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Sowing the Seeds of a Local Foods Revolution: Agritourism as an Agent of Change

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Title: Sowing the Seeds of a Local Foods Revolution: Agritourism as an Agent of Change

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Abstract:

Two major societal changes in the world, agricultural intensification and urbanization, have changed the local food systems landscape. Over the years, technological developments, increased global supply, and changing markets (e.g., increased demand for processed foods) have contributed to the trend towards large-scale specialized agriculture (Barbieri, Mahoney, & Butler, 2008). During the same time-span, the world has undergone a rapid increase in urbanization due to the migration of rural dwellers seeking to enhance their wellbeing from the resource efficiency and economic prosperity that cities offer (UNFPA, n.d.). The existing local food system is now characterized by a weak producer-consumer relationship around food and fiber, in which many consumers (especially children) don't know where their food comes from (Pense, Leising, Portillo, & Igo, 2005; Vileisis, 2008), and many small family farms are destined to disappear (Barbieri et al., 2008).

We posit that agritourism, defined as the enjoyment of educational and recreational activities on working farms (Gil Arroyo, Barbieri, & Rozier Rich, 2013), could serve as a revolutionary catalyst to restore the producer-consumer relationship related to local foods. Although agritourism is salient for the mosaic of activities—from contemplative to consumptive—offered to visitors, most of them incorporate principles of experiential and place-based education. Combined, experiential and place-based education are suitable to improve knowledge gain, stimulate learning interest and motivation, foster higher-order thinking skills (Ives & Obenchain, 2006), and instill pro-environmental and civically engaged behaviors (Jacobson et al., 2015). We also posit that young children could be agents of change in the local foods revolution as evidence indicates the effectiveness of reaching kids to market products (Flurry & Burns, 2005).

CTS 2019

Therefore, we designed a two-faceted quasi-experimental study to test the suitability of agritourism to increase agricultural literacy and willingness to purchase local foods (Facet 1) and to test the potential of children as agents of change (Facet 2). We will present preliminary results from Facet 1 obtained from surveys conducted in October–November 2018 among 149 families with young children (ages 8–15) visiting agricultural settings before and after engaging in agritourism activities. The majority of responding parents were female and highly educated and averaged 40 years old. Statistical tests ($p < .05$) indicate that agritourism increases adults' attitudes towards local foods, their willingness to purchase local foods and increase their budgets for such purchases, and their intention to consume local foods. Most responding children were female and white and averaged 11 years old. Results on the impact of agritourism on increases children's agricultural literacy will also be presented.

This study responds to the call to gain a more holistic knowledge of the values of agritourism (Barbieri, Stevenson, & Knollenberg, 2018). We conclude that agritourism seems a suitable catalyst to restore the producer-consumer relationship related to local foods, which can serve to recognize the many values that agritourism provides to society. In doing so, this study equips farmers, consumers, policymakers, and development agencies with information to maximize the use of agritourism towards the local foods revolution.

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