

Fields of opportunity: A mixed-methods analysis of agritourism entrepreneurship in Kansas

by

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B.S., University of California, Davis, 2024

A THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Communications and Agricultural Education
College of Agriculture

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2026

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Abstract

Faced with threats such as climate change and market volatility, U.S. agricultural producers are increasingly turning to agritourism to diversify income and build resilient businesses. While this combination of agriculture and tourism offers economic opportunities, it requires producers to adopt new aspects of an entrepreneurial mindset, exposing them to unique challenges generic agritourism resources often fail to address. There is a need to know how agritourism operators, particularly in Kansas, navigate these challenges to develop the entrepreneurial knowledge necessary for success.

Therefore, this study utilized a sequential, exploratory, mixed-methods approach informed by entrepreneurial learning to achieve two overarching research aims related to agritourism entrepreneurship. Phase One (Chapter 2) described a sample of prospective and established agritourism operators' ($N = 54$) transformation of experience into specialized, usable entrepreneurial knowledge. Through seven semi-structured focus groups and three interviews with existing and prospective agritourism operators in Kansas, the findings highlight the need for tailored support systems, including industry-specific mentoring, financial incentives, and targeted workshops. Phase Two (Chapter 3) employed audience segmentation and cluster analysis to characterize prospective and established agritourism operators ($N = 93$), focusing on their perceived levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy, persistence, and alertness. Additionally, respondents identified their preferred communication methods, their trust in information sources, and their willingness to be involved in policy development. Ultimately, this study provides insight for scholars and practitioners interested in developing the agritourism industry and offers a first-hand account of the entrepreneurial barriers and opportunities faced by Kansas operators.

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Acknowledgements

I am beyond excited to sit here and thank all the individuals who have made this journey possible. I can't believe my time as a Wildcat is coming to an end. I never expected to move halfway across the country just to go to school, but I am forever grateful that I opened the email that would change my life.

To Dr. Hill. The Elphaba to my Glinda. You may have shown me how to fly, but you've also kept me humble, kind, and gracious. I am forever grateful to have you in my life. You took a chance on me, and little did you know, you gave me back my power and love for learning. I am endlessly thankful for your trust and patience. I wish I could work with you forever. You have changed my life...for good.

To my committee members, Drs. Jason Ellis, Rachel Mui, and Cheryl Boyer, I am extremely lucky and grateful to have your support. Dr. Ellis, thank you for asking the tough questions that sharpened my thinking. Throughout the writing of this thesis, I would constantly ask myself, "What would Dr. Ellis ask about this?" Without knowing, you were the guiding compass of this work, and I wouldn't have it any other way. Dr. Mui, thank you for your kindness and care with this project. Every time I spoke to you about my work, I always felt like you had my back. I appreciate all your feedback, memes, and energy for entrepreneurship, even in a Tuesday at 7 p.m. class. Dr. Boyer, your relentless joy and hugs do not go unnoticed. Thank you for being in my corner and supporting me throughout this work. I am indebted to you all and thank the universe for bringing you all to my journey here at K-State.

To my friends, here at K-State and Davis (and those from Sanger, too!), thank you for being in my life. I know love is real because of you all. You have supported me through all my phases and have stuck by me, even when I wasn't there for myself. Susana, Charissa, and Claire, I especially want to thank you for being my family here in Kansas. Suse, thank you so much for the endless late nights spent laughing and chismeando in the library when we should have been working. You have been my lifeline throughout my time here in Manhattan, and I am so happy I sat next to you at that bingo event. Charissa, your endless support of me and my goals has been one of the best things I could ask for. Thank you, thank you, for always being there for me (and my plants). And Claire, we are lucky that you live in Lawrence, because I fear that if you were in

the office with me, we would never get anything done. I am so happy to have you in my life and so grateful for your never-ending love and support. You always know what to say to make a girl feel special. I am excited to have you all in my life forever.

To the folks at the Staley School of Leadership, thank you for showing me that genuinely kind people still exist. Kim, Mary Kay, Del'sha, and everyone else who have shown that they care about me, not only as a student, but as a person. Your support has been instrumental, and I look forward to squeezing out a few more months with you all. To the First-Generation Student Center and Tri-Alpha. Thank you, Rebeca, for always trusting me and pushing me to be the best scholar I can be. To my fellow Tri-Alpha members, your journeys will continue to inspire me for as long as I have a life here in academia. And to the folks at Konza Strength, thanks for caring for my body and mind. Who knew that a little CrossFit gym in the corner of Manhattan would bring me back to myself.

Thank you to my family. Mom, Dad, DeAna, Josué, Alicia, and Jane. You are the reason I'm still here today. I hate being a thousand miles away from you all, but I know that no matter how far, I will always have your love and support. You have believed in me every step of the way, and no matter how much I annoy you all, I know I always have a home to come back to. To my boys and baby girl, Auntie is still working through it, but I can't wait to be there one day for your college graduations. Lord knows, I'll probably be the one funding it!

I want to thank all the agritourism operators who trusted me to share their stories. Thank you for putting up with my endless emails and for inviting me to experience your operations with kindness and openness.

Lastly, I do want to thank past Mia for getting up and trying every day. Thank you for trying everything and putting yourself out there no matter what. Thank you for surviving and pushing through those really dark days. Thank you for toughing it out in the barn, even when mice were eating your underwear. Thanks for getting through all those tough STEM classes during undergrad, and trying again, even when you failed over and over (and over) again. And thank you for taking the risk to move to a state you've never visited before. Thank you for always believing in yourself and maintaining your standards in everything that you do.

P.S. Thank you to Beyoncé, Ariana Grande, Bad Bunny, and Megan Thee Stallion for being the soundtrack to my life and for giving me something to escape to when my brain wouldn't shut off. You will always be in my headphones, getting me through the day.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to all first-generation students. For many of us, we've had to create opportunities where there weren't any. We had to go through it confused. We had to go through it scared. We had to go through it alone.

But we persisted. We opened our own doors. We changed our family legacies.

For many of us, we are proud children of immigrants. People who uprooted their lives to make sure we had chances they could never have imagined.

This work is dedicated to all the sacrifices that made it possible for me to be here today. Thank you for opening the doors so that I can walk through them.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Overview

This chapter provides background on the history, role, and importance of the agritourism industry in the United States. The study's need, purpose, research questions, frameworks, rationale, and scope are also outlined for both phases. Two phases were used to fully address the study's purpose: to explore the entrepreneurial challenges and opportunities faced by agritourism operators in Kansas that affect business development and long-term viability. This research will therefore identify critical communication and education gaps, informing strategies to address these challenges and improve sector growth. This study was made possible by the Kansas State University Global Food Systems Seed Grant.

Background

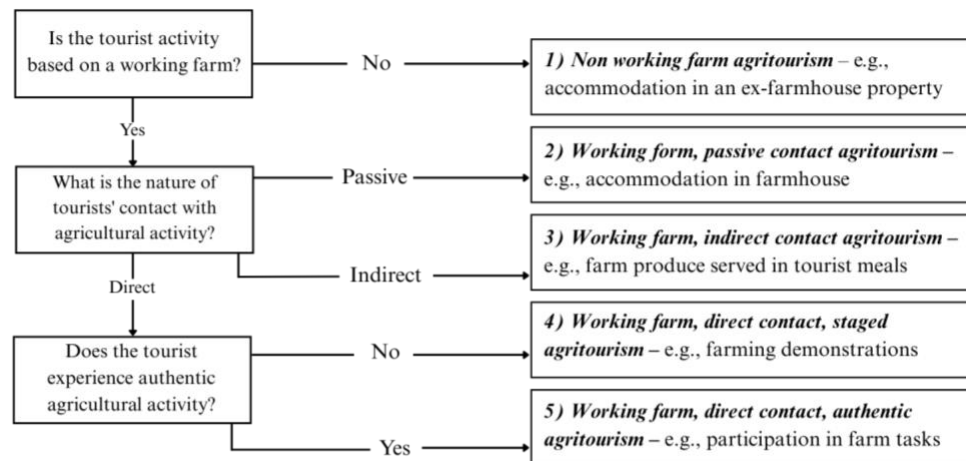
Brief History of Agritourism

The agritourism industry has surged in recent years, driven by the need for sustainable and resilient food systems (Ammirato et al., 2020). Diversifying and exploring new agricultural practices, however, is not a new phenomenon (Gil Arroyo et al., 2013). Agritourism, or farm tourism, has been recognized in European countries for more than 100 years, with heavy concentrations of operations in agriculturally specialized countries such as Italy, Austria, Germany, and England (Busby & Rendle, 2000; Hill & Busby, 2002). In the United States, agritourism has been recognized since the early 1900s, with farm-related recreation and entertainment as popular excursions for urban residents (Busby & Rendle, 2000). Bridging the gap between farming and travel, agritourism is defined as a commercial venture that welcomes guests to agricultural businesses' farms or ranches. The goal is to entertain and/or educate these visitors while also providing a new revenue stream for the farm enterprise (National Agricultural

Law Center, n.d.). Agritourism practices include those that are “farming-related activities carried out on a working farm or other agricultural settings for entertainment or education purposes” (Arroyo et al., 2013, p. 45). Common agritourism activities include pick-your-own produce operations, farm stays, petting zoos, educational farms, and hunting lodges (National Agricultural Law Center, n.d.). However, defining the parameters that constitute an agritourism business has resulted in mixed definitions of the practice (Chase et al., 2018). Phillip et al. (2010) (Figure 1.1) provide a typology for defining agritourism, as practices can be classified as passive or indirect.

Figure 1.1

Typology for defining agritourism



Note. Phillip et al., 2010

Agritourism has become a growing trend as U.S. agricultural producers seek to diversify their income streams. This trend is fueled by extrinsic threats, such as climate change and agricultural market volatility, as well as by opportunities arising from consumer demand for more family travel, multi-activity trips, and a growing interest in the agricultural sector (Gil Arroyo et al., 2013). The surge in demand for outdoor activities following the COVID-19

pandemic also created opportunities for small-scale farmers, encouraging them to expand their operations to include tourist attractions alongside their traditional farm or ranch structures (Brune et al., 2023). As traditional production agriculture becomes increasingly difficult to sustain, the economic benefits of business diversification offer a unique opportunity for agritourism operators to leverage both agriculture and tourism within a combined enterprise (Ammirato et al., 2020; Busby & Rendle, 2000).

The global agritourism industry has been noted as a successful business venture across a variety of countries (Hollas et al., 2023). Globally, the industry is estimated at USD 8.10 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach USD 15.78 billion by 2030 (Grand View Research, 2024). North America accounted for the largest share of agritourism revenue, at 46.24% in 2024 (Grand View Research, 2024). In the United States, more than 28,000 farms provided agritourism and recreational services, valued at more than USD 1.2 billion (Hollas et al., 2023; USDA, 2024). This growth is driven by farmers, who are often women and older individuals, seeking to educate the public and diversify their income (McGehee et al., 2007), and by consumers seeking authentic agricultural experiences, local food, and educational opportunities (Hollas et al., 2023). The most popular agritourism ventures are diverse, reflecting consumers' varied interests. These include direct-to-consumer sales, on-farm sales, outdoor recreational activities, farm stays, and educational farm tours (Whitt et al., 2019).

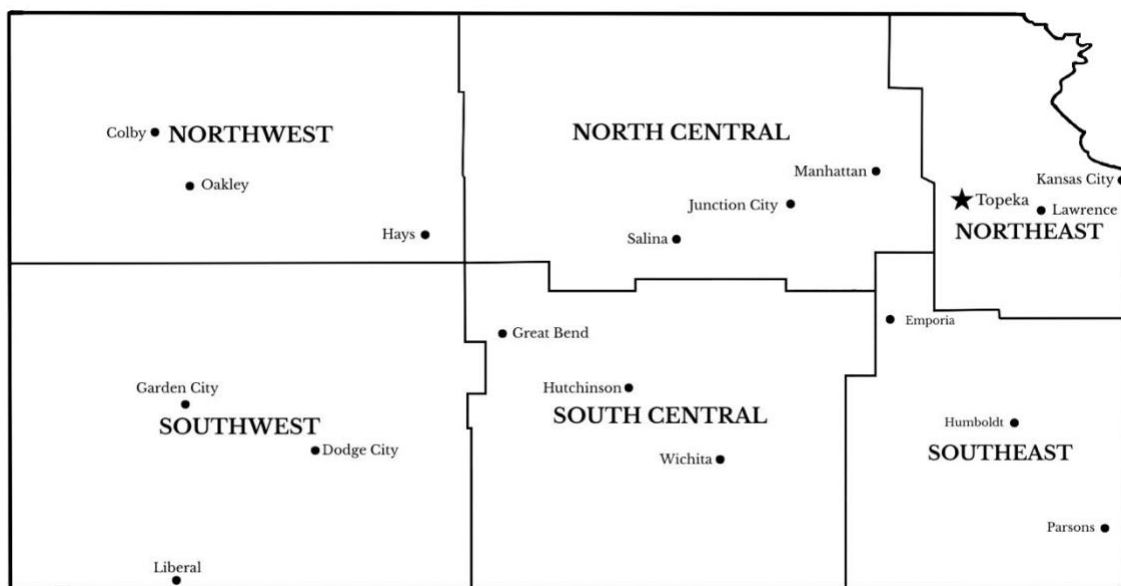
Agritourism's Landscape in Kansas

The Kansas Agritourism Promotion Act, enacted in 2004, established a clear position in favor of agritourism expansion in the state (Kansas Agritourism Program, n.d.). The act aims to encourage "owners or operators of farms, ranches, and rural attractions, including historic, cultural, and natural attractions, to invite members of the public to view, observe, and participate in such operations and attractions for recreational or entertainment purposes" (Kansas Statutes

Chapter 32, Article 14, 2024). As of June 2025, there were 432 registered agritourism businesses; 418 of these had active emails on file (Kelsey Wendling, Kansas Agritourism Program, personal communication, June 1st, 2025). However, 811 farms in Kansas reported income from agritourism and recreational services in 2022 (Entsminger & Schmidt, 2024). These agritourism operations are identified and categorized across six regions in Kansas (Kansas Tourism, n.d.) (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2

Kansas Tourism Regions



Note. Kansas Tourism, 2025

Kansas ranks 25th in on-farm agritourism and recreational service sales in the United States, generating more than USD 17.4 million for producers (USDA, 2024). Growth in the Kansas agritourism landscape has been particularly driven by the state's distinctive agricultural heritage. Popular enterprises in the state mirror national trends, particularly on-farm accommodations and agri-tainment, such as corn mazes, pumpkin patches, and pick-your-own produce operations. The current industry landscape also reflects growing interest in wineries and

vineyards, petting zoos, and seasonal activities (Collins et al., 2024; Kansas Agritourism Program, n.d.). Farmers engaging in agritourism in Kansas tend to be female and, on average, in their early 50s, with a noteworthy portion being relatively new to the agritourism business (Collins et al., 2024). Visitors to Kansas agritourism sites are often from out of state, generally have higher-than-average incomes, and seek authentic agricultural experiences, local food, and educational opportunities (Entsminger & Schmidt, 2024).

With interest and demand for agritourism experiences continuing to rise, operators face challenges in navigating regulatory frameworks, marketing their ventures, and implementing best practices (Ammirato et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2024). As a result, a robust ecosystem of resources and organizations has emerged to target specific challenges faced by operators. Currently, the Kansas Agritourism Program plays a key role in the collective identity of agritourism within the state. Registration with the Kansas Agritourism Program provides a layer of limited liability protection from the State on the individual's property, education, networking, and resource opportunities, and free marketing on the Kansas Agritourism Program website (Kansas Agritourism Program, n.d.).

