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Katie Amaral

Leslie D. Edgar

Donald M. Johnson

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## Abstract

With the struggling economy, agriculturalists are seeking new ways to become economically stable and viable. Agritourism is a topic that has not yet been evaluated at the collegiate level. Yet it may be an answer for agriculturalists seeking new approaches to profitability. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions, knowledge, and sources of information of agricultural communications students at the collegiate level in order to strengthen agritourism marketing competencies and skill development in postsecondary education. This quantitative descriptive study assessed agricultural communications students (N = 66) from 11 universities across the nation to determine students perceptions, knowledge, and identified sources of information regarding agritourism. The study maintained an 80.5% response rate. Most respondents were female (81.0%), and the majority of respondents were majoring or double majoring in agricultural communications (94%). All most all respondents had families involved in agriculture (95.2%). Respondents ranked agriculture (M = 4.98, SD = 0.12) and agritourism (M = 4.45, SD = 0.66) as important. Agriculture-related festival(s) or event(s) (M = 4.46, SD = 0.75) were noted as the most important agritourism venue. Generally, respondents had previously attended an agritourism event (61.5%). Website (95.4%), print advertisement(s) (93.8%), and word-of-mouth (81.5%) were identified as the best sources of information in promoting agritourism. Over half of the respondents indicated not knowing whether or not their state had an agritourism department (52.3%). Future studies involving non-agricultural students' perceptions and knowledge of agritourism must be conducted. Efforts should be made to increase agritourism marketing education and training in postsecondary education.

## Keywords

agritourism, agriculture, agricultural communications, rural tourism, students' perceptions

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# Agricultural Communication Students Perceptions, Knowledge, and Identified Sources of Information about Agritourism

Katie Amaral, Leslie D. Edgar, and Donald M. Johnson

## Abstract

With the struggling economy, agriculturalists are seeking new ways to become economically stable and viable. Agritourism is a topic that has not yet been evaluated at the collegiate level. Yet it may be an answer for agriculturalists seeking new approaches to profitability. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions, knowledge, and sources of information of agricultural communications students at the collegiate level in order to strengthen agritourism marketing competencies and skill development in postsecondary education. This quantitative descriptive study assessed agricultural communications students (N = 66) from 11 universities across the nation to determine students' perceptions, knowledge, and identified sources of information regarding agritourism. The study maintained an 80.5% response rate. Most respondents were female (81.0%), and the majority of respondents were majoring or double majoring in agricultural communications (94%). Almost all respondents had families involved in agriculture (95.2%). Respondents ranked agriculture (M = 4.98, SD = 0.12) and agritourism (M = 4.45, SD = 0.66) as important. Agriculture-related festival(s) or event(s) (M = 4.46, SD = 0.75) were noted as the most important agritourism venue. Generally, respondents had previously attended an agritourism event (61.5%). Website (95.4%), print advertisement(s) (93.8%), and word-of-mouth (81.5%) were identified as the best sources of information in promoting agritourism. Over half of the respondents indicated not knowing whether or not their state had an agritourism department (52.3%). Future studies involving non-agricultural students' perceptions and knowledge of agritourism must be conducted. Efforts should be made to increase agritourism marketing education and training in postsecondary education.

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## Introduction

Twenty percent of the population in the United States lives in rural areas, but only 1% is directly employed in agriculture (Carpio, Wohgenant, & Boonsaeng, 2008). In 2004, farm-based recreation or agritourism, which includes hunting, fishing, horseback riding, and other on-farm activities, provided income to about 52,000 U.S. farms (2.5%) (Brown & Reeder, 2007). Agritourism consultants

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*Research previously presented at the Region AAAE and the National AAAE conferences as a manuscript.*

and researchers have predicted that agritourism in the U.S. will grow by 30% each year over the next decade (Das & Rainey, 2008; Eckert, 2008; Miller, McCullough, Rainey, & Das, 2010).

