourism Development*

Figure 2. 2022 Monthly Webinar Topics



### Findings

The program reached 181 unique attendees between January and November. Attendance ranged from 21 to 92 participants with an average attendance of 40. In addition to these direct contacts, the YouTube videos received 496 views; an average of 49 views per session. Of note is the interest from a broad range of organizations and agencies, which highlights the opportunities to form broader partnership networks to implement destination management strategies. Figure 3 shows a typical breakdown of session attendees by role in their community/destination.

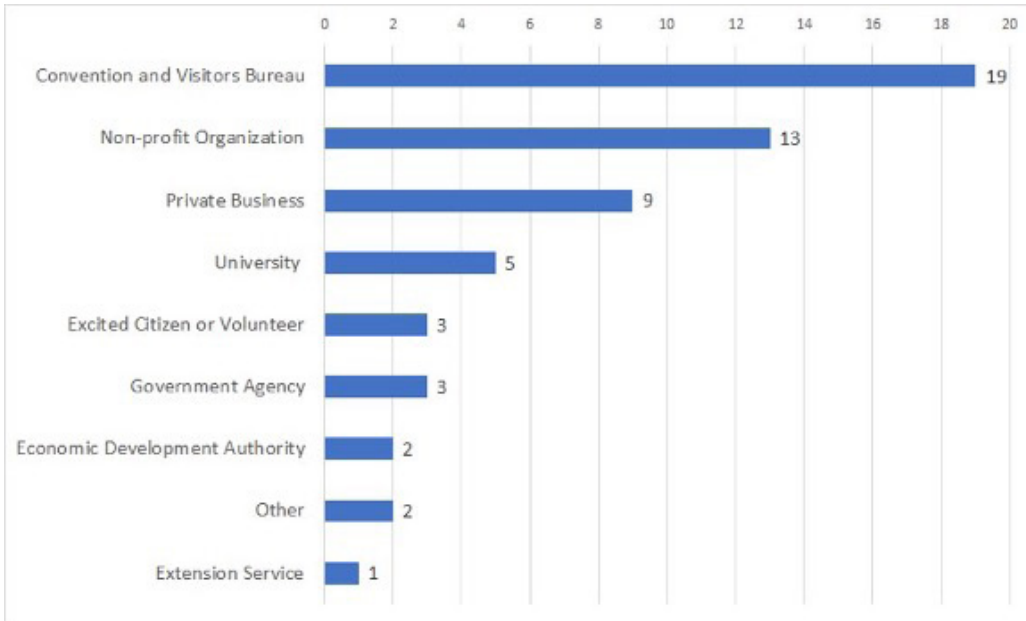


Figure 3. Webinar Attendance By Role in Community/Destination

Polls conducted during webinars demonstrate increases in content-area knowledge and anticipated changes in behavior and practice. Attendees demonstrated that they recognized the need for their organization to balance shared governance (partnerships and team building, community relations), leadership and planning, and product development with more traditional marketing roles most often undertaken by CVBs and local DMOs (see Figure 4).

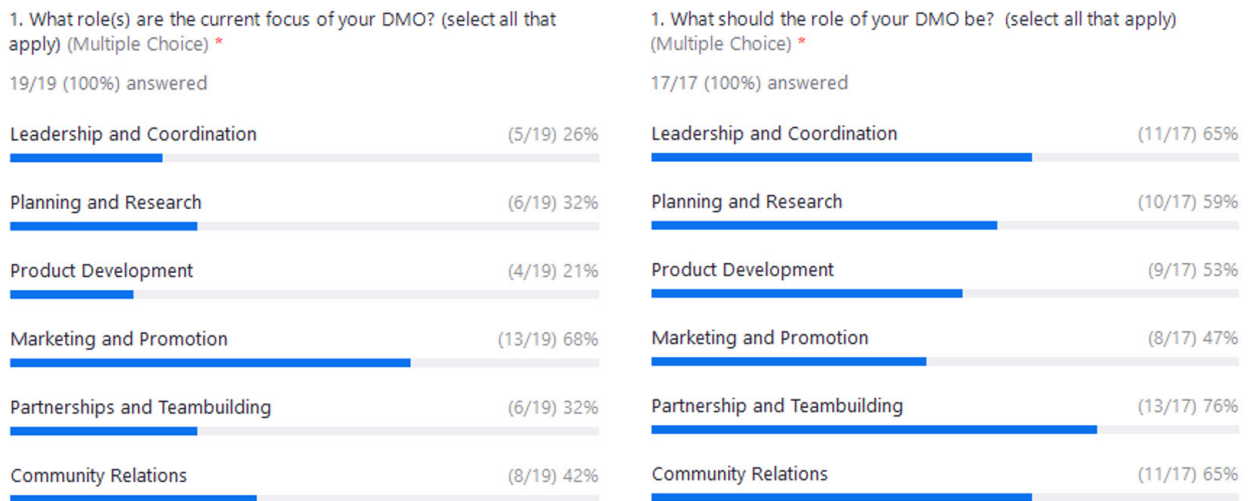


Figure 4. Sustainable Tourism Development Webinar Attendees’ Current and Anticipated Destination Management Focus Areas

Actions taken on issues and follow-through on decisions made by attendees included a request to facilitate strategic planning sessions with the Hardy County CVB board in January 2023 to identify destination management roles and activities, a local Extension agent being asked to serve on the Visit Fayetteville (CVB) board (beginning January 2023) with the board hoping to leverage this relationship with WVU Extension to implement sustainable tourism principles and practices in the destination and following the webinar on research strategies and recognizing the importance of data collection and monitoring, and the Pocahontas County CVB contracted with faculty in the WVU Recreation Parks and Tourism Resources program to collect visitation and spending data at sites across the county and provide economic impact estimates.

### **Discussion**

The West Virginia Sustainable Tourism webinar series was a direct outgrowth of a need identified in research by Eades and Arbogast (2022). It has been rewarding to see that research translate to new, rigorous Extension programming. The WVUES team involved in this project represented a cohesive blend of subject matter expertise and key local knowledge to teach best practices in sustainable rural tourism development and the critical elements of destination management. Engagement with industry leaders and funders has led to fruitful conversations about the expansion of Extension programs in the community and new educational programs and materials for practitioners across the state.

While our examples are specific to West Virginia, the best practices discussed are applicable to destinations (and communities) across the country. Engagement with industry leaders and funders has led to fruitful conversations about program expansion and new programming opportunities, topics, and materials for Extension professionals and practitioners across the state and potentially in the northeast and southern regions through partnerships with Extension colleagues and the Regional Rural Development Centers including a proposal to expand the webinar content into a certificate program in rural destination management for rural DMOs and Extension faculty.

Challenges remain to successfully implementing the strategies and lessons presented in the webinars. Interest and awareness for transitioning from a marketing approach to a management approach were piqued, and webinar attendees recognized the need for their organization to balance shared governance, leadership and planning, and product development with more traditional marketing roles. Capacity, funding, and resources remain limited and are major obstacles to moving from awareness to action.