The Kansas Agritourism Program is governed by the Kansas Department of Commerce. The Department of Transportation and the Department of Wildlife & Parks are also identified as key supporters of travel and economic growth (Kansas Agritourism Program, n.d.). Additionally, the Department of Agriculture supports agritourism, specifically through the From the Land of Kansas program, which aims to promote Kansas products more broadly (From the Land of Kansas, n.d.). Agritourism is distinctive in that businesses can provide both tourist activities and direct sales to customers (Hollas et al., 2024; Schmidt et al., 2023). Being that agritourism is part agriculture and part tourism, agritourism operators in Kansas also receive support from tourism-

based entities. The Kansas Sampler Foundation, Flint Hills Tourism Coalition, Kansas Museums Association, Gravel Kansas, Kansas Bed & Breakfast Association, Kansas Outfitters & Landowners Association, Kansas Post Rock Limestone Coalition, Kansas State Historical Society, Meet Kansas, SportsKS, Tour Kansas, and Travel Industry Association of Kansas have aligned themselves as explicit supporters of the Kansas Agritourism Program. In addition, Kansas Farm Bureau has a clear policy stance in support of agritourism and offers resources and access to LandTrust, a recreation access network (Brown, 2017).

Agritourism and Sustainable Rural Development

By providing the public with an avenue to experience agriculture firsthand, agritourism offers a unique opportunity to foster rural development. In this study, rural development is defined as “an overall improvement in the economic and social well-being of rural residents and the institutional and physical environments in which they live” (Hodge, 1986, p. 271).

Agritourism aims to support sustainable rural development by maintaining existing family farms, creating local employment opportunities, and conserving landscapes and biodiversity (Ammirato et al., 2020). In turn, agriculture is recognized as a fundamental contributor to the overall sustainable development of rural areas (Ammirato et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2024). Agriculture is often associated with rural landscapes but is only sustainable through continuous reflection and diversity in practices, production methods, and market structures (Jónsdóttir & Gísladóttir, 2023). A shift in consumer preference towards sustainable, local food systems and short food supply chains has spurred the development of today’s agritourism industry (Ammirato et al., 2020; Bisoffi et al., 2021). Agritourism is unique in its capacity to meet consumer demand for accessible food sourcing while also contributing to all three dimensions of sustainability: economic, environmental, and social (Ammirato et al., 2020).

Economic Sustainability

Small farms, defined as those with a gross cash farm income (GCFI) less than \$350,000, and mid-size farms, with a GCFI of \$350,000 to \$999,999 (USDA, 2025), are highly vulnerable to globalization, agricultural commercialization, climate change, and resource depletion (Barbieri, 2020). However, agritourism has emerged as a key means of navigating financial difficulties faced by agriculturalists and has gained popularity as a solution amidst these challenges. In the United States, agritourism and recreation services grew by 25% between 2017 and 2022, with annual on-farm receipts exceeding USD 1.2 billion (USDA, 2024). Agritourism enables farmers to diversify their income sources beyond traditional practices, thereby mitigating risks associated with market fluctuations and depleted natural resources (Whitt et al., 2019).

Likewise, agritourism is crucial for job creation in rural communities, as niche agricultural activities often require specialized skills. Additionally, tourism-specific operations, such as those offering overnight stays and tours, require stable, year-round employment to meet customer demand (Ramsey & Schaumleffel, 2006). Tourists visiting agritourism operations inject revenue into local economies and stimulate economic activity vital for supporting small, local businesses (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024; Ramsey & Schaumleffel, 2006). This financial support from tourists directly affects the long-term viability of these agricultural communities, as the correlation between economic robustness and investment attraction is well established (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024; Palmi & Lezzi, 2020; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). Such investment enhances a region's perceived desirability, thereby stimulating demographic shifts toward increased residency (Ramsey & Schaumleffel, 2006; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). Ultimately, the robust economic benefits of agritourism for local economies encourage sustainable rural development (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024).

Environmental Sustainability

Agritourism plays a direct role in environmental conservation, as its long-term viability depends on the protection of natural resources (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024). When complemented by regenerative agricultural practices, agritourism plays a crucial role in preventing the exhaustion of natural resources, thereby benefiting long-term soil health, biodiversity, and water management (Ammirato et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2025). Practices such as cover cropping, reduced tillage, composting, and other agricultural holistic approaches improve soil structure, increase organic matter, and reduce erosion (Singh et al., 2025). Beyond the direct application of eco-friendly methods such as water conservation and recycling, operators further contribute to environmental conservation by teaching visitors about ecological principles and sustainable practices. This dual commitment models and promotes increased awareness of conservation and environmental protection, ultimately bolstering overall environmental sustainability (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024).

A core principle of sustainable rural development is the ongoing use of land without continuous degradation (Jónsdóttir & Gísladóttir, 2023). Agritourism operators are inherently responsible for environmental stewardship to ensure their businesses thrive in the long term. Therefore, they often implement practices like water conservation, organic farming, and permaculture (Ammirato et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2025). By implementing sustainable practices essential to business success, agritourism can ultimately enhance biodiversity and improve natural resources within farm systems (Singh et al., 2025). Agritourism stands as a promising model for producers to foster sustainable practices and directly contribute to the health and longevity of natural environments.

Social Sustainability

Despite limited attention in previous research, agritourism is regarded as a key component of sustained efforts to preserve and restore communities' collective beliefs, roots, and cultural heritage (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024). During the COVID-19 pandemic, agritourism operators filled a niche when demand increased for outdoor activities, youth education, and local tourism (Bisoffi, 2021). Agriculture is commonly associated with private lands (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 2009); however, agritourism provides visitors with access to these lands, enabling direct interactions with producers and an understanding of the intricacies of agriculture (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024). This invitation to visit farms strengthens social bonds between producers and the local community and is encouraged by activities, such as hosting community events and educational experiences (Kothari & Perwej, 2021). While promoting participation in agriculture, agritourism businesses also foster trust and raise awareness and understanding between agricultural producers and consumers (Peroff et al., 2022).

Public support for agritourism operations can also promote cultural preservation by increasing exposure to traditional foods and activities (Kothari & Perwej, 2021). This is especially prevalent in Kansas, as agritourism protections extend to historical sites and landscapes (Kansas Agritourism Program, n.d.). In essence, agritourism plays a crucial yet overlooked role in social sustainability (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024). By fostering direct connections between the public and agricultural practices, agritourism strengthens social bonds and builds trust, ultimately contributing to the well-being of people and communities (Ammirato et al., 2020; Contini et al., 2009; Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024). This emphasis on community vitality, alongside the promotion of traditional foods and activities, positions agritourism as a key component in preserving cultural heritage (Ammirato et al., 2020). Just as sustainable agriculture ensures long-term ecological health and economic viability, agritourism cultivates vibrant

communities and satisfying livelihoods, ensuring collective beliefs and roots endure for future generations (Yanan et al., 2024).

Need for Study

Agriculture is undergoing a transformation, moving beyond its traditional role of food production to embrace new avenues for economic sustainability and community engagement (Ammirato et al., 2020). As the sector evolves, so do the challenges, including the persistent decline of small family farms, an aging farm population, and increasing land prices (Hoppe & Banker, 2010; Khanal & Mishra, 2014). This trend exacerbates a critical disconnect between the public, particularly urban populations, and the intricate realities of modern agricultural producers and practices (Pittman, 2006; Regan & Kenny, 2022). In this evolving landscape, agritourism has emerged as an intersectional opportunity, offering producers diversified income streams, preserving agricultural landscapes, and connecting consumers directly with the origins of their food (Barbieri, 2020). Agritourism offers a tangible pathway to mitigate challenges in the agricultural sector by providing supplemental income that can help sustain smaller operations, attract younger generations to agricultural entrepreneurship, and potentially increase the profitability of existing land (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024; Whitt et al., 2019). While agritourism has emerged globally as a promising strategy for diversification and community engagement, its precise role in mitigating these specific challenges in regions such as Kansas warrants further investigation (Amanor-Boadu, 2013; Collins et al., 2024).

While agritourism holds promise, the specific vulnerabilities facing small and medium-sized agricultural operations, particularly in Kansas, present unique challenges that limit its full potential (Amanor-Boadu, 2013; Collins et al., 2024). Though supported by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), these operations are particularly sensitive to market

instability, globalization, and climate change (Kanu & Przezbórska-Skobiej, 2025; USDA NRCS, n.d.). Agritourism businesses are particularly sensitive to extrinsic factors, as their size and newness make them vulnerable to unstable funding and inconsistencies in government regulation. Given the uniqueness of Kansas agriculture and tourism, a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient to address business development gaps (Amanor-Boadu, 2015; Collins et al., 2024; Rozier Rich et al., 2016). Currently, the Kansas Agritourism Program is constrained as it addresses both the operator and the visitor, with emphasis on the visitor's experience rather than the operator's struggles. By using an entrepreneurial and communication lens to guide this investigation, this research can identify key challenges presented by agritourism operators and provide capacity development directly targeted toward these concerns. Tailoring education and communication to Kansas-related operator issues can, in turn, equip future operators in agri-entrepreneurship, thereby furthering the development of the agritourism industry in the state.

Purpose and Research Questions

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore the entrepreneurial challenges and opportunities faced by agritourism operators in Kansas that impact business development and long-term business viability.

From Farmer to Founder: A Qualitative Analysis of Kansas Agritourism Operators'

Entrepreneurial Journeys (Phase One)

RQ1: What career experiences motivate operators to start and sustain an agritourism business?

RQ2: What entrepreneurial knowledge do agritourism operators rely on when considering starting or expanding their agritourism business?

RQ3: How do agritourism operators demonstrate exploitation or exploration modes of transformational learning?

RQ4: What factors influence the transformational learning process of agritourism business operators?

Targeting Growth: Segmenting the Entrepreneurial Drivers of Kansas Agritourism

Operators (Phase Two)

RO1: Identify audience segments based on entrepreneurial alertness, persistence, and self-efficacy

RO2: Describe the identified audience segments' demographic characteristics

RO3: Describe the identified audience segments' communication preferences

RO4: Describe the identified audience segments' trust in information sources

RO5: Describe the identified audience segments' willingness to engage in societal behaviors

Frameworks

This study employed multiple theoretical frameworks to guide its multi-method approach. The Entrepreneurship Learning Theory (Politis, 2005) served as the conceptual lens for the first phase of the study, supported by the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1971). The second phase of this study employed audience segmentation and cluster analysis as its conceptual framework.

Entrepreneurship Learning Framework

Entrepreneurial success is shaped by previous experiences, and even more so, the experiential processes that transform those first-hand experiences into entrepreneurial knowledge (Politis, 2005). These raw experiences, over time, cultivate knowledge and skills to cope with the

difficulties of business establishment and management. This process of transformation, or the way entrepreneurs learn, is how people gain the knowledge, abilities, and mindset needed to spot and seize opportunities, create businesses, and adjust to new situations (Politis, 2005). To provide a dynamic understanding of this process of learning, entrepreneurship learning theory highlights three main components: a) entrepreneurs' career experiences, b) the transformation process, and c) entrepreneurial knowledge.

Entrepreneurs' career experiences refer to the individual's direct observation and/or participation in the process of creating a new business. Politis (2005) identifies three types of career experiences associated with entrepreneurial learning: prior start-up experience, prior management experience, and prior industry-specific experience. Prior start-up experience refers to direct participation in or observation of the business establishment process, providing tacit knowledge that informs decision-making. Prior management experience exposes individuals to the intricacies of business, such as marketing and sales, thereby equipping them to apply these skills in challenging situations. Likewise, prior industry-specific experience provides a deeper understanding of field-specific conditions that outsiders lack. These three experiences provide exposure to the difficulties of business establishment, ultimately resulting in the knowledge to solve similar issues in future endeavors.

However, Politis (2005) argues past experiences are insufficient to inform entrepreneurial learning and must undergo transformation to become usable. There is a clear distinction between experience and knowledge, as experience informs the practical knowledge derived from it. Drawing on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, the cultivation of knowledge through transformation can be broken down into two distinct phases: exploitation and exploration. The mode of exploitation refers to how entrepreneurs use existing knowledge and select actions

similar to those they have taken in prior experiences. It involves a process of refinement, routine, and reliability that impacts the stability of the behavior. By capitalizing on the success of a previous endeavor, the individual can be assured of similar positive results. Exploration, on the other hand, is how individuals explore new possibilities through experimentation, discovery, and innovation, thereby creating new varieties of experience (Politis, 2005). By choosing new actions that differ from the ones they have chosen previously, they are open to new possibilities that can advance their navigation around a barrier. Consequently, the avenue of exploration yields more frequent failures than exploitation, yet remains important for sustained learning over time. Navigating a balance between exploitation and exploration remains an individual matter, as the mode of transformation itself depends on other factors.

The outcomes of prior entrepreneurial events, the entrepreneur's predominant logic or reasoning, and the entrepreneur's career orientation all play pivotal roles in how the individual transforms experiences into knowledge. The outcomes of previous events, whether successes or failures, shape how the individual moves forward from the experience. If they succeed, they may continue to reinforce those practices and exploit them moving forward. However, if they fail, Politis (2005) argues the individual will proceed in an exploratory manner and try new approaches. Likewise, individuals' predominant logic or reasoning shapes how experiences are transformed, as in causal and effectual reasoning. Causal relies on what should be done with predicted outcomes in existing markets, while effectual relies on the creativity needed to build new markets. Lastly, the entrepreneur's career orientation and career motivations shape how the individual seeks new learning opportunities.

Politis (2005) identifies four career motivations: linear, expert, spiral, and transitory. Linear career orientations are motivated by power and achievement and move in the direction of

achievement satisfaction. Expert career orientations are characterized by a devotion to a single occupation, driven by refinement and development within that field. Both linear and expert career orientations are more inclined to exploit preexisting knowledge and less likely to deviate from trusted knowledge. Yet, individuals in a more spiral-oriented career are motivated by personal development and creativity, moving across career paths in similar fields to gain new experiences. A transitory career orientation may similarly shift career paths, is motivated by independence and variety, and is inclined to switch fields entirely, exemplifying exploratory modes of transformation.

The culmination of experiences and the process by which those experiences are transformed into knowledge inform the final component of the entrepreneurial learning framework. Entrepreneurial knowledge is the wisdom derived from experience and influences two outcomes: greater effectiveness in recognizing entrepreneurial opportunities and greater effectiveness in coping with the liabilities of newness. Entrepreneurs with prior experience possess the necessary information and develop the cognitive capabilities to value new relationships and business characteristics, thereby increasing their likelihood of success. They are comfortable in their new ventures because of the valuable experiences they have transformed into knowledge over time, and can recognize when odds are favorable. This also increases their ability to cope with the liabilities of newness, which are identified as traditional obstacles such as funding and trust (Politis, 2005). Previous experience, relationships, and relevant skills can be an advantage in developing new businesses.

Understanding how entrepreneurs learn offers key insights into the success of their business ventures (Shen et al., 2021). Entrepreneurial learning theory provides a robust framework for understanding why some agritourism operators thrive while others struggle. It

moves beyond a surface-level analysis of problems and solutions, delving into the underlying processes of knowledge acquisition, skill development, mindset shifts, and social interactions (Pliakoura et al., 2020). These elements are vital for navigating the unique challenges and capitalizing on the significant opportunities inherent in the agritourism sector (Ndirangu & Bwisa, 2016).

Social Learning Theory

Individuals learn through direct experience, as well as by observing others' actions and their consequences (Bandura, 1971, 1977). Observational learning allows individuals to learn vicariously rather than directly experiencing the event. By observing others' behavior, the individual mitigates the consequences they face, thereby creating space to proceed with the action. Bandura (1971, 1977) emphasizes observational learning is not possible without cognitive processes, specifically the mediational process. Four mediational processes are identified: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation.

Attention must be paid to the behavior and the resulting consequences for the individual to form a representation of the behavior. Merely an act is not enough for the behavior or action to be imitated; it must capture the attention of the individual seeking to replicate it. Retention is the process by which an individual captures and stores behavior for future use. For an action to be effective, it must both capture an individual's attention and be retained. Motor reproduction is the ability to perform the behavior; however, it may not always be possible to replicate, as there may be physical limitations that prevent the behavior from being imitated. Lastly, the motivational processes are the perceived rewards or consequences that result from imitating the behavior. If the perceived benefits outweigh the costs, the individual may be more comfortable replicating the behavior (Bandura, 1971, 1977).