Agritourism is any activity, enterprise, or business designed to increase farm and community income by attracting the public to visit agricultural operations and outlets that provide educational and/or recreational experiences to help sustain and build awareness of rural quality of life (University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, 2006). Therefore, agritourism can be defined in a variety of ways. Pittman (2006) called agritourism the crossroads of tourism and agriculture. The Tennessee Agritourism Initiative (TAI) defined agritourism as “an activity, enterprise, or business which combines primary elements and characteristics of agriculture and tourism, and provides an experience for visitors which stimulates economic activity and impacts both farm and community income” (Bruch & Holland, 2004, p. 1). The TAI group noted attractions consistent with this definition include agriculture-related and on-farm events; including places, such as museums, festivals and fairs, century farms, corn-maze enterprises, farmers markets, tours, retail markets, festivals and fairs, petting zoos, fee-fishing, horseback riding, bed-and-breakfast establishments, pick-your-own produce farms, and wineries. In addition, in other states like Arkansas, on-farm hunting involving the farm’s agricultural resources as a part of the hunting enterprise (i.e. rice fields for duck hunting) is also categorized as agritourism (Ramsey & Schaumleffel, 2006).

Many terms are employed in the literature describing tourism activity in rural areas: (a) agritourism/agrotourism, (b) farm tourism, (c) rural tourism, (d) soft tourism, (e) alternative tourism, (f) ecotourism, (g) green tourism, and several others. Though these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, most, technically, have specific meanings, and these meanings may differ, especially across regions and internationally (Roberts & Hall, 2001). Although various names have been used to identify expanding agricultural enterprises to the general public, the common thread is rural areas expanding on current agricultural endeavors. These endeavors are used to capitalize on tapping additional resources with the traditional distinction that recreation includes activities carried out by day-visitors, whereas to qualify to be a tourist you have to stay overnight (Tribe, Font, Griffiths, Vickery, & Yale, 2000).

Agritourism can provide a way for improving the incomes and potential economic viability of small farms and rural communities. Agritourism can be a supplementary, complimentary, or primary enterprise for a farm. “Travel and tourism are big businesses across the globe. In the United States alone, leisure travelers spend more than \$341 billion and support more than 5.85 million jobs” (Blacka et al., 2001, p. 5). Agritourism is increasing in popularity (Pittman, 2006) as a way for traditional agricultural producers to become financially stable and provide a profit.

Agritourism operations exist in every state. In many states, organizations, state officials, citizens and others have undertaken efforts to enhance agritourism. Several states have agritourism promotion efforts underway, including Alabama, Mississippi, Missouri, Utah, North Carolina, Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico (Pittman, 2006). The types of efforts and the degree to which they are undertaken vary substantially between states. For example, agritourism efforts made in some states involve the state government, while other state activities are conducted by non-governmental associations or through university systems.

The continual growth of agritourism in America is a relatively recent phenomenon when compared to farm-stay programs and working farms that have existed for years in Europe. In the early 1990s almost 25% of vacations were spent in a rural setting in Europe (Tribe et al., 2000). With a large population living in rural areas and such a small population employed directly by agriculture it

can be assumed that individuals will visit agritourism operations because there are limited options for entertainment. Because of the limited number of entertainment offerings individuals are more likely to participate in agritourism activities (Bruch & Holland, 2004; Carpio et al., 2008).

In the previous 30 years, agritourism has become a more relaxed setting for an increasingly urban population. It can be an escape from urban life with participation in traditional rural activities such as picnicking and fishing which contribute to the feeling of harmony (Hall, Mitchell, & Roberts, 2003). A recent report indicated that white individuals are 10% more likely to visit a farm; whereas families with children six years of age and younger are 4% more likely to visit a farm as an entertainment venue (Carpio et al., 2008). The study reported that the average number of trips to a farm was approximately 10 times, with an estimated expenditure of \$174.82 per trip. The type of tourist who visits agritourism venues differs demographically; but it is important to understand who is visiting the family farm in order to better serve the tourist as well as ensure that economic growth and diversity continue (Koh & Hatten, 2002). Promotion and marketing is an important component of agritourism success. The Virginia Cooperative Extension Services suggested promoting agritourism businesses by word-of-mouth, printed materials, media, direct mail, community network, and a website (Blacka et al., 2001).