WVU Extension could play a critical role in providing local capacity and technical assistance, yet there are currently few Extension agents in the state engaged in this work. Team members continue to establish relationships with partners across campus to enhance the services that can be offered to local leadership through Extension and academic faculty and student engagement. Several follow-up meetings have been held to explore how state and county faculty can better partner and strategically deliver programming. Thus, we continue to work to identify methods to build local capacity and provide resources that can advance local strategies and contribute to outcomes beyond raising awareness.

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## Role of Women in the Drink Tourism Industry and the Potential Impacts on Rural Economic Development

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### Keywords

women, rural development, drink tourism, resiliency, diversity

### Introduction

Drink tourism has demonstrated its ability to provide opportunities for rural economic development. Knollenberg et al. (Knollenberg et al., 2021) state that for communities to maximize the economic benefits from tourism, they must attract visitors by promoting their assets, such as recreational opportunities, community services, and importantly, diverse food and beverage offerings. The ever-expanding craft beverage industry has shown it can be an important community asset. Beyond simply purchasing beverages, tourists and residents alike commune through experiences at breweries, wineries, and distilleries (Taylor et al., 2020). Experiences include tastings, food-pairings, music festivals, weddings, scenic views, and food fairs, for example. For some, the availability of these experiences motivate their travel and destination choices (Curtis et al., 2020; Kline et al., 2017) as well as residential location preferences (Reid & Gatrell, 2017).

At the same time, the participation of women in entrepreneurship can enhance economic development, especially in rural areas (Albrecht, 2014). Why? Studies show that women often have better leadership skills, due to preferences for teamwork, and a high capacity to innovate and problem-solve (Rafi, 2020). Women are also more likely to volunteer in their community (city councils, planning, destination/tourism), as well as share skills and new knowledge, leading to mentoring and capacity building (Sajjad et al., 2020). Women are more likely to develop social networks, which is an important component of resiliency in the small business literature (Majokweni & Molnar, 2021).

Women are also better suited to manage businesses and products targeting women, and wine is currently heavily promoted, for better or worse, to women. For example, the New York Times published an article in 2022 entitled "Marketing Wine as a Respite for Harried Wine Women" (Newman, 2022) and one winery's, Chateau Ste. Michelle, promotional efforts use an "engage-with rather than talk-at approach," asking women to share where and how they enjoy wine (Landers, n.d). Finally, a woman's participation in entrepreneurial activities not only supports her family income but also plays a significant role in economic development and social well-being of her community (Sajjad et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, the drink tourism industry is currently heavily dominated by white males and is lacking in diversity in general. In 2021, wineries independently owned by women made up only

5% of wineries in California and Oregon and only 3% of those in Washington (Darling, 2021). And Washington State had 1,000 bonded wineries, but only two were owned by Black Americans. Due to mounting sexual assault and racism claims brought by women working in the brewing industry, Bob Pease, then president and chief executive of the Brewers Association, stated, "Considering the volume and severity of the testimonials from women across the industry, the number of concerns raised and discussed among our leadership has been significant. We are unable to enforce changes at the brewery level, but we recognize that as an industry we need to do more to build a more inclusive and respectful brewing community" (Bloch, 2021).

Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine resiliency factors in rural drink tourism enterprises, building on previous work on rural winery resiliency research conducted by Curtis and Slocum (2021), while also examining the opportunities and hurdles for women in the drink tourism industry in the western U.S. through a survey of wineries, breweries, and distilleries. Here we highlight differences in perceived opportunities across the two drink tourism industries and between women and men respondents.

## Methods

Data were collected through two online Qualtrics surveys conducted in the fall of 2022. One survey focused on wineries and the other on breweries/distilleries across eight western states. A directory of applicable businesses was assembled and included 3200 wineries and 1750 breweries/distilleries. Survey invites were sent out via email and the owner/manager, head winemaker, head brewer, or similar were requested to respond. The survey included questions across a broad range of categories including but not limited to business details and structure, product and service offerings, including tourism and events, marketing methods, local business resources and networks, COVID-19 related challenges and adjustments, career opportunities (professional development, education, flexible work schedules, etc.), and opportunities and hurdles for women in the business and the industry in general. Questions, 40 in total, were devised to gather appropriate data as to assess the potential resiliency of drink tourism providers per recent literature which finds the following factors of resiliency including, but not limited to, business ownership structure, labor force, product and production size, financial status and year in business, markets and marketing practices, social capital and networks, and business culture (Curtis & Slocum, 2021; Slocum & Kline, 2014; Ahmed et al., 2004).

In total, there were 37 winery and 57 brewery/distillery responses. Of those, 30 winery and 50 brewery/distillery responses were usable. The winery responses included nine women and 21 men respondents (30% women), 14% of the wineries were established in the last 10 years, and 70% were established between 11 and 30 years ago. Respondents were primarily the owner or manager (79%) of the winery, and all were family-owned wineries. Just over two-thirds (70%) had 10 employees or less, and 21% had between 11 and 25 employees.

The brewery/distillery responses included 15 women and 25 men respondents (30% women). The majority (80%) of the breweries/distilleries were established in the last 10 years. Also, the majority (82%) of the respondents were the owner/manager, 67% were family owned, and 50% had 10 employees or less and 30% had from 11 to 25 employees.

## Findings

Table 1 provides an overview of the women respondents' perceived opportunities for women for both the winery and brewery/distillery surveys. We see that women's earnings at breweries were viewed as more or less equal to men's, but that was not the case for wineries. Just under half, or 44% of the women winery respondents felt their earnings were below their male counterparts.

One thing to note, however, is that the brewery respondents were a lot more unsure (47%) of the salary differences. The opportunities for advancement and promotion were viewed as similar to those of their male counterparts by all respondents, but again the brewery respondents were more unsure (33%). Finally, women winery respondents felt their work environment was supportive in terms of flexible work schedules, maternity leave, etc., but the brewery respondents felt less so (78%).

Question Description	Response Choice	Winery	Brewery
Are your opportunities for employment and advancement/promotion equal to your male counterparts on average?	Definitely not	0%	0.00%
	Probably not	0%	0.00%
	Unsure	11%	33%
	Probably yes	44%	27%
	Definitely yes	45%	40%
Are your earnings equal to your male counterparts on average?	Definitely not	11%	0%
	Probably not	33%	6%
	Unsure	11%	47%
	Probably yes	22%	7%
	Definitely yes	22%	40%
Is the business supportive of family obligations, such as flexible work hours, maternity leave, etc.?	Definitely not	0%	0%
	Probably not	0%	0%
	Unsure	0%	0%
	Probably yes	0%	22%
	Definitely yes	100%	78%

Table 1. Respondent Perceived Opportunities for Women

Table 2 provides an overview of the differences in women’s and men’s perceptions of their opportunities. A much lower percentage of women respondents at both the wineries and breweries rated their opportunities for advancement/promotion as excellent than the men respondents. In fact, the difference was 14% for both. Interestingly, women respondents rated their opportunities for mentoring, education, remote work, etc., higher in general than the men respondents, except for mentoring and management training for winery respondents and management training for brewery respondents. None of the women brewery respondents felt they had opportunities for management training.