Social networks are influential in the development of entrepreneurial knowledge, as individuals often initiate new ventures by imitating others (Yang et al., 2023). Through these networks, entrepreneurs can acquire new information and gain new tacit knowledge to inform their future endeavors. While prior experiences play a major role in developing knowledge, peer influence during social communication can shape the steps the entrepreneur takes going forward. Likewise, entrepreneurs do not rely solely on their knowledge and experience; they also draw on their social networks for guidance (Yang et al., 2023). Relying solely on one's own experiences may prove inefficient (Bandura, 1977); therefore, entrepreneurs must capitalize on social observational learning to navigate the complexities of their new ventures.

Social learning theory offers a useful framework by moving beyond individual learning to emphasize the influence of one's social environment (Bandura, 1971, 1977). For agritourism operators, this means recognizing that their entrepreneurial journey is heavily shaped by who they observe, interact with, and are influenced by (Nurkasanah & Sarwoprasodjo, 2024). Observational learning from established operators alongside vicarious reinforcement from others' success significantly aids skill development and encourages new practices (Ferreira et al., 2022). For the purposes of this study, social learning theory, complemented by entrepreneurship learning theory, can elucidate the impact of observation and reinforcement on the success of agritourism ventures (Tri Harinie, 2017).

Audience Segmentation and Cluster Analysis

The second phase of this study aims to inform the development of regulatory adjustments, financial assistance, and training programs tailored to the current capacity and entrepreneurial mindset of Kansas agritourism operators. To achieve this, the study utilizes audience segmentation, also known as market segmentation, a technique used to develop more effective communication by focusing on groups of individuals who share common perspectives

and values (Grunig, 1989; Orton et al., 2024; Slater, 1996). This three-step process involves gathering baseline data on audience attitudes and behaviors, identifying distinct segments, and designing optimal messaging strategies (Slater, 1996). To develop the audience segments, data were analyzed using a two-stage cluster analysis approach (Yim & Ramdeen, 2015), leveraging the strengths of both hierarchical and K-means clustering to ensure a stable, interpretable solution. First, a Hierarchical Cluster Analysis (HCA) using Ward's Method with squared Euclidean distance was performed as it is designed to minimize within-cluster variance, thereby effectively uncovering distinct, cohesive groups within a population (Everitt et al., 2011; Ward, 1963). To refine respondent assignments, a K-means clustering analysis was performed following the initial HCA. This iterative procedure assigns each participant to the cluster with the nearest mean, enhancing the internal validity of the resulting segments (Gibson et al., 2021). While audience segmentation and cluster analysis are common in tourism literature, they have historically been restricted to segmenting tourists themselves (Baby & Kim, 2025; Lwoga & Maturo, 2020; Sullins et al., 2010; Varmazyari et al., 2018; Zeng & Chen, 2020). By applying these techniques directly to agritourism entrepreneurs, this research addresses a critical gap by identifying key target audiences to better structure support programs.

Research Design and Rationale

An exploratory sequential research design was used for this study. The initial qualitative data collection and analysis informed the subsequent quantitative data collection. This study employed a mixed-method approach, combining the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. This combination provides deeper insight into research questions and enhances the validity and interpretability of findings by integrating diverse data types (Ahmed et al., 2024). Qualitative methods, such as focus groups in this study, yield in-depth insights into the

intricacies of participants' experiences and motivations. Quantitative methods, such as the survey used in the second phase of this study, provide measurable data that can be generalized for the broader population (Ahmed et al., 2024). Combining these methods enables navigation around their respective barriers, as quantitative methodology can be instrumental in fortifying the phenomena that qualitative methods identify (Verhoef & Casebeer, 1997).

The use of exploratory sequential research enables a more in-depth exploration of phenomena are directly experienced by our target population (Ahmed et al., 2024). Existing literature provides limited insight into the barriers and opportunities faced by Kansas-specific agritourism operators, making a purely quantitative approach insufficient without prior qualitative exploration. In this research, the primary qualitative exploration of agritourism operators enabled a deeper investigation of recurring barriers and opportunities faced by a variety of individuals. The data collected in this first phase of research directly informed the second phase of this study. For instance, key themes and specific terminology used by operators were then incorporated into the quantitative survey, enabling a deeper investigation into the entities that support or impede agritourism business development. Likewise, an informed quantitative study can include key aspects specific to Kansas operators, thereby reinforcing common themes, phenomena, and experiences outlined in the primary qualitative collection (Proudfoot, 2022).

Scope of Investigation, Assumptions, and Limitations

The target population for this study comprises established agritourism operators in Kansas and individuals with an actionable interest in establishing an agritourism business within the next five years. For the first phase of the study, participants were recruited via purposive and snowball sampling through a registration list provided by the Kansas Agritourism Program ($N =$

418) supplemented by an open-distribution effort through K-State University Research and Extension Offices, the Kansas Farm Bureau, the Kansas Sampler Foundation, NetWork Kansas social media and newsletters, and the Agriculture Today podcast. While the total membership of these additional organizations was not disclosed, this approach enabled participation by the wider agritourism industry, including those outside the registered list. For the second phase of the study, the sample was drawn from two sources: the Kansas Farm Bureau weekly e-news publication ($N = 11,000$), including a subsection of approximately 20 members interested in agritourism, as well as the Kansas Agritourism Program's list of currently registered agritourism operators with active emails on file ($N = 418$). This study was completed under several assumptions. In both phases of the study, it was assumed that all participants had prior knowledge of what constitutes an agritourism business and that prospective operators had foundational knowledge or experience with the processes involved in establishing an agritourism operation. It was also assumed that participants would answer honestly and accurately in both phases of the study.

Limitations for the first phase of the study include limited responses from the Southwestern and Southeastern regions of Kansas. Likewise, registration with the Kansas Agritourism Program may represent a skewed sample of agritourism operators in the state due to the resulting benefits of program participation. Data collection for the first phase of the study spanned four weeks, and although multiple dates and times were offered, limited time spent in each city may have resulted in smaller sample sizes. For the second phase of the study, generalizability is a significant limitation, as the sample was not representative of all agritourism operators in Kansas. A sample size calculation for an unknown population indicates that 97 responses would be required to maintain a 10% margin of error at a 95% confidence level

(Althubaiti, 2022; Cochran, 1977); however, this study fell under this threshold. A notable limitation of this thesis is the inconsistent definition of agritourism across the Kansas Agritourism Program, the Kansas Farm Bureau, and the USDA. This definitional ambiguity may have led to participant self-selection bias, as some individuals may have either incorrectly opted out or participated based on their understanding of what constitutes agritourism.

Chapter Two - From Farmer to Founder: A Qualitative Analysis of Kansas Agritourism Operators' Entrepreneurial Journeys

Overview

This chapter presents phase one of the two-phase study. An in-depth exploration is needed to produce effective resources that promote agritourism business development in Kansas. This exploration should investigate the factors affecting an operator's entrepreneurial identity and the current conditions that impact business expansion. Through a series of focus groups informed by the Entrepreneurial Learning Theory and supported by the Social Learning Theory, we describe the factors that impact established and prospective agritourism operators, areas for growth and expansion, and identify the main motivations behind business establishment. A questionnaire also provided demographic information about the operators.

Introduction

The demand to expand agriculture into untapped markets has driven the growth of agritourism across the United States (Hollas et al., 2024). Driven by a need for diversification, farmers and ranchers are transforming their traditional operations into commercial enterprises that attract visitors for education and entertainment (Barbieri, 2019; Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024; Whitt et al., 2019). Incorporating these agritourism activities provides a tangible pathway to mitigate growing environmental, social, and economic challenges while protecting and conserving family-owned businesses (Hollas et al., 2024). Further, this diversification can attract a younger generation to agricultural entrepreneurship, help sustain smaller operations, and increase the overall profitability of existing land (Van Sandt et al., 2018; Whitt et al., 2019). Reflecting this nationwide trend, Kansas has experienced substantial localized growth, with

agritourism expanding by 19 percent since 2017 and generating over USD 17 million for operators statewide (USDA, 2024).

Despite its promise, the intersection of agriculture and tourism poses unique vulnerabilities. As these operators move beyond their role as farmers and ranchers, they face complex issues that extend beyond traditional agricultural management (Ammirato et al., 2020). Agritourism businesses are particularly susceptible to market instability, globalization, and climate change. Their size and newness make them vulnerable to unstable funding and the complexities of government regulation (Hollas et al., 2022). While existing literature identifies broad challenges and barriers to expansion within Kansas (Amanor-Boadu, 2013; Collins et al., 2024), a critical gap remains: we have yet to explore the specific entrepreneurial knowledge and capacity required for operators to overcome these hurdles. Current research acknowledges the existence of barriers but fails to investigate the internal strategies and professional development required to navigate them.

A “one-size-fits-all” approach to business development is insufficient for agricultural producers who must navigate the distinct economic and cultural landscape of Kansas (Amanor-Boadu, 2013; Collins et al., 2024; Rozier Rich et al., 2016). When a producer introduces an agritourism venture, they are not merely adding a task; they are launching an entirely new business stream requiring a complete shift in entrepreneurial mindset. While the Kansas Agritourism Program provides essential guidance, its primary focus on the visitor experience often overlooks the internal, operational challenges a producer faces when integrating agritourism into a working farm. This creates a critical knowledge gap regarding the foundational strategies and practical steps required for these entrepreneurs to manage new business identities. Producers must simultaneously manage traditional agricultural risks while

mastering the nuances of hospitality, including building brand identity, implementing digital marketing strategies, and meeting expectations of public visitors (Miller et al., 2023; Yusuf et al., 2024).

This research seeks to bridge this gap by examining agritourism through an entrepreneurial and communication lens, with a specific focus on the producer's journey. By identifying the unique challenges and barriers inherent in adding a tourism revenue stream, this investigation moves beyond general industry trends to conduct a micro-level analysis of operator needs. The goal is to inform the development of educational and communication resources tailored to the dual-role reality of Kansas agritourism operators. Strengthening the entrepreneurial capacity of these operators will not only support individual business viability but also foster the sustainable development of the agritourism industry across the state.

Literature Review

Agritourism as a means of agricultural diversification is not a new phenomenon, as tourism in agricultural spaces has been recognized globally for more than 100 years (Busby & Rendle, 2000; Hill & Busby, 2002). Farm-related tourism in the United States has been recognized in some capacity since the early 20th century (Busby & Rendle, 2000). However, defining the boundaries of agritourism has been difficult, as the definition of an agritourism business remains debated (Gil Arroyo et al., 2013; Lamie et al., 2020; Phillip et al., 2010). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the National Agricultural Law Center (NALC) currently define agritourism as “a form of commercial, recreational, or educational enterprises that link production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors onto a farm, ranch, or other agricultural business for the purposes of entertaining and/or educating the visitors while generating income for the farm, ranch, or business owner” (USDA, n.d.). In scientific

literature, the consensus of agritourism's definition includes key terms such as "agricultural setting", "farm", "entertainment", "education", and "agrarian" (Ammirato et al., 2020; Gil Arroyo et al., 2013; Lamie et al., 2020). Likewise, the term agritourism is often interchanged with terms such as "agrotourism", "farm tourism", "farm-based tourism" and "rural tourism" (Ammirato et al., 2020). Phillip et al. (2010) and Flanigan et al. (2014) provide typologies for defining agritourism activities, highlighting customer interaction with agriculture, the authenticity of the experience, and the farm's operational status.

Operations vary by location, ranging in size and activities offered. Common examples of agritourism include pick-your-own operations, farm stays, petting zoos, educational farms, hunting lodges, agriculture museums, and outdoor festivals (National Agricultural Law Center, n.d.). In Kansas, the 2004 Kansas Agritourism Promotion Act (Kan. Stat. Ann. §§ 32-1430-1438, 2024) recognizes agritourism activities as those that allow the general public to interact and enjoy rural activities (Kansas Tourism, n.d.). These activities include, but are not limited to, ranching and farming activities, as well as historical, cultural, and/or natural attractions. This is realized through working farms, lodges, wineries, outdoor recreation, educational experiences, and direct-to-consumer sales.

Economic, Social, & Environmental Impacts

Scholarly literature widely supports the multi-faceted benefits of agritourism, often categorized by their economic, social, and environmental impacts (Ammirato et al., 2020). In the United States and globally, agritourism has been noted as a successful means for business diversification and rural economy revitalization (Ammirato & Felicetti, 2013; Jin et al., 2021; Ramsey & Schaumleffel, 2006; Sonnino, 2004). Small farms, defined as those with a gross cash farm income (GCFI) less than \$350,000, and mid-size farms, with a GCFI of \$350,000 to \$999,999 (USDA, 2025), are particularly susceptible to volatile markets (Barbieri, 2019), as seen

throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Brune et al., 2023a; Brune et al., 2023b; Callahan, 2023; Hollas et al., 2022). By creating new income streams, agritourism helps mitigate these financial risks and stimulates local economies through job creation, increased visitor spending at local businesses, and enhanced tax revenue (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024; Palmi & Lezzi, 2020; Ramsey & Schaumleffel, 2006; Tew & Barbieri, 2013). The success of agritourism is evident in global markets, including Italy, where it plays a key role in rural development (Broccardo et al., 2017; Contini et al., 2009; Sonnino, 2004).

While the pursuit of economic viability is a primary driver, agritourism also provides a valuable platform for fostering significant socio-cultural benefits. It plays a critical role in fostering a consumer-to-producer connection, educating the public about agricultural practices, and building trust in local food systems (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024). For many visitors, it provides an authentic experience rooted in agricultural life that can help preserve rural heritage and cultural traditions (LaPan & Barbieri, 2013). The literature surrounding the socio-cultural benefits of agritourism is limited (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024); however, several studies (Adom et al., 2020; Ciolac et al., 2019; Ciolac et al., 2020; Kothari & Perwej, 2021; Xue et al., 2020) converge on the idea that agritourism can be a benefit to social livelihoods, especially in rural areas.

This preservation of rural heritage and cultural tradition is often intricately linked to the land itself. The literature on the environmental benefits of agritourism reflects this positive dynamic. Numerous studies have examined how agritourism can promote sustainable land management and responsible resource use (Barbieri, 2013; Grillini et al., 2023; Mastronardi et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2025). While agritourism is often presented in a positive light, few studies examine its negative environmental impacts. Kipkorir et al. (2022) identify agritourism as a

critical factor in aggravated human-wildlife conflicts with the construction of tourist facilities near neighboring forests. The literature on agritourism's impact on the local environment is limited, particularly regarding strain on public infrastructure and disruption to ecosystems associated with increased visitor presence (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024; Panić et al., 2025). In addition, a gap remains in the literature regarding the tangible pathways operators can take to achieve these environmental gains. Agritourism literature often recognizes established businesses and their relationships with local environments (Barbieri, 2013; Chatterjee & Prasad, 2019; Mastronardi et al., 2015); however, it fails to identify the creation of new businesses and how these fit into the community and environment. This critical omission leaves new operators without the tools needed to navigate the complexities of building a business sustainably, balancing economic viability with the preservation of cultural heritage and the natural environment.

Operational and Visitor-Centric Perspectives

Extensive agritourism literature identifies the relationship between agritourism operations and visitors (Bowman et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2024; Chin & Musa, 2019; Miller et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2023). This literature primarily highlighted the use of social media, word-of-mouth communication, and other digital channels to connect with consumers, such as online booking platforms and virtual tours (Sigala & Gretzel, 2017; Turtureanu et al., 2025). Yet a major disconnect exists among agritourism operators. As Katsande et al. (2024) observed in Zimbabwe, operators frequently lack the technical expertise and infrastructure to maintain these digital connections. These barriers are not limited to developing regions; they are also observed in the United Kingdom (Morris & James, 2017) and the United States (Schmidt et al., 2024), revealing the unique operational and management challenges agritourism operators face stretch beyond those associated with traditional agricultural production.