An exhaustive review of literature failed to identify research studies assessing postsecondary students' knowledge or perceptions of agritourism. Agricultural communication students' knowledge and perceptions regarding agritourism may prove valuable due to their potential future influence and impact on promoting, advertising, and marketing these venues. Research priority area (RPA) #2 in the *National Research Agenda (NRA): Agricultural Education and Communication, 2007-2010* noted the explicit need to aid the public in effectively participating in decision making related to agriculture (Osborne, n.d.). The charge was echoed in a recent update of the research agenda and reinforced the need to prepare a professional workforce to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century agriculture (Doerfert, 2011). Agricultural communication students assist publics in making efficient and effective decisions regarding agriculture. These future agricultural communicators and their knowledge and perceptions will influence the messages they create. Therefore, it is important to determine agricultural communication students' perceptions and knowledge of agritourism as well as identify informational sources used to gain understanding on agritourism-related topics. Additionally, the study can assist faculty in designing university curriculum to assist agricultural communications students in promoting and supporting agriculture, specifically agritourism.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was grounded in the following relevant topics: (1) agritourism; (2) educational program planning in agriculture; and (3) adult program planning. The theoretical framework of this study was based on Media-Society Theory III: Functionalism theory (McQuail, 2005) and was used as a focus to design of the study. Specifically, McQuail (2005) noted that exploration of specific gratifications that motivate people to be attracted to specific media is almost as old as empirical mass communication research. The Uses and Gratifications Approach prevailed in the late 1950s and continued through the 70s as television focused on a consumer-based approach where viewers could be program selective. Blumler and Katz (1974) posited that the Uses and Gratifications Approach allowed different people to receive the same communication message for very different purposes. Essentially, the same media content may gratify different needs for different individuals and the consumer is the gatekeeper for selecting the received information. This study focused on assessing the agritourism information sources of students.



A common model used in adult education is the Lifelong Education Program Planning (LEPP) model by Rothwell and Cookson as cited in Kilgore (2003). The model consists of four quadrants: exercising professional responsibility, engaging relevant contexts, designing the program, and managing administrative aspects. The steps of the model are designed to assist adults in exercising professional responsibility, because it is important to ensure that a program meets the needs of the students (Rothwell & Cookson, 1997 as cited in Kilgore, 2003). Before teaching a sound agricultural communications program, an assessment should be used to determine learners' current knowledge and needs (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997). Kilgore (2003) touted that a program planner's work is never done and just as the needs change for adults in education they will continually change for agritourism. One way to educate the special needs of adult students is by having a college level course to educate them about agritourism and marketing and promotion skills that can be employed to support U.S. agriculture. This study focused on assessing the agritourism educational needs of students.

An adult's deep need to be self-directing is particularly important in program planning. Boone, Saffret, and Jones (2002) wrote that target publics make their own decision about educational needs and what will fulfill those needs. Therefore, successful program planning for adults typically begins by determining attitudes and perceptions.

Lasswell claimed that media performed four basic functions for society: (a) surveying the environment to provide news and information, (b) correlating response to this information (editorial function), (c) entertaining (diversion function), and (d) transmitting culture to future generations (Lull, 2000, p. 111). Charles R. Wright (1959), an American sociologist, expanded Lasswell's view of media functions by outlining manifest and latent functions as well as dysfunctions of mass media communication. "Wright proposed that when the media alerted the public to a health risk, for instance, it was serving its news and information function, but if a public panic was created, this was a dysfunction" (Macnamara, 2003, p. 3).