Question Description	Response Choice	Winery - Women	Winery - Men	Brewery - Women	Brewery - Men
How would you rate the opportunities for advancement/promotion?	Not applicable	11%	29%	7%	17%
	Poor	0%	0%	7%	3%
	Average	11%	24%	33%	23%
	Good	56%	23%	20%	20%
	Very good	22%	9%	26%	15%
	Excellent	0%	14%	7%	21%
Which of the following opportunities are provided to you at the business or through a local association?	Mentoring	4%	7%	13%	9%
	Flexible work hours	26%	12%	15%	13%
	Remote work	4%	5%	13%	7%
	Family/maternity leave	9%	9%	8%	6%
	Professional development	22%	19%	16%	17%
	Tuition or education credit reimbursement	9%	7%	8%	4%
	Conference attendance	22%	19%	23%	20%
	Management/decision training	4.3%	9%	0%	11%

Table 2. Difference in Women’s and Men’s Opportunities



When asked about the primary obstacles or issues for women at the business and/or in the industry, the following were mentioned by brewery/distillery respondents:

- Broader societal issues—lack of support for childcare in society as a whole, less encouragement to explore the field and the options there.
- Not enough jobs and everyone assumes women do not want to work in the brewery or that they like beer.
- Lack of financing, investment and community of female peers. No male interest or support in changing the industry.
- Being taken seriously, and that we know as much about beer as men do.
- At this brewery, we actively seek to hire and promote women and POC. It's a bit tougher in the greater industry, which leans heavily white male.

Respondents from the winery industry mentioned the following obstacles:

- Breaking through the male-dominated cellars.
- Traditionally women manage the tasting room, and it is somewhat more difficult to have a greater impact (greater significance) in the winemaking process or harvest, due to long standing traditions of migrant work in the area or generational farming as a gendered profession.
- Too many men in positions of power that just want to hire other men that are just like them.
- Male-dominated culture at the management level, heavy female culture at the hospitality level.

## Discussion

These results paint an interesting picture of the differences in the perceived opportunities for women and men in the drink tourism industry. Despite the rather bleak image of the brewing industry (Jags, 2021; Chapman & Brunsmas, 2020) as a supportive work environment for women, results show that the women brewery respondents felt their opportunities were equal or greater than those of the men respondents across seven of eight measures. This could be due in large to the small number of respondents in our sample, an industry move to enhance opportunities for women, or random chance. The apparent lack of understanding of employment opportunities and salary ranges is troubling, as well as the perceived lack of opportunities for management training. For women in the winery industry, they also felt well supported, but the lack of mentoring and opportunities for management training, and the disparities in earnings between women and men in the same positions is concerning. For men in both industries, it seems their opportunities for remote work and flexible schedules are lower than for women, indicating potential gender bias in policies, also concerning.

While these two drink tourism providers provide a similar product for their visitors, in fact, they are very different industries behind the scenes and the current roles of women within them also very different. For example, it's more common for women in the wine industry to run the tasting room and events, as well as handle marketing functions. Head winemakers and owners are almost always men. But in the brewing industry, women tend to be involved in all aspects of the business, including head brewer positions. Additionally, the wine industry in the U.S. tends to be older and established, while the craft brewing industry has greatly expanded over the last two decades. Our sample reflects this as well. Stark cultural differences create distinguished dynamics and breaking "traditions" of excluding women from ownership and management, especially in the wine industry, will take time (Darling, 2021).

Communities seeking to lure drink tourism providers to enhance their assets and tourism offerings will need to carefully consider the culture of those businesses and the labor force they may bring in or recruit from the local community.

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## ENGAGING WITH SPECIFIC AUDIENCES

### Assessing the Role of Travel on Retirement Decisions in North Carolina

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#### Keywords

retirement, research, destination organization, collaboration

#### Introduction

The US population aged 65 and older grew five times faster than the total US population from 2010 to 2020 (Caplan, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further increased the retired population of the US (Frye, 2021; Li, 2022). Retirees generally have more disposable income and leisure time and contribute to the economic growth of state economies and communities, as they spend more money—including major purchases (e.g., new homes), bring wealth from other states and sources of income (e.g., pensions), and often volunteer and support economic development. In line with this trend, travel by retirement-aged adults has also been steadily growing over the past two decades (Federal Highway Administration, 2019). In North Carolina (NC), retirement has been on the rise more so than in most places in the US (Villanova, 2023).

While research on moving for or during retirement is easy to find, there is less formal research on tourism and travel's relationship with retirement migration. Moving in retirement is likely driven primarily by broader economic and social conditions, with tourism features as a secondary consideration for moves (Kuentzel & Ramaswamy, 2005). Data show that previous travel to an area makes an individual more likely to retire there, specifically as it relates to vacation and leisure travel (Draper, 2009; Hudson et al., 2019). In addition, visiting to look for a community to permanently relocate further confirmed the decision to move (Draper 2009). Related, second home ownership in an area increases the likelihood of retiring to that area, which researchers surmise is due to increased community ties to an area (Myers & Muschkin, 1993). While, overall, the number of visits alone has not been found to have a significant effect on the decision to move, there is anecdotal support that visiting a destination at least three to five times increases the likelihood of retiring to that location (Carlson et al., 1998; Hudson et al., 2019).

For nearly 15 years, NC has had a legislative mandate to invest in retirement. Toward this end, the state has prioritized attracting retirees and establishing certified retirement communities (i.e., an application process to recognize communities for providing amenities, services, and opportunities retirees enjoy). This NC retirement program, Retire NC, is now housed in the state destination marketing organization, Visit NC. In 2022, Visit NC reached out to NC State Tourism Extension to support research needs in understanding travel's role in retirement decisions.

#### Methods

Using previous research and input from Retire NC, NC retirement communities, and researchers familiar with the sample population, the NC State Tourism Extension team developed a survey for potential and current retirees. The survey was sent through the Retire NC listserv, an opt-in for

anyone interested in learning more about retirement in NC (~30,000 individuals) in April 2023. Total survey responses were 1,448 (~5% response rate), with 1,254 usable responses.

**Results**

Respondents were retired (65%) with an average retirement year of 2020 and average age of 65. The majority had not yet moved for retirement with only 19% having already moved. Respondents were typically male (56%), racially identified as white (84%), and married (71%); 63% had a four-year degree or higher with a medium-income between \$100,000 and 150,000, much higher than the median US income (\$54,000). Almost a quarter lived in NC at the time of the survey, while the other 76% lived out of NC. The majority of these out-of-state respondents were from the Northeast (40%) or South (40%).

To provide a better understanding of respondents’ prior travel and its role in retirement decisions, the research team developed a travel index consisting of four variables previous research had identified as being linked to retirement decisions. Combining these four variables in this study allowed the research team to analyze the retirement decisions based on a single variable (i.e., the travel index, Figure 1). The variables used in the travel index include the number of visits to NC in the past ten years, visits to NC for vacation/ leisure, visits to NC for retirement planning, and if they have ever owned a second home in NC.



Figure 1. Four variables used to calculate the travel index.