The most critical of these challenges lies in the digital landscape, as the ability to navigate and successfully market through social media has become a primary benchmark in agritourism expansion (Miller et al., 2023). Existing literature maintains a key to entrepreneurial success is an effective marketing strategy that builds a compelling brand and communicates the authenticity of a farm experience (George & Rilla, 2011). Barbieri et al. (2016) identified daily social media updates and announcements of farm products as a successful marketing tactic. Similarly, Stanciu & Costea (2012) identified social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X as valuable tools for business promotion, customer engagement, and brand awareness. Notably, the Kansas Agritourism Program manual includes a marketing section that highlights the importance of social media. The manual also highlights media relations, advertising, customer communications, such as newsletters and websites, and promotions (Kansas Agritourism, n.d.). However, operators in Kansas are equipped with brief definitions and marketing practices that fail to account for variability and the operator's level of expertise. These studies and supplemental literature often analyzed established businesses, providing limited insight into the practical steps and resource allocation required for new or small-scale operators to successfully build a brand and market their businesses (Quella et al., 2021; Rakhmawati et al., 2025).

A core component of successful agritourism management is understanding the consumer (George & Rilla, 2011). The literature identified various visitor motivations, including a desire for recreation, education, or experience of agrarian, rural life (Ammirato et al., 2020; Hollas et al., 2024). Research has shown visitors are increasingly seeking authentic experiences that connect them directly to food sources and to agricultural lifestyles (Das & Rainey, 2009; Gil Arroyo et al., 2013; Pitas & Chen, 2023; Yang et al., 2010). Furthermore, studies often analyze

the demographics and expectations of agritourism visitors, helping operators understand their target market (Brune et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2022). Martinus et al. (2024) presented an alternative impact on consumer perceptions, noting the influence of location, i.e., the site, place, or setting of an agritourism business, on rates of visitation. This research is critical for operators to tailor their offerings, yet the literature often presents these findings as general principles without addressing the specific challenges faced by new operators in diverse, geographically unique regions such as Kansas.

While there is extensive literature on the broad benefits and barriers of agritourism (Collins et al., 2024; Hollas et al., 2022; Tew & Barbieri, 2012), it fails to provide tangible insight into the practical realities of the mindset shift from farmer/rancher to agritourism entrepreneur. Current research frames sustainability as a high-level, aspirational concept rather than as a daily struggle to balance economic viability with environmental stewardship (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024). Moreover, the existing body of agritourism literature fails to account for the entrepreneurial learning process, specifically how operators acquire the marketing, communication, and hospitality skills necessary to manage an agritourism operation. As a result, established and prospective operators alike are often left without a practical roadmap for acquiring and integrating these new skills into their existing businesses. Ultimately, there is a critical need to investigate the lived entrepreneurial experiences and specific knowledge-acquisition processes of agritourism operators in Kansas.

Conceptual Framework

Entrepreneurial Learning and Social Learning Theory formed the conceptual framework for this study. Entrepreneurial learning, as defined by Politis (2005), is the process through which entrepreneurs develop the skills and mindset needed to identify opportunities and navigate

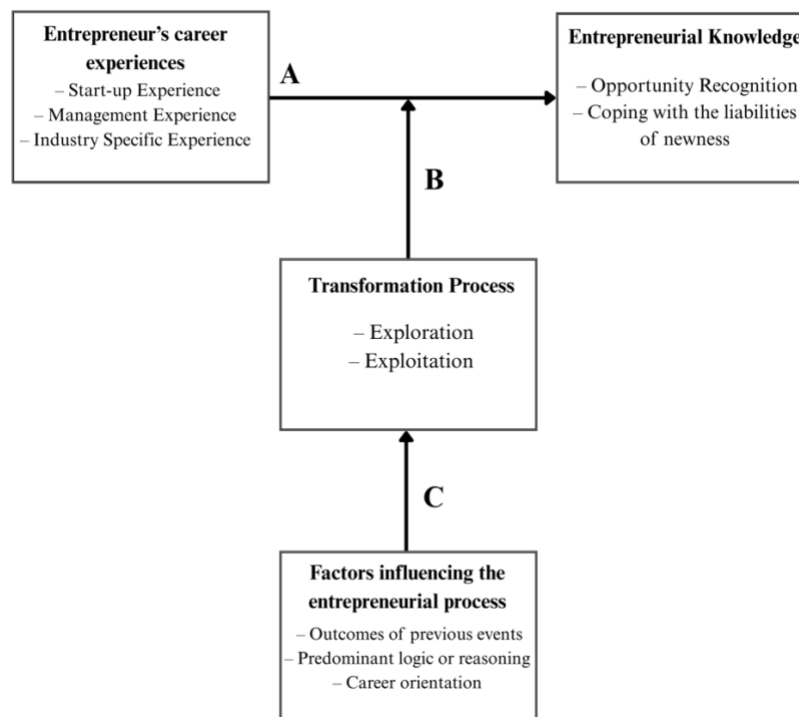
business challenges. While individual experience is crucial, Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1971, 1977) highlights the importance of the social environment in an entrepreneur's development.

Entrepreneurial Learning

Entrepreneurial success is built on a foundation of experience, but it is the transformation of those experiences into usable knowledge that matters. According to Politis (2005), this process is how entrepreneurs develop the skills and mindset needed to identify opportunities and navigate business challenges. The framework for entrepreneurial learning comprises three main components: a person's career experiences, the transformation process used to learn from those experiences, and the resulting entrepreneurial knowledge gained (Politis, 2005; Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1

Model of the Entrepreneurial Learning Framework



Note. Politis, 2005

An entrepreneur's journey is shaped by prior career experiences, including prior start-ups, prior management, and prior industry-specific experience (Politis, 2005). For this study, these experiences can be operators' roles in previous agricultural careers, the pre-existing agricultural enterprises other than agritourism, or their careers beyond agriculture (Rae, 2004). These experiences provide valuable, firsthand contextual learning that evolves into tacit knowledge helpful in making decisions and handling difficult situations (Rae, 2006). Tacit knowledge, defined in this study as knowledge that is not articulated or written, is gained through personal experience, practice, observation, and immersion (Dampney et al., 2002). Immersion within the agriculture and agritourism industries, as explored in this study, is a critical factor that shapes the development of entrepreneurs.

However, raw experience alone is not enough; it must be processed. The experiential learning model describes a cyclical process where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). The model posits that learning is a hands-on, reflective process involving four components: experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application (Coleman et al., 2024; Kolb, 1984; 2015). These components are not individual phases but rather stages through which the entrepreneur is exposed to an experience, reflects on it, forms ideas and thoughts about it, and applies the learned experience to new opportunities (Coleman et al., 2024). Effective learning, therefore, requires an individual to fully engage with the phases (Kolb, 2015). For example, an agritourism operator might introduce a new event that initially fails to meet expectations. By reflecting on shortcomings, the operator can develop new strategies and apply those insights to create a more successful experience.

Within the experiential learning cycle, Politis (2005) distinguishes between two transformative pathways: exploitation and exploration. While the former involves refining and

leveraging proven past strategies, the latter prioritizes experimentation and discovery. In this study, exploitation is mirrored in how operators perfect their signature offerings, such as a Christmas tree farm owner consistently refining holiday operations to meet visitor expectations. Conversely, exploration is evidenced by the pursuit of novel practices, such as leveraging social media to cultivate entirely new revenue streams.

The entrepreneur's choice between these two modes is influenced by factors such as the outcomes of previous ventures, the entrepreneur's reasoning style (i.e., causal and effectual reasoning), and their career orientation. Politis (2005) identifies linear, expert, spiral, or transitory career orientations as influences on an individual's transformation of experiences into knowledge. Linear and expert career orientations are both primarily motivated by advancement within a specific field, whether through power, achievement, or the refinement of a singular skill set. These individuals tend to favor exploitation, leveraging and building upon their existing knowledge base. Conversely, spiral and transitory career orientations are more driven by personal growth and a need for variety. A spiral orientation seeks diverse experiences within similar fields, while a transitory orientation pursues independence by switching fields entirely, embodying an exploratory approach to career development (Gabrielsson & Politis, 2011). The exploratory mindset is particularly common among agritourism operators, who often have diverse career aspirations and are drawn to the field from within and beyond the agricultural industry (Quella et al., 2021).

The final component of the framework, entrepreneurial knowledge, acts as a culmination of previous experiences and the transformation process. Politis and Gabrielsson (2015) note the positive association between increased business capacity, career experiences, and knowledge. This knowledge informs two key outcomes: an increased ability to recognize entrepreneurial

opportunities and an improved capacity to cope with the challenges of a new business. Entrepreneurs with a rich history of experiences possess the cognitive skills to identify valuable opportunities and new relationships (Politis, 2005). In the context of agritourism, opportunity recognition is identified as the operator's ability to recognize new markets, attractions, and experiences, while also maintaining a close relationship with their community and support systems (Broccardo et al., 2017). Their comfort and confidence in new ventures come from having transformed past experiences into usable knowledge over time, allowing them to recognize favorable conditions. Continued exposure to new opportunities, coupled with previous experiences, enhances entrepreneurs' ability to manage the liabilities of newness, such as traditional obstacles like securing funding and building trust. The success of their business is contingent on the response of the community and how well operators can identify and target audiences (Elshaer et al., 2023; Sullins et al., 2010).

Wang and Chugh (2014) identify the fragmented nature of entrepreneurial learning as a hindrance to growth; their review highlights a critical path forward, specifically, the need to understand how entrepreneurs develop resources for exploratory and exploitative learning. This study addresses that need by identifying the specific skills agritourism operators require to balance these dual modes. However, these skills do not develop in a vacuum; Wang and Chugh (2014) emphasize participation in external networks is vital for knowledge acquisition. This aligns with Politis et al. (2019), who posit entrepreneurial learning is inseparable from the context in which it occurs. For agritourism entrepreneurs, the operation itself serves as a dynamic learning environment in which knowledge is acquired through real-time application and iterative experimentation. Within this environment, social phenomena such as affective motivation, constructive feedback, and a peer atmosphere act as the primary catalysts for development

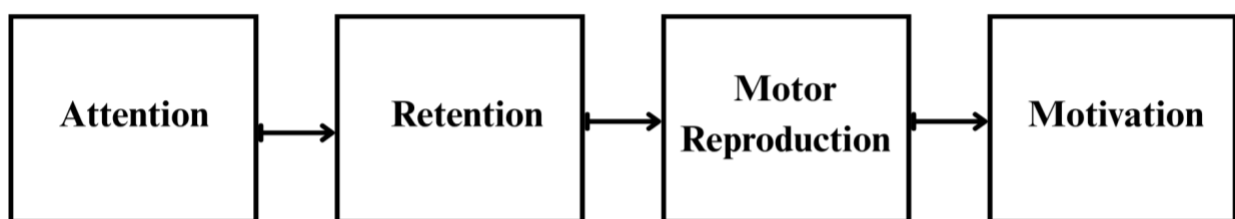
(Politis et al., 2019). Consequently, external networks are not merely helpful; they are the essential mechanism through which experiential learning is triggered and sustained.

Social Learning Theory

Building on the importance of engagement with external networks, this study also employs Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1971, 1977), which highlights the social environment's role in an entrepreneur's development. Entrepreneurs engage in formal and informal learning, such as in university courses and peer-learning groups (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Erdélyi, 2010). People learn from their own actions and by observing the actions of others (Tri Harinie et al., 2017). Observational learning allows agritourism operators to learn vicariously from successful peers, mitigating risk and encouraging the adoption of new practices (Huang et al., 2016). This process relies on four key factors: paying attention to the observed behavior, retaining that information, having the ability to reproduce the action, and being motivated by the perceived rewards (Bandura, 1977; Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2

Model of the Social Learning Theory



Note. Bandura, 1977

An operator's collective knowledge, gained from personal experience and social networks, provides a significant advantage in overcoming challenges, recognizing new entrepreneurial opportunities, and increasing effectiveness in coping with the liabilities of

newness (Klyver et al., 2025; Politis, 2005). Social Learning Theory has been used extensively in agricultural contexts to study learning relationships between farmers, career mobility in agriculture, and climate change response (Dooley, 2020; Grady, 1990; Nurkasanah & Sarwoprasodjo, 2024). Leta et al. (2018) identified local methods of social learning in Ethiopia as a coping mechanism against systemic inequalities in formal agricultural extension services. They found 90 percent of farmers rely on informal social learning from peers, friends, and relatives, acquiring knowledge through communication, observation, collective labor groups, public meetings, and socio-cultural events.

BenYishay and Mobarak (2014) investigated social learning and communication in agricultural technology adoption, aiming to leverage social networks in extension policy. Their randomized controlled trial in Malawi demonstrated communicator effort is susceptible to incentives, and the social identity of the communicator influences learning and adoption. When incentivized, peer farmers are the most effective channel for convincing others to adopt new technologies, largely due to their comparability to recipient farmers in terms of agricultural conditions. Notably, in entrepreneurship research, Social Learning Theory has been used to study how individuals develop an interest in entrepreneurship. Tri Harinie et al. (2017) highlight how families create first-hand entrepreneurial opportunities for their members. This aligns with Canovi and Lyon's (2019) research regarding the significant influence of familial roles within the agritourism industry.

While agritourism has been a subject of increasing research, existing studies have not adequately addressed the learning processes of operators (Bagi & Reeder, 2012; Hollas et al., 2022). By applying entrepreneurial learning and Social Learning Theory, this research provides a novel framework to understand how agritourism operators acquire knowledge and skills in their

entrepreneurial journey. There is a need to understand the ways in which agritourism operators learn to better recommend practices that cultivate useful knowledge (Collins et al. 2024; Miller et al., 2023). An examination of Kansas agritourism operators will help agricultural and science communicators gain a better understanding of the way these operators learn, transform, and apply knowledge (Wang & Chugh, 2013), which will enable statewide resources to be specifically targeted to meet operators' needs.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to describe the current conditions that impact the expansion and development of agritourism businesses in the state of Kansas. This study will identify the factors affecting an entrepreneur's identity as an agritourism operator and address areas for communication improvement, with the ultimate aim of using operator perspectives to cultivate stronger statewide resources and educational content to promote sustainable economic development. The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What career experiences motivate operators to start and sustain an agritourism business?

RQ 2: What entrepreneurial knowledge do agritourism operators rely on when considering starting or expanding their agritourism business?

RQ 3: How do agritourism operators demonstrate exploitation or exploration modes of transformational learning?

RQ 4: What factors influence the transformational learning process of agritourism business operators?

Methods

Research Design Overview

To answer the research questions, we conducted seven semi-structured focus groups and three interviews with 54 existing and potential Kansas agritourism operators. The study was grounded in a qualitative, phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Regmi, 2024), which was used to explore established and prospective agritourism operators' perceptions of agritourism business establishment. The focus group and interview data presented here are part of a larger sequential, exploratory, mixed-methods study. Quantitative data were also collected in this first phase of the study to identify the demographics of the agritourism operators.

Population and Sample

The population consists of established and prospective Kansan agritourism operators, with participants recruited via purposive and snowball sampling from each region of Kansas (see Figure 2.3). This non-probability approach was used to purposefully recruit participants who have direct experience with, or a proactive interest in, managing an agritourism business. We also asked these directly recruited participants to share the opportunity to participate in the research with others like them. The recruitment process was a multi-phased approach, initiated in January 2025 and continued through March 2025, using five primary channels:

- 1) **Registered Kansas Agritourism Program Operators List:** Recruitment was conducted primarily through email outreach to agritourism operators registered with the Kansas Agritourism Program (KAP). To register with the KAP, an operation must offer an agricultural visitor experience and maintain an active online presence through a website or social media. The contact list was provided by the program and served as the initial

sampling frame, and a standardized email was used to introduce the study and gauge interest in participation.