Media-Society Theory III: Functionalist theory (McQuail, 2005) explains how information is diffused through a social system and consists of five elements. These elements are information, correlation, continuity, entertainment, and mobilization (McQuail, 2005). Information consists of providing facts about events and facilitating innovation. A study conducted by the state of Pennsylvania asked operators to rate their top five resources to market agritourism as well as visitors to use of resources (Ryan, DeBoard, & McCellan, 2006). The operators ranked (1) word-of-mouth, (2) repeat business, (3) newspaper advertisements, (4) brochures, and (5) Internet/websites as the top five. The visitors ranked (1) Internet/ websites, (2) information/welcome centers, (3) brochures, (4) travel books/guides, and (5) word-of-mouth as their top sources for finding information about agritourism (Ryan et al., 2006). This information depicts where agritourism visitors and operators get information about agritourism activities. Therefore, it is important to assess students' perceptions and knowledge of agritourism and identify specific sources of agritourism information.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to determine the knowledge and sources of information of agricultural communications students at the collegiate level in order to strengthen agritourism marketing competencies and skill development in postsecondary education. The research objectives of the study were to:

- 1) Describe students' perceptions of the importance of agritourism.
- 2) Identify students' level of agritourism knowledge.

- 3) Identify sources of information about agritourism used at the collegiate level.
- 4) Describe demographic characteristics of the participating students.

## Methodology

This study used a descriptive survey methodology. The statistical analysis was descriptive in nature, and the instrumentation followed Dillman's Total Tailored Design method (2007). The target population for this study included all participants at the Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow (ACT) Professional Development Conference held in Stillwater, Oklahoma, February 26 through March 1, 2009. This audience was identified due to their background and knowledge of communication and media sources and their representation of multiple institutions teaching a variety of courses. Currently, 13 universities have ACT (Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow) chapters and eleven chapters were represented at the conference. There were 91 students registered for the 2009 conference and 82 attended the four-day event.

Prior to the conference an instrument was developed. Questions for the instrument were modeled after a previous study completed by Sussex County Office of Conservation and Farmland Preservation in New Jersey (New Jersey Agritourism Survey, n.d.) and based on a survey conducted in Tennessee (Jensen, Dawson, Bruch, Menard, & English, 2005). The questionnaire booklet consisted of 25 questions and was designed by the principal researcher. The study was designed to collect perceptions, knowledge, sources of information, and select demographics of agricultural communications students attending the 2009 ACT conference. A field test was administered to faculty and students in the Agricultural and Extension Education Department at the University of Arkansas resulted in minor changes to the instrument to improve clarity and establish face and content validity.

To determine instrument stability, the instrument was administered twice (at a 14 day interval) to 10 students enrolled in an agricultural communications bachelor's degree program at the University of Arkansas. The agreement percentage between the first and second administrations was 71.3%, indicating acceptable instrument reliability (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2006). There were 66 respondents from the 2009 ACT conference, resulting in an 80.5% response rate. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Software for Social Sciences (SPSS) 15.0 to identify frequencies, standard deviations, and means. Open-ended responses were analyzed using open coding (Creswell, 2007; Glense, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding consists of "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61).

## Findings

### Demographics

Respondents ( $N = 66$ ) were from ten universities throughout the nation. The highest number of respondents ( $n = 18$ ) were from Oklahoma State University, which is where the conference was held (28.1%). The Ohio State University had the second highest amount of students completing the instrument ( $n = 9$ ; 14.1%). Tarleton State University had 12.5% ( $n = 8$ ) of the respondents, followed by Kansas State University ( $n = 7$ ; 10.9%), Texas Tech University ( $n = 6$ ; 9.4%), and California Polytechnic University—San Luis Obispo ( $n = 5$ ; 7.8%). The four schools with the lowest percentage of respondents were University of Arkansas ( $n = 4$ ; 6.3%), Missouri State University ( $n = 3$ ; 4.7%), Texas A&M University with two ( $n = 2$ ; 3.1%), and the University of Florida ( $n = 2$ ; 3.1%).

The majority of the respondents ( $n = 64$ ) were seniors ( $n = 25$ ; 39.1%), followed by juniors ( $n = 16$ ; 25.0%), freshmen ( $n = 12$ ; 18.8%), sophomores ( $n = 7$ ; 10.9%), and graduate students ( $n = 4$ ;

6.3%). The majority of respondents were majoring or double majoring in agricultural communications (94%). The highest number of respondents ( $n = 42$ ) were agricultural communications majors (65.6%). Six respondents (9.4%) were agricultural communications and animal science double majors. Two respondents (3.0%) were agricultural science and agricultural communications double majors, two (3.0%) were agricultural services and development double majors, and two (3.0%) were agricultural science majors. Single respondents (1.6%) reported double majors in agricultural communications and one of the following: agricultural education, English, poultry science, agricultural business, Spanish, leadership development, advertising, dairy science, agricultural science, and agriculture unknown. Overall, 59 respondents indicated an educational focus in agricultural communication (92.2%).

Respondents were asked to identify the type of community in which they grew-up. The largest percentage (44.8%) of students had grown-up on a farm, while the smallest percentage had grown-up in a rural non-farm (less than 10,000) area (12.7%) or a city (more than 10,000) (12.7%).

The mean respondent age was 20.5 years ( $SD = 1.6$ ). One half (50%) of the respondents were either 20 or 21 years of age. Of the 63 respondents reporting gender, 47 were female (81.0%) and 16 were male (19.0%). Of the 61 respondents reporting ethnicity, 56 were Caucasian (91.8%). Single respondents (1.6%) reported the following ethnicities: Caucasian and Native American, Native American, Caucasian and Hispanic, Hispanic, and Portuguese.

The last series of demographic questions asked the respondent about their family's involvement in agriculture and agritourism, 95.2% of respondents indicated that their families were involved in agriculture ( $n = 63$ ). However, for the majority of respondents (74.6%), farming was not the family's primary source of income. Only three (4.8%) respondents indicated that their family operated an agritourism venue.

### Perceptions of Agritourism

Respondents were asked to rank their perceived level of importance of two terms, agriculture and agritourism, on a 5 point Likert-type scale (1.00-1.49 = "very unimportant"; 1.50-2.49 = "slightly unimportant"; 2.50-3.49 = "neutral"; 3.50-4.49 = "slightly important"; 4.50-5.00 = "very important"). Students perceived both terms as being "slightly" to "very important". Agriculture had the highest mean with a score of 4.98 ( $SD = 0.12$ ), followed by agritourism ( $M = 4.45$ ;  $SD = 0.66$ ).

Respondents were asked to rate their self-perceived level of importance of 11 agritourism venues on a 5 point Likert-type scale (1 = "very unimportant" and 5 = "very important"). Responses in Table 1 indicate that eight of the 11 venues had means of 4.0 or greater. The most important perceived agritourism venue was agriculture-related festival(s) or event(s) ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ). Pick-your-own produce or fruits and on-farm hunting tied as the second most important venues ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ). The least important perceived agritourism venue was on-farm fishing ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ).



Table 1  
*Perceived Importance of Agritourism Venues (n = 65)*

Venues	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Agriculture related festival or events	4.46	0.75
Pick-your-own produce or fruits	4.28	0.86
On-farm hunting	4.28	0.86
Winery	4.26	0.91
Agriculture-related museum	4.26	0.91
Community farmers market	4.23	0.84
Christmas tree farm	4.23	0.89
Pumpkin Patch	4.12	1.01
On-farm lodging	3.80	0.96
On-farm retail outlet	3.71	0.86
On-farm fishing	3.69	0.93

### **Knowledge of Agritourism**

An open-ended question was used to determine how respondents defined agritourism. Eleven primary themes resulted from the open-ended question. Of the 55 responses, 26 (47.3%) included the word “tour.” The following is an example response: “Touring agricultural related locations for education and information.” Six respondents (10.9%) noted the word “visit.” A typical response was, “Visiting or touring agricultural related businesses and industries.” Four (7.3%) mentioned “show,” with an example being, “Showing the world agriculture from every perspective.” Entertainment was mentioned by one (1.8%) respondent who stated, “Using agriculture as a source of entertainment and information for the public.”

Respondents were questioned about whether or not their home state had an agritourism department. Of the respondents ( $n = 65$ ) over half 52.3% did not know if their state had an agritourism department; 41.5% indicated their home state had an agritourism department, and 6.2% indicated their home state did not have an agritourism department. Respondents were asked to identify whether or not they had heard certain terms related to agritourism. The most recognized term was “agritourism” (84.8%), followed by “rural tourism” (66.7%). Table 2 identifies additional responses to agritourism terminology.

Table 2  
*Knowledge of Agritourism Terminology (n = 66)*

Terms	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Agritourism	56	84.8	6	9.1	4	6.1
Rural tourism	44	66.7	19	28.8	3	4.5
Farm tourism	41	62.1	19	28.8	6	9.1
Community Supported Agriculture	36	54.5	24	36.4	6	9.1
Eco-tourism	29	43.9	30	45.5	7	10.6
Green tourism	17	25.8	43	65.2	6	9.1

### Sources of Agritourism Information

Respondents ( $n = 65$ ) identified sources of information regarding agritourism information and promotion, and the results are reported in Table 3. Word-of-mouth (81.5%) and paid advertising in local paper, radio or television (70.7%) were the most common previously exposed/observed methods of agritourism promotion.

Table 3  
*Sources of Information about Agritourism (n = 65)*

Sources of Information	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Word-of-mouth	53	81.5	6	9.2	6	9.2
Paid advertising in local paper, radio or television	46	70.7	9	13.8	10	15.4
Website	42	64.6	12	18.5	11	16.9
Free media relations with local paper, radio or television station	41	63.0	6	9.2	18	27.7
Free media relations within travel magazines (e.g. article in magazine)	36	55.4	11	16.9	18	27.7
Paid advertising with travel magazines	35	53.8	12	18.5	18	27.7
Free advertising relations with local paper, radio or television station	33	50.8	10	15.4	22	33.8
Paid advertising with trade associations	29	44.6	13	20.0	23	35.4
Direct mailing	29	44.6	24	36.9	12	18.5

To determine sources of information, respondents ( $n = 65$ ) identified if specific types of media would be helpful in promoting agritourism (Table 4). The type of media with the highest percentage was website (95.4%). Print advertisement was the second most effective type of media to promote agritourism (93.8%). The media types with the lowest percentage were Myspace (50.8%) and wikis (33.8%).

Table 4  
*Sources of Information to Look for Specific Information about Agritourism Events (n=65)*

Types of Media	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Website	62	95.4	1	1.5	2	3.1
Print advertisement	61	93.8	1	1.5	3	4.6
Television advertisement	59	90.8	1	1.5	5	7.7
Radio advertisement	59	90.8	2	3.1	4	6.2
Facebook	57	87.7	5	7.7	3	4.6
Email	55	84.6	5	7.7	5	7.7
Blogs	42	64.6	11	16.9	12	18.5
Myspace	33	50.8	25	38.5	7	10.8
Wikis	22	33.8	18	27.7	25	38.5

Respondents identified how they ( $n = 65$ ) had learned about an agritourism event, if previously visiting one. As shown in Table 5 respondents identified that word-of-mouth (69.2%) and friends (63.1%) were the most frequent sources of information about agritourism events. Tourism book and billboards (20%) were the two least frequent ways of learning about agritourism events.

Table 5  
*Sources of Information to Learn About Agritourism Site (n = 65)*

Source of Information	Yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Word-of-mouth	45	69.2	20	30.8
Friends	41	63.1	24	36.9
Farm sign	31	47.7	34	52.3
Website	30	46.2	35	53.8
Newspaper	26	40.0	39	60.0
Farm advertisement on radio	22	33.8	43	66.2
Internet search	22	33.8	43	66.2
Magazine	20	30.8	45	69.2
Billboard	13	20.0	52	80.0
Tourism book	13	20.0	52	80.0

Respondents ( $n = 65$ ) were asked where they would look for specific information if they were to consider visiting an agritourism site or farm. As shown in Table 6, Internet search (72.3%) had the highest percentage, followed by local newspaper (30.8%), magazine (24.6%), and the yellow pages (9.2%).