Respondents indicated, on average, they took at least seven trips to NC in the past ten years, with about a third indicating they traveled within NC 11 times or more during that time (Figure 2). Visiting for vacation was included in a broader question asking about the reason for visiting NC; two-thirds (65%) of respondents indicated they had visited for vacation (Figure 3).

**NC Trips in Past 10 Years**

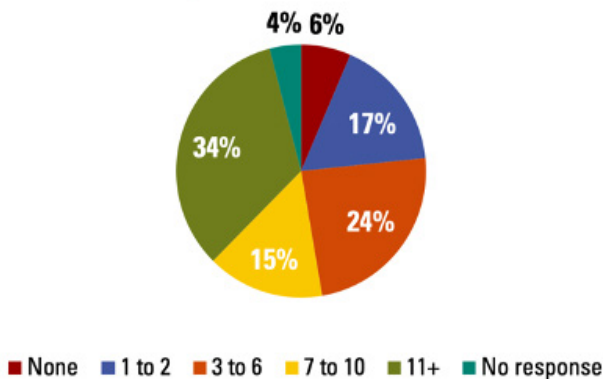


Figure 2. Respondent-reported number of trips to NC in the past ten years (n=1,254).

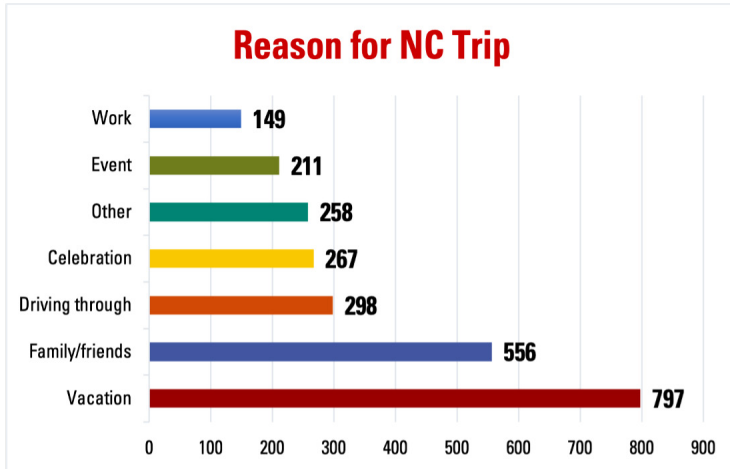


Figure 3. Respondent-reported reason for trip(s) to NC in the past ten years. Respondents could select multiple reasons (n=1,254).

It was also valuable to know how many times respondents had traveled to NC specifically for retirement planning, and two-thirds of respondents had visited at least once for retirement planning (Figure 4). The next highest option was four or more times, suggesting that if you visit potential destinations, you'll probably go to that location more than once. When asked if respondents had ever or currently owned a home in NC, most had not (88.7%), with 9% of out-of-state respondents as second homeowners and 20% of in-state respondents (Figure 5).

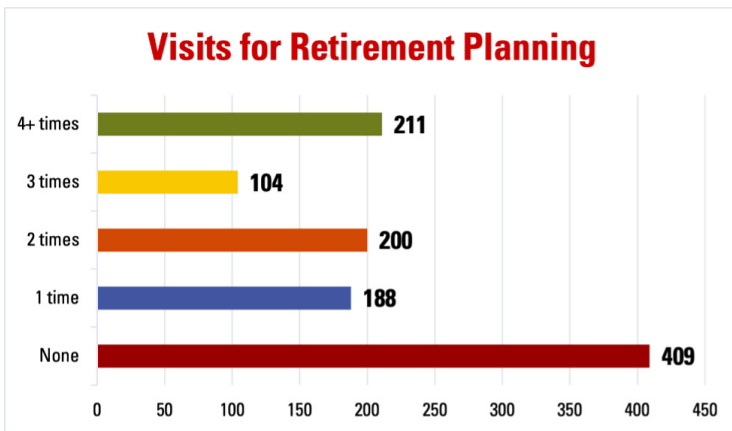


Figure 4. Respondent-reported number of trips to or in NC to plan for retirement (n=1,112).

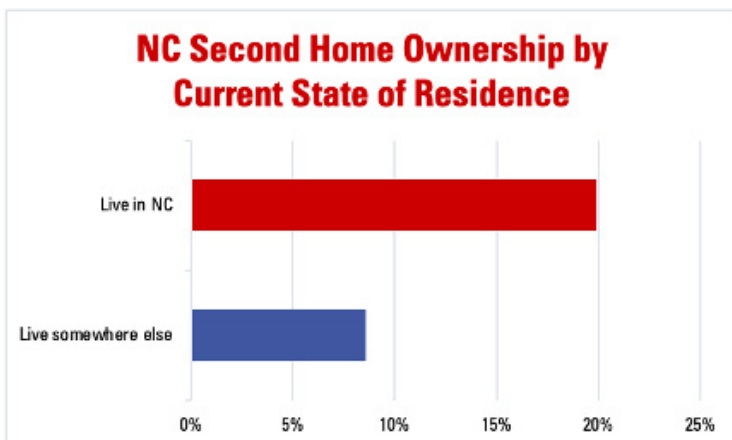


Figure 5. Respondent-reported ownership of a second home in NC (n=1,057).



The travel index was used to compare actual and predicted retirement migration behavior. We asked respondents to indicate their first, second, and third choice of US state to move for retirement. The team found that people who had selected NC as their top choice for retirement had a significantly higher travel index than those who did not. Those who had not yet moved for retirement and selected NC as their top retirement destination had an average travel index of 5.8, 1.5 points higher than those who selected another state or outside of the U.S as their top choice for retirement (Figure 6). Looking at the four variables in the travel index, the number of visits to NC for retirement planning had a large impact on the travel index. As such, the number of visits for retirement planning was higher for those who selected NC as their top choice (1.9 times versus 1.2 times).

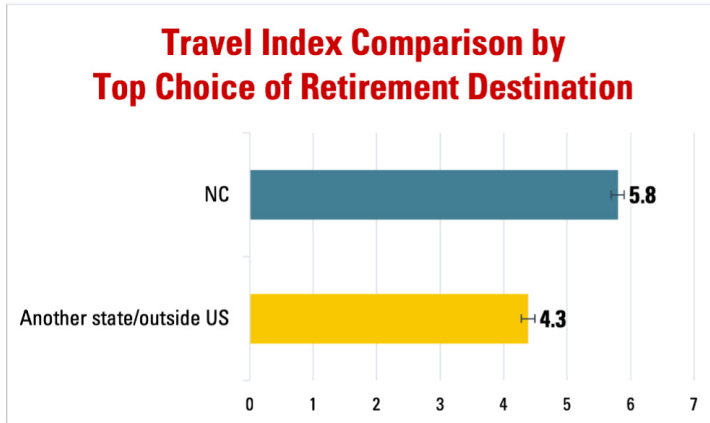


Figure 6. Mean travel index for those who selected NC as their top choice of retirement destination and those who selected another option (n=1,027).

The team also wanted to test whether these predictive trends held when looking at actual retirement behavior (n=223). Those who had already moved to or within NC for retirement had an average travel index of 6, while those who moved to another state other than NC for retirement had an average travel index of 5.2 (Figure 7). Across all four items in the index, individuals who moved to NC for retirement had a higher average, especially for the number of times visiting the state for retirement planning (2.6 times versus 1.7 times, respectively).

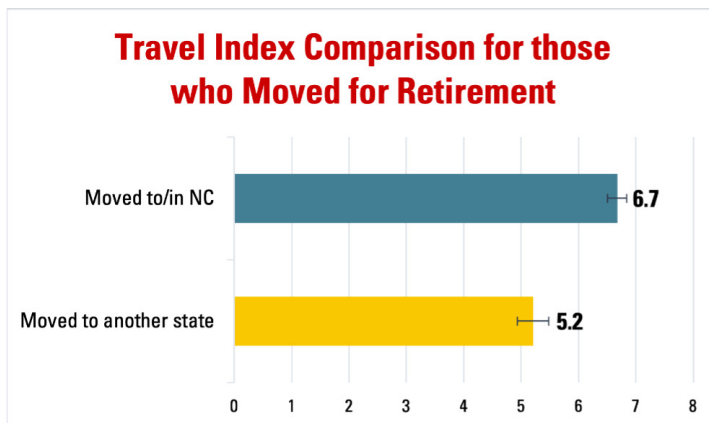


Figure 7. Mean travel index for those who moved to/in NC for retirement and those who selected another option (n=223).

Although there was a significant difference, we found that the influence of prior travel on the decision to retire to NC was only a small part of the retirement decision. The analyses showed that only about 10% of the variance respondents' retirement decision was explained by travel; this means 90% was explained by something else, like the retirement destination's factors (e.g., climate/weather), the respondent's personal characteristics (e.g., income level, partnership status), or a whole host of reasons. In line with the literature review, retirement decisions are highly personal. Each individual will have a specific combination of reasons and context that influence their decision.

### **Discussion**

While we found a connection between travel to a destination and the decision to retire there, this survey was on a motivated group who have the intentions and means to move for retirement. Future research of potential retirees should replicate the use of the travel index to further analyze this connection between travel and retirement decisions. This study found these motivated retirees will travel to an area, likely multiple times, before they move there. Our sample showed over half traveled to NC seven to ten times in the past ten years, and nearly three in four stayed two or more nights on average while traveling to NC. Given this high rate of travel, communities should find ways to maximize opportunities to market and leverage this retirement planning travel to their benefit. Therefore, collaboration between retirement programs and destination organizations should collectively work to promote their destination for potential retirees and their motivations. Most importantly, as destinations work to include and market to potential retirees, it must be top of mind that travel is one factor in a suite of factors in the retirement migration decision. Travel to an area does not equate to retiring there, so having a more general focus on inclusion and diverse activities in your destination that appeal to a variety of visitors should always be a top priority.

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## Using GIS to Assess Equitable Recreation Access in the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument

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### Keywords

outdoor recreation, GIS, case study, equity

### Introduction

Access to nature, such as city, state, and national parks as well as other green spaces, has myriad benefits, including improving individuals' physical, mental, and social health. Simply spending time in nature has been shown to reduce stress and improve measures such as blood pressure and cholesterol. Outdoor recreation typically involves some type of physical activity, commonly walking. Walking has many health benefits, particularly for older adults, such as decreasing weight, lowering the risk of stroke, and improving sleep, among many others. Nature can also improve psychological health and lead to an increase in positive emotions (Godbey, 2009). Despite the many benefits of nature for individual and community health, access to these spaces is highly variable across the United States. Neighborhoods that serve predominantly lower income or minority demographic groups also have reduced access to parks compared to white neighborhoods (Wolch et al., 2002). Overall, visitors to public lands and waters across the country are less diverse than the U.S. population as a whole. Because access to nature is tied to so many positive health benefits, these disparities in access to public lands mirror disparities in health outcomes in these demographic groups (Franchina et al., 2022). In summary, access to nature is a vital resource that has important implications for human health and social behavior, yet many communities lack access to it.

Outdoor Alliance is a non-profit organization that advocates for legislative land protection proposals and equitable recreation access. When Outdoor Alliance works to protect a place, they need to assess who benefits from the proposal and who does not. To facilitate that understanding, this project applies spatial analysis tools to assess outdoor recreation access in the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, which covers 346,117 acres around the Los Angeles Basin in California (San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, 2023). The San Gabriel Mountains and Foothills Protection Act, first introduced to Congress in 2017, would designate an additional 109,167 acres as part of the monument.

### Methods

All work was completed in ArcGIS Pro 3.1. Python scripts used for data ingestion, cleaning, processing, analysis, and visualization can be found at the following site: <https://assessing-equitable-recreation-access-uw-mad.hub.arcgis.com/>.

The Network Analyst toolkit in ArcGIS Pro was used to create a network dataset and complete a service area analysis. Network datasets are used to model transportation networks and include information about road connectivity such as one-way streets and turn restrictions. Network datasets are a critical input for service area analyses. Service areas represent the maximum distance that can be traveled along a network within certain cutoff distances.

Road network data included primary, secondary, and local roads from the TIGER dataset (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021) and U.S. Forest Service roads within the boundaries of the national

monument (U.S. Forest Service, 2015). The service areas were generated using all visitor centers and fee stations in the study area as facilities. Three service area polygons were created based on 5-mile, 30-mile, and 90-mile cutoffs. These values were chosen to capture multiple ways people might visit the monument. People who live within 5 miles have a short travel distance and could potentially even travel by a mode other than automobile. People who live within 30 miles could visit the monument as an evening or after-work activity, and those who live within 90 miles could visit as an all-day or weekend trip.

After the service area polygons were created, census tract boundaries and attributes were overlaid onto the service areas (Manson et al., 2023). Many census tracts were only partially included in a service area, necessitating the use of areal interpolation techniques. The Tabulate Intersection tool in ArcGIS Pro was used to compute the intersection between the census tracts and the service area polygons to determine the percent of the census tract contained within the polygon. All census attributes were then multiplied by that percent to obtain the scaled values for each attribute. There were three categories of variables of interest for this project: race/ethnicity, education, and income. The two measures used to capture race and ethnicity were the percentage of people of a given racial or ethnic group in each census tract and the most prevalent racial or ethnic group in each census tract. The percentage of people with a bachelor's degree or higher in each census tract was used to measure educational attainment. The variable used to measure income was the percentage of people living below the federal poverty level in each census tract. These metrics were calculated for each service area as well as for the entire state.

The following types of recreation opportunities were identified on the site: hiking, mountain biking, equestrian use, whitewater paddling, rock climbing, picnicking, and camping. These activities were identified by Outdoor Alliance as priority activities (Outdoor Alliance, 2019a; Outdoor Alliance, 2019b; Outdoor Alliance, 2019c; U.S. Forest Service, 2017). The number of sites for each type of recreation were calculated, as well as the miles of trail and river available. The recreation opportunities were then split based on their location in either the current boundaries of the area or the proposed expansion. The number or miles of each type of recreation was calculated for each category of land. Then, the percent increase in each type of recreation gained from the proposed expansion was calculated.

## Results

In all three service areas, the racial or ethnic group with the highest percentage was Hispanic/Latino, followed by white and then Asian. While this distribution is roughly in line with the demographic makeup of California as a whole, the percentages of each racial or ethnic group do vary from the overall distribution in some important ways. The percentage of the population that is Hispanic/Latino in the 0–5-mile service area and the 5–30-mile service area appears higher than in the state of California as a whole. In contrast, the percentage of the population that is white is lower in the first two service areas than in the state as a whole. The first service area also has lower percentages of nearly all other racial/ethnic groups when compared to the entire state (see Table 1). Figure 1 shows the most prevalent race for each census tract across all three service areas.

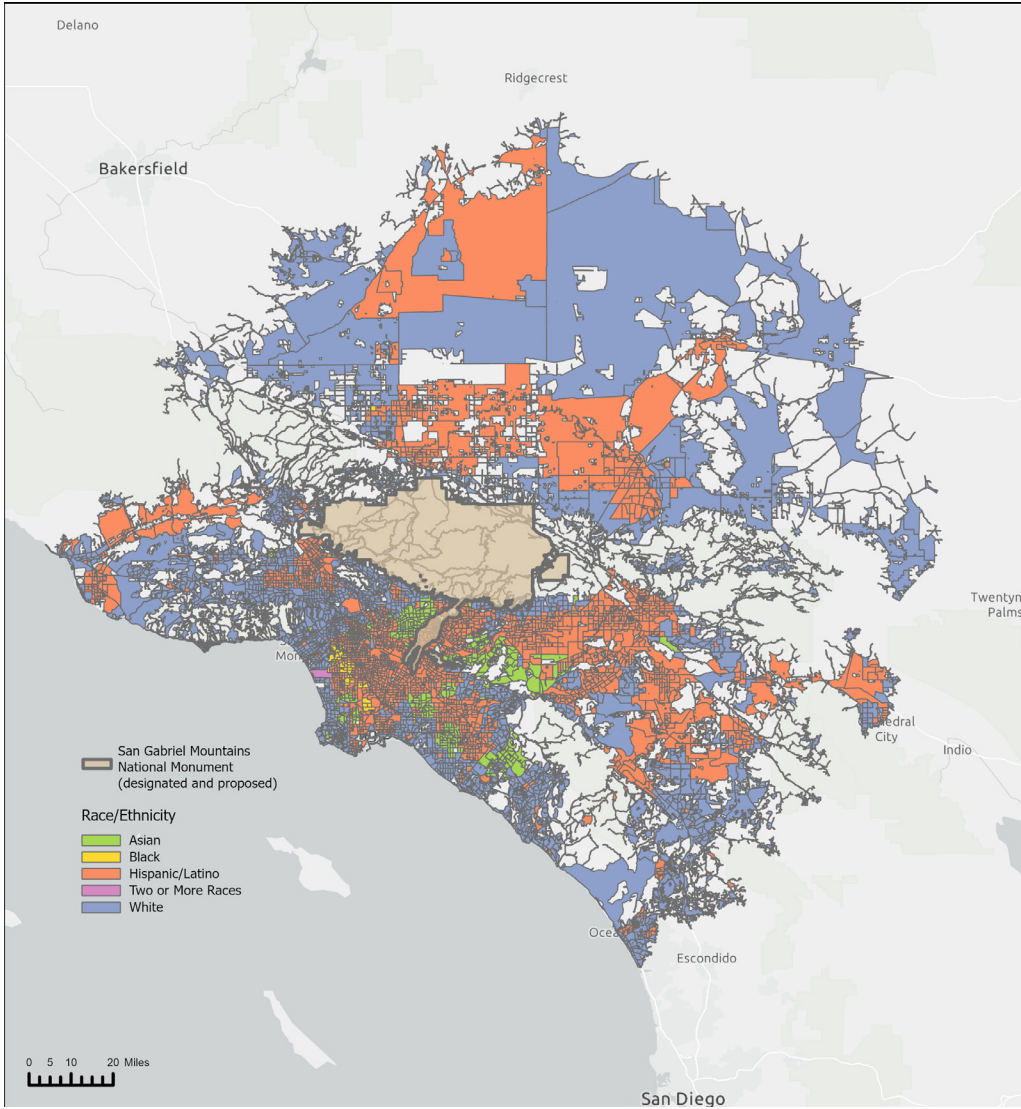


Figure 1. The most prevalent race for each census tract.

Race/Ethnicity	% in 0–5 miles	% in 5–30 miles	% in 30–90 miles	% in CA
Hispanic/Latino	57.23	53.54	40.21	39.40
White	23.27	20.27	36.54	34.69
Asian	13.42	17.37	11.31	15.12
Black	2.74	5.39	6.74	5.36
Multiracial (two+ races)	2.51	2.55	4.04	4.12
Other Race	0.49	0.50	0.59	0.57
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.25	0.19	0.30	0.39
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.09	0.19	0.28	0.35

Table 1. Percent of the population that belongs to each racial/ethnic group for each service area and the state.



The first two service areas are slightly below the state average for the percentage of individuals 25 years or older with a bachelor’s degree or higher. The percentage of people with a bachelor’s degree or higher rises for the third service area, with the average closely matching the overall state average. All three service areas have roughly similar levels of people living below the federal poverty level as the state of California does, with the second service area being slightly higher than the other service areas (see Table 2).

	<b>% in 0–5 miles</b>	<b>% in 5–30 miles</b>	<b>% in 30–90 miles</b>	<b>% in CA</b>
<b>Bachelor’s degree or higher</b>	28.96	28.77	35.14	34.72
<b>Income below federal poverty level</b>	10.43	14.30	12.06	12.58

Table 2. Percent of individuals 25 years or older with a bachelor’s degree or higher and percent of individuals with income below the federal poverty level for each service area and the state.

The monument offers numerous recreation opportunities in both the currently designated area and the proposed expansion. These opportunities include multiple-use trails for hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian use; whitewater paddling; rock climbing; picnicking; and camping. The proposed expansion to the monument would increase the number of recreation opportunities for most activities that currently exist in the area (see Table 3).

<b>Type</b>	<b>Current</b>	<b>Expanded</b>	<b>% increase</b>
Trail – hiking only	148.70 miles	45.18 miles	30.38
Trail – hiking multi-use	217.95 miles	163.91 miles	75.21
Trail – mountain biking multi-use	64.37 miles	118.73 miles	184.46
Trail – equestrian multi-use	4.88 miles	0 miles	0
Whitewater paddling	8.38 miles	2.52 miles	30.13
Rock climbing	167 sites	3 sites	1.80
Picnic areas	15 sites	10 sites	66.67
Campsites	22 sites	3 sites	13.63

Table 3. Comparison of current recreational opportunities and the proposed expansion.

**Discussion**

The racial and ethnic makeup of the service areas around the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument differs from the overall California population in potentially important ways that could have implications for land managers and other monument staff. There is a relatively small but growing body of literature on the topic of differences in racial preferences for recreation types in parks and protected areas. It is imperative for recreation managers to consider the cultural backgrounds of park visitors in order to ensure that park amenities meet the needs of a diverse population of visitors. This evaluation is particularly important in a landscape such as the San Gabriel Mountains, which is located near highly developed and densely populated urban areas, because urban recreation areas are often characterized by more culturally and ethnically diverse

visitors (Sisneros-Kidd et al., 2021). There is a large Hispanic/Latino population living near the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument: 57.23% of the people living within a 5-mile drive of a visitor center and 53.54% of people living 5-30 miles away identified as Hispanic/Latino in the 2020 census.

Studies have demonstrated that different racial and ethnic groups show different motivations for visiting natural areas and thus, different preferences for the amenities they use. Research has shown that Hispanic/Latino park users visit parks in larger groups with more extended family members than visitors from other backgrounds (Johnson & Monroe, 2008). Latino visitors also reported stronger social motivations for visiting natural areas than non-Hispanic visitors, in one study of Georgia state park users. Observations from that study indicated that Latino visitors tended to prefer picnic and day use areas over other sites, presumably because those areas facilitated social interactions (Whiting et al., 2017). The number of picnic sites in the current San Gabriel Mountains National Monument is far outnumbered by the number of hiking and rock climbing areas in the monument. The current bounds of the monument contain 15 designated picnic areas. The proposed expansion to the monument would add another 10 picnic sites, which is a 66.67% increase in the number of picnic areas compared to the current boundaries. An increase in the number of picnic sites would benefit the local population and could encourage more locals to visit the monument.

### **Conclusion**

This project completed an analysis of the demographic makeup around a protected area that offers valuable recreation and nature-based opportunities to demographically diverse communities. Conducting this type of analysis can give insight into the types of recreational experiences that might be most beneficial to the communities that live around these sites. Given the strong connection between access to nature and human health, increasing the likelihood that typically nature-deprived communities will visit and make use of public green space has far-reaching implications for overall public health and wellness. The results of this project provide a data-driven foundation for advocacy to expand and manage these areas effectively.

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## **Pink Flamingos and Ice Cream Carts? Beach Ambassador Project Educates Beachgoers About Water Safety Through Direct Engagement**

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### **Keywords**

beach safety, Sea Grant, community development, diversity-equity-inclusion, outdoor recreation

### **Overview**

A strategy to increase public wellness, the Beach Ambassador Project aims to effectively communicate Lake Michigan beach conditions while increasing water safety awareness and knowledge among local beachgoers and tourists in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Beach Ambassador Project is organized by Milwaukee Community Sailing Center, Milwaukee Riverkeeper, Milwaukee Water Commons, University of Wisconsin Sea Grant Institute, and local water safety leaders. The Beach Ambassador team engages with beachgoers on Bradford and McKinley Beaches in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to clearly and effectively educate visitors about current or potential beach hazards, including rip tides and beach closures due to water quality.

### **Background**

The Beach Ambassador Project (BAP) was developed in 2021 by Milwaukee partners as a response to water safety concerns at Lake Michigan beaches such as increased beach use by locals and tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic, inadequate signage, a lifeguard shortage, and closure of public pools leading to increased drownings and rescues. For example, while signage is present at some beaches indicating water quality and/or presence of lifeguards, it may go unnoticed, misunderstood, or not adequately updated [Figure 1]. While Milwaukee beaches have been staffed with open-water certified lifeguards in previous years, in 2020 there were no lifeguards placed at beaches due to staffing and recruitment issues. Smartphone apps and websites are available to inform visitors of current conditions (e.g., NOAA Great Lakes Beach Hazards, National Weather Service, Swim Guide), but they may not be easily accessible or frequented by beachgoers. There are dangerous gaps in understanding among locals and tourists on how to be safe in open waters. COVID-19 has also increased risk of drowning by contributing to the lifeguard shortage when there was a multiple-year hiatus in lifeguard training programs due to pool closings from the pandemic. Despite no presence of lifeguards and beaches being marked as closed when water quality or weather conditions are dangerous, people still frequent Milwaukee beaches in large numbers with highly varied levels of swimming abilities. Deaths have also occurred when bystanders attempt to save swimmers in distress but do not have proper equipment, swimming competency, or knowledge of rip currents to do so. These factors, perhaps compounded by historic racial inequities related to swimming and socio-economic, cultural, and geographic barriers, have led to hundreds of rescues and the drowning of four Black males at McKinley Beach during incidents in 2020 (Hughes, 2020).

People of color, and particularly Black communities, are at increased risk of drowning due to almost 70% of Black children having no or low level of swimming ability (Irwin, Irwin, Martin, & Ross, 2010). Drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury or death among children and adolescents in the United States. Black children in the United States, without regard to age or income, are up to 7.6 times more likely to drown than white children (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024).

These startling statistics were the impetus for several local organizations to partner on initiatives related to better understanding barriers to swimming and accessing swimming opportunities in Milwaukee. Some of these initiatives include the co-creation of a map that shows “swimming pool deserts” in Milwaukee, the launch of Milwaukee’s first open water swim on the Milwaukee River, and regular “education/recreation” coalition meetings that bring local partners representing different sectors (government, non-profit, academia, healthcare) and community members together to strategize ways to be more inclusive and have diverse representation in local water activities. The BAP is led by four of these organizations and a local leader on public water safety who came together for a “call to action” meeting in July 2020 to address concerns regarding the drowning of four people on Milwaukee’s McKinley Beach and to discuss how to better reach beachgoers with water safety information. The project leaders encompass a diverse array of perspectives and backgrounds and each work directly on issues related to social and environmental justice.



Figure 1. Lifeguard shortages started in 2020 due to staffing and recruitment issues.

## Methods

The Beach Ambassador Project approach to increasing safety on Milwaukee beaches is multifaceted but starts with a coalition of organizations strategically thinking about how to make Milwaukee beaches safer and more welcoming for locals and tourists. The development of the BAP was one of the outcomes of a series of “call to action” meetings where local partners discussed strategies to prevent further drownings and to tackle inequities related to swimming, beach access, and current water safety issues in Milwaukee through the development of short-term and long-term action items.

In the short term, an outreach program (“Beach Ambassador Project” or “BAP”) was developed to provide beachgoers with water safety information through an interpersonal approach. The BAP launched in Summer 2021 at Bradford Beach in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on Lake Michigan (Figure 2). Bradford Beach and McKinley Beach were chosen as pilot locations for the BAP due to their popularity among beachgoers in the summer, their proximity to downtown Milwaukee and their

proximity to a shed owned by a partnering organization that beach ambassadors used to store outreach materials and personal belongings. However, following the four deaths at McKinley Beach in 2020, it was fenced off to the public to prevent further drownings (Sandler, 2021) so outreach has focused primarily on Bradford Beach which is also a short walk from the shed and gets very crowded in the summer. As of April 2024, McKinley Beach is still closed but has been redesigned and is under construction.



Figure 2. Site of Beach Ambassador Project, Years 2021–2023

Through a variety of methods (e.g., face to face, media outlets, tabling at events, educational workshops), beach ambassadors share information and resources with beachgoers, media, and decision-makers to help people better prepare for potential beach hazards or weather conditions. Some topics discussed include rip currents (how to recognize them, how to escape them, different types found in the Great Lakes), current or potential extreme weather events, water quality warnings (the meaning of different colors on warning signs, potential threats to water quality such as sewage overflows or bacteria outbreaks, when not to swim), and risks from hypothermia. Additionally, beach ambassadors share printed and laminated educational resources to better exhibit these concepts, and they encourage beachgoers to scan a QR code to access online resources (e.g., Swim Guide app showing water quality conditions, current weather conditions, rip current survival guide, etc., Figure 3). To further engage the public, beach ambassadors also wear matching t-shirts and push an ice cream cart painted with the Beach Ambassador logo. While the cart only contains outreach materials and extra supplies, it serves as a good talking point [Figure 4].





Figure 3. Example of visual used to explain rip currents to beachgoers.



Figure 4. Beach Ambassadors with cart painted with "Beach Ambassador" logo.

Each year, beach ambassadors are strategically selected through a thorough recruitment, interview, hiring, and training process. Special consideration is also given to ensure that BAs are representative of the diversity of Milwaukeeans (ethnically, racially, gender, age) and priority is given to applicants who are familiar with Milwaukee. As part of the recruitment process, flyers are placed in local establishments around town such as coffee shops, college campuses, and libraries. Lead by project partners, BAs are required to complete a 2-day training to learn skills related to water safety (e.g., how to monitor daily beach conditions, identify hazardous weather conditions, how to escape a rip current, how to recognize drowning, appropriate beach safety equipment) and effective ways to engage the public.

Throughout the summer, BAs spend about fifteen hours per week on the beach speaking directly with the public about water safety concerns and sharing outreach materials and online resources. Before each shift, BAs note the current weather and beach conditions (e.g., air temperature, water temperature, water quality, wind conditions) in a field notebook to be aware of talking points to discuss with beachgoers. After each interaction, they track field notes on "non-responses" (if people walked away or were not interested in speaking to them) as well as



demographics of the interaction (e.g., estimated number of people in the group and their age, gender, race), topics discussed, and note any meaningful dialogue that was discussed. The data collected provide evaluation metrics to help improve the program and inform project partners as to how many people are being reached through direct communication as well as demographic groups that could be better reached. Additionally, BAs participate in events with project partners and bring their own ideas of how to grow, strengthen, and expand the program. Past focus areas have included social science/evaluation, water quality testing, social equity, youth education, art, social media, website development, and development of an outreach “toolkit” for tabling about the BA program. BAs are not lifeguards, not law enforcement, have no authority when on the lakefront, and are not asked, nor required, to intervene during an emergency. At the end of each summer, BAs and project partners participate in a group discussion to evaluate successes, challenges, and possible improvements of the program, and the BAs complete a survey evaluation created by the partners.

## Results

There was a significant reduction in drownings and rescues on Milwaukee’s beaches in 2021, likely due to several factors such as the closing of McKinley Beach and efforts to increase awareness of water safety on Milwaukee’s other public beaches. In its inaugural year, 2021, five part-time seasonal employees provided beachgoers at Bradford Beach with water safety information through a face-to-face approach. Beach ambassadors staffed the beach from noon to 5:00 p.m. on Thursdays through Sundays from early June through Labor Day. The program has since (2021-2023) employed fifteen beach ambassadors as summer employees, has engaged over 1300 beachgoers on Great Lakes water safety conversations and has provided useful websites and knowledge about topics such as rip currents and water quality. The program has also expanded to include a water safety social media campaign, sidewalk chalking, and water safety workshops for youth groups [See Figure 5] and was featured in over 28 local media outlets (e.g., “Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,” Urban Milwaukee, local TV stations) to raise awareness among Milwaukeeans about Lake Michigan water safety. Designed and created by one of the BAs, the “Beach Ambassador” website was launched in Winter 2024 (see [beachambassadorsmke.org](http://beachambassadorsmke.org)).



Figure 5. Beach Ambassadors teaching youth about water safety on Lake Michigan beach (Milwaukee, WI).

## Discussion & Impacts

The Beach Ambassador Project, combined with other local efforts, focuses on providing greater awareness of water safety strategies for Milwaukee beachgoers to have safe, meaningful experiences on the water. Additionally, the project is important in upholding Wisconsin's Public Trust Doctrine, which requires the state to serve, "as a trustee for the citizens' rights to navigate and enjoy recreational activities in the waters of the state" (Henning, 2019). The project's leading partners will continue to work closely with local city and county decision-makers and elected officials to share recent information, data, resources, and recommendations on water safety. The work will also continue to directly serve communities of color.

It is not meant to supplant, but rather supplement the county's lifeguard program by providing useful resources to the public to help them prepare to safely enjoy Milwaukee's public beaches. Ongoing conversations between local partners have led to the development of similar programs focused on beach safety, such as the Aquatics Ambassadors program in 2023 which was developed by Milwaukee Parks Foundation to bring together a diverse group of community members including professional swimmers, lifeguards, and new swimmers to work on direct lifeguard recruitment efforts and to act as a think tank to improve the lifeguard recruitment process (see Additional Resources list). Regionally, the BAP has inspired a similar program in South Haven, Michigan, called SHAPE (South Haven Ambassadors Program and Education) designed to educate the public on beach and water safety. Locally, while initially BAs were placed at Bradford Beach, the program could be expanded to other beaches not currently served by lifeguards, but that regularly close due to weather and water quality conditions, as well as beach morphology.

This project has already made an impact by raising awareness about accessible swimming beaches on Milwaukee's lakefront through media and outreach campaigns. It also aims to help dismantle barriers and improve access by providing all beachgoers with the tools they need to enjoy public beaches on Lake Michigan safely. By providing educational resources and tools to beachgoers, this project has provided information that can be taken home to communities and shared, which means that "upstream" causes of drownings (e.g., lack of safety information) are being addressed through peer-to-peer in-person information exchange and safety programming. Further, the BAP partners have made the hiring of personnel that reflect Milwaukee's racial make-up a priority: in 2021 the Beach Ambassadors were mainly men and women of color.

While the BAP was designed to serve Milwaukee residents, it also has important implications for tourists who may be less informed on the scale, power, fluctuating temperatures and weather hazards on the Great Lakes. For example, tourists are perhaps more likely to use improper recreational equipment that could be dangerous with the powerful rip currents or waves of Lake Michigan such as inflatables ("floaties") designed for pool use or kayaks designed for use in smaller waterbodies. The presence of beach ambassadors during the summer provides tourists an opportunity to learn more about unique Lake Michigan weather and wave conditions through an interpersonal approach. Outreach materials used for the BAP are applicable to other Great Lakes coastal communities and have been co-developed with Great Lakes partners to be used at a broad scale (see Additional Resources list below). The BAP provides tourists with both tangible and online resources to prepare for their visit and potential hazardous beach conditions.

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## Additional Resources

Beach Ambassadors MKE <https://beachambassadorsmke.org/>

Great Lakes Surf Rescue Project <https://gl srp.org/>

Great Lakes Water Safety Consortium <https://www.greatlakeswatersafety.org/>

Milwaukee Parks Foundation Aquatic Ambassadors Program <https://mkeparksfoundation.org/aquatics-ambassadors/>