

# EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN AGRITOURISM MARKETING

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Agritourism is one form of outdoor recreation that has the potential to provide economic and cultural benefits, with little to no environmental impact (Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008), making it a worthwhile pursuit in the mission to use sustainable tourism to maximize positive outcomes for both farms and their host communities. However, the lack of understanding towards the needs and motivations of customers is a major barrier to agritourism development (Srikatanyoo and Campiranon, 2011), lending to a level of uncertainty in designing marketing materials. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore which elements of photographs used in the marketing of agritourism are most effective at reaching consumers. The application of the grounded theory method serves as the methodology for identifying consistent themes in the data. Data was collected through focus group based discussion based on a set of photographs that represent potential visual marketing aids in agritourism. The photographs that served as the conversation platform during focus groups were all taken on pasture based livestock farms that participated in an agritourism pilot project in West Virginia. Participants selected for focus groups were stakeholders in tourism, including farmers who participate in agritourism, tourists who may or may not have visited a farm, and community members such as visitors center employees and restaurant owners. Considering that the three primary stakeholders in agritourism

are agritourism providers, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), and agritourists (McGehee, 2007), it was decidedly important to include responses from each of these segments. The conversation of each focus group was recorded and transcribed, and served as the primary source of data for this study. The transcriptions of the interviews were scrutinized through content analysis, and were subsequently coded according to the themes that emerged in responses. The data from this study identifies patterns of centrality within specific demographic groups involved in agritourism, and is intended to better equip farmers, agritourism coordinators, tourism planners, and destination marketing directors in the development of their marketing strategies by providing them with insight into the different reactions that photographs of agritourism might illicit for members of their potential audience.

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN AGRITOURISM MARKETING

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By

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## ***1.0 Introduction***

The addition of a quarter million people to the global population every 24 hours has brought with it a burgeoning demand for food (Pimentel & Giampetro, 1994). In the United States, this growing demand has largely been addressed through the implementation of industrialized agricultural systems. These systems rely heavily on petroleum-based fuels and chemicals, are frequently water consumptive, and place little importance on traditional growing seasons. However, a recent counter demand for alternatives has resulted in a high willingness to pay for local food (Adams & Salois, 2010). Increased food safety issues and environmental distress resulting from industrialized agriculture are just a few of the factors that have sparked a rejuvenated desire for local produce and meat (Borst, 2008). The concepts of a ‘foodshed’ and ‘civic agriculture’ have taken shape, under the premise that local food supply chains reduce environmental impacts and support community well-being (Adams & Salois, 2010). While small farmers are beginning to see success with the rising demand for local food, many are still in need of additional income streams to supplement food sales.

One option for farmers to pursue extra revenue is the inclusion of agritourism into their business plans. Bringing tourists onto farms helps create a personal connection between producer and consumer, encouraging brand loyalty, and ultimately yielding higher profits to the farmer. Agritourism has been receiving more attention in the last decade, and has been the subject of various research studies. However, there is a gap in the literature concerning the design of market and promotional strategies (Colton & Bissix, 2005). While this literature review will address the role of branding in agritourism development, it is clear that there is a need for more information that can be of use to farmers in designing their marketing portfolios.

## ***1.1 Agritourism and Sustainable Tourism***

Agritourism provides an opportunity for direct farmer to consumer marketing that synthesizes concepts of agriculture with the triple bottom line (TBL) approach of sustainable tourism. A healthy TBL ensures financial sustainability while minimizing negative impacts on the natural environment, as well as preserving the socio-cultural well being of the host community (Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans, 2012). When discussing sustainability it is pertinent to present the definition set forth in the Brundtland report, from the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), asserting that sustainable development is that which meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same (UNWCD, 1987). Weaver (2006) defines sustainable tourism by synthesizing tourism development with the Brundtland report definition of sustainable development. In that sense, one might think of sustainable tourism, as “tourism that wisely uses and conserves resources in order to maintain their long-term viability” (Weaver, 2006, pp. 10). Weaver goes on to discuss how agritourism, which he calls farm tourism, is actually one of the oldest forms of deliberate alternative tourism, and has a high potential to contribute to rural economies. One of the most frequently cited benefits of tourism is wealth creation (Okech, 2008), which is especially sought after in rural areas where farmers struggle to bring extra revenue streams into their business models. Attracting visitors from other areas to farm attractions where they can buy local foods can bring substantial income not only to the farmers themselves, but also to their community members by creating the opportunity for tourists to spend money at other stores, lodging business, and retailers (Farmer, 2012).

Aside from economic benefits, agritourism may also act as a tool for preservation of rural

heritage (Barbieri & LaPan, 2013) with little to no environmental impact (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008). Furthermore, tourism can contribute to conservation of the natural environment, by linking an economic value from tourist revenues to landscapes that may otherwise have been degraded by detrimental activities such as logging, poaching, or mining (Holden, 2008). The protection of landscape is especially relevant in the case of livestock farmers acting as stewards of the environment. Livestock farmers using responsible methods such as permaculture and continuous grazing to maintain grassy pastures, contribute to the sequestration of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Lal, 2004), improving environmental health by offsetting fossil fuel emissions and contributing to soil health (Pollan, 2006). Including tourism in the economic portfolio of a farming operation is one strategy that might aid in the preservation of rural landscapes and open spaces (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009).

### ***1.2 How Farms Market Themselves***

Effective marketing strategies are crucial in the continued growth of local food systems (Conner, Montri, Montri, & Hamm, 2009). An extended web presence assists rural farmers in reaching urban markets that sometimes have a demand for more gourmet and specialty products that are not received quite as well in rural markets (Bond & Brockhouse, 2011). Direct marketing via social media also helps foster a communication line between producers and consumers. Farmers can post daily updates on what is happening at the farm as well as products that consumers can expect to see on the shelves in the immediate future. The use of social networks can also be a catalyst for organizing, and is a low cost option for marketing (Diamond, 2012). In an article discussing the success of the Oklahoma Food Cooperative, Diamond uses the example of how

the cooperatives founder successfully utilized internet communication with his existing contacts to catalyze the formation of a large social network – effectively reaching a critical segment of potential customers (Diamond, 2012). Agritourism, in itself, may be considered as a marketing tool for the farm, given that participation in agritourism offers farmers an opportunity to increase their public visibility, as well as profitability (Rilla, Hardesty, Getz, & George, 2011; Tew and Barbieri, 2012).

### ***1.3 Background of GVPN***

Data for this study was collected in conjunction with an agritourism development pilot project with the Greenbrier Valley Pasture Network (GVPN), a group of farmers practicing pasture-based livestock farming in West Virginia. The GVPN project was a funded, regional pilot program designed to create new alliances and strengthen existing linkages within the sustainable meat industry and the community of the Greenbrier Valley, West Virginia. Organizing the skills and talents of farmers, providing training on agritourism, and marketing the agritourism experience collectively is the GVPN strategy to bind sustainable agriculture and tourism to increase sales for meat producers. The pilot program, launched in March of 2013 culminated in October 2013 with the first annual two-day farm tour. Throughout the project period, photographs were taken at the farms, portraying farmers with their animals and landscapes, many of which were used in the marketing of the farm tour.

### ***1.4 Purpose***

The purpose of this study is to explore which elements of photographs used in the marketing

materials for agritourism are most effective at reaching consumers. The application of the grounded theory provides a methodology for identifying consistent themes in the data. Data was collected through focus group based discussion of a set of photographs that represent potential visual marketing aids in agritourism. The data accrued from this study will better equip farmers, agritourism coordinators, planners, and destination marketing directors in the development of their marketing strategies by providing them with insight into the different reactions that photographs might illicit for members of their potential audience. Understanding consumer preferences in the attributes of marketing materials increases effectiveness (Conner et al, 2009). Additionally, since tasting local food is a crucial component of the tourist experience (Kim & Eves, 2012), the data will also be instrumental to destination marketing organizations, restaurants, and other tourism stakeholders seeking to attract visitors who are interested in participating in local food experiences.

### ***1.5 Objectives/Research Questions***

The first objective of this study is to determine which types of photographs, specifically concerning agritourism marketing efforts, are the most appealing to consumers. The second objective is to determine if there is a difference in the way various agritourism stakeholders react to the photographs taken on livestock farms participating in agritourism, i.e. is a photograph featuring pure landscapes more effective in promoting agritourism to someone who has visited a farm before, while a photograph of a farmer interacting with an animal is more appealing to potential tourists who have experience with farms? The following research questions were asked:

1. Why are some photographs more successful than others in marketing agritourism

experiences? Specifically, what are the elements within a photograph that elicit a strong response or connection between informants and the image?

2. Is there a difference between what farmers find visually appealing and what other stakeholders are drawn to? If so, what are these differences?
3. What emotions and/or associations do these images provoke for the various stakeholder audiences?
4. What are the implications of these results for the design of marketing campaigns in agritourism?

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Context of Agritourism Development***

Agritourism is emerging as a rewarding investment, with 23,350 farms in the U.S. reporting agritourism income, accounting for a reported \$566 million dollars in farm income in the 2007 U.S. Census (Thessen, 2007). These statistics show an improvement in agritourism development since the 2002 agriculture census, but still demonstrate that less than 1.5% of farms in the U.S. are reporting income from agritourism and recreation (Thessen, 2007). Although farm tourism has a long history, the terms ‘agritourism’ and ‘agrotourism’ have been attributed a variety of descriptions. Since the 1990’s, scholars have presented a multitude of definitions to encompass the activities that compose agritourism (Phillip, Hunter, & Blackstock, 2010). Distinctions between ‘farm-based tourism’ and ‘agritourism,’ have further convoluted the vernacular. Dr. Carla Barbieri, a well-known author in the study of agritourism has published a range of literature on the term, and in a recent collaborative study presented with her co-authors the following definition of agritourism: “farming-related activities carried out on a working farm or other agricultural settings for entertainment or education purposes” (Arroyo, Barbieri, & Rich, 2013). This broad definition allows for the inclusion of a wide range of activities within the umbrella of agritourism that can be separated further still, as pointed out in a recent essay by Dr. Sharon Phillip. Phillip, a professor in the Geography and Environment department of the University of Aberdeen, synthesized a myriad of academic definitions concerning agritourism, farm tourism, and vacation farms into a cohesive framework. She and her co-authors differentiated specific types of agritourism by variations such as direct vs. passive contact with



tourists, working vs. nonworking farms, and staged vs. authentic experiences (Phillip, Hunter & Blackstock, 2010). Historically, farm-tourism was focused on development of individual agrarian attractions, with little to no coordination efforts between host farms. However, the farm-tourism product has evolved over time, and has begun to include a variety of experiences in order to create the ‘agritourism product’ (Forbord, Schermer, & Griebmair 2012). Distinctions between agritourism products, such as those made by Phillip et al., enable users to categorize various forms of farm-based tourism. Activities that might occur on a farm that constitute agritourism include (but are not limited to) pick your own systems, recreational activities, hosted events such as weddings or festivals, guided tours, and dining or accommodation opportunities on the farm (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009).

Deborah Che, an Assistant Professor of Geography at Western Michigan University who specializes in nature-based tourism, economic development, and environmental policy in the United States, has studied the collaborative nature of agritourism marketing. Che asserts that in order to create a ‘place-based identity’, with which tourists can easily identify and is conducive to marketing efforts, agritourism operators should work cooperatively (Che, Veek, & Veek, 2005). She comments on the detrimental effect that an individualistic approach to marketing has illustrated within the sector. This approach has impeded further development, and affirms the researchers recommendations to align with marketing and strategy theorists who propose “horizontal alliances for collaborative marketing” (Che et al., 2005, pg. 227). In the process of cultivating an identity as a desirable destination farmers may increase their target market base by branding themselves as a cohesive destination, with multiple attractions. Investment in a trusted regional food brand may also help farmers to overcome barriers such as operating on a small

scale in remote proximity to large markets and infrastructure (Reul, 2012). Linking farmers through Internet advertising, information sharing, and an overall regional approach to marketing can help establish a regional identity as an agritourism destination. As a direct result of collaborative marketing, this type of agrarian tourism can present opportunities for rural areas to supplement traditional agricultural incomes, and proliferate ‘economic diversification’ (Che et al., 2005, pg. 227). It is worth noting that that a high degree of participation in such membership-based business organizations can influence overall gross income, further supporting an emphasis on the value of cooperative branding in agritourism (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008).

Organizations dedicated to the support of sustainable agriculture and healthy food systems are also starting to invest in the marketing of agritourism. Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) is a non-profit organization based in Pittsboro, North Carolina, dedicated to “advocacy for fair farm and food policies, building the systems family farms need to thrive, and educating communities about local, organic agriculture” (CFSA, 2012). One of the programs that the group sponsors is a “Barn Storm Tour” in which events are hosted at various farms across North and South Carolina. The tour provides advertising and spreads the benefits of agritourism across the Carolina’s. CFSA made it their mission to use the publicity from the tour to bring attention to the 2012 Federal Farm Bill, which was under review for legislative renewal by the U.S. House of Representatives at the time of 2012 tour. CFSA used agritourism as a tool to raise awareness to the risks contained in the new bill to many “gains that have been made over the past decades in federal farm bill policy that help local food economies and organic farmers prosper” (CFSA, 2012). The actions of the organization illustrate how successfully marketed agritourism can also be utilized as tool to affect political change.