- 2) **K-State Research and Extension Offices:** To broaden recruitment to include potential agritourism operators, a recruitment flyer and email were sent to all 105 K-State Research and Extension County and District offices statewide. Specifically, Agriculture and Natural Resource Extension agents, County Directors, and Office Professionals were asked to share the information with established agritourism operations or individuals interested in becoming agritourism operators in their respective counties, leveraging their existing networks to reach potential participants.
- 3) **Social Media & Newsletters:** The study's recruitment information was disseminated through several online platforms. Recruitment flyers and announcements were posted on the official Facebook pages of the Kansas Farm Bureau, the Kansas Sampler Foundation, NetWork Kansas, and the Kansas Agritourism Program. Additionally, the recruitment materials were included in each organization's respective newsletters, reaching a wide audience of individuals and businesses involved in agritourism and rural community initiatives.
- 4) **Agriculture Today Podcast:** To gain a broader audience of individuals interested in agritourism, the research team was interviewed for the *Agriculture Today* radio segment and podcast, which aired January 20th, 2025. *Agriculture Today* is a daily program hosted by Shelby Varner at Kansas State University and is distributed to radio stations across the state and published on prominent podcast platforms (*Agriculture Today*, 2025).

- 5) **Word-of-Mouth:** We also relied on participants to share the study information with other established and prospective agritourism operators, which helped generate additional interest and participation through their professional networks.

At the time of the study, the Kansas Agritourism Program list consisted of 431 existing agritourism businesses that were actively enrolled in the program. The USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service identified 811 businesses in Kansas as reporting agritourism income (USDA, 2024). Ultimately, 42 existing operators and 12 prospective operators participated after exhausting recruitment resources. Examples of the recruitment materials can be found in Appendix A and B.

Questionnaire

After completing a consent form, but before the start of the focus groups or interviews, participants were asked to complete a nine-item demographic questionnaire. The complete questionnaire is provided in Appendix C. Participants were given five minutes to complete the survey at the beginning and end of each focus group. Participants were asked about their agritourism operational status, registration status with the Kansas Agritourism Program, zip code of their business, years in operation, percentage of household income derived from agritourism, and percentage of income derived from farming or ranching, excluding agritourism income. Participants were also asked for their age, gender identity and ethnicity.

Of the 54 individuals, 45 completed the questionnaire items regarding demographics ($n = 45$). Of the respondents, there were more female ($n = 26$, 57.7%) than male participants ($n = 18$, 40%); however, one individual did not respond ($n = 1$, 2.2%). The average age of participants was 54.5 ($SD = 12.82$), ranging in age from 31 to 81 and were mostly white ($n = 36$, 80%) with one American Indian or Alaskan Native ($n = 1$, 2.2%), three Asian ($n = 3$, 6.6%), and three

Hispanic ($n = 3$, 6.6%) representation. Two individuals did not report their race and ethnicity ($n = 2$, 4.4%). Most participants ($n = 33$, 73.3%) were active agritourism operators, and 12 were prospective operators ($n = 12$, 26.6%). Of the 33 active operators who completed the questionnaire, all were currently registered in the Kansas Agritourism Program.

Of the participants ($N = 54$), 33 (64.7%) responded to questionnaire items related to the characteristics of their agritourism business. Age of agritourism operation varied amongst businesses, with the oldest operation being in business for 40 years and the newest being one year old ($M = 12.3$; $SD = 11.41$). Participants reported that agritourism constituted, on average, 36% of their total household income ($M = 36\%$; $SD = 39.10$), with individual contributions ranging from 1% to 100%. In comparison, traditional farming or ranching activities, not including agritourism, accounted for an average of 40% of their total household income ($M = 36\%$; $SD = 37.96$). Respondent participants represented five of the six Kansas Agritourism Program regions. Despite extensive recruitment efforts, individuals from the Southeast region did not participate. The proportion of participants from each region is detailed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1.

Focus Group and Interview Participants by Regions of Kansas ($n = 45$)

Region	<i>f</i>	%
Northwest	2	4.4
Northeast	15	33
North Central	2	4.4
South Central	16	36
Southeast	0	0
Southwest	2	4.4

No Response	8	18
Total	45	100

Data Collection

The recruitment email included a link to a Qualtrics survey to sign up for an in-person or online-via-Zoom focus group. For each Kansas Agritourism Program region, two focus group meetings were scheduled on sequential dates for a total of 12 in-person focus groups, and an additional two focus group meeting dates were offered over Zoom. Focus group meetings were held at mid-evening and noon. However, if a focus group meeting did not have a minimum of five participants, the focus group was canceled, and those who signed up were offered one-on-one interviews or to join a Zoom meeting. In cases where a participant could not attend, an alternative option was provided: a one-hour, in-person or online meeting via Zoom, scheduled at a mutually convenient time for both the research team and the participant. Table 2.2 depicts the location of focus groups, interviews, and participant attendance.

Table 2.2

Locations, Dates, and Attendance of Focus Groups and Interviews

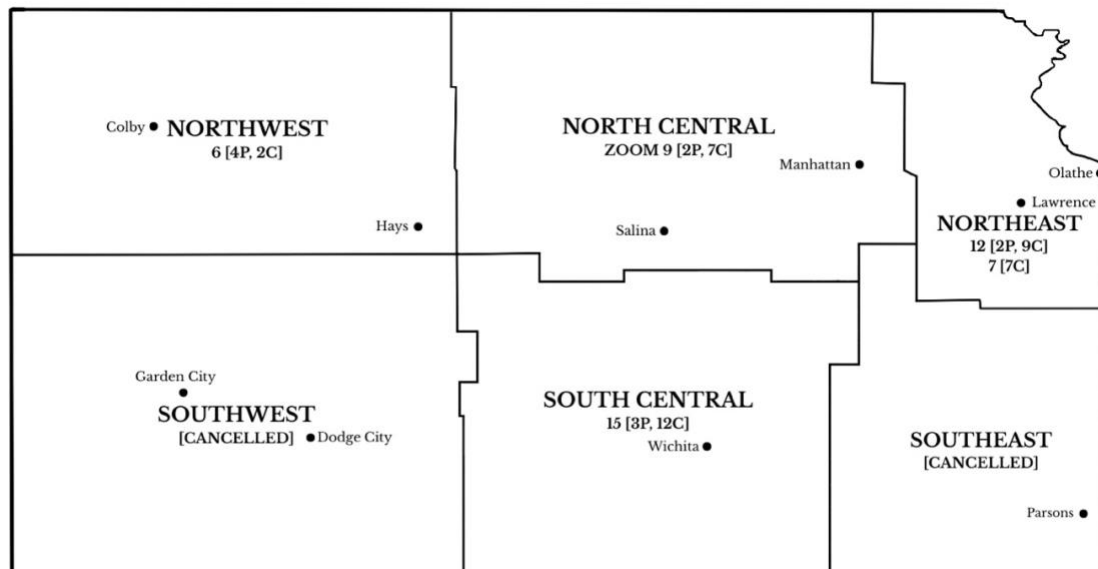
Region	Date	Focus Group Meeting Location	Attendance
Southwest	Cancelled	<i>Garden City</i> , Southwest Extension Center	-
		<i>Dodge City</i> Community College	
Northwest	Cancelled	<i>Colby</i> , Thomas County Extension Office	-
	2/21	<i>Hays</i> , Cottonwood Extension Office	7 [4P, 3C]
North Central	Cancelled	<i>Salina</i> , Kansas State Campus x 2	-
Northeast	3/3-3/4	<i>Lawrence</i> , Douglas County Extension Office	12 [2P, 9C]

		<i>Olathe, Johnson County Extension Office</i>	7 [7C]
South Central	3/6-3/7	<i>Wichita, Sedgwick County Extension Office x 2</i>	16 [3P, 13C]
Zoom	3/10-3/11	Umberger Hall 3 rd Floor Offices x 2	9 [2P, 7C]
Southeast	Cancelled	<i>Parsons, Southeast Extension Center x 2</i>	-
One-on-One	2/24	Zoom	3 [3C]
Interview	3/14	Site visit - <i>Wilson</i>	
	3/31	Site visit – <i>Lawrence</i>	

Note. P = prospective, C = current agritourism business operator

Figure 2.3

Study Site Map of Participants' Region of Operation in Kansas



Note. N = 54, P = prospective, C = current agritourism business operator

Facilitators

The focus group meetings, advertised to last no more than two hours, consisted of small, three-to-five person groups. To ensure data collection consistency, focus groups were conducted

by a team of trained student facilitators, which included the author, two undergraduate students, two master's students, and one Ph.D. student. All facilitators underwent two training sessions with the Principal Investigator and the author, based on the guidelines in *Qualitative Research Methods* (Tracy, 2019). All facilitators received training in *Responsible Conduct of Research, IRB Researchers and personnel on IRB protocols, Export Compliance, and Undue Foreign Influence: Risk and Mitigations* through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). The facilitators were given identical facilitator protocols (see Appendix G), containing the questions used to guide the conversation (Table 2.3). This standardized approach ensured all participants were asked the same foundational questions. However, facilitators were encouraged to use their discretion in formulating follow-up questions to explore emergent themes and elaborate on participants' responses, as long as they remained aligned with the original research questions (Chand, 2025; Goertzen et al., 2023; Kornbluh, 2022). Within the facilitator's guide, a semi-structured list of interview questions was followed, informed by the Entrepreneur Learning Framework (Politis, 2005) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1971, 1977).

Recording and Confidentiality

In-person focus groups were recorded with an audio recorder, downloaded to the author's Microsoft OneDrive cloud account, transcribed using Rev (Rev.com), and deidentified. If any potentially identifying information remained, it was replaced with a participant ID to further protect the participants' anonymity. This process was also followed for the one-on-one interviews. During interviews and focus groups conducted via Zoom, participants' video and audio were recorded due to the limitations of the platform; however, video recordings were immediately deleted, and only audio recordings were kept for data analysis. All participants, regardless of medium, were given consent forms detailing their rights to privacy and confidentiality (see Appendix D). For those participants who chose the online format, consent

forms were emailed prior to the meeting, and audio recording began only after all consent forms were received. Participants were reminded of their rights and confidentiality at the beginning and end of each focus group meeting. At the conclusion of the focus groups and interviews, participants were informed about several agritourism-specific resources through Kansas State University. These opportunities included a waived fee to a digital marketing course, *Insight Summit*, hosted by the Center for Rural Enterprise and Engagement, waived fees for microcredential courses, and access to the Wildcat Consulting program through the College of Business Administration. Data collection was approved by the Kansas State University IRB Institutional Review Board (IRB-12233) (Appendix E and F).

Facilitator Guide

The researcher-developed facilitator guide was designed to encourage participants' discussion of each construct of the Entrepreneur Learning Framework and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1971, 1977; Politis, 2005; Tracy, 2019). The guide was reviewed by a panel of experts, including one agricultural communication and one business management faculty member, and one extension, horticulture, and natural resources faculty member. Table 2.3 presents the questions asked in the focus groups and their corresponding theoretical constructs.

Table 2.3

Focus Group Questions and Related Theoretical Construct

Category	Related Theoretical Construct	Question
Motivations and Outcomes	- Factors Influencing the Transformation Process - Social Learning Theory - Motivation	Why did you or do you want to start an agritourism business?

	• Factors Influencing the Transformation Process	<i>Follow up:</i> What's your motivation?
	• Social Learning Theory - Motivation	
	• Entrepreneurial Knowledge	What do you hope will be the legacy of that agritourism business?
	• Transformation Process	What do you get, or do you foresee getting, out of having an agritourism business?
Opportunities and Restraints	• Entrepreneurial Knowledge	What specific challenges have you or are you currently facing in establishing or expanding your agritourism business?
	• Entrepreneurial Knowledge	<i>Follow up:</i> What, if any, specific challenges are you facing in effectively marketing your business and attracting new customers?
	• Entrepreneurial Knowledge	<i>Follow up:</i> Do you face any difficulties adjusting to new technology and techniques?
	• Entrepreneurial Knowledge	What, if any, financial difficulties do you experience related to your agritourism business?

Educational Influences	• Entrepreneurial Knowledge	What, if any, regulatory barriers do you experience related to your agritourism business? (<i>i.e. zoning laws, land use restrictions, or health and safety regulations</i>)
	• Entrepreneurial Knowledge	What future challenges do you anticipate facing?
	• Entrepreneurs' Career Experiences	Before starting your agritourism business, what made you feel ready to take that step?
	• Factors Influencing the Transformation Process	(<i>i.e. beliefs, knowledge, experiences</i>)
	• Social Learning Theory – Attention & Retention	
	• Entrepreneurs' Career Experiences	<i>Follow up:</i> What about that [participants answer] gave you the confidence to start?
	• Factors Influencing the Transformation Process	
	• Social Learning Theory – Attention & Retention	

- Transformation Process What resources have been the most helpful
 - Social Learning Theory to you in overcoming challenges to establish
 - Attention or expand your agritourism business? (*i.e. people, educational content, programs, etc.*)
 - Transformation Process What learning resources are missing from
 - Social Learning Theory what's available to help you be more
 - Attention successful?
 - Transformation Process When you think about these resources, how
 - Social Learning Theory do you prefer to interact with them? (*In terms of format, frequency, source of information*)

Examples: What formats do you prefer:
written, video, K-State Online courses, or
Instagram, Facebook, TikTok?
 - Transformation Process *Follow up:* How often would you like to see
 - Social Learning Theory this content?
 - Motor Reproduction
-

Data Analysis

Interview and focus group recordings were transcribed using Rev (Rev, 2025). The author printed the resulting 16 transcripts and hand-wrote memos. Participant names were removed and assigned an anonymized identification code based on a number and their focus group location (e.g., L for Lawrence, 1-10). All transcript files were uploaded to Atlas.Ti, a

qualitative data analysis software, for coding. The coding team consisted of the author and an undergraduate student in agricultural communications who was also a focus group facilitator. The team recognized personal biases and influences that may have transpired throughout the coding process. Both the author and the undergraduate student coder have in-depth education in agricultural education, communications, and policy. Our shared experiences with agricultural entrepreneurs and our passion for agricultural advocacy sensitized us to the data, serving as areas for reflexivity as we engaged with the operators' stories and with one another throughout the coding process.

To analyze the data, we used a phronetic iterative approach (Tracy, 2018). The approach is a pragmatic method for analyzing qualitative data that emphasizes learning through practice and the examination of contextual knowledge and situated meanings (Tracy, 2019). Therefore, during the coding process, we oscillated between inductively identifying emergent themes in the data and as well as deductively identifying entrepreneurial learning and social learning theoretical concepts within the data. This approach focuses on specific aspects of data with the potential to address practical problems and contribute to existing theories (Tracy, 2019). Our qualitative data analysis followed a multi-step process, including open and thematic coding to ensure a systematic and rigorous approach to properly interpret the focus group transcripts. This process was structured into three main phases: initial data immersion and organization, primary-cycle coding, and secondary-cycle coding.

The initial phase of our analysis involved preparing and familiarizing ourselves with the raw data. The author imported all 16 focus group and interview transcripts into Atlas.Ti, which provided a centralized workspace for managing and organizing the data. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the material, the coding team read all transcripts at least two

times. During this process, we engaged in memoing, noting initial thoughts, reflections, and emerging ideas. These memos helped us track our evolving understanding of the data and maintain a record of our analytical journey. This process was crucial for identifying areas of interest before formal coding began (Tracy, 2019).

Following initial familiarization, the coding team moved into primary-cycle coding, also known as open coding. The goal of this phase was to identify foundational concepts and ideas within the data (Tracy, 2019). As a team, we both coded the same three transcripts to ensure a shared understanding of the coding process. We assigned short words and phrases to capture the essence of the data, focusing on core elements of who, what, where, and when (Tracy, 2019). After this initial coding session, we reconvened to debrief and compare our individually created code lists. Through a collaborative discussion, we worked to resolve any discrepancies, refine code definitions, and build a unified understanding of the data in one final codebook. This crucial step ensured inter-coder reliability before proceeding with applying the initial, refined codes to the rest of the data set (Tracy, 2019).

To maintain the authenticity of the participants' voices, we adopted a fracturing approach, breaking down the data into smaller, manageable slices and applying multiple *in-vivo* codes, codes that use the participants' exact words, where possible. Throughout this process, we noted *exemplars*, which were significant quotes or illustrations useful for later analysis and reporting. As the team moved through the primary coding cycle, an individual code list was maintained, documenting each code's name, definition, and example. This iterative process, known as the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965), allowed for our coding framework to evolve organically from the data. This phase concluded with a team check-in to review progress and consolidate our individual code lists into a shared, master codebook.

During the final phase, secondary-cycle coding, we moved beyond descriptive labels to develop broader, more abstract themes from the codes. Using the first-level codes, we identified patterns and groupings that linked codes together in a meaningful way. This axial coding process allowed us to synthesize data and generate second-level codes, also known as themes (Tracy, 2019). These themes represented the core findings of this research, explaining and theorizing the relationships between different concepts within the data. Throughout both coding cycles, we maintained a comprehensive audit trail through continuous memoing. This practice helped us document the rationale behind our analytical choices, maintain consistent reflexivity to our own perspectives, and highlight particularly significant quotes (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022; Tracy, 2019). By the end of data analysis, we had a robust set of codes and themes that formed the basis for our final analysis. The systematic, phronetic iterative approach ensured our findings were not only grounded in the data but also developed through a transparent, iterative, and verifiable process.

Findings

The following results highlight the factors that affect an agritourism operator's entrepreneurial identity and illustrate the current conditions impacting the expansion and development of agritourism businesses within Kansas.

RQ1: What career experiences motivate operators to start and sustain an agritourism business?

The analysis of operators' career experiences revealed three central themes: *previous agricultural careers and family history*, *careers outside of agriculture*, and *agricultural education* provided the foundational entrepreneurial knowledge required to establish and sustain an agritourism business. Many operators described their *prior agricultural careers and family histories* as entry points to agritourism, thereby deepening their understanding of the

complexities of operating an agricultural enterprise. Furthermore, their prior agricultural experience provides resources and existing infrastructure to establish their agritourism operation. For instance, one operator noted the influence of his current position and background on the establishment of his agritourism business when he said, “My full-time job is an ag chemical salesman, but I grew up on a farm, and so it was an outlet to grow something where I didn't have to invest in a whole bunch of equipment to harvest” (H03).

The operators’ previous careers were not limited to agriculture; their *careers outside agriculture* also provided diverse skills and confidence that served as drivers for starting their agritourism businesses. For instance, one operator with a background in hospitality felt agritourism was a natural progression:

My background is in hotel and restaurant management. So, I’ve managed a hostel in Europe, a ski lodge in Oregon, and a lodge in the Ozarks. I’ve always been involved in hospitality and tourism. And so, knowing that [agritourism] is something unique and interesting, and it’s not too far off the beaten path. (IO3)

For others, careers outside agriculture increased their tolerance for stress and confidence in overcoming challenges, to the extent that agritourism feels like an easier career path. For instance, operators with previous military careers shared sentiments like one operator who said, “People have tried to blow me up and everything else. So farming and testifying or writing stuff, nobody’s going to try to kill me. I just think it’s fun” (IO2). Additionally, operators highlighted that prior *agricultural education* played a substantial role in establishing their businesses, providing them with the practical skills to operate an agriculture-based enterprise. One producer credited his enology education as a precedent for starting his own winery, “For me, it was having

gone to wine school, and then having worked at other wineries and having that experience” (L10).

RQ2: What entrepreneurial knowledge do agritourism operators rely on when considering starting or expanding their agritourism business?

The analysis identified two key themes in the entrepreneurial knowledge that operators rely on for business establishment and expansion: *previous failed ventures* and *risk management*. Over time, participants leveraged the knowledge they gained from *prior failed ventures* to explore adding new consumer experiences to their agritourism business models. Identifying when and how they failed in the past allowed operators to refine their approach and try again. One operator described the events she hosts at her agritourism operation, and how some are a case of trial and error, sharing:

We do an airplane flyover and drop eggs from the airplane, and it’s phenomenal, and an adult egg hunt. I have completely bombed on the last two, and I’m going to give it one more go and see if we can make it work. (W05)

Several operators shared similar stories, addressing their failed ideas and how important these failures were for business evolution. One participant shared how his initial business idea ultimately failed, but led him to do other activities instead, sharing:

When we built the farm, that was the idea, we were going to be a Christmas tree farm.

Come to find out, it’s almost impossible to grow a Christmas tree in Kansas. But we still do, we have ice skating, and we still do Christmas. (W06)

Previous business setbacks heightened operators’ perception of risk, leading them to rely on *risk management* knowledge as a crucial strategy for advancing their agritourism ventures. One participant noted, “You learn all your life about something. Sometimes the hard way. Sometimes, hopefully not always” (H06). The participants recognize the instability of

agriculture, with many describing themselves as risk takers, as one operator shared, “As an entrepreneur, I always have been a risk-taker probably all my life” (I01). Conversely, many operators emphasized the need to balance opportunity with risk, noting even the most appealing venture must be declined if the risk is unmanageable. For instance, one operator shared, “I can bump that up to 30 weddings, no problem. It’s relying on that, but then it’s like, when there’s not a wedding and you’re doing the stays, you can’t put the cart before the horse” (W11).

RQ3: How do agritourism operators demonstrate exploitation or exploration modes of transformational learning?

Two factors influence the way entrepreneurs transform their experiences into knowledge, exploitation and exploration (Politis, 2005). Analysis revealed one dominant theme: *customer-informed, refined activities*. Agritourism operators repeatedly engage with their customer bases, demonstrating exploitative transformation of knowledge. By emphasizing customer engagement, operators learn which activities customers expect to reliably experience each time they visit the business, and then offer those experiences and improve them over time. For example, one operator shared, “I think there is a huge value in being consistent and just doing the same thing year after year” (H03). Another operator shared her experience implementing a U-pick activity in her current operation, noting, “We totally underestimated the U-Pick factor. The people want authenticity” (W09).

Operators emphasized connecting with their communities, providing valuable learning experiences that fostered creativity, allowing operators to explore and *offer novel experiences*. For example, one participant described how he developed his agritourism enterprise in direct response to the community’s interest in visiting the farm, sharing:

We do paint with alpaca parties. We realized eventually, if this is going to be a thing, then we need to do it the right way. And so that's what led us into the agritourism. It grew out of the fact that people wanted to come out and see what we had built. (W15)

For many participants, listening to their customer base emboldened them to explore new ventures and capitalize on growing interest and demand. One operator shared how she initially did not recognize a business opportunity; however, local hunting demand led her to open an agritourism business, sharing, "We had some people find us and ask if they could rent it for deer hunting and everything, so it kind of expanded, and now we've got pheasant hunters" (H06).

Beyond networking with communities and exploitative learning, participants highlighted a strong commitment to exploratory learning through the adoption of new business practices, specifically, *exploring marketing and digital education*. Operators tended to engage in this explorative process to expand their customer base over time, increasingly viewing the internet as a vital educational tool. This trend is exemplified through the operators' reliance on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Operators favored YouTube in particular, such as this operator, when asked about the educational format: "YouTube is great for me because I understand how to do YouTube" (Z08). Another operator noted, "It [agritourism handbook] needs to be on YouTube and spots that people are going to find it" (H01). This digital shift is driven by a recognized need to move beyond traditional outreach methods. As one operator shared, "We use social media. That's the way to market. And we have found more success that way than doing the conventional media" (L10). This understanding of the changing marketing landscape was a common thread among participants, with one operator sharing, "We market 100% through social media" (W15). Another operator stated, "Facebook is something we do. Our website hasn't done anything, but Facebook. It seems the best" (L07).

RQ4: What factors influence the transformation process of agritourism business operators?

Participants were asked about the factors influencing their business decisions and how they translate past experiences into actionable knowledge for future business endeavors. Two themes emerged from their responses: *barriers to agritourism development* and *social interactions as assets*. Participants across regions identified multiple *barriers to agritourism development*, which were classified into subthemes: *labor constraints*, *instability of federal grant funding*, *rising taxation*, *limited insurance coverage*, *the absence of an agritourism advocate*, *regional differences*, *COVID-19*, and *limited access to educational resources*. As this operator puts it, "... There are tons of opportunities in expanding agritourism. There are only two restrictions, either time or money" (L04). While several operators indicated they could navigate these challenges, many characterized this as a temporary fix and called for real, tangible change.

Many operators cited financial constraints as their primary barriers to agritourism development, with particular emphasis on *labor constraints*. Operators struggle to move forward with new business ideas, fearing they do not have sufficient labor to maintain those new experiences. For example, one operator details the difficulties in scaling her business, noting labor as a key issue, sharing, "I have to hire more people. And that's always the challenge" (L01). Many participants reiterated the difficulty of finding labor to help manage their agritourism businesses, with some pointing out management decisions are another job in themselves. For example, one participant described this as a constant challenge in their agritourism business, sharing:

Like it's the staffing, all day, every day is the biggest challenge. Then, with that, it's keeping up with the emails and the messaging, the voicemails, and finding one staff member who's good with livestock and Instagram is harder than you think. (W11)

Further emphasis on financial constraints is evident in participants' fears about the *instability of federal grant funding*. Participants emphasized their success depends on this now uncertain funding. For one participant, she shared how the instability of federal funding has caused ripple effects in her agritourism business, explaining:

We are currently very impacted by the federal funding freezes and the potential threat of contracts being broken. We did a lot of work to apply for them. We were chosen, we signed contracts, and they're reimbursement grants for the most part. (O01)

One potential operator highlighted the uncertainty of future funding as his primary concern for establishing his future agritourism operation, noting, "And now we're to the point where I don't know that there will be any federal dollars" (H04).

Operators also cited *rising taxation* as a barrier to their business development. Many operators shared the sentiment expressed by one operator regarding property taxes: "Property taxes are our biggest burden. It goes up and up and up each year" (Z01). Multiple participants expressed anxiety about the ambiguous tax classification of their agritourism business, which can fluctuate between agricultural and commercial classifications, creating legal and financial complexities. Currently, agritourism sits under the Department of Commerce, not the Department of Agriculture. One operator expressed concern about the state's position on agritourism, stating: "The bureaucracy of Kansas does not understand that agritourism is an extension of agriculture" (I02). As exemplified by one participant who stated:

I think it would help too if agritourism were under the Department of Agriculture, where it actually is recognized. Although the laws say we're in agriculture, I would say that we're not always considered. (O07)

This discrepancy seeps into even a seemingly simple structures, such as a chicken coop, which was subject to commercial taxation: “My chicken coop gets taxed as commercial” (W06).

Another participant echoed this point, explaining his experience with his county, sharing:

Sedgwick County is treating me just as if I were a downtown business sitting on the corner of First and Main in Wichita. As far as they’re concerned, I’m taxed the same, I’m regulated the same. (Z07)

Another participant shared how increased taxation was influencing her business decisions, stating, “We can’t hire this person, we can’t expand, we can’t grow, because we just have to pay our property taxes” (W08). Many participants emphasized their passion for agritourism and their drive to continue operating their businesses, urging consistent taxation and, eventually, tax incentives for operating agritourism businesses. One operator offers a possible solution, sharing:

I would love to have the State of Kansas somehow promote agritourism-and then they say, "How do you do that?" Well, give us a reasonable tax that we could survive... I’d love to have tax relief. (Z07)

Operators also point to *rising insurance costs* as clear barriers to business expansion and establishment. As this operator notes, “The one that’s knocking me back is insurance costs” (L06). Agritourism businesses have unique characteristics, and many participants attribute this uniqueness to insurance companies’ reluctance to provide services. One participant noted how high taxes and high insurance rates necessitated new business strategies, sharing:

If you’re talking five grand a month just to do business, there’s a problem there, because we’re not open every day of the year. That’s what’s helping to keep us unprofitable and from actually being successful. (W04)

Despite the Kansas Agritourism Act of 2004's limited liability protection, operators reported the coverage provided is insufficient. Many participants mitigated this using Kansas Farm Bureau Financial Services as their insurance provider. While Farm Bureau's policies provide a degree of protection at a higher cost, some operators report persistent vulnerability, suggesting the coverage does not fully mitigate their business risks. For example, this participant shared, "I do have liability insurance, through Farm Bureau, but I honestly don't know if it's enough" (Z09). While some operators enjoy working with them, stating "Farm Bureau has been excellent" (I01), operators also note it is the only company that will insure agritourism businesses. For example, one operator shared:

Insurance is a big deal, and it is increasing, and we feel a little trapped because Farm Bureau is the only one we can find that will cover us. Which, fine, but they have no competition, and they're expensive (W08).

Another operator echoed the sentiment, stating Farm Bureau is his insurance company, but they have increased their premiums, sharing:

...Insurance, like you alluded to with the river. It seems like Farm Bureau is the only niche market for Kansas agritourism. And we have seen a 60% increase in our monthly premium in less than two years. (W06)

The federal funding, taxation, and insurance barriers combine to create a need, identified by participants, for an agritourism advocacy group, specifically to address county- and state-level governance issues. The need for an *agritourism advocate* was a consistent finding across regions. Many operators shared the sentiment, "I would say really what's missing out of all of agriculture tourism is an advocate" (I03). Another operator expressed his concern and confusion, stating: "Well, who's our advocate? Who's fighting for continued hoop house supports, or any

other specialty programs that USDA talks about?” (Z02). Yet participants emphasized they lacked the capacity to advocate for themselves, in addition to other agritourism responsibilities. One operator shared how her unique position, being part of a nonprofit education farm, has called her to question their collective bargaining power, sharing, “What’s our role in doing policy and advocacy? Because I think farmers are too busy to put that upon. They have such high responsibility, and it’s tough to figure out where to fit in talking to legislators” (O01).

Notably, agritourism advocacy was highlighted through conversations relative to *regional differences*. Operators in more densely populated areas had more negative interactions with county government regulations, as this operator notes, “We have been going rounds with the county. And, in fact, we had to hire a lawyer” (W16). One operator observed her agritourism counterparts in a densely populated county, sharing, “I don’t think anybody has to fight harder than the farms in Johnson County” (W09). Another operator shared similar frustration, feeling like she is too small to deal with her county, sharing:

One way to summarize some of the things that we’re saying is I want it to be more of an advocate for me in the state. Like in terms of a collective voice. I feel so little in these conversations and arguments, like they don’t care. Even my county appraiser, she doesn’t care about me and my little voice. (W08)

The *COVID-19* pandemic had mixed effects on agritourism operators. For some, COVID-19 grew their operations, as they could take advantage of social distancing and outdoor activity requirements, such as this operator:

2020 was the perfect year to open a campground, because nobody was able to fly.

Nobody wanted to stay in motels. Everybody bought campers that year and everybody started camping. (H01)

Additionally, another operator shared how COVID positively impacted his winery, sharing, “But, when COVID struck, we realized that we had so much land and people could come out and feel safe” (L10). However, others, particularly those with event-related agritourism activities, found COVID-19 detrimental; for example, one operator stated: “COVID did a number on the weddings, we've never been able to get back to pre-COVID time on the weddings” (W04). Another operator shared, “...We totally shut down when COVID hit because we needed to make sure that we were safe for a little while, and the farmers’ markets weren't opening” (W10).

Finally, many operators reported that the existing resources provided by the Kansas Agritourism Program (KAP) were insufficient to address their barriers, particularly *limited access to educational resources*. Operators noted that KAP and KSRE resources often required a significant time investment to navigate. The delivery formats were frequently cited as inefficient, making it difficult for operators to integrate these tools into their daily workflows without sacrificing essential operational hours. One participant shared how, despite the Kansas Agritourism Program’s newsletters being sent, they were time restrictive, sharing: “I’m not necessarily saying that the newsletters are the best way to get a lot of information across because most of us don’t take the time to go out and read it all either” (H01). Multiple participants reported that, although resources were available, they were “too technical” (L06) or “time-consuming” (O01). Further, participants found that the time spent searching for resources to solve existing challenges takes them away from their businesses, creating a continuous cycle of unaddressed problems. For example, one operator shares how she has had to navigate marketing issues but cannot allot the necessary time to manage social media, explaining:

We're farmers, we're not social media experts. That's the barrier. The social media that we started with in 2014 is completely different, you know, 11 years down the road, and to figure out the algorithm, I don't have time for that, nor could I figure it out. (W09)

A pressing concern for operators was accessibility and the format of resources, as they struggled to find information specific to their needs. Operators expressed a need for a centralized, user-friendly source for marketing education resources. As one operator described:

It would be nice if it were a database that were accessible, you know. How do we map that and see what type of education is missing? But also, how can we make it easy for other people to access? (O07)

Furthermore, operators report that existing extension resources and agents provide insufficient educational support for agritourism. Many noted that cooperative extension agents often appear unprepared or overextended, leaving them unable to address niche agritourism questions. One operator even remarked that he frequently finds himself acting as the primary educator for his local county agent:

And in our county, our agent does not know a thing about crops. So she would call me when people had crop questions. So for me, now that I've been doing this for 14 years, professionally, my level of knowledge has exceeded that of an extension agent. (L11)

Another operator details his experience with his local extension agents:

We got a really mediocre ag agent and three 4-H agents with no horticultural knowledge, background, or anything, which is really depressing. You really need that plant science knowledge to get through this. And our master gardener program has just collapsed; it's gone. There's nobody doing anything. (Z04)

A crucial influence on the transformational process for operators is how they navigate these operational challenges. Operators cited the importance of turning *social interactions into assets*, whether with their customer base, agricultural organizations, local resources, or from interactions in previous careers. For example, one operator mentioned how multiple network channels have helped them in navigating business challenges, sharing “Facebook groups have been really helpful for me...And then, visiting with other farmers, you know, shooting emails or phone calls, visiting other farms” (Z06). Building and using social networks was crucial for many operators, as one shared their importance in saying:

It’s networking. And you find out from somebody that’s already doing it, how can you do it better? It’s just amazing how, if you can cooperate and network with other people, how much you can learn. (L03)

This sentiment was echoed by another operator, who urged group gatherings for knowledge exchange, sharing, “Anytime you can sit in a classroom, sit in a building somewhere, and you’re with other growers. Networking is a beautiful thing” (Z02). Participants shared learning from other operators and being a part of agricultural organizations were useful, particularly citing organizations such as the North American Direct Farm Marketing Association (NAFDMA) and Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC). For instance, one operator stated, “I think everybody who was involved in NAFDMA, who had the pumpkin patches and stuff, had a better year than they had in years” (W05).

Many participants emphasized social reinforcement and customer feedback were crucial assets for entrepreneurial learning. For some operators, speaking directly to customers informs their business plan, as one operator shared: “You just walk around and observe and talk and pay attention to what they’re doing and liking and different things like that” (H03). This two-way

relationship, where the business provides for the community and the community in turn provides valuable insights, enhanced the owners' confidence in their product. One participant noted, "People want the experience. Give them that experience. That's where the growth is" (I03).

Discussion

This study investigated the factors affecting an operator's entrepreneurial identity and the current conditions that impact business expansion, using a qualitative application of the Entrepreneurial Learning (Politis, 2005) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1971, 1977). In this section, I discuss the study's results alongside previous research to draw conclusions and identify implications for future research and practice.

The findings of this study offer a nuanced understanding of the entrepreneurial journey of individuals within the agritourism sector, highlighting the interplay between prior experiences, intrinsic knowledge, and external barriers. Throughout the qualitative data analysis, we found that participants' entrepreneurial journeys are primarily driven by their prior professional and educational backgrounds. For many, this foundational knowledge gave operators the confidence to start their businesses and the necessary resources and skills to navigate the industry's intricacies. These prior career experiences, however, were not restricted to agriculture, with operators describing a range of careers before engaging in agritourism. Politis (2005) posits individuals with prior start-up or industry experience are better prepared to cope with the liabilities that come with starting a business. The operators were more willing to engage in exploratory learning and had diverse career backgrounds, with many adding agritourism to supplement or replace their existing jobs. This finding corresponds with Quella et al.'s (2021) identification of flexible career aspirations among agritourism operators.

Our findings align with the entrepreneurial learning framework, as operators reported learning from past experiences, coupled with prior careers, enabled them to identify new opportunities. Mainly, the failures of past events drove operators to experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), allowing them to fail, reflect, reconceptualize, and test new experiences. Failure is a means of entrepreneurial learning, allowing operators to reflect and move forward with renewed tacit knowledge (Lattacher & Wdowiak, 2019). For participants, these failures and the resulting barriers were not deterrents, as operators identified their roles as inherently risk-taking. This acceptance of risk, learned through experience, evolves into an active focus on managing it. In line with extensive literature (Baby & Kim, 2024; Shadbolt & Olubode-Awosola, 2016; Spika, 2020), our findings confirm managing risk is a critical factor in operators' decision-making.

The existing entrepreneurial learning framework (Politis, 2005) does not adequately account for outside influences on explorative and exploitative learning (Wang & Chugh, 2014). Contrary to Politis (2004), our findings emphasize observational learning and customer reinforcement were more influential in the transformation process than predominant logic or reasoning and career orientation. The feedback exchange fosters trust and a renewed sense of community for operators and their customer base (Shirley et al., 2025). Closely aligned with Bandura's (1971, 1977) Social Learning Theory, collective learning and the impact of organizational behavior are essential components of the entrepreneur's learning journey, as are the community's behaviors in this instance. This finding is common in the existing agricultural literature on farmers' social learning (Dooley, 2020; Khazami et al., 2020; Nurkasanah & Sarwoprasodjo, 2024; Theodoropoulou, 2004). Farmers, or agritourism operators in our study, are more likely to observe and replicate successful practices of other operators (Asprooth et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025). The operators prioritize direct knowledge from their professional networks

before seeking information online or through educational sources, as communicating with other operators is more efficient and reliable.

Our findings align with the existing literature on the barriers faced by agritourism operators (Choo & Park, 2020; Collins et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024. Insufficient financial resources (Kubickova & Campbell, 2018), challenges with marketing and advertising (Collins et al., 2024; Joyner et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2023), and labor shortages (Ecker et al., 2010) were heavily discussed amongst our participants. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a definitive turning point for many operators, corresponding with previous studies (Brune et al., 2023a; Brune et al., 2023b; Ohe, 2023; Roman & Grudzień, 2021), though it produced differing outcomes amongst operators. While some operators thrived by providing the outdoor spaces customers needed, others, particularly event and wedding venues, faced severe operational disruptions and financial strain. Further, a finding unique to Kansas operators was county interference, increased taxation, and limited insurance options. The Kansas Farm Bureau was repeatedly identified as the sole insurance servicer across regions, prompting mixed reactions. For some operators, they were content with their respective Farm Bureau representative; for others, especially in the more densely populated regions, they were more adverse. A unique dichotomy emerged in the data: rural businesses faced less bureaucratic “red tape” but struggled with marketing and building a customer base. However, those in more densely populated regions, located near populated urban centers, fought more with their county government, but could depend on community support. This furthers the sentiment that a one-size-fits-all approach to agritourism resources is insufficient (Rozier Rich et al., 2016), as Kansan operators differ drastically across regions. Again, Politis’ (2005) conceptual framework does not incorporate regional or locational influences on the shaping of entrepreneurial knowledge.

Recommendations

Future Research

This study highlights several promising avenues for future research. It would be valuable to assess whether the entrepreneurial and social learning theories explored here apply to other agritourism operators, particularly in states with different industry landscapes. Such an investigation could compare and contrast influences across states, shedding light on unique, state-specific barriers to establishing and running an agritourism business. Additionally, our research repeatedly showed that agritourism operators strongly need an agricultural advocate and an organization tailored to their industry. Building on this finding, a future quantitative study could survey a statewide representative sample to determine whether operators agree on their advocacy needs. This research would provide crucial details about the specific barriers operators want an advocate to address. Likewise, further research can identify agritourism hotspots within Kansas and illuminate regional differences at a macro-level, such as differences in county governance's influence on agritourism business establishment. In addition, further research should investigate the availability and stability of federal and state funding for agritourism operators, with a concentrated focus on farmers and ranchers who want to establish agritourism businesses on their operations.

Practice

Agritourism practitioners looking to support business growth should focus on providing educational resources in readily accessible formats. Operators expressed a strong desire for marketing and advertising materials that are easy to understand and replicate. Further research should highlight effective, existing resources that operators are more drawn to. Additionally, operators want a dedicated, operator-specific database of relevant content to help them overcome common business barriers. When it comes to the format, videos, particularly on platforms like

YouTube, were repeatedly cited as the preferred method of learning. Beyond digital resources, operators are enthusiastic about networking opportunities. They would appreciate group gatherings that are scheduled at a convenient time, keeping their busy growing seasons in mind. They also highlighted a need for more localized networking and partnerships, especially within specific industry groups.

Industry

To better support agritourism in Kansas, agricultural policymakers must advocate for policies that address key operational barriers. A major issue is the lack of clarity in taxation, classification, and enforcement, which creates uncertainty for operators. While a universal approach may not be appropriate, according to participants, a clear and consistent tax classification is essential. Operators also seek greater financial security through tax incentives and enhanced limited liability protection. The current insurance landscape is challenging, with the market heavily dominated by a single provider. Operators seek more competitive, consistent rates from a variety of providers to ensure their businesses remain viable. Finally, operators point to a clear organizational discrepancy that they consider a barrier: the Kansas Agritourism Program is housed within the Department of Commerce rather than the Department of Agriculture. The participants suggested that the current placement fails to account for the agricultural roots of their operations at the state agency level. These operations, under the Kansas Agritourism Promotion Act, must be built around agricultural components, including, but not limited to, "...farming activities, ranching activities or historic, cultural or natural attractions" (Kan. Stat. Ann. § 32-1432). Administrative repositioning could increase goodwill between the government agencies and agritourism operators who perceive their businesses as agricultural first, tourism second.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is its limited representativeness. Our sample was skewed toward participants from two highly populated regions of Kansas, and we had no representation from the southeast region. This is a gap in our findings, as we cannot fully understand the unique barriers faced by operators proportionally across the state. Furthermore, our focus groups were condensed into a four-week window with limited scheduling options. While we selected a low-producing time of year, February through March, it is likely that agricultural responsibilities still prevented some operators from participating. To address this, future research should broaden participation opportunities or utilize existing gatherings to achieve a more representative sample. A final limitation concerns the participant groups themselves. Although we included both prospective and established operators, our findings were more so influenced by the latter. However, this approach facilitated networking between established and prospective operators. A clearer understanding of the differences between these groups is crucial for developing statewide resources that benefit all types of operators and promote industry expansion through both new entry and growth of existing operations.

Conclusion

The findings of this research emphasize the importance and influence of social networks, community engagement, and barriers to agritourism business establishment conveyed by Kansas agritourism operators. Their journeys as entrepreneurs are directly shaped by their responses to barriers, but are motivated by their previous careers and education (Politis, 2004), and influenced directly by their social connections (Bandura, 1971, 1977). While agritourism operators are enthusiastic about the opportunities agritourism presents, they are unnerved by the lack of local and state protections and other extrinsic barriers that limit their growth. Agritourism operators,

both established and prospective, are resilient throughout adversity, making every experience meaningful. Their identities as agriculturalists, entrepreneurs, and community members are tightly intertwined, facing barriers that attack each identity. The operators' community-focused approach offers a valuable starting point for an agritourism advocate. By partnering with these groups, an advocate can cultivate change and address their specific challenges on an impactful scale (Meyers et al, 2011).

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Chapter Three - Targeting Growth: Segmenting the Entrepreneurial Drivers of Kansas Agritourism Operators

Overview

This chapter presents Phase Two of the two-phase study. An in-depth exploration is needed to investigate the factors that drive entrepreneurs to adopt agritourism, the institutional policies that impact this decision, and the support available to promote business expansion. Using a quantitative survey, audience segmentation, and cluster analysis, we describe the characteristics of entrepreneurs engaged in agritourism, focusing on their perceived levels of self-efficacy, persistence, and alertness. Additionally, respondents identified their preferred communication methods, their trust in information sources, and their willingness to be involved in policy development.

Introduction

The U.S. agritourism sector has evolved into a \$1 billion industry (USDA, 2024), essential for farm income diversification; however, a paradox exists within the Kansas landscape. Despite the state's position as a powerhouse of agricultural commodities and more than 800 farms reporting agritourism sales, Kansas ranks only 25th nationally in agritourism income (USDA, 2024). The systemic, overarching barriers to agritourism expansion, such as farm liabilities and marketing, are well established (Collins et al., 2024; Hollas et al., 2024; Mahmoodi et al., 2022; Pratt et al., 2022). More uncertain is the current industry landscape for Kansas agritourism operators, which remains fragmented and underexplored. Specifically, existing macro-level studies often overlook the multifaceted, micro-level entrepreneurial realities of operators themselves. Agritourism operators are not simply farmers and ranchers; they are fundamentally entrepreneurs who require entrepreneurial beliefs and skills to successfully

manage the risks, innovations, and customer-facing aspects of their business (Phelan & Sharpley, 2012; Van Sandt et al., 2018).

The viability of an agritourism operation depends on the behavior of its owner. Who they are as entrepreneurs directly affects the success of their business and the effort they are willing to invest into the industry (Ahmed et al., 2025). Understanding who these operators are beyond their agricultural identities requires a deeper investigation into their roles as entrepreneurs and how they navigate shifts from a production mindset to a service mindset. This transition requires entrepreneurs to be more self-efficacious, persistent, and alert, traits that fundamentally shape how they navigate information and perceive risk (Bandura, 1977; Chavoushi et al., 2021; Kirzner, 1979, 1985; Newman et al., 2019; Yan et al., 2023). Consequently, the expansion of the agritourism landscape in Kansas is not just about providing resources, but rather about understanding the key stakeholders operators listen to and why they gravitate toward specific sources of support. Understanding these micro-level characteristics of agritourism entrepreneurs, such as why some operators endure hardship more easily than others or what specific resources operators trust more, is essential to the broader picture of agritourism industry development (Bläse et al., 2024). Identifying the specific information-seeking behaviors and trusted networks of Kansas agritourism operators provides the foundation for this growth. These insights allow for the creation of a more integrated support system aligning policy goals and resources with the diverse entrepreneurial characteristics of the individuals they seek to serve (Lawhorn & Levin, 2024).

Key Stakeholders

Reyes (2025) identified three primary organizations that act as connective tissues between operators and the agritourism industry as a whole: the Kansas Agritourism Program (KAP), K-State Research and Extension (KSRE), and the Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB). These

organizations provide the structure needed to unite farmers and ranchers across the state under the umbrella of agritourism, including logistical support for the industry, the intellectual capital necessary for expansion, and a stable regulatory environment. These stakeholder organizations act as primary sources for operators, acting as the first step when deciding the direction of the operation and the environment in which it can succeed.

KAP supports agritourism operators through a statewide initiative of the Department of Commerce in accordance with Kansas State Statute § 32-1430-1438 (Kansas Tourism, n.d.). Registration with KAP provides a layer of limited liability protection from the State for an individual's property, education, networking, and resource opportunities, as well as free marketing on the Kansas Tourism website (Kansas Tourism, n.d.). KAP is essential to agritourism's collective identity in the state, serving as the sole organization uniting agritourism operators. However, the primary role of KAP is not to advocate or promote policy for operators, but rather to act as a registrar of active agritourism operations within the state. The program also disseminates information on how to get started in agritourism, current resources, and industry partners through the website and quarterly newsletters. However, operators express discontent with the accessibility and ease of navigation of resources (Reyes, 2025).