Table 6  
*Source of Information to Look for Specific Information about Agritourism Events (n = 65)*

Source of Information	Yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Internet search	48	72.3	17	26.2
Local newspaper	20	30.8	45	69.2
Magazine	16	24.6	49	75.4
Yellow pages	6	9.2	59	90.8

### Conclusions, Discussion, and Implications

The majority of the respondents in this study were female (81.0%) and most were Caucasian (91.8%). Research indicates that this is often the case with agricultural communications professionals as shown in the study of Agricultural Communicators in Excellence (ACE) members where 58.8% were female and 94.9% were Caucasian (McGovney, 2005). As shown in the literature review Caucasian individuals are 10% more likely to visit a farm than other ethnicities (Carpio et al., 2008). The largest percentage of respondents in this study described the community they grew-up in as a farm. Previous research has indicated that rural farms are attractive tourist destinations (Brown & Reeder, 2007). If the majority of the respondents were raised on a farm it may be possible for them to implement agritourism venues in their family's farming operation to expand, increase or stabilize profitability.

Participants in this study noted that the terms "agriculture" and "agritourism" were important. Research has shown that many terms are employed in the literature to describe tourism activities in rural areas (Roberts & Hall, 2001). Most respondents in this study recognized the term "agritourism" and it was the most recognizable term in rural/farm related tourism (Roberts & Hall, 2001). Therefore, this study supports the importance of using the term "agritourism" to describe recreational events associated with agriculture. Almost half of the respondents in this study identified "touring" as a relevant theme in agritourism; therefore, it can be assumed that many view agritourism as a type of tour. Media-Society Theory III: Functionalism (McQuail, 2005) theory notes that entertainment relates to providing amusement, diversion and the means of relaxation as well as reducing social tension and entertainment was also a primary theme identified. Because agritourism can be entertaining it can be assumed that it is a form of entertainment and should be promoted as such.

Over half of the respondents in this study reported not knowing if their state had an agritourism department. Research shows that agritourism operations exist in every state, and in many states, organizations, state officials, citizens, and others have undertaken some type of effort to enhance agritourism (Pittman, 2006). It is clear that agritourism is not being promoted to the level of audience saturation.

The majority of respondents in this study noted exposure to agritourism promotion via word-of-mouth; perhaps this is an indication that many individuals are learning about agritourism events from an acquaintance. The second highest percentage of agritourism exposure was through paid

advertisements; therefore, it may be possible that participants are reading about agritourism events in these venues and then passing that information along to a friend. Research in Tennessee indicated that of the respondents, 50% or more used word-of-mouth, business sign, a state website and newspaper advertisements to advertise their agritourism operations (Blacka et al., 2001; Jensen et al., 2005). This research study follows closely to the Tennessee report (Jensen et al., 2005) and echoes the need to train post-secondary agricultural communications students in diverse promotion techniques to better meet industry needs.

Respondents in this study noted that direct mailing and paid advertising with trade associations were the least wanted sources of information regarding agritourism. This is likely due to college students not receiving direct mailings or trade magazines. Websites were identified as the best type of media followed by print advertisement. A Tennessee study asked respondents (consisting of current agritourism business owners) to identify marketing and promotion assistance services needed (Bruch & Holland, 2004). The top five identified were (1) Internet site development, (2) liability and insurance issues, (3) assistance identifying and making tour bus and travel group contacts, (4) market research, and (5) visitor safety analysis. Research has shown that “students of the millennial generation spend an average of nearly 6.5 hours in front of some type of media each day” (Phipps, Osborne, Dyer, & Ball, 2008, p. 291). Because of this, agritourism websites should have effective tags to assist with ease and efficiency of agritourism searches. This study supports previous research that indicates that agritourism business owners should use a website to promote their business (Bruch & Holland, 2004; Ryan et al., 2006), and collegiate students should be trained in website development and promotion and marketing techniques to better meet the needs of the growing agritourism enterprises in the U.S.

Respondents indicated that they had learned about previously attended agritourism events by word-of-mouth and friends. A Pennsylvania study indicated that agritourism operators rated their top five resources for marketing agritourism as (1) word-of-mouth, (2) repeat business, (3) newspaper ads, (4) brochures, and (5) Internet/ websites (Ryan et al., 2006). Visitors ranked the top marketing resources as (1) Internet/ websites, (2) information/ welcome centers, (3) brochures, (4) travel books/guides, and (5) word-of-mouth as their top sources for finding information about agritourism. This study supports and validates these findings and notes the importance of training students with competencies in marketing, communications, promotion, and advertising as well as in technical skills such as website and print media development.

Previous research indicates that agritourism has increased in interest and scope and is speculated to increase exponentially over the next decade (Brown & Reeder, 2007; Das & Rainey, 2008; Eckert, 2008; Miller, McCullough, Rainey, & Das, 2010). Recent focus in agricultural education and communications identified the need to prepare the public in effectively participating in decision making related to agriculture and prepare a professional workforce that is prepared to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century agriculture (Doerfert, 2011; Osborne, n.d.). Therefore, there is a need to focus university level courses on agritourism education and diverse ways of promotion, marketing, advertising, and skill development to provide future agricultural communicators with the skill-sets needed to meet the ever changing needs of agriculture.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Media-Society Theory III: Functionalism theory shows continuity is about forging and maintaining commonality of values. Many agricultural communications students were raised on a farm



and it can be assumed that they share similar values especially since 95.2% of the respondents have family involved in agriculture (McQuail, 2005). With only 25.4% of the respondents having farming as their family's primary source of income, and 44.8% growing up on a farm it can be assumed that agritourism may be feasible alternative to expand/add to their current operations. Additional research should be focused in this area.

When given six terms related to agritourism, the term agritourism was the most recognized (84.8%). Other terms: rural tourism, farm tourism, community supported agriculture, eco-tourism and green tourism all had varying degrees of recognition, but further research would need to be conducted to determine if the phrases should continue to be included in reference to agritourism.

It is recommended that agritourism business owners not promote their operation with direct mailings and paid advertising with trade magazines. Websites are recommended to represent agritourism operations because 95.4% of respondents felt it would be the most helpful in promoting agritourism. Also, with 72.3% using an Internet search, it is important to create effective website keywords to help with searches. Myspace and wikis are not recommended as promotion tools for agritourism. It is also recommended that agritourism venues have an identifiable farm sign because almost half (47.7%) of the respondents had attended an agritourism venue because of advertisement on a farm sign.

Based on the small population of the study, it is recommended that further research be conducted with non-agriculture collegiate students since only 12.7% were from a city with 10,000 or more individuals and 95.2% had family involved in agriculture. The population was also predominately female (81.0%), so a sample group with more males would be another recommendation, as well as, including more than ten universities and a broader range of ethnicities.

Additionally, curriculum should be integrated into collegiate courses. Because websites and print media were noted as the most successful means for agritourism promotion, university students (particularly agricultural communications students) should be highly trained in these areas. Also, an agritourism conference would be useful since word-of-mouth had one of the highest means as an effective communications piece. A conference would also enable collegiate students interested in agritourism to gather and gain knowledge as well as share experiences.

### About the Authors

Katie Amaral holds a Master of Science degree in Agricultural and Extension Education with an emphasis in Agricultural Communications from the University of Arkansas. She is employed as the marketing manager at Dave Wilson Nursery in Modesto, Calif.

Associate professor and ACE member Leslie Edgar teaches agricultural communications and education courses at the University of Arkansas.

Don Johnson is a professor of Agricultural Education, Communication and Technology at the University of Arkansas.

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