North Carolina Agritourism Networking Association (NCANA) is another group that has formed with the goal of facilitating farmers who hope to incorporate agritourism into their business models. The NCANA website contains resources such as an agritourism directory, liability information, and a guide to getting started. As a program originating out of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Marketing Division, NCANA proves a useful example of how marketing, tourism, and agriculture can intertwine in order to create revenue streams for participants (NCDA&CS, 2013). According to a recent report from the NCANA website comparing data collected via the survey of agritourism operators in both 2005 and 2012, 66% percent of agritourism operators reported offering farm tours as a part of their agritourism product, as compared to only 14% in 2005 (Xu & Rich, 2013). This growing market provides an opportunity for farmers to invite the public to view their operations, see how their food is grown, and develop a connection between producer and consumer. In fact, agritourism providers have cited a variety of perceived benefits of offering tourism on their farms, including an enhanced ability to reach new customers, retain old customers, and improve the family quality of life on the farm (Tew & Barbieri, 2012). The owners of Jackson's Orchard, in Warren County, Kentucky, have been welcoming visitors to their vineyard since the early 80's, offering hayrides and other entertainment activities. Bob Jackson, the owner of the winery, cites agritourism as the reason that he has been able to successfully bring family members back to the farm to run their expanding operations. He has also found that the increase in tourism revenues has helped to compensate for low yields in particularly cold years (Keeton, 2008). The Green Bluff Growers Association in Seattle provides another example of the growing success of agritourism. Having realized that the agricultural area northeast of Spokane, Seattle is becoming

a destination for agritourism, and local growers are investing in print and web advertising to showcase the farms and orchards that are open to visitors. Members of the growers association cite a cohesive marketing strategy as a great contributor to branding the destination as a thriving agritourism hot spot (Friar, 2010).

While agritourism can be extremely useful to farmers seeking to diversify their economic portfolio, there are still many challenges within the field. Diversification can be difficult when farmers are faced with navigating zoning regulations, obtaining proper permits, meeting health and safety regulations, and ensuring they are covered for liability through their insurance policy (Rilla et al, 2011). Besides the liability of inviting the public onto one's farm, concerns of farmers include obtaining capital investment for infrastructure, finding and keeping employees, and developing new and effective promotional materials for advertising that will attract customers (Jensen et al, 2013).

## ***2.2 The Agritourist Demographic***

The lack of understanding regarding the needs and motivations of customers is a major barrier to agritourism development (Srikatanyoo & Campiranon, 2011), leading to a level of uncertainty in designing marketing materials. However, some general data does exist on the demographics of the typical agritourist, suggesting a likelihood that agritourists will be interested in activities that are unique to the setting of the farm, such as visiting historical sites and purchasing local food (Draper, Shenoy, & Norman, 2006). This data implies an opportunity for farmers to advertise partnerships with local restaurants or historic aspects of the farm. In a study identifying where farm tourism may have the greatest potential, researchers found that farms located within close

proximity to cities may do well to offer recreational activities, while those farther from heavily populated areas may want to consider offering habitat based attractions – geared towards hunters, anglers, and trail riders (Brown & Reeder, 2007). In this same study, researchers also identified a profile on the average agritourism customer, asserting that they are likely to be of the baby boomer generation, have a median family size of three, and have a higher level of education than the national average (Brown & Reeder, 2007).

Carpio, Wohlgenant and Boonsaeng (2008) used the same National Survey on Recreation and the Environment from 2000 (NRSE 2000), to formulate a picture of U.S. demand for agritourism. Carpio and his colleagues found that “the factors influencing the decision to become a farm visitor indicated race and location of residence as the most important characteristics explaining this decision” (Carpio et al, 2008). This study hypothesized that people located in urban areas may be more likely to visit farms than those in rural settings, but found the opposite to be true. The researchers attributed this to the large number of Americans who live in rural areas but are not directly connected to agriculture. Additionally, they found that age and education have a significant effect on the decision to visit farms recreationally, with the number of trips increasing as visitors approach their early 40’s, where interest peaks and subsequently begins to taper off (Carpio et al, 2008).

While the NRSE 2000 seems to be the only source of nationwide data on agritourist demographics, statewide surveys can still provide useful insights. In a Tennessee report on visitors to agritourism attractions, researchers surveyed 464 visitors to agritourism sites across the state. They found that 84% of the visitors who filled out the survey were female, and that 72% possessed an education at a bachelor’s degree level or higher (Jensen, Lindborg, English, &

Menard, 2006). In Michigan, another survey revealed that the top reason cited for visiting agritourism operations was to buy or pick fresh produce (Che, Veek, & Veek, 2006). More than 95% of the participants in this survey were in-state residents, traveling an average of only 22 miles to reach the operation. Che, Veek, and Veek, use this data to conclude that rather than solely focusing on marketing to visitors in long-distance areas, it is important to cultivate customer relationships with neighbors and locals. The researchers also point out that many visitors to farms are in fact locals, and not tourists, making an integral part of this study to include opinions of residents in both the host community as well as other areas. A similar study in New Hampshire found that both in-state and out of state visitors were most likely to be in the age range between 35-49, with New Hampshire participants more likely to be females while out of state visitors were more likely to be male (New Hampshire Agritourism Survey, 2002). In Wisconsin, researchers found that the median age of the agritourist was 52 years, with the majority of participants having an educational level higher than a bachelor's degree, and higher incomes than average Wisconsin residents (Brown & Hershey, 2012).

Choo and Petrick (2014) explored how the relationships between satisfaction and social interactions of tourists on farms can shape their intentions to revisit. Using a survey, the researchers found that agritourism providers would do well to create positive social interactions for visitors, not only with the farmers themselves, but also with local residents, companions, and other customers. Ensuring positive experiences in all levels of the agritourism product will contribute to decisions to revisit the farm again (Choo & Petrick, 2014), which is imperative in establishing brand loyalty and strong customer relationships. In another study related to the needs and motivations of agritourists, Srikatanyoo and Campiranon (2010), used a factor analysis

to determine three major groups of agritourist needs - “activities and shopping; facilities, services, and location; and attractions and environment” —as well as three types of agritourist motivations—“agricultural experiences; quality of life, relationships, and adventure; and relaxations” (Srikatanyoo & Campiranon, 2010, p. 174). The researchers also noted differences between male and female agritourists, finding that female agritourists have the potential to be more demanding customers, and will place a high value on safety, while male customers, who still value safety, place the most about beautiful scenery.

In a California study on agritourism, it was found that word of mouth was the leading form of promotion, with 97% of participants in a survey based research project citing it as the most effective type of marketing material (Rilla et al, 2007).. The researchers found that signs outside of businesses, business cards/brochures, and websites were listed as the subsequent most effective modes of marketing. Other recommended types of promotional materials include advertisements in regional magazines, both paid and feature stories in newspapers, chamber of commerce ads, materials in visitor bureaus, direct mail, and business newsletters (Rilla et al, 2007). A Tennessee agritourism study found that the most commonly used methods of promotion for Tennessee agritourism ventures include websites, Facebook business pages, road signs, brochures, email, and the Tennessee Vacation Guide. Some of the farms that participated in regional branding such as Pick Tennessee Products or the Tennessee Farm Fresh program cited a 9% sales increase as a result of this marketing (Jensen, Bruch, Menard, & English, 2013).

### ***2.3 Photography and Agritourism***

One of the most common applications of photography within an agricultural research

context is the use of photo-elicitation as a methodology for data collection. Originally developed by anthropologists, photo-elicitation is a method of using photography as a development tool to generate conversation. In this process, photographs are taken of subject or topic under study, and are used as a springboard for discussion (Purcell, 2009). In the photo-elicitation method, personal interviews depend on photographs as the springboard for discussion topic, rather than beginning with a set of pre-determined questions (Sherren & Verstraten, 2012). This has also led to the development of a technique called autodiving, which involves using photographs of consumers to explore their behavior, ultimately giving insight into ways to successfully market to those consumers (Purcell, 2009). Heisley and Levy (1991) define autodiving as a research method that draws data from showing consumers images of themselves in order to spark a discussion from the consumer explaining their own actions and behaviors.

Schnell (2011) explored how marketers utilize local food in their promotional materials by focusing on telling the story of a place. He highlights how tourism destinations are now using photographs to portray of all the steps of food production through the farm to fork, contributing to a drastic transformation in the marketing of farms over the past 15 years. He asserts that in the past, farmers have largely been excluded from photographs of tourism landscapes, positioned as merely a backdrop for leisurely and scenic tourism advertisements. Schnell points to the emergence of agritourism as a contributing factor to the contemporary portrayal of farms as active landscapes (Schnell, 2011); indeed they have become destinations in themselves, providing tourists with an appealing opportunity to meet and interact with farmers to learn about the origins of their food. Culinary tourism certainly intersects with the interests of agritourism stakeholders, in that the marketing of food can reinforce the sustainability of a destination while



also contributing to the regional branding of food products (Quan & Wang, 2003). Rand and Heath (2006) suggest that destination marketing organizations (DMOs) would significantly benefit by including food tourism in their overall marketing strategies. The researchers acknowledge the relationships between food tourism and local culture, economic development, and agriculture, however, the authors neglect to include agritourism in their strategies for competitive marketing (Rand & Heath, 2006), indicating an opportunity for farmers to take an advantage of marketing to the culinary tourist audience.

Gao, Barbieri, and Valdivia (2013) call attention to the urgent need for a better understanding of consumer/visitor preferences of visual elements within agricultural landscapes. The authors denote three major categories of features within the landscape: natural (flora, fauna, and unmanaged habitats), agricultural (farm land use), and cultural (interactions between human activities, environment, and farm-related structures). They found that most participants preferred natural features such as wildlife, water resources, and native flora within agritourism landscapes, as well as historical/cultural aspects. They also reported that previous agritourism experience increased landscape appreciation amongst the participants and called for future studies to further examine the how relationships with land influence landscape preferences. The quantitative, exploratory findings of Gao, Barbieri, & Valdivia (2013) may further be enriched by the results of the present study, as the methodology provides a qualitative approach to exploring visitor preferences within agritourism landscapes.

Ryan and Ogilvie (2011), scholars from Edith Cowan University in Australia, discuss a range of data collection techniques that rely on photographs in business research. The study involves the application of the photo-elicitation technique to study place attachment in a rural

town in order to understand consumers' motivations and develop loyalty in buying behavior. In this study, residents were asked to photograph certain aspects of the rural place to which they felt attached. During in-depth interviews, researchers initiated discussion about what was missing from the set of photographs, as well as asked participants to choose their three most important photographs and to describe how they felt when they looked at them. While there were some limitations to the methodology (related to issues faced with asking participants to invest time and effort into taking the photographs), the researchers concluded that overall the use of photographs greatly enhanced the detail and richness of the data accrued in the duration of the study (Ryan and Ogilvie, 2011).

Photo-elicitation and auto-driving have been useful tools that utilize photography within agricultural settings, and for this current study, were adapted for focus groups (a more traditional method in marketing research).

#### ***2.4 Focus Group Testing in Marketing***

There are many methods to collect data for marketing research, but focus groups are the most appropriate for the purposes of this study, as they allow firms to design products based around the input of the consumer (Browell, 2000; Leahy, 2013). Originating as a method for gauging consumer attitudes (Marrelli, 2008), the focus group methodology has been adapted to serve the purposes of a variety of research endeavors. Morgan (1996, p. 130) defines a focus group as “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher.” Morgan draws attention to the essential components listed in this definition, pointing to the importance that the method is devoted to data collection, and data is sourced from the interaction of group members during the discussion, which is actively facilitated by the

researcher. This last point is critical; the facilitator must keep the group on task, and maintain direction within the conversation (Browell, 2000). In designing the focus group, the facilitator will first draft a set of core questions to be used in each group interview; these questions should be open-ended and tailored to the audience (Lee, 2005). The facilitator should also have follow up questions prepared, as well as be equipped to ask questions that may evolve organically throughout the conversation (Marrelli, 2008). In designing the questions, the researcher must first figure out, what decision will be made (or attempted), based on the results (Schlossberg, 1991). In the case of the current study, the data should help to inform the selection of photographs, more specifically the most appealing elements of those images, that should be included in the marketing materials for agritourism ventures. When focus groups rely on photographs to generate much of the direction of the discussion, the interview questions should be less rigidly structured, and focus on what thoughts the images evoke (Sherren, Fischer, & Fazey, 2012).

Consumer research frequently involves the exploration of the consumptive experience that plays on the desires, emotions, and enjoyment of consumers (Holbrook, 2005). Holbrook using autoethnography and the photographic essay, employed an a priori consumer value typology to organize a set of photographs, which he then used to evoke introspection on the consumption experience. While Holbrook chose to use a predetermined value typology, he acknowledged the valid approach of applying Straussian grounded theory which “starts with the raw materials, and builds from there, allowing a cohesive conceptualization to emerge from the data” (Holbrook, 2005, p. 46). In both the case of Holbrook’s study and this thesis, a set of photographs serves as the raw material upon which theory might be constructed.

Focus groups are particularly well suited for use in relatively new fields, allowing marketing researchers to gather rich and experiential data as form of preliminary inquiry into consumer beliefs or attitudes towards a product (Threlfall, 1999). Creating a comfortable environment in which to facilitate the focus group will further influence the likelihood that researchers will gather spontaneous attitudes and feelings elicited by a product (Popp, 1989). Since the collection of consumer reactions to a product through focus groups are so clearly defined as a useful ‘starting point’ (Sorenson, 1988), it would seem an appropriate methodology in exploring the relatively new topic of how to use photographs in agritourism marketing. The data from this study should be used to inform marketing material design, including the best platform, given that focus groups should not be used a the sole source of data to inform decision making, and should not be generalized into quantitative results (Cox, Higgenbotham, & Burton, 1976; NOAA Coastal Services Center, 2009).

## ***2.5 Discussing Photography***

Photographs are an imperative piece of the marketing mix for any successful product, and in fact can be 26% more successful in the design of advertisements than other artwork (Mazurkiewicz, 2002). The effects and emotions depicted within photographs can have a dramatic influence over the consumer response to the promotions containing those images (Mitchell, 1986). Photography is also inextricably linked with tourism, as images may inspire in viewers the desire to see for themselves the landscapes and cultural contents of a photograph (Neumann, 1992). In fact, the relationship between the images that are used to market tourist destinations and the resulting photographs that tourists take while visiting that destination can

result in a mirroring of tourist snapshots to photographs in marketing materials (Garrod & Fyall, 2008). Indeed, photography is a crucial component in the construction of the appeal of a tourist destination (Feighery, 2009).

The discussion of a photograph is a data-gathering process, and can involve the description of subject matter, form, medium, and style of an image (Barrett, 2006). However, as the purposes of this study are to find generalizable data that may be applied to future marketing materials, the discussion of imagery will mainly focus on subject matter. The frame refers to the deliberate arrangement of subject matter, which is used to focus the viewer's attention or point of view (Emerling, 2012). The medium, or the way the image is presented (e.g. handmade print, digital print, internet medium), will vary throughout marketing materials, and is thus not relevant to the undertaking of this study. The style in which a photograph is made revolves around the artist's personal disposition and may be influenced by changing time periods, geographic locations, and personal choices concerning the presentation of subject matter (Barrett, 2006). Style refers to the collection of consistent recognizable elements that a photographer uses within the presentation of visual imagery (Scharf, 2006).

A photograph may be aesthetic as well as documentary, simultaneously drawing meaning from the composition of the image as well as the response to the image by the audience (Crowe, 2003). The interpretation of a photograph occurs whenever the discussion of a piece moves beyond offering information and into the implications and meanings contained or elicited by the image (Barrett, 2006). Responding to an image allows the viewer to become an active spectator, recognizing how and why the image has an effect, rather than passively consuming the experience (Emerling, 2012). While formal critiques of photography may include an

examination of artistic style, the focus group methodology in this study will seek to identify the most compelling subject matter within the set of photographs intended to market agritourism to a variety of consumers. This arrangement of subject matter may be thought of as the frame of the image. The images contained in the data set are all taken by a singular photographer (the primary researcher), in an effort to establish consistent style and reduce one source of variation from the dialogue. The dialogue will provide the foundation for the comparison of various participant responses to the photographs using the grounded theory method.

## ***2.6 Grounded Theory***

Grounded Theory is a method of qualitative research that allows the investigator to gather scientific data, identifying codes and theories as the process of inquiry unfolds (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). This methodology was first described by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their 1967 publication *The Discovery of Grounded Theory; Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Since this joint publication, however, Glaser and Strauss have published differing views on the application of the Grounded Theory Method (GTM). Glaser has remained committed to the centrality of inductive reasoning in GTM (i.e. the researcher should use the data to inform the development of theory and hypotheses), while Strauss has suggested that the research question should be formed based on what is already known about the subject (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Despite the branching out from original methods proposed by Glaser and Strauss, what remains central to GTM is the rigorous and systematic approach to collection, coding, and analysis of qualitative data (Cooney, 2010).

Researchers may use open coding to look for general patterns and meanings, and then move into more directed comparisons of clusters and categories within the data – also known as focused, or selective coding. Finally, axial coding is used to link the categories together within a general framework (Kendall, 2008). In the case of this study, axial coding was used to synthesize the codes identified in the open coding process, in order to identify points of centrality among the groups (Priest, Roberts, & Woods, 2002). This final step in the coding process allowed for the comparison of differences and similarities between each responses in each focus group, for instance the use of similar words like authentic, historic, or nostalgic. Memoing is another way of referring to the process of taking field notes about the concepts that are noticed by the theorist during the coding of data; keeping track of or reviewing memos and code categories inform the researchers decisions to build and refine theories (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Critics of GTM assert that preconceived notions or dispositions of the researcher too often prevent theories derived through GTM from being solidly based in data (Selden, 2005). Other critiques of the methodology accuse practitioners of oversimplifying complexities in data, constraining analysis by emphasizing procedure over interpretation, and of using faulty inductive knowledge to support conclusions (Thomas & James, 2006). Despite these criticisms, GTM is still widely used in a variety of fields ranging from healthcare to software development (Adolph, Kruchten, & Hall, 2012; Thomson, Petty, & Scholes, 2013), valued for its ability to generate knowledge of reality through inquiry and observation. Bryant (2002) points to the many researchers who use GTM as a crutch to support or mask subpar research objectives and background in methodology. While presenting an overall critical discussion of GTM, Bryant does concede that the method is useful for inquiry focused on the human interactions and interpretations, especially when

researchers take the advice of Strauss and Corbin (1998) to think abstractly, remain open to constructive criticism, and remain sensitive to participants while also devoted to the work process.

The application of GTM has also been noted for its particular usefulness in the analysis of visual data (Konecki, 2009; Savich, 2012). Thus far however, much of the application of grounded theory within the analysis of image-based data has focused on the aim to provide a voice to marginalized individuals or communities (Liebenberg, Didkowsky, & Ungar, 2012). Since the age of the average American farmer is on the rise, with many farmers at or above the age of 55 and at a high risk for injury related to equipment operations and continued strenuous labor (Mitchell, Bradley, Wilson, & Goins, 2008), they may be thought of as a marginalized community. Furthermore, Southern West Virginia continues to be impacted by the practice of mountain top removal, threatening not only environmental well being, but also impacting social, cultural, and economic facets of the region (Burns, 2005). In a study using focus group methodology as well as GTM, small farmers were prompted to discuss the positive outcomes of their participation in an agritourism networking association; many farmers felt empowered within their communities, and placed value on the collective voice of the network (Ainley & Kline, 2012).

GTM has also been used in the field of marketing research. Gambetti, Graffigna, and Birachi (2012) used the grounded theory method to explore consumer-brand engagement, which enabled the researchers to draw insights into how marketers might best engage their customers with their branded products. The exploratory study used semi-structured interviews with marketing managers and communication professionals to gain better understanding of how a



brand might engage consumers through using long-term strategies to establish trust and commitment based consumer relationships (Gambetti, Graffigna, & Birachi, 2012). In a review of her own research on how consumers construct their relationships or views of corporate brands, Rindell (2009) discussed the major challenges that presented in the use of GTM in marketing research. She asserts that during a researcher's first attempt to use GTM, it is difficult to realize at the outset what the central theme or theory is, leading to her to suggest diligence in taking memos and recording reports on theory development throughout the entire research process (Rindell, 2009).

Johnson, Egelkraut, and Grout (2010) also used GTM in a marketing context to explore how small to medium agribusinesses gather and apply market intelligence. In an effort to aid these small to midsized enterprises make more informed marketing decisions, the researchers interviewed marketing personnel at a variety of food manufacturers in Oregon to discover how their marketing decisions were informed. The researchers found that the subjects gathered marketing information from multiple, often overlapping, sources, and that one of the main factors in determining success in marketing is not determined from where market intelligence is gathered, but rather how it is used (Johnson, Egelkraut, & Grout, 2010).

## ***2.7 Study Purpose***

In consideration of the above review of literature, it is pertinent to reiterate the purpose of this study - to explore which elements of photographs used in the marketing materials for agritourism are most effective at reaching consumers. The application of GTM will provide an

approach for identifying themes in the data collected from the focus group based discussion. The data accrued from this study will better equip farmers, agritourism coordinators, planners, and destination marketing directors in the development of their marketing strategies, by providing them with insight into the different reactions that photographs might illicit for members of their potential audience. The data will also be instrumental to DMOs, restaurants, and other tourism stakeholders seeking to attract visitors who are interested in participating in local food experiences.

### **3.0 Methods**

#### ***3.1 Greenbrier Valley Background***

The data for this study was collected in conjunction with an agritourism development pilot project with the Greenbrier Valley Pasture Network (GVPN), a group of farmers practicing pasture-based livestock farming in West Virginia. The GVPN project was a funded, regional pilot program designed to create new alliances and strengthen existing linkages within the sustainable meat industry and the community of the Greenbrier Valley, West Virginia. Agritourism is gaining popularity in West Virginia, with the development of farm tourism gleaning support from both the West Virginia Department of Agriculture and the State's Division of Tourism (Anderson, 2007). While many states are seeing a decrease in family owned farms, West Virginia has actually gained over 2,000 farms between 2002 and 2007, and continues to lead the nation in the number of family owned farms (Bickers, 2009). The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) asserts that agritourism has increased the sales to WV agribusiness products to \$200 million, and exposed up to 300,000 out-of-state customers and companies to WV products (WVDA, 2012).

The GVPN intends to bind sustainable agriculture and sustainable tourism to increase sales for meat producers by organizing the skills and talents of farmers, providing training on agritourism, and marketing the agritourism experience collectively. The pilot program, made possible by a mini-grant from the Central Appalachian Network (CAN), was launched in March of 2013, and culminated in October 2013 with the first annual two-day farm tour event.

### ***3.2 Focus Group Selection***

Participants selected for focus groups were stakeholders in tourism, including farmers who participate in agritourism, tourists with varying levels of participation in agritourism, and community members such as visitors center employees and retail operation owners. It is important to note that there are many individuals associated with or affected in some affinity by tourism development, which comprise an interdependent network of stakeholders within any destination (Waligo, Clarke, & Hawkins, 2013). Considering that the three primary stakeholders in agritourism are agritourism providers, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), and agritourists (McGehee, 2007), it was deemed necessary to include input from each of these segments. In total, five focus groups were held; each group contained 4-6 participants, in order to maintain a small group size conducive to open dialogue, except for the GVPN farmer group where all farmers participating in the pilot project were included. The GVPN group was composed of farmers whose farms were depicted in the photographs. To gather the opinions of farmers without a personal tie to the photographs, participants in a second farmer group were personally solicited from attendants to an agritourism conference in Western North Carolina. Selecting farmers from this region ensured that the topography shown in the photographs was similar to the topography of the participant farms (the common thread was the Appalachian Mountains). The community group participants were recruited through personal phone calls, and consisted of employees at the visitor's center who are involved in destination marketing, retail stakeholders, and individuals involved in community development.

Given that many visitors to farms are seeking a break from daily stress and city life (Srikatanyoo, 2010), while others are in fact local residents living in the same rural communities

as the agritourism destinations (Che, 2006) it was decidedly important to sample from the local community, as well as other geographic locations. Agritourists were contacted through their participation in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) group. A CSA is a system in which members subscribe for shares of a harvest, paying for the season in advance (Borst, 2008). Usually CSAs are a product of an agricultural cooperative, in which members are supplied with regular parcels of food from each farmer involved in the cooperative. The CSA model distributes risk between members, subsidizing the farmers overall cost while providing benefits to members in the form of viable shares of the harvest (Borst, 2008). The choice of a CSA group was a deliberate attempt to sample from an organization where members have already illustrated an interest in local food systems through the purchase of local produce. Contact was first made with the organizer of the CSA in a metropolitan area, who then e-mailed an announcement to CSA members. The announcement included the purpose of the study and asked for volunteers to participate. Interested members were directed to a background ‘qualifying survey’ which asked basic demographic information, along with questions about what types of agritourism activities the participant had participated in during the past two years. The activities listed were: farm tour, farm dinner, petting zoo, pick your own produce, on farm events, hay or sleigh rides, overnight stays in a bed and breakfast, visited an on farm produce stand, visited an on farm restaurant, corn maze, horseback riding, hunting, or fishing, and included a write in space for other activities. Participants were grouped based on activity participation; those that had participated in fewer than 4 activities were selected for their low experience in agritourism, while the others with more than 5 activities were grouped in the high experience agritourism group. See Figure 1 for an outline of focus group participants.

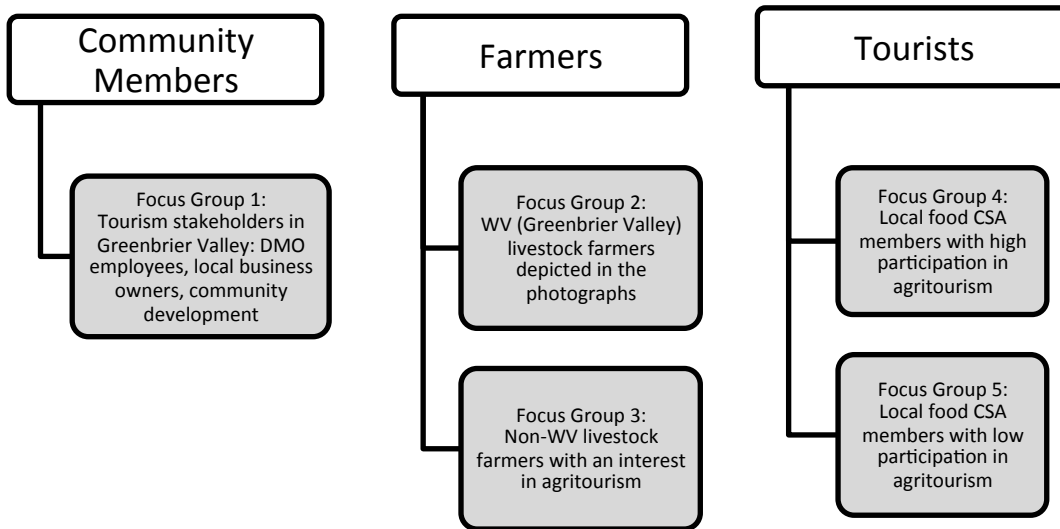


Figure 1: Focus Group Participants

### ***3.3 Data Set Design***

A wide range of images were selected to present to focus group participants including portraits of the farmers themselves, close up shots of animals, expansive landscapes, brightly colored imagery, and black and white (B&W) shots. In selecting the photographs the main categories for content included landscapes, animals, people, and farm house interiors or built environments. Additionally, images within these four broad categories also include key sub criteria, i.e. each category contained a mixture of color vs. B&W, warm tones vs. cool tones, posed smiling vs. candid moments, animals with and without fences, etc. This broad approach to categorization

was necessary due to the risk that the content could become secondary to compositional elements (tonal range, colors, level of skill and technique, and the bias in the fact that the primary researcher chose the appeal in each image). Including a wide range of photographs in the set helps to offset the inherent differences in composition in each category. The preliminary ‘grouping’ of images was not revealed to participants. See Table 1 for a detailed description of the photographs included in the data set.

Table 1. Detailed description of data set

<b>Photo #</b>	<b>Photo Title</b>	<b>Category</b>
1	Hay rake, barn, and silo	Landscape
2	Farmer and tourist in field	People
3	Piglets feeding	Animals
4	Farmhouse with barn in background	Interiors/built environment
5	Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen	People
6	Long horned cow in mud	Animals
7	Farmhouse guest room	Interiors/built environment
8	Tourists in farmer’s truck	People
9	Cows in open green field	Animals
10	Flowers in front of barn (B&W)	Landscapes
11	Tourist in hay wagon taking pictures	People
12	Cow through wooden fence	Animals
13	Sunrise over landscape with silo	Landscapes
14	Farming couple in scenic landscape	People
15	Red Devon cow through wire fence	Animals
16	Historic graveyard on farm grounds	Landscapes
17	Male farmer opening barn door (B&W)	People
18	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	Animals
19	Farmhouse kitchen scene (B&W)	Interiors/built environment
20	Farming couple posing with ram	People
21	Farmer selling ground meat	People
22	Portrait of a horse (B&W)	Animals
23	Fresh eggs in red basket	Interiors/built environment
24	Portrait of a cow (B&W)	Animals
25	Male farmer driving tractor	People
26	Brightly colored rooster	Animals

The primary researcher took all of the photographs used to springboard conversation

during the focus groups. The photographs were taken through the course of the aforementioned agritourism pilot project from June through October of 2013. This was done for a number of reasons: 1) to limit bias that might result from various styles present in the work of different photographers, 2) to add an element of ‘reality’ to the data set by using images that were actually used in a marketing campaign for agritourism, and 3) to allow for the comparison of responses between farmers with a personal relationship to the farms depicted in the photographs against the responses of livestock farmers with no relationship to the photographs.

### ***3.4 Focus Group Design***

Each participant was provided with a set of 26 4x6 images, and was initially asked to look through the deck in order to familiarize themselves with the photographs. Next, participants were asked to complete a rating exercise, based on a rating system of 1 being equivalent to *No personal connection* and 4 denoting a *Strong personal connection*. Asking participants about their personal connection to the photographs allowed for exploration of implications for emotional marketing and branding efforts. Emotional marketing has become commonplace in postmodern consumer societies, wherein consumers respond to marketing for products and services that appeals to the value and needs of contemporary consumers (Rytel, 2010). This is especially pertinent in tourism marketing, where marketing strategies that incorporate cultural values through recognition of tourist’s emotions can contribute to the creation of positive experiences for the visitor (Marciszewska, 2005). Bjork (2010) explored how elements on tour operators’ website could stimulate emotional responses, finding that photographs, along with information content and structure, were the most important elements for stimulation of emotional



responses within the tourists decision making process.

In addition to selecting photographs with which they had a personal connection, participants denoted their 'top five' favorite images, which were subsequently discussed with the group. During this time, the moderator used a set of predetermined questions to guide the dialogue. The rating exercise was intended to familiarize participants with the images, and facilitate their thinking about why or why not some images elicit personal connections. This method teased out the natural groupings or categorizations that might emerge (e.g. people who live in cities chose images x,y,z - all featuring similar content). Because of the inherent variance in color, angle, exposure, the questions were designed to provide focus to the purpose of the study. As suggested in the review of the focus group literature, the images were used as the springboard for discussion allowing the photographs themselves to steer the direction of the conversation. In order to ensure that the conversation covered topics relevant to agritourism marketing in general, the moderator made a conscious effort to ensure that the conversation focused more on the content, than the composition of the photographs. The questions used follow:

1. Now that you have had a chance to look through the images I would like for you to please choose the top five images that evoke a strong personal connection or emotional response for you.
2. Please tell me why you chose these five images. (Probe: What are some of the emotions that you felt when looking at specific pictures?)
3. Thinking about those same 5 photos, would you want to visit that farm? Why or why not?
4. How does your interest vary between photographs that contained people, and those that were focused on animals?
5. How does your interest vary between photographs that had no people and those that did?
6. How does what the people are doing in the images affect your response?
7. What are some other elements that have not been mentioned that affected your response?

8. What are some things that you did not find in this set of photographs that you think might appeal to you or other potential visitors to farms in a way that would encourage participation in agritourism?

### ***3.5 Data Coding and Analysis***

The conversation of each focus group was recorded and transcribed, and served as the primary source of data for this study. The transcriptions of the interviews were scrutinized through content analysis, and were subsequently coded according to the themes that emerged in responses. Using the grounded theory method to identify existing codes and themes in the data, a case-by-case variable matrix from the texts and codes was formulated. This type of latent coding, recognized by Bernard and Ryan (2010), has become the norm in qualitative data analysis, creating a matrix that can be analyzed through a variety of methods (some researchers choose statistical analysis, while others proceed with qualitative methods). Applying this method of conventional content analysis is often deemed appropriate in situations where pre-existing theory on a topic is limited, and allows the researcher to formulate categories and variables as they flow from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Content analysis is particularly useful in examining word-frequency in text in order to discover points of cognitive centrality or important concepts (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, (2007).

A team of three researchers worked together to code the data, using the strategy of triangulation, which increases credibility and accuracy in qualitative research (Pitney, 2004). To further ensure the trustworthiness of the coding process, the researcher followed the recommendations of Saldana (2012), to maintain a reflective journal on the research project

containing notes on the coding process and the formulation of analytic memos. Rigorous data analysis can also be achieved by transparently describing in the report the process of data handling, organization, and analysis (Tracy, 2010). Content analysis is also increased in strength when the researcher incorporates the views of the participants themselves, as opposed to making inferences on their own (Carlson, 2008). This study includes the opinions of not only the target audience for tourism, but also the farmers who are portrayed in the photographs strengthening the data and contributing to trustworthiness. Trustworthiness was further established through the combination of various participant recruitment methods with consistent data collection (White, Oelke, & Friesen, 2012). Including thorough descriptions of the contextual factors related to data collection and focus group proceedings further establishes transparency and trustworthiness, making it apparent to investigators whether or not the research findings might be applicable in other scenarios (Orvik, Larun, Berland, & Ringsberg, 2012). Final discussion and interpretation of data is enriched and validated through concise reporting supported by the accompaniment of participant quotes (Williams & Morrow, 2009).

## 4.0 Results

### 4.1 Focus Group Data

Five focus groups were held during the weeks of November 22<sup>nd</sup>, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, and February 29<sup>th</sup>. Participants varied in age, gender, and relationship with farms (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of Focus Group Participants

	<b>Focus Group 1</b>	<b>Focus Group 2</b>	<b>Focus Group 3</b>	<b>Focus Group 4</b>	<b>Focus Group 5</b>
<b>Date held</b>	11/22/14	11/22/14	2/22/14	2/29/14	2/29/14
<b>Participant Description</b>	Community members in Greenbrier Valley, WV	Greenbrier Valley farmers depicted in photographs	North Carolina Farmers with an interest in Agritourism	Local food CSA members (tourists) with low agritourism experience	Local food CSA members (tourists) with high agritourism experience
<b>Number of Participants</b>	12	4	4	4	4
<b>Gender mix</b>	6 Female 6 Male	4 Female	3 Female 1 Male	2 Female 2 Male	3 Female 1 Male
<b>Ages</b>	One 30's, One 40's, Two 50's	Four 30's, Two 40's, Four 50's	One 30's, One 40's, Two 50's	Three 50's, One 20's	One 20's, One 30's, Two 50's
<b>Relationship with farms</b>	High knowledge of farming	Low to moderate exposure to farms	High knowledge of farming	Low to moderate exposure to farms	High exposure to farms

*Note: Ages are estimates, depicted by decade*

### ***Focus group 1 – Community Group***

This focus group consisted of community members in the host community where the photographs were taken. Participants in this group were tourism stakeholders in the Greenbrier Valley, including DMO employees, local business owners, and an employee with a non-profit focused on community development. Three members of the group had extensive to moderate experience on and around farms (stemming from growing up on farms or having farming relatives), while the remaining person did not feel she was that familiar with farming life (having grown up in proximity to, but not on farms). Despite efforts to contact male stakeholders, all of the participants in this group were female. The focus group was held in a private room at the Greenbrier Valley Visitors Center.

The two participants in this group that were employed by the local DMO made frequent comments that related the photographs to marketing potential. Thus, marketing was a major theme in this group with participants focusing on images that they felt would entice visitors with the opportunity to have interactive and educational experiences. One of the focus group members was specifically drawn to photographs that represented her own memory of growing up in proximity to a local farm, saying, “This is what I remember walking across the street, and looking eye to eye with a cow who is staring back at me. To me, a lot of this is part [of] having grown up in this valley, that I cherish. A lot of nostalgia.” However, other participants in the group responded negatively to the same photograph (and other similar images that contained fences), noting that the cow seemed to have sad eyes. The disparate reactions indicate how an individual with less experience on a farm was drawn to this photograph while others who have more direct experience with agriculture and farm animals prefer the images of ‘free-ranging’

animals.

Other discussion in the group covered the need to clearly indicate in each photograph who is the farmer, and who is the tourist. Members in this group also described the photographs with words like fulfilled, passionate (referring to photo 5 – female farmer bottle-feeding calves), pride, and joy (photo 14 – farming couple in scenic landscape). There was a general preference for candid photographs that conveyed scenes of people interacting and having fun. Additionally, when asked what might be missing from the photos, focus group participants discussed how the photographs used in marketing for agritourism should include children to accentuate the educational component of the experience. See table 3 for a list of photographs that participants in the community focus group reported strong personal connections to.

Table 3. Photographs with strongest connection: Community group

<b>Photo #</b>	<b>Photo Title</b>	<b>Average Connection Rating</b>
13	Sunrise over landscape with silo	4.00
23	Fresh eggs in red basket	4.00
26	Brightly Colored Rooster	4.00
22	Portrait of a horse (B&W)	3.75
14	Farming couple in scenic landscape	3.50
18	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	3.50
19	Farmhouse kitchen scene (B&W)	3.50
20	Farming couple posing with ram	3.50
24	Portrait of a cow (B&W)	3.50
12	Cow through wooden fence	3.25
3	Piglets feeding	3
5	Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen	3
8	Tourists in farmer's truck	3
9	Cows in open green field	3
10	Flowers in front of barn (B&W)	3
15	Red Devon cow through wire fence	3

*\*Connection ratings were based on a likert scale from 1-4, where 1 is no personal connection, 2 is somewhat connected, 3 is a personal connection, and 4 is a strong personal connection.*

### *Focus group 2 – West Virginia Livestock Farmers*

All of the farmers in this group were pasture based livestock farmers in the Greenbrier Valley of West Virginia; their farms were depicted in the photographs. There were 12 participants with an even ratio between male and female. The conversation was hosted at a locally owned restaurant in the Greenbrier Valley. Ten of the farmers (representing 5 farms), primarily raised cattle, but also had small assortments of other animals on their farms such as pigs, horses, or chickens. Two of the farmers (one farm), specialized in mixed breeds, incorporating various animals such as pigs, rams, assorted poultry, and rabbits.

One of the most frequently mentioned preferences for photographs amongst participants in this group was for those that depict candid moments. Farmers preferred to see images that conveyed hard work and authenticity, discussing the appeal of images that show “the interaction between the farm and the person [farmer]... you interacting with your farm, not just being in it.” Others showed a general preference for photographs of animals without people, and were drawn to images of aesthetically pleasing landscapes. Multiple farmers commented that they felt a sense of relaxation in the ‘old-timey’ styled B&W photographs. Photo 1 (hay rake, barn, and silo) was a lengthy subject of discussion in this group as participants cited various positive attributes including bright colors and patterns, as well as a sense of rich history in the image. This is best explained by one female farmer, who said, “in farming, I love the history between the farm, the silo, and the hay. Those of us that understand the story, that the machinery's replaced the animals that were in that barn originally... So the hay's kind of replaced the corn, too. So it tells quite a story every time.”

Some farmers noticed characteristics of physical appearance in the animals that they would not necessarily want to showcase to tourists in marketing. Other general discussion in this group centered on the need to include children the photographs and a desire to see images that show the process of hard work and equipment in use on the farm throughout all seasons of the year. See table 4 for a list of photographs that participants in the West Virginia livestock farmer focus group reported strong personal connections to.

Table 4. Photographs with highest connection: WV livestock farmers

<b>Photo #</b>	<b>Photo Title</b>	<b>Average Connection Rating</b>
<b>12</b>	Cow through wooden fence	3.50
<b>15</b>	Red Devon cow through wire fence	3.50
<b>13</b>	Sunrise over landscape with silo	3.42
<b>24</b>	Portrait of a cow (B&W)	3.33
<b>5</b>	Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen	3.25
<b>1</b>	Hay rake, barn, and silo	3.17
<b>18</b>	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	3.08
<b>21</b>	Farmer selling ground meat	3.08
<b>10</b>	Flowers in front of barn (B&W)	3.00
<b>20</b>	Farming couple posing with ram	3.00

*\*Connection ratings were based on a likert scale from 1-4, where 1 is no personal connection, 2 is somewhat connected, 3 is a personal connection, and 4 is a strong personal connection.*

### ***Focus group 3 – North Carolina Livestock Farmers***

This group consisted of livestock farmers with an interest in agritourism but with no personal relation to the photographs. While many of the farmers did raise vegetables or other produce, they also raised livestock on their farms. Two of the farmers specialized in cattle supplemented with mixed breeds such as pigs or chickens. The remaining two farmers specialized in produce but also had smaller mixed breeds of animals on their farms such as rabbits, sheep, and chickens.



Three participants in this group were female, with one male. The meeting was held on the campus of Warren Wilson College in Asheville North Carolina.

Farmers in this group made a distinction between what they might feel a personal connection to, and what they believe a tourist might like to see. One farmer said, “I also think we risk missing... We are not our clientele.” Another farmer mentioned a memory in which a photograph of pigs won the cover of a prominent magazine, which led to a discussion on what types of photographs of animals are the best for marketing. In general, the farmers agreed that tourists are drawn to animals with a more unique appearance, such as bright red Devon cows. There was also a consensus amongst the participants in this group that tourists would be drawn to photographs with bright colors and textures that feature the opportunity to interact with both farmers and animals. While the farmers had a preference for more ‘authentic’ images – for instance photo 6 (long horned cow in mud), they felt that tourists might prefer to see more manicured images. One particular exchange between farmers illustrates this sentiment shared by the participants:

**Farmer A:** Marketing is about that line [approaching] realism...you want to be realistic, but you don't want to scare people away.

**Farmer B:** The feedback I get from our own website ....was people wanted to go were those pretty scenes were. I hated to break it to them but you have to really focus here to get that scene and ignore the mud [that's] real life...There are people who want to see pigs in mud and there are people who don't want to think that they're suffering in mud.

The farmers continued by discussing the role that stereotypes can play in marketing, expressing a distaste for “the image that we all have of family farms in Iowa 1,000 acres, big tractor, big barn images.” One farmer felt that small local farmers “need to be fighting that stereotype not furthering [it].” Countering that point, another participant pointed to the example of photo 26 (brightly colored rooster), arguing that farmers should leverage those ‘stereotypical’ images to draw people in, and then once they are on the farm, use the opportunity to teach them just what is different about nonconventional agriculture.

In general, the participants had a desire to see photographs that evoke a sense of nostalgia or desire to connect and interact with the farmer, the animals, and the farm. A final theme within this group was the appeal of B&W photographs; the farmers liked them on a personal level, but would not use them for print or web marketing, preferring color to capture interest. See table 5 for a list of photographs that participants in the NC livestock farmer group reported strong personal connections to.

Table 5. Photographs with strongest connection: NC livestock farmers

<b>Photo #</b>	<b>Photo Title</b>	<b>Average Connection Rating</b>
<b>5</b>	Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen	3.25
<b>8</b>	Tourists in farmer’s truck	3.25
<b>18</b>	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	3.25
<b>19</b>	Farmhouse kitchen scene (B&W)	3.25
<b>26</b>	Brightly Colored Rooster	3.25
<b>14</b>	Farming couple in scenic landscape	3
<b>23</b>	Fresh eggs in red basket	3
<b>15</b>	Red Devon cow through wire fence	3

*\*Connection ratings were based on a likert scale from 1-4, where 1 is no personal connection, 2 is somewhat connected, 3 is a personal connection, and 4 is a strong personal connection.*

#### ***Focus group 4 – Tourist Group with Low Agritourism Experience***

The participants in this group, two males and two females, had all been on a farm tour at some point, however reported an overall low participation rate in various types of agritourism. It is worth noting that although members in this group were selected because they reported participation in less than four agritourism activities in the past year, both of the male participants had extensive experience with farms – one was raised on a farm and another is the current volunteer coordinator for a major farm tour event. All of the participants were familiar with this particular farm tour event, which may have influenced their responses to the photographs as they thought about marketing in relation to that event. The meeting was held at a coffee shop in Pineville, NC.

An interesting contrast between members of this group took shape in the opposing viewpoints held by the older and male participants who had worked or lived on farms and the younger and female participant who was a law student, a vegan, and had limited experience with farms. This difference became evident in the discussion of photo 1 (hay rake, barn, and silo), during which a male participant described his interest in the distinctive farming equipment in the image. The younger female had a different reaction to the photo, saying “Seeing that picture I just think of old stuff, and if I saw it I probably wouldn't want to go.” Differences between the two demographics also emerged in discussion over the presence of fences and the level of proximity to the animals in the images. Male participants cited a preference for close up shots of animals with no fences, feeling that “when it's a photo where it's cows or something and they're

far away, I feel like I'm not going to get the hands on [experience].” Conversely, the young female participant placed photographs with fences amongst her favorite selections, describing an image of a cow behind a fence by saying, “I like it, but that's just something I like to do (photo 15 – red Devon cow through wire fence). If I see a cow, I would probably stand at the fence and just stare at them for 10 minutes.” However, another female participant noted that seeing the animal confined behind a fence was off-putting to her (photo 12 – cow through wooden fence), making her feel that the “cow is [saying] ‘let me out.’”

There were some elements that all of the participants were drawn to, especially those things that they would not get to see in the city, such as wide open space and scenic landscapes with lots of greenery and few structures. The participants discussed how the images of farmhouses, both interiors and exteriors, were not particularly of interest to them. Participants felt that these photographs would be useful if a tourist were interested in spending the night on the farm, but should not be included for marketing daytime tours and activities. Similar to feedback from other groups, participants noted that photographs depicting opportunities to touch and interact with unique animals were particularly effective for marketing. The participants defined unique in this case as animals that they may not have seen before, and specifically used this word to describe the brightly colored rooster in photo 26 (this was unique to participants who were accustomed to one breed of plain white chickens) and the sheep in photo 18 (sheep with green grass and red ear tags). Finally, participants discussed the difference in their reaction to B&W images versus those in color, feeling that B&W images “seem more artsy, like they're going to be in an art book or something. Not as attractive as PR [public relations] sets.” See . for a list of photographs that participants in the low agritourism experience focus group reported

strong personal connections to.

Table 6. Photographs with highest connection: Low agritourism experience tourist group

<b>Photo #</b>	<b>Photo Title</b>	<b>Average Connection Rating</b>
<b>20</b>	Farming couple posing with ram	3.75
<b>18</b>	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	3.25
<b>26</b>	Brightly Colored Rooster	3.25
<b>8</b>	Tourists in farmer's truck	3
<b>13</b>	Sunrise over landscape with silo	3

*\*Connection ratings were based on a likert scale from 1-4, where 1 is no personal connection, 2 is somewhat connected, 3 is a personal connection, and 4 is a strong personal connection.*

#### ***Focus group 5 – Tourist Group with High Agritourism Experience***

The participants in this group, three females and one male, reported an overall low participation rate in various types of agritourism. There were three females and one male in this group. Two of the female participants were in the 45-60 year age range, sharing similar views and building on one another's input. The younger female participant made frequent mention to her children, influenced by her experiences with them during agritourism events. The male participant was in his early 30's. The majority of participants in this group had visited an on farm produce stand, attended on farm events, taken hay or sleigh rides, picked their own produce, visited petting zoos, and had all been on farm tours. The meeting was held at a coffee shop in Charlotte, NC.

The dialogue in this focus group began with a discussion on group reactions to B&W photographs, with most feeling that they are a bit more 'artsy,' while the color photographs have greater marketability. However, one participant did comment that, "in a newspaper, it [B&W] would look good. I mean, I love the color pictures too, but I know color pictures in a newspaper

are very expensive.” When asked what was missing from the set of images participants reiterated the importance of including children in the images. While the feeling that children should be depicted in the photographs was present in all groups, it was most heavily emphasized within this focus group. The participants selected multiple photographs throughout the set that they felt would be improved through the inclusion of children. This was especially the case with photo 5 (female farmer bottle feeding calves), where participants felt that the image would be more effective if it were a child feeding the calves instead of an adult. One participant explains, “that's because on some of the farm tours where we've gone, my daughter has fed the calves. It's one of our most memorable experiences, so we really love to have [a] connection with that.”

Participants expressed an overall negative response to fences and ear tags in the images. They agreed that the fences made them feel that “even if you go, there's a wall between you and the animals, [and] one of the best things about going into the farms is that you don't really feel that wall.” In discussing the ear tags, there were two reasons that they were unappealing. First, the male participant pointed out that the red ear tag (specifically in photo 18 – sheep with green grass and red ear tags) was distracting and so brightly colored that it almost became the focal point. Further, the participants agreed that not only are the tags distracting, they also remind the viewer that the animal is bound for slaughter, and made them “feel sorry for him. You kind of know what he's bound for. You don't want to think about that.” Finally, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the desire to see family and farmer interaction in the photographs because, “farmers are our favorite thing about visiting different farms. A lot of the ones in our area I know do incredible outreach programs and have families come work with them. There's really a special thing about it, and so having them present, in any kind of marketing for the farm

I think is really important.” See table 4 for a list of photographs that participants in the high agritourism experience focus group reported strong personal connections to.

Table 4. Photographs with highest connection: High agritourism experience tourist group

<b>Photo #</b>	<b>Photo Title</b>	<b>Average Connection Rating</b>
12	Cow through wooden fence	3.50
15	Red Devon cow through wire fence	3.50
13	Sunrise over landscape with silo	3.42
24	Portrait of a cow (B&W)	3.33
5	Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen	3.25
1	Hay rake, barn, and silo	3.17
18	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	3.08
21	Farmer selling ground meat	3.08
10	Flowers in front of barn (B&W)	3.00
20	Farming couple posing with ram	3.00

*\*Connection ratings were based on a likert scale from 1-4, where 1 is no personal connection, 2 is somewhat connected, 3 is a personal connection, and 4 is a strong personal connection.*

#### **4.2 Results by Photograph**

The following section contains a summary of the responses to each photograph including comparisons across focus groups. This section details the commonalities and differences of between group reactions to the individual photographs, and will be further discussed in Chapter five. Table 3 contains information on the average level of connectedness focus group participants felt in relation to each photograph.

Table 3. Average Participant Connection by Photograph

<b>Photo #</b>	<b>Photo Title</b>	<b>Average Connection Rating</b>
14	Farming couple in scenic landscape	3.05
13	Sunrise over landscape with silo	3.00
20	Farming couple posing with ram	3.00
24	Portrait of a cow (B&W)	3.00

26	Brightly Colored Rooster	3.00
9	Cows in open green field	2.95
12	Cow through wooden fence	2.95
18	Sheep with green grass and red ear tags	2.95
19	Farmhouse kitchen scene (B&W)	2.85
23	Fresh eggs in red basket	2.85
5	Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen	2.80
8	Tourists in farmer's truck	2.80
15	Red Devon cow through wire fence	2.75
10	Flowers in front of barn (B&W)	2.70
22	Portrait of a horse (B&W)	2.65
1	Hay rake, barn, and silo	2.60
3	Piglets feeding	2.55
25	Male farmer driving tractor	2.50
6	Long horned cow in mud	2.35
17	Male farmer opening barn door (B&W)	2.30
11	Tourist in hay wagon taking pictures	2.25
21	Farmer selling ground meat	2.25
16	Historic graveyard on farm grounds	2.10
7	Farmhouse guest room	2.00
2	Farmer and tourist in field	1.70
4	Farmhouse with barn in background	1.50

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***Photo 1. Hay rake, barn, and silo***

Many of the participants in the tourist groups did not realize the three elements of farming history that are represented in the photo. Farmers in both groups associated it with rich history, calling it an ‘Americana’ type photo which evokes nostalgia. The feeling of nostalgia was also noted by community members, despite the fact that one member criticized the lack of a clear focal point. Some tourists liked the image because of the distinctive machinery, while another found it to be an unappealing depiction of ‘old stuff.’ Multiple participants commented on the appeal of the bright colors in this image.

***Photo 2. Farmer and tourist in field***



Participants in both tourist groups generally agreed that the photograph was not appealing because it is unclear who or what is in the photograph, and lacked any barn or pasture that conveyed a “real farm feel.” Community group members commented that it was a generic photograph of people in a yard, but wondered if other people who are not from rural areas might value it more. This photograph was unmentioned by participants in both farmer groups.

***Photo 3. Piglets feeding***

This image was favored amongst members of all groups, and was referred to as containing the ‘aww’ factor by participants in both the WV farmer group and the low experience tourist group. Farmers felt that the pigs were candid and nurturing, well deserving of attention and appropriate for marketing. However, there was a strong agreement amongst all participants that positioning the animals in such a way as to avoid showing the tail end of the animal would have been more appealing. One farmer noted that the pigs seemed to be in less than optimal health. Two tourists recalled memories of feeding pigs in 4H clubs, creating a personal connection to the image.

***Photo 4. Farmhouse with barn in background***

Only the participants in the high experience agritourism group mentioned this photograph. It was noted that, while it did show the farmhouse and barn in the background, it was not very related to the farm’s production operations with one participant stating simply that she did not like the house.

***Photo 5. Female farmer bottle-feeding calves***

Multiple participants in all of the groups chose this photograph as a favorite. Words that were used in describing the photo included interaction (between the farmer, the farm, and the animals), authenticity, fulfilled, passionate, and experience. Farmers in the WV group liked the photograph because it showed a farmer interacting with the farm, not just being in it. Farmers in the NC group preferred it because it was a candid shot with good composition, portraying a “real” woman farmer. One of the farmers in this group pointed out that most farmers (or educated tourists) will notice this means there was a problem with the mother cow since the farmer is having to bottle feed. This comment is countered by other farmers who argue that while some tourists may be educated enough to decipher that underlying issue, others will simply be drawn by the opportunity to feed animals. Members in the community group liked the B&W coloring of the image and the authentic expression on the farmers face. Tourists responded to the image by saying that they would be inclined to visit because the photograph presents the opportunity to participate in feeding animals, but that it would be more enticing if it showed children feeding animals. One tourist commented that the angle was ‘off’ in the image, but felt that it worked because it “makes it look more spontaneous, emphasizing action”, while another said that it was “kind of posed, but it’s okay because they are actually doing something.”

***Photo 6. Long horned cow in mud***

The only participants that mentioned this photograph were members of the NC farming group. Participants were drawn to the realistic feeling of the ‘beautiful cow’ in the mud, but felt that tourists may not want to see all of the mud in the image. It was also discussed that the unique appearance of this long horned cow may be appealing to tourists who usually prefer to see

different breeds of animals.

***Photo 7. Farmhouse guest room***

This photograph was mostly discussed by participants in tourist groups. Participants in both groups felt that it did not contribute to showcasing the farm. One participant commented that if the wallpaper were “so 'tacky' the rest of the farm would be too.” One tourist mentioned that she would stay in the farm house, but there was a general agreement that photographs of farmhouse interiors are only relevant in marketing for farms that feature overnight stays, and should not be included in marketing for daytime farm events.

***Photo 8. Tourists in farmer’s truck***

The interaction portrayed within this photograph was the basis for many positive comments. Farmers felt it to be a familiar scene, which would appeal to families with children, offering an opportunity to mingle with animals. Tourists found it useful for showing how children can learn from and experience the tour in close proximity to the animals. Some tourists recalled personal experiences of hauling hay or feeding cattle. However, one tourist commented that the idea of squinting into the sun seemed unappealing.

***Photo 9. Cows in open green field***

Participants in the WV farmer group noted an attraction to this photograph because of the candid positioning of the animals along with the bright colors. Participants in the community group and non-WV group did not mention this photograph. Tourists in both groups liked the close up shots

of the animals free of fences where the cows are not confined.

***Photo 10. Flowers in front of barn (B&W)***

Participants in all groups discussed this photograph, and while some liked it for the B&W textures and background, most wanted to see the flowers in color; one participant found the B&W effect “creepy”. Many of the participants discussed that because they recognized the familiar flowers that they would have preferred to see this image in color. One tourist said, “flowers are always in color.”

***Photo 11. Tourist in hay wagon taking pictures***

Farmers in the NC group described an overall negative response to this image for multiple reasons. First, it was pointed out by some that the “newness of the fence” was off-putting in the rustic setting of the farm. What was perceived to be a fence was actually a guardrail on the hay wagon. The male participant in this group pointed out that the bra strap of the girl in the photograph was showing, making it unappealing. A male participant in the low agritourism experience group, who found that seeing the bra strap made him feel embarrassed for the girl, echoed this sentiment. Two female participants in the low agritourism experience group stated that they did not like the photograph because “it’s about taking a picture, not animals,” elaborating by saying that since “everyone has camera phones there is no need to emphasize the opportunity to take pictures.” The WV farmer group did not discuss this photograph.

***Photo 12. Cow through wooden fence***

There were mixed responses to this photograph as some people found it off-putting and negative, while others found it to be one of their favorite images. In the community group one participant called the photograph ‘the seer and the seen’ as it represented a curiosity between the subject and the viewer. Another community member was especially drawn to the photograph as it brought up personal memories for her as she recalled the animals across the street from her childhood home, and looking eye to eye with a cow through a fence. Two of the participants in the community group did not like image, feeling that the eyes of the cow were sad. This was supported by participants in all of the tourist groups, where the majority of people found the photograph negative, creating a wall between the visitor and the animal and leaving a negative feeling that the cow is confined.

***Photo 13. Sunrise over landscape with silo***

This photograph was a big favorite amongst participants, with one farmer saying it represented a piece of her life she really wants to share with the world, “it’s about the beauty of Appalachia, and just how exquisite life here is, and mysterious, and captivating.” Other farmers in the WV group agreed that the image was aesthetically pleasing. Participants in both tourist groups selected this photograph as a favorite because of the natural scenery, the panoramic view, and the wide-open space with not many structures. One tourist said that he would like to live there, while another said that it reminded him of being raised on a farm.

***Photo 14. Farming couple in scenic landscape***

Farmers in the WV group noted the appeal of this image stemming from the depiction of the

happy couple and the beautiful view. Farmers in the NC group had mixed responses to the photograph, as some liked the imagery of the expansive valley and the sense of familiarity with the farmers the photo created. Others felt that it was too passive, lacking any action or interaction. Community members used words such as pride and joy to describe the emotions shown by the farmers in photograph, and were particularly drawn to the vastness of the valley. Tourists in the low experience group liked the scenery in the image, but would have preferred it without the farmers posing in the foreground.

***Photo 15. Red Devon cow through wire fence***

This photograph was discussed by one WV farmer as a good photograph to use for marketing because of the color of the cow. However the same farmer criticized the image because the animal appeared to be in less than optimal health. A farmer in the NC group noted that she “liked the realistic notion of the cow with flies on her nose, [it] gave the sense it was not a manicured show cow. This one looks like a cow on a pasture.” The same community member who chose photo 12 (cow through wooden fence) as a favorite also liked this image, as again she recalled interacting with farm animals from the other side of a fence as a child. One tourist echoed this sentiment, saying that she would like to stand on the other side of the fence and view the cow. Other tourists felt that the scene depicted something that could be seen while driving past the farm, therefore it not represent an agritourism experience. One tourist commented that this photograph was preferable to the one with a wooden fence, because “at least with the wire fence you can see through to the animal.”

***Photo 16. Historic graveyard on farm grounds***

The only participants that made mention of this photograph were in the low experience agritourist group. One tourist said that he was initially drawn to the image because of the nature in it, but once he realized it was a graveyard was turned off. He felt that the graveyard was irrelevant to the farm.

***Photo 17. Male farmer opening barn door (B&W)***

Participants in the WV farming group as well as those in the community group chose this photograph as a favorite. These participants used the words authenticity, hard work, exhaustion, and reality to describe this image that they felt illustrated life and work on a farm. Tourists in both groups did not like the image, finding it unappealing because did not communicate action well, and was unclear if the subject was a farmer or a tourist.

***Photo 18. Sheep with green grass and red ear tags***

Participants in 4 of the 5 focus groups had positive responses to this photograph. It was described by a farmer in the WV group as having the ‘aww’ factor, while farmers in the NC group preferred it because of the colors, textures, and the impression it gave of fun and first hand interactions with animals. Members of the community group felt that the bright colors in the image had a high marketing potential, grabbing the viewer’s attention and drawing them in for the experience. One community member commented that she did not like the contorted angle of the sheep. Members of the low experience tourist group were drawn to this photograph because it offered an opportunity to touch and interact with different animals that they may not have

personally encountered before (as opposed to cows). Participants in the high experience agritourism group had negative responses to this image, finding the bright red ear tags not only visually distracting, but also a sad reminder of the process of raising livestock for slaughter. It was discussed that while the tourists do recognize the practicality of using ear tags they would prefer for the tags to be less visible in photographs used for marketing.

***Photo 19. Farmhouse kitchen scene (B&W)***

Participants in the NC farmer group liked the old timey feel of this kitchen, asserting that it made them want to visit the farm to bake bread and cook in the kitchen. One farmer liked the feeling it evoked, but cautioned that the image may be a bit busy [visually], for marketing purposes.

Participants in both the community group and high experience tourist group liked the photograph because it made the connection for education on where food comes from, but felt that it could have been improved by having people interacting or cooking in the kitchen. A tourist in the low experience agritourism group felt the image was too ‘artsy’ being that it was in B&W, and reminded him of Martha Stewart magazine. One tourist said that because the kitchen was so inviting she felt a desire to see more of that farm. This comment provides an opportunity to discuss the fact that the images depicting farm house interiors or exteriors were among the least popular in the set. With the exception of this image of the farmhouse kitchen, most respondents did not feel connected to images of built environments on the farm.

***Photo 20. Farming couple posing with ram***

Multiple participants across groups felt that this photograph was a candid portrayal of fun and



interaction. Community group members found that it created a sense of relationship with the farmer, with one member suggesting that the image could be used in marketing for farm weddings as something for wedding guests to do during the event. Farmers in the NC group liked the image, but stated that they would be more likely to visit to see the ram, not the farmers. One participant in the NC group compared the farmers in this image to the farmer in photo 25 (male farmer driving tractor), because the subject of 25 was her ‘picture of a real farmer’, while this couple was not “dressed to be farming.” In response to this comment, the male NC farmer said that he personally identified with the farmers in this image much more than the farmer with a more ‘conventional’ look (photo 25), saying “I’m in t-shirts, my hairs too long, [and] my place is overgrown as opposed to the tractor on relatively flat pasture ground which I would love to own, but do not.” One tourist did not like the image because she felt it was too posed, while the rest of the tourists selected the image because of the hands on experience with the animals. One tourist said, “because she's having so much fun it makes you think you're going to have fun if you go too.”

***Photo 21. Farmer selling ground meat***

Farmers in both groups like this photograph because of the candid shot that showcased hardworking hands that called to mind images of sharing and interaction. Community members also commented on the hard-working hands, but said they would have preferred the image with a different background. Tourists in the high experience agritourism group also commented on the background of this image, feeling that it would have been made stronger by emphasizing the farm as the background and even suggested adding a produce stand to this image to convey to

tourists the opportunity to buy products at the farm.

***Photo 22. Portrait of a horse (B&W)***

One tourist in the high experience group responded well to this image, saying that because she likes horses it made her want to visit the farm. A tourist in the low experience group said that he got the feeling that because the photo is close to the horse, he would also be able to get close to the horse. One community member stated that she saw the marketing appeal of the photo, but that she personally was not drawn to it; “everyone’s a sucker for a horse but me.” None of the farmers commented on this image.

***Photo 23. Fresh eggs in red basket***

Farmers in the NC group liked this photograph because it was the only product photo among the set that communicated the ability to buy and take something home from the farm (Note: photo 21 also portrays a product but participants neglected to mention this). One farmer felt that it had low marketability because the photograph seemed clichéd. Community group members chose the image as a favorite because of desire to have fresh eggs, saying, “it all starts here.” Tourists discussed the appeal of buying the eggs but felt that the image would be more engaging if it depicted tourists actually gathering eggs in an activity that differentiated the product from what might be available at the grocery store. Three participants noted that at first glance they thought the eggs were oranges.

***Photo 24. Portrait of a cow (B&W)***

The only mention of this photograph was made by a participant in the NC farm group who stated that although she liked the portrait of the cow, she would not use it in marketing because she believes that tourists want to see more of the manicured ‘show cows.’

***Photo 25. Male farmer driving tractor***

Farmers in the WV group liked this image because they felt it showcased WV small farmers using traditional methods and modern equipment. A female farmer in the NC group commented that the farmer in this photo was her “picture of a real farmer.” However, she did balance this comment by saying that in general she felt that the set of photographs was lacking images of women really working, getting sweaty and dirty, on the farm. A participant in the community group felt that the image was valuable for marketing because it showed a farmer on a working and on a tractor, but did not like the image because she felt that visitors might not get to actually experience that during the tour. Tourists in both groups noted that the farm equipment looked nice and new, and liked the image for the action it conveyed. However, they also agreed that the photograph could be improved if the farmer were smiling and showing a more welcoming attitude.

***Photo 26. Brightly colored rooster***

This photograph was by far the most favorite image in all focus groups. It is interesting to note that while tourists described this photograph as ‘unique’, farmers labelled it ‘stereotypical.’ Farmers in the WV group felt the image was appealing because of the colors and the rich history behind this specific breed of rooster. Farmers in the NC group felt the image was well composed,

and presented an opportunity to leverage the sort of conventional marketing images to draw visitors in (for the ultimate purpose of education about how small family farms break conventional farming stereotypes). One farmer noted that she did not like that the chicken was on pavement, because it cannot scratch on pavement. One participant in the community group suggested pairing this photo with photo 23 (fresh eggs in red basket) in an advertisement, “showing how your food gets to your table.” Tourists in both groups chose the image because of the uniqueness of the chicken (much nicer in appearance than chickens the tourists have seen in the past), which created an appeal and desire to visit.

### **4.3 Summary of Results**

While the responses differed between farmers, community members, and tourists, there were some significant themes that emerged from the data, namely the interactions between stakeholders, desire to see children on the farm, differing outsider/insider perspectives, feelings of nostalgia, preference to see unique animals, consideration of fences, use of B&W and color images, and authenticity.

*Interaction between stakeholders* - Interaction was a major theme in all groups. Participants from each group either selected photographs because of the interaction occurring in the image, or critiqued some images on the lack of interaction within the photograph. Overwhelmingly, participants preferred candid photographs that portrayed the farmer interacting with the animal. Respondent’s feedback on photo 25 (Male farmer driving tractor) illustrates this theme, in that most liked the photograph, but suggested that they would prefer to see the farmer interacting

with people. This theme was especially apparent through the popularity of photo 5 (female farmer bottle-feeding calves) among participants who enjoyed seeing the farmer interacting with and feeding the animals.

*Desire to see children on the farm* - When asked what was missing from the photographs, the majority of participants felt the presence of children in the photographs would make them a stronger marketing tool. Suggestions were made by participants to show images of children riding hay wagons, interacting with animals, rolling in grass, and participating in educational experiences. The inclusion of children in marketing for agritourism was certainly a priority for most participants, some of which felt that this would entice families with children to visit the farm for the children's entertainment and ultimately contribute to customer loyalty through the parents' purchasing decisions.

*Differing outsider/insider perspectives* - Another theme that emerged was the difference between insider (farmer) and outsider (community and tourist) perspectives. This occurred as some farmers noticed things about animals in the photographs that did not showcase optimal health, and thus said that they would not use these images in marketing. However, some tourists chose images of those same animals for their overall visual appeal. For example, the animals in photo 15 (red Devon cow through wire fence) and photo 3 (piglets feeding) were noted by some farmers to be in less than optimal health; conversely, participants in the tourist and community groups were drawn to these images because of the unique coloring of the cow and the cute ('aww') factor that they attributed to the piglets.

*Feelings of nostalgia* - The idea of memory and nostalgia was another theme that was prevalent in responses. This theme is also deeply connected to the historical element that some farmers discussed – present in discussion of photo 1 (hay rake, barn and silo) wherein farmers explained the rich history of the image, while community members said the photograph evoked nostalgia. As participants discussed their reasons behind choosing certain images, it was clear that favorites were often chosen based on a sense of familiarity with what was presented in the photograph. Similar to the community member who attributed her selection of images with to her childhood memories, a male tourist discussed how experiences growing up on a farm shaped his responses. This tourist favored photographs containing scenic landscapes that reminded him of his childhood home. He also stated that that he was more inclined to select photographs of unique animals, that he had perhaps not encountered before because of the opportunity for a new experience.

*Preference towards unique animals* – The selection of images containing unique animals was another theme in itself, as participants across groups expressed a preference for images such as the unique bird in photo 26 (brightly colored rooster), the red Devon cow in photo 15, and the sheep in photo 18. Photo 18 (sheep with green grass and red ear tags) also spurred the discussion that one tourist group had on their reaction to the ear tags in some of the photographs. While photo 18 was popular with most participants, it is important to note that most of the tourists in the high experience agritourism group felt that the ear tags were not only visually distracting, but also negative because they called to mind the ultimate purpose for the animal (slaughter). These

tourists stated that they preferred not to think about this step of the process in raising livestock.

*Consideration of fences* - The discussion of photo 15 also brought up another interesting theme centered on how participants reacted to the presence of fences in the photographs. While farmers made no particular mention of feelings evoked by the presence of the fences in photos 15 (red Devon cow through wire fence) and 12 (cow through wooden fence), tourists and community members focused much discussion on this theme. The majority of tourists felt that the fence in the image gave the impression of a wall between the visitor and the animal, contradicting the intention of agritourists to interact with animals on the farm. Many of the tourists also felt that the animals behind the fences looked sad and reported overall negative response to these images. However, one participant in the low experience agritourism group and one participant in the community group actually chose the images with fences as their favorites. The tourist who chose these images stated that the fences did not bother her, as she remembered visiting farms and taking pictures of animals in this setting. The community participant said that the images of the animals behind fences called to mind her memories of growing up in proximity to farms, recalling seeing animals framed through the fence as she walked to school.

*Use of color and B&W images* - Another widely discussed theme was how participant's preferences varied between B&W vs. color images. The results showed that many people attributed their selection of certain photographs to the bright colors in the image. Conversely, some farmers indicated a personal preference for B&W photographs, but agreed that they may not be the most successful for marketing. This view was reinforced through feedback from most

participants (especially those in the two tourist groups), that B&W images come across more as pieces of art, and less as suitable material for marketing. This does come with the caveat from one tourist that the black and images should be saved for cost effective printing in newspapers and other print ads that are much cheaper in B&W.

*Authenticity* - The final, and perhaps most important theme was the emphasis placed on authenticity. Many participants across groups discussed their preference for images in which the subjects did not seem overly posed for the photograph, showing authentic moments on the farm. Not only did participants in all groups choose photographs based on their sense of authenticity, they also discussed this as one element that could have been more heavily emphasized to improve the set of images for marketing. Participants in farmer groups said that they would like to see more images of farmers working, and equipment actually in use (authentic/realistic work). Participants in tourists and community groups connected the idea of authenticity to the major theme of interaction, saying that images of authentic and candid interaction between farmers and tourists would have improved the set.



## 5.0 Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that some photographs do indeed have the potential to be more successful than others in marketing agritourism experiences. This difference is highlighted by the handful of photographs that were the most widely discussed and chosen as favorites in comparison to those that were minimally, or not all, discussed. The emphasis placed on the element of authenticity in the photographs by participants in all groups suggests that a sense of place conveyed in the image can result in more effective photographs for marketing agritourism experiences. Additionally, an image of a farmer relating with animals or visitors is also deemed effective by the study's participants. The strong element of authenticity connects to the initial research question posed in this study, which asked, *Why are some photographs more successful than others in marketing agritourism experiences? Specifically, what are the elements within a photograph that elicit a strong response or connection between informants and the image?* In discussing what contributes to creating a sense of authenticity, participants indicated a preference for images in which farmers seemed more candid rather than posed. This is closely related to Phillip, Hunter & Blackstock's differentiation of specific types of agritourism such as direct vs. passive contact with tourists, working vs. nonworking farms, and staged vs. authentic experiences (Phillip, Hunter & Blackstock, 2010). The results of this study point to a tourist preference for direct, rather than passive contact, as well as authentic vs. staged experiences. For example, many of the members of the tourist group felt that the portrayal of the farmers in photo 14 (farming couple in scenic landscape) was too passive in nature, contrary to their preference for photo 5 (female farmer bottle-feeding calves), which they described by using words such as 'passionate' and 'fulfilled'. Photo 5 contained the significant element of interaction, which

many participants cited as critical for successful photographs in the marketing of agritourism.

The emphasis that the tourists (from a highly populated urban city), placed on interaction relates to the suggestion of Brown and Reeder (2007) that farms located within close proximity to cities should offer recreational activities (as opposed to offering habitat based attractions to target audiences composed of rural hunters or anglers).

Other elements that provoked a strong response between informants and the images were connected to personal memories. This finding closely relates to research question three, *What emotions and/or associations do these images provoke for the various stakeholder audiences?* For farmers, the best example of this was their lengthy discussion on the history of the equipment in photo 1 (hay rake, barn, and silo). Some participants in the tourist group found that images with elements of aesthetically pleasing landscapes were particularly successful in eliciting personal connections (e.g.. photo 13 – sunrise over landscape with silo). Photo 3 (piglets feeding) also called to mind personal memories for two of the tourists who recalled feeding animals in 4-H club (a youth organization). Other associations that emerged were the opportunity to buy farm products (photo 23 – fresh eggs in red basket), associations with previous farm tour experiences (photo 25 – male farmer driving tractor), and opportunities to view unique animals (photo 15 red Devon cow through wire fence; photo 18 – sheep with green grass and red ear tags; photo 26 brightly colored rooster). These findings are consistent with the assertions of Draper, Shenoy, and Norman (2006) that agritourists will be interested in activities that are unique to the setting of the farm, such as visiting historical sites and purchasing local food. Gao, Barbieri, and Valdivia also found that potential visitors to farms preferred viewing natural features, as well as historical or cultural elements within agricultural landscapes. It is also interesting to note that while tourists associated the rooster in photo 26 with the opportunity to experience unique

animals, some farmers felt that the image was ‘stereotypical’. Despite this difference in personal associations, both groups agreed that the image was well suited for marketing.

Participants felt that the inclusion of children in the images would elicit a strong personal response. Both tourists and farmers associated photo 5 (farmer bottle feeding calves) with memories of their own children feeding animals on farms and farm tours. This reinforces the position that ensuring positive experiences (interactions) in all levels of the agritourism product will contribute to decisions to revisit the farm again (Choo & Petrick, 2014).

The results also indicated that participants, while they may have felt a personal connection to ‘nostalgic’ B&W images, felt that that color photographs were more successful than B&W photographs for marketing agritourism. The presence of fences in the photographs was another element that contributed to overall success of the images. One tourist participant and one community participant discussed that the fences called to mind their personal memories of experiencing farms as neighbors or while driving past farms. However, the majority of tourists felt that fencing in front of animals rendered the photographs of animals less successful for marketing due to the fact that they imply barriers or distance between the tourist and the animal. This association provoked negative emotions for the participants, who felt the images with fences were ‘off-putting,’ or even ‘sad.’ While tourist and community participants discussed the element of fencing in the photographs, farmers did not address this subject. This leads into the application of these results to the secondary research question in this study, *Is there a difference between what farmers find visually appealing and what other stakeholders are drawn to? If so, what are these differences?* The emergent difference between outsider and insider perspectives suggests that there is indeed a difference between responses for farmers and other stakeholders. For instance, participants in the WV farming group as well as those in the community group

chose photo 17 (male farmer opening barn door B&W) as a favorite. These ‘insider’ participants found this photograph appealing because they felt it realistically illustrated life and work on a farm. Conversely, tourists in both groups did not like the image, finding it unappealing because it did not communicate action well. Participant responses to Photo 18 (sheep with green grass and red ear tags) further explicated these differing reactions. Farmers and community members were drawn to this image for its bright colors and implicit opportunity for interaction with animals. This is in stark contrast to the participants in the tourists groups who concentrated on the negative connotations they associated with the ear tags in the image. Another clear contrast between what tourists found visually appealing and what farmers were drawn to was manifest in the discussion of images such as photo 3 (piglets feeding), photo 5 (female farmer bottle-feeding calves), and photo 15 (red Devon cow through wire fence). The farmers’ deep knowledge of animal health affected their response to these images, as some of them illustrated less than optimal scenarios for the animals. However, tourists and community members responded in a positive manner to these same photographs for reasons such as interaction and bright colors. Research question four, *What are the implications of these results for the design of marketing campaigns in agritourism?*, is discussed in detail in the next section.

## **5.1 Implications**

*Practical implications* – Farmers seem to realize that they are not their own market, differentiating between what they would personally connect with and what they would use for advertising. For instance, some of the farmer participants discussed their preference, or personal connection to, images that were in B&W. One farmer even commented, “I see my farm in black and white,” but went on to say that he would be more inclined to use color photographs for

marketing. This farmer's opinion was echoed by others in the group, and further validated by the position of many tourists who felt that color images would be much more likely to encourage a desire to visit the farm. The implication from these results is twofold: first, there is a difference between what farmers and tourists might find appealing (which many of the farmer participants seemed to recognize), and second, farmers, DMOs and other agritourism stakeholders should focus on using richly colored images for agritourism marketing. However, one tourist did point out the financial sensibility of having high quality B&W images for use in newspapers ads that may be too costly for color printing.

The tourists' preference for images that depict unique animals, such as the distinct look of the brightly colored rooster (photo 26), or the bright coloring of the red Devon cow (photo 15) suggests that farmers, DMOs, and other agritourism stakeholders would do well to promote unusual or uncommon breeds, offering a special experience to visitors. One female farmer suggested taking advantage of this preference by using such photographs as an entrée to education. "People who are looking for agritourism are so disconnected from food in general. They're almost attracted to some things like [photo 26] just because they think, 'Oh, we want to go to a farm with a pretty rooster. We're going to start there, and then they learn about the alternative or sustainable things that are going on in the background.'"

Results also imply the necessity to use photographs to form realistic expectations for the visitor. Although it was acknowledged that tourists may not feel compelled to visit a farm in which the photographs show animals in mud, it is important to find a balance between managing expectations and showing aesthetically pleasing images. For example, farmers who discussed photo 6 (long horned cow in mud) felt that the mud might turn off a tourist and while it may not be appealing to a visitor, it would be unwise to lead them to believe that visiting the farm is a

clean and pristine experience. The farmers suggested cropping the image so that it still showed the cow in mud, but made the cow the focal point and deemphasized the amount of mud in the photo.

Another ramification of these results is that marketing for agritourism should emphasize authenticity, publicizing photographs of farmers taking part in physical labor or operation of farm equipment. The emphasis on authenticity in the photographs connects to the major desire by tourists and farmers alike to see interaction in the photographs. This implies that photographs for marketing should contain images of farmers interacting with tourists (with a clear distinction between the farmer and the tourist). Furthermore, it should be a priority to advertise the potential for children to interact with farmers and animals.

Many visitors felt that fencing in front of animals in the photographs conveyed limited possibilities for interaction. There were a few participants who reacted positively to photos 12 (cow through wooden fence) and 15 (cow through wire fence), associating the fences with past memories of being in proximity to farm animals. However, the general consensus was that fences in front of animals call to mind negative connotations about confinement. Tourists felt that the photographs should call attention to the specialness of the small farm, differentiating between the appealing image of free-range grass fed animals and the negativity associated with images from confined animal feeding operations (CAFO's). Similarly, tourists expressed an aversion to photographs that showed animals with ear tags. While some tourists did state that they understood the practicality of the tags, their responses indicated that farmers should make efforts to de-emphasize the tags in photographs. This could be achieved by positioning the animal in such a way that the tag is not as noticeable, or using muted colored ear tags.

There is also a need to discuss the identification of photo 19 (farmhouse kitchen scene B&W) as the only interior photograph amongst the set that elicited overall positive responses from participants. This is in contrast to sentiments expressed by many of the participants in the tourist groups that there is no need to see farmhouse interiors unless a part of the agritourism experience includes an overnight stay. However, this photograph was often selected because of the potential for interaction to take place within the kitchen. This suggests that farm house interiors or exteriors may not be well suited for advertising day time farm tour events unless those images contain opportunities for educational and interactional experiences within the setting. For example, many participants like photo 19 because it invoked the thought of cooking with the farmer or of farm food in the kitchen.

Tourists also clearly indicated their desire to see more options for buying produce. While it was explained to focus group participants that this study focused explicitly on livestock farmers, tourist participants made it clear that many of them would not participate in the tour if there were only opportunities to see livestock farms (and no produce farms). Tourists pointed out that when going on a farm tour, they often want to buy produce, and learn about how those food products are grown. This indicates an opportunity for livestock farmers to address this desire to buy products on the farm by offering value added products such as suet, honey, smoked meats, milk, eggs, and fiber products, as well as potentially partnering with produce farmers to have some available on the days of tours. These types of partnerships may be especially advantageous in the pursuit of the 'horizontal alliances for collaborative marketing' suggested by Che, Veeck, and Veeck (2005).

It may also be advantageous to synthesize the finding of this study, specifically the practical implications discussed in this section, into an informational piece intended for farmers.

This ‘tip’ sheet might provide farmers with a ‘how to’ create successful images for marketing their own agritourism operations, based on the implications of this study.

*Academic implications* – The results provide several connections to the existing literature on agritourism and marketing. The varying success of photographs can be used to inform the pairing of images with various forms of marketing media. For example, considering that Rilla et al (2007) found that business cards/brochures, and websites were among the most effective modes of marketing for agritourism, while Jensen et al (2013), reported that farms who participated in regional branding experienced increased sales through collaborative marketing. This might imply that elements of the most successful images in this study should be considered in designing such marketing materials as those listed above, especially with consideration for marketing multiple farms seeking to create a regional brand.

Srikatanyoo and Campiranon (2010) noted differences between male and female agritourists, finding that female agritourists have the potential to be more demanding customers, and will place a high value on safety, while male customers, who still value safety, place the most about beautiful scenery. This study extends that finding, as men often chose photographs of landscapes (especially in the tourist groups) as their favorites. Choo and Petrick (2014) found that visitors to farms were more likely to be repeat visitors when they experienced positive social interactions. This finding was supported by the results of this study, in which tourists, farmers, and community members reported strong feelings that photographs of agritourism should emphasize interaction, as it is an imperative piece of the agritourism experience. The multitude of participants who expressed a desire to see photographs that depict action on the farm also seems connected to Schnell’s (2011) argument, that agritourism has contributed to the



recognition of farms as destinations on their own, leading to the positioning of farms as active landscapes in tourism marketing. For example, some participants expressed that they did not connect with images in which farmers were portrayed in a 'passive', or posed scenario (photo 14- farming couple in scenic landscape, photo 17-male farmer opening barn door, and photo 20 farming couple posing with ram) and would have preferred to see action and work happening on the farm.

Again, it is important to note that the lack of understanding regarding the motivations of customers is a major barrier to agritourism development (Srikatanyoo & Campiranon, 2011); the results of this study begin to tap into the various motivations of customers, especially illustrated by the resulting themes centered on nostalgia. Multiple participants in this study discussed how their varying experiences on farms shaped their responses to the photographs, implying that previous relationships with farming are one important motivation for agritourists. These motivations are related to the emotional connections that participants made to memories of their personal childhood experiences with farms, as well as the emotional connection to memories of their own children experiencing farms. However, more research is needed in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of agritourist needs and motivations. Gao, Barbieri, and Valdivia (2013) called for future research to examine how human relationships with land influence landscape preferences. This study found a connection between participant's memories, as well as previous experiences, of farms and their photo preferences. For instance, most participants who had extensive relationships with agricultural landscapes preferred to see images in close proximity to animals. Other participants, who had a more removed relationship to agricultural landscapes, placed images with fencing between the viewer and the animal amongst their

favorite selections. This sheds light on the need for research to further explore how previous experience with farms affects agritourists' preferences within agricultural landscapes.

There are also implications for further exploration of the connection between agritourism and culinary tourism. As Quan & Wang (2003) pointed out, the marketing of food can reinforce the long-term sustainability of a destination while also contributing to the regional branding of food products. Farmer participants in this study commented on the difficulty they face in producing styled food product photographs, which was highlighted by an expressed desire from tourists to see more images that showcase the opportunity to buy food products on the farm. Further research may focus on exploring theories related to the outsider/insider theme that was prevalent in the results of this study. A deeper understanding of how personal memories and motivations affect farmer perceptions of photographs used for agritourism marketing may contribute to more sound design choices in subject matter which will meet the needs of both potential agritourists and farmers.

## **5.2 Limitations**

This study was limited to a small sample size of tourists, all of which were residents in one geographic location. Participant reactions to the photographs could differ based on geographical setting and resulting landscapes, with some tourists preferring to see farms in familiar settings. These tourists' experiences with farms varied greatly, with some participants having lived or worked on farms while others had only visited for specific activities. Furthermore, there were more female participants in this study, creating an inherent bias towards the female perspective.

There are also some limitations stemming from the small group of photos used in the study. Presenting focus group participants with more images, as opposed to only 26, could have

uncovered more underlying themes in the participant's responses, however, it was deemed prudent to use a smaller set because of the time constraints of a focus group. The set of images may have been strengthened through the presentation of photographs within the frame of simulated advertisements. Some participants indicated that they might have responded differently to photographs if they had been accompanied by some descriptive text explaining the contents of the image, introducing the farmer, and describing offerings of the specific agritourism element within the photograph. During farmer focus groups, it was also suggested that the set of images should have included photographs taken during all 4 seasons, allowing tourists to envision in a variety of settings (fields covered in snow vs. fields blossoming with spring flowers).

The fact that there were no children in the images may be considered a limitation, albeit one with positive consequences. This constraint actually encouraged participants to emphasize their feelings that depictions of children enjoying activities on farms are imperative in marketing for agritourism. Finally, while an effort was made not to disclose to participants that the primary researcher took the photographs, some participants did specifically inquire about the source of the images during the focus groups. Knowing that the focus group facilitator was the same individual as the photographer may have biased participant responses.

### **5.3 Future Research Directions**

This exploratory study was a first step in gaining an understanding of the role that photographs can play in marketing for agritourism. While the data does contribute to a general understanding of major themes within this type of marketing, there remain multiple opportunities for future research. If the study were to be replicated or adapted, it might be bolstered through the inclusion

of the opinions of more tourists, including participants who may have never visited a farm in a work or a recreational capacity. The inclusion of this target market could provide useful insight to farmers and other stakeholders in agritourism on how to reach previously untapped markets. Future research could also blend qualitative and quantitative data, utilizing an online survey tool that would allow researchers to quantify participant responses. Since most recreational visitors to farms are in their early 40's, (Brown and Reeder, 2007), the majority of participants in this study were over the age of 40. However, since age and education have a significant effect on visitors decisions to visit farms recreationally (Carpio, Wohlgenant & Boonsaeng 2008), future research might include a variety of age groups, exploring how photographs might be used to reach younger target markets such as college students or young professionals. In addition to these groups, it may also be beneficial to include a focus group consisting of practitioners in marketing and graphic design fields. Feedback from individuals who are already designing materials that may be used for agritourism, or who may potentially use the results of the study to inform their own marketing campaigns could increase the strength of the study.

It would also be advantageous to test photographs presented in a variety of mediums such as newspaper ads or editorials, brochures, websites, or social media marketing pieces. Furthermore, a study that includes multi-media pieces that pair sounds and audio with images of agritourism could be extremely useful to marketers. Researchers may also consider conducting studies that compare how various topographies within farm settings could affect results, presenting participants with photographs of farms in multiples states comparing mountain vs. coastal or arid vs. humid landscapes.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

The results of this study are a preliminary exploration of how various stakeholders in agritourism respond to photographs used to market recreational and educational activities on farms.

Agritourism is emerging as an effective tool for the preservation of small family farms, providing farmers with the opportunity to educate consumers while diversifying farm incomes.

Effective marketing materials are one of the fundamental tools needed in order to ensure continued growth of agritourism. These marketing materials should be designed with concern to the varying needs of all stakeholders in agritourism, tailoring to the diverse emotional responses and associations that photographs may elicit for members of each segment. It is clear that a greater understanding of agritourist needs and motivations is needed to inform future research on effective marketing to various target segments of agritourists. The illustrated potential of photographs to elicit emotional responses and personal associations to previous experiences on farms and farm tours warrants further exploration of how to leverage these connections within agritourism marketing. These exploratory findings shed some light on the differences between how farmers, tourists, and community stakeholders respond to the images used in marketing agritourism, highlighting key themes that may be instrumental in the future design of marketing materials.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Photographs

This appendix contains the set of photographs that were presented to each member of the focus groups. Participants received a set of 4x6 sized images containing one each of the following images.

Photo 1. Hay rake, barn, and silo



Photo 2. Farmer and tourist in field



Photo 3. Piglets feeding



Photo 4. Farmhouse with barn in background



Photo 5. Female farmer bottle-feeding oxen





Photo 6. Long horned cow in mud

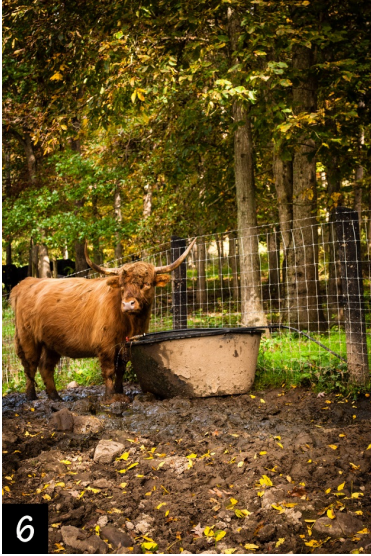


Photo 7. Farmhouse guest room



Photo 8. Tourists in farmer's truck



Photo 9. Cows in Open Green Field



Photo 10. Flowers in front of barn



Photo 11. Tourist in hay wagon taking pictures



Photo 12. Cow Behind Wooden Fence



Photo 13. Sunrise over landscape with silo



Photo 14. Farming couple in scenic landscape



Photo 15. Red Devon Cow Through Wire Fence



Photo 16. Historic Graveyard on Farm Grounds



Photo 17. Male Farmer Opening Barn Door

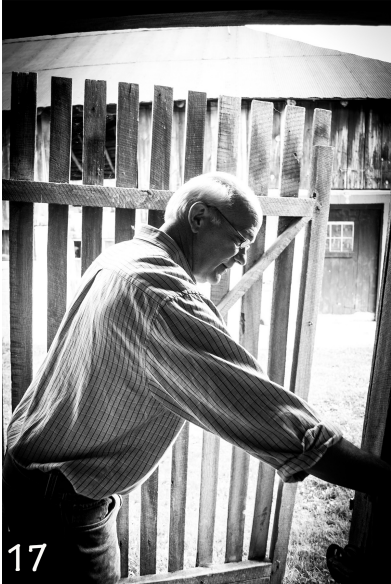


Photo 18. Sheep with green grass and red ear tags



Photo 19. Farmhouse Kitchen Scene



Photo 12. Farming Couple Posing with Ram



Photo 21. Farmer selling ground meat



Photo 22. Portrait of a Horse



Photo 23. Fresh Eggs in Red Basket



Photo 24. Portrait of a Cow



Photo 25. Male Farmer Driving Tractor



Photo 26. Brightly Colored Rooster