Beyond the administrative structure of KAP, operators are often directed toward KSRE for technical support through local extension offices. As a broad network serving all Kansans, KSRE focuses on large-scale issues such as water conservation, advancing agriculture and food systems, family welfare, and community vitality (K-State Research and Extension, n.d.). This interdisciplinary approach can be essential in supporting the needs of farmers, their families, and communities at large (Schmidt et al, 2022). However, for agritourism operators across the state, this breadth can be a disadvantage; the resources provided, such as farm succession planning and

liability management, are often targeted to a broader audience rather than tailored to the niche agritourism market. The previous study (Reyes, 2025) suggests a disconnect at the local level, where cooperative extension agents may feel underprepared to handle agritourism-specific hurdles. While KSRE is an essential information hub, it lacks the agency to lobby for systemic change, leaving operators in search of a dedicated advocate to champion their specific interests (Reyes, 2025).

KFB is uniquely positioned to fill this void. As a non-profit, bipartisan organization, the KFB serves as the primary bridge between Kansas agriculturalists and state and federal legislation. Beyond its policy work, the KFB provides tangible operational support by leveraging partnerships with LandTrust for recreation access and with Farm Bureau Financial Services to offer specialized agritourism insurance and limited liability options (Brown, 2017). Its official policy position actively supports agritourism expansion as a tool for economic development, backing tax incentives for insurance premiums and advocating for a uniform legal definition of agritourism activities (Brown, 2017). Despite these resources and formal policy stances, a significant gap remains in practice. While the KFB is a key stakeholder, the previous study (Reyes, 2025) found many of the 54 participating operators perceive the organization as an ineffectual advocate within the current industry landscape. This disconnect underscores the need for an organizational investigation to bridge the gap between high-level policy goals and the entrepreneurial realities of operators. To be truly effective, the KFB's policy advancements must move beyond broad support and begin addressing the urgent, micro-level barriers that still hinder Kansas agritourism operators.

Literature Review

The viability and sustained growth of agritourism ventures require a symbiotic relationship between supportive regulatory and governmental environments and the unique psychological entrepreneurial attributes of operators themselves (Baby & Kim, 2024; Campbell & Kubickova, 2020; Kubickova & Campbell, 2020). The inherent entrepreneurial nature of agritourism operators suggests psychological entrepreneurial characteristics are key factors in understanding industry involvement. By analyzing an operator's internal beliefs and motivations, we can better understand the operator's behavior, decision-making, and ultimate success (Baron, 2008). The findings of this study establish a framework for identifying strategic initiatives that can empower Kansas agritourism support programs. Aligning initiatives with respondents' specific entrepreneurial traits ensures that future policy and resource development directly address the unique needs of the state's agritourism industry (Gibson et al., 2021). This study aims to use three constructs: entrepreneurial self-efficacy, persistence, and alertness, as the basis for segmenting agritourism operators. Higher levels of self-efficacy, persistence, and alertness indicate greater receptivity to support (Ahsan et al., 2020; Ferriera et al., 2018; Holland & Garrett, 2013; Li et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2012). Further, clusters will be described by demographics, perceived trust, communication preferences, areas of needed support, and societal behaviors, identifying agritourism operators willing to be involved in programming development.

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish a specific task or goal (Bandura, 1997; Newman et al., 2019), is a core determinant of success in diversified industries. Social Cognitive Theory posits individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to engage in challenging goals, demonstrate greater resilience by

recovering from setbacks, and maintain motivation even in the face of adversity (Artino Jr., 2012; Bandura, 1997). Directly tied to behavioral change, increased self-efficacy significantly influences an individual's choices and their effort levels. Self-efficacy can be developed through several sources: mastery and vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and the management of emotional and psychological states (Bandura, 1997). This process creates a positive feedback loop, as successful ventures reinforce and positively impact an individual's sense of efficacy (Peifer et al., 2020). In the entrepreneurial context, self-efficacy is crucial in determining an individual's willingness to engage in entrepreneurship as a career. Furthermore, it strongly correlates with key entrepreneurial behaviors, including willingness to engage in risky and uncertain ventures, leadership, creativity, and passion (Newman et al., 2019).

Self-efficacy remains a cornerstone of existing entrepreneurial research (Newman et al., 2019; Peifer et al., 2020; Sauola et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2023), particularly regarding the development of microentrepreneurship ventures (Alshebami, 2023; Chhabra et al., 2022; Dong et al., 2022; Madawala et al., 2023). However, the literature offers limited reflection on the specific identities of tourism microentrepreneurs (Ferreira et al., 2018). Agritourism operators occupy a unique intersection of agriculture, tourism, and hospitality. Standard resources designed for those individual sectors often fail to address the complex, overlapping needs of an agritourism operator (Ferreira et al., 2018).

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is often measured as a singular construct, yet McGee et al. (2009) argue it is multidimensional and extends beyond an individual's innate belief in their own abilities. For example, Ferreira et al.'s (2018) exploration of urban tourism microentrepreneurs suggests microentrepreneurial self-efficacy encompasses five dimensions: *pursuing innovation*, *marshaling resources*, *adapting to externalities*, *aligning core purpose with self*, and e-

marketing. *Pursuing innovation* relates to entrepreneurial efforts to seek new methods, approaches, and ideas. *Marshaling resources* details the use of different partners to initiate business establishment, such as community partners or industry organizations. *Adapting to externalities* addresses microentrepreneurs' ability to understand and take advantage of legal nuances in an uncontrollable landscape. *Aligning core purpose with self*, refers to how operations are presented in accordance to the operators' individual characteristics and passions. *E-marketing* highlights the microentrepreneurs' ability and competencies to effectively use social media and online tools to market and engage customers (Ferreira et al., 2018). In accordance with Ferreira et al. (2018), this study employs a multidimensional approach to develop a more robust understanding of the relationship between increased self-efficacy and the success and sustainability of agritourism ventures.

The existing agricultural entrepreneurship literature supports exploring the relationship between self-efficacy and the performance of agritourism ventures. Specifically, KC et al. (2025) explored self-efficacy as it relates to agritourism operators' resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors highlight the increase in operators' self-efficacy despite instability and lack of government support throughout the pandemic. The study supports Ferreira et al.'s (2018) claim of multidimensionality, as the sampled agritourism businesses thrived due to creativity and problem-solving, specifically by marshaling resources and new ideas through peer networks. Additionally, Ferreira et al. (2022) explored self-efficacy as it relates to social capital, the resources available to individuals fostered through networks of relationships built within the industry. The survey of 207 farmers in North Carolina revealed strong, statistically significant relationships between social capital and internal self-efficacy and external self-efficacy (Ferreira et al., 2022). Internal self-efficacy as it relates to entrepreneurial intention was also well

established; however, external self-efficacy, support from external sources to increase confidence, was not significantly supported, illustrating a gap between outside organizational support and firm performance (Ferriera et al., 2022). These findings support our multidimensional investigation to better understand the influence not only of personal entrepreneurial traits but also of operators' willingness to engage and learn from one another.

Entrepreneurial Persistence

Alongside one's internal belief in their own capabilities, the drive to succeed is crucial. Therefore, this study additionally explores entrepreneurial persistence, the continued investment of time, effort, and resources despite obstacles and discouraging results (Yan et al., 2023). Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process requiring individuals to actively pursue their goals despite challenges. In agriculture, extrinsic threats such as climate change and agricultural market volatility require operators to consistently endure, recover, and reinvest (Gil Arroyo et al., 2013; Yan et al., 2023). Persistence reflects the repeated decision and motivation to continue pursuing an opportunity even when facing shortfalls, external shocks, or temptations from other opportunities (Caliendo et al., 2019; Gimeno et al., 1997).

Persistence consists of two intertwined components: motivational commitment and resource reinvestment. Motivational commitment relates to the psychological intention to continue. It is fueled by goal setting and the deep personal connection the operator has with the venture itself (Baum & Locke, 2004). In an agritourism context, this commitment is often exemplified through farm legacy or the desire to connect with the community (Ammirato et al., 2020; LaPan & Barbieri, 2013). On the other hand, resource reinvestment acts as an observable action. This component involves operators repeatedly choosing to allocate financial, physical, and time resources back into the venture (Caliendo et al., 2019; DeTienne et al, 2008). For

agritourism operators, resource reinvestment may take the form of investments in farm infrastructure or new technology.

Persistence is well documented in the existing entrepreneurial research (Baum & Locke, 2004; Caliendo et al., 2019; Duan et al., 2025; Holland & Garrett, 2013). For example, Yan et al. (2023) conducted a systematic literature review of 42 articles related to entrepreneurial persistence and venture success. The authors found persistence is not tied to a single factor but can be linked to economic conditions, entrepreneurial mindset, motivation, self-efficacy, and social capital (Yan et al., 2023). Like entrepreneurial self-efficacy, persistence is argued to be a multidimensional construct. Previous research identifies psychological ownership, personality, passion, education, social and cultural barriers, cognitive style, crisis management, and entrepreneurial experience influence entrepreneurial persistence (Duan et al., 2025). The literature on entrepreneurial persistence is limited; however, Bilal et al. (2022) examined the mediating roles of persistence and passion in the relationship between growth constraints and entrepreneurial intention among 262 Omani women. The study found social networking has a significant impact on entrepreneurial intention and persistence, whereas family support and access to finance do not, further corroborating our emphasis on social capital and peer networks.

Entrepreneurial Alertness

Success in a dynamic, rapidly evolving market also depends on entrepreneurial alertness, the proactive ability to perceive, discover, and act upon novel market opportunities others overlook (Chavoushi et al., 2021; Kirzner, 1979, 1985). Alertness is crucial for finding niche markets, as Kirzner (1979, 1985) argued an entrepreneur is not simply an innovator but rather an *alert agent* who notices opportunities created by market imperfections. Entrepreneurial alertness involves three dimensions: scanning and searching for information, associating and connecting information, and evaluating and judging potential opportunities (Gaglio & Katz, 2001; Li et al.,

2022). This cognitive capacity is positioned as a primary driver of innovation and competitive advantage, particularly in small, family-run businesses typical of agritourism ventures that need to innovate quickly (Amato et al., 2016).

Scanning and searching involve continuous exploration of new information, changes in customer tastes, and shifts in supply conditions. It is positioned in existing literature as an ambient awareness, not a goal-directed activity (Tang et al., 2012). For agritourism operators, finding niche markets and product innovation are crucial. More alert operators are more likely to see value in underutilized farm assets, notice emerging trends, or identify local policy changes that create economic opportunities. Scanning and searching can be operationalized as entrepreneurial engagement with content that pushes the latest industry trends, such as online newsletters, blogs, and social media pages. However, entrepreneurs cannot identify an opportunity alone; they must also connect the non-obvious links between unrelated pieces of information. For instance, an agritourism operator who offers petting zoos may connect the calm nature of their older, more docile livestock with the growing demand for therapeutic wellness experiences. Instead of a traditional petting zoo, they create a high-value niche by linking animal husbandry to trending mental health practices. The association and connection process requires entrepreneurs to be creative while balancing familiarity and novelty (Karami et al., 2024).

Such creativity and balance inform the final component of alertness: evaluation and judgement, one's ability to assess the discovered opportunity's potential profitability and viability, leading to the decision to pursue the venture. Evaluation and judgment help an entrepreneur filter out seemingly useless information and keep their attention on successful ventures (Li et al., 2022). Over time, this fosters situational awareness among entrepreneurs, enabling them to better understand their industry's needs and consumer demands. Throughout

the process, the entrepreneur seeks feedback and insights from external sources to make informed decisions about the idea's viability (Tang et al., 2012). For example, a neighboring operation may be engaging in and advocating for a new, trendy experience, such as growing sustainable hemp for livestock bedding, but an operator needs to evaluate whether adopting hemp production would be appropriate for their specific operation.

Altogether, the three components of entrepreneurial alertness are evident in the agritourism sector, as operators engage with each to determine whether agritourism would be a viable revenue stream for their existing agricultural operations. While alertness has not been applied in the agritourism context, it is well documented in the existing entrepreneurial literature (Araujo et al., 2023; Chavoushi et al., 2019; Karami et al., 2024; Lanivich et al., 2021). The need for this construct is supported by the existing literature examining alertness-derived entrepreneurial behavior, specifically opportunity recognition (Araujo et al., 2023). For example, successful resource acquisition and recognition of opportunities were fostered primarily through peer-to-peer learning among agritourism entrepreneurs in Sichuan, China (Yang & Sukpasjaroen, 2024).

Entrepreneurial alertness has been explored in a general agricultural context, including its influence on agricultural students (Shiri et al., 2022) and the influence of personality traits on alertness (Liang et al., 2019). Both studies highlighted the role of social capital and openness to social networks as mediating factors toward increasing entrepreneurial alertness. Further, Calle et al. (2022) examined alertness in small- and medium-sized agritourism operations. In the U.S., many agritourism businesses fall into this classification, as small farms are defined as those with a gross cash farm income (GCFI) of less than USD 350,000, and mid-size farms as those with a GCFI of USD 350,000 to 999,999 (USDA, 2025). Calle et al. (2022) found farmers' opportunity

alertness and risk-taking propensity significantly increase their intentions to diversify. This proactive mindset ultimately enhances a farmer's ability to survive market volatility. The findings support our exploration of alertness as a construct to better inform strategic initiatives that encourage agritourism operators to adopt new business ideas.

Conceptual Framework

Kansas agritourism operators represent a diverse set of entrepreneurial identities generic agricultural resources cannot adequately serve (Amanor-Boadu, 2013; Collins et al., 2024; Rozier Rich et al., 2016). Agritourism encompasses a wide spectrum of operations, ranging from small family-run hobby farms with minimal revenue to large, commercially integrated operations offering diverse experiences. This heterogeneity means operators face different challenges, possess varying resource levels, and require distinct types of support (Hollas et al., 2024). Given the diversity of agritourism entrepreneurs, this study employs audience segmentation and cluster analysis to identify meaningful groups of operators defined by their unique psychological profiles. To develop the audience segments, data were analyzed in SPSS V.30 using a two-stage cluster analysis approach (Yim & Ramdeen, 2015). This method leverages the strengths of both hierarchical and K-means clustering to ensure a stable, interpretable solution. First, a Hierarchical Cluster Analysis (HCA) using Ward's Method with squared Euclidean distance was performed. Ward's method was selected because it is designed to minimize within-cluster variance, thereby effectively uncovering distinct, cohesive groups within a population (Everitt et al., 2011; Ward, 1963). A visual inspection of the agglomeration schedule and dendrogram was used to identify the number of clusters representing the maximized dissimilarity in the data (Everitt et al., 2011; Ward, 1963). Following the HCA, a K-means clustering analysis was conducted to assign respondents to observed cluster segments. This iterative process ensures

each individual is assigned to the cluster with the closest mean, thereby maximizing the internal validity of the segments (Gibson et al., 2021). Existing rural and agritourism literature emphasizes the importance of audience segmentation as a crucial measure of market conditions (Baby & Kim, 2025; Lwoga & Maturo, 2020; Sullins et al., 2010; Varmazyari et al., 2018; Zeng & Chen, 2020); however, this work mainly concentrates on segmenting visitors, rather than the operators themselves.

Critical to this study is the assessment of agritourism operators' entrepreneurial characteristics alongside their willingness to engage with programs, policy development, and available resources. Operators with higher levels of self-efficacy, alertness, and persistence are more likely to accept governmental and industry support (Ahsan et al., 2020; Holland & Garret, 2013; Li et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2012). These support mechanisms must be precisely tailored to individual needs to amplify those key entrepreneurial psychological attributes effectively. As government programs increase capacity and entrepreneurs gain confidence through effective support, they become increasingly willing to participate in and influence both the programs and the policy development necessary to sustain the industry (Kingdon, 2011; Prasannath et al., 2024). In doing so, these operators demonstrate societal behaviors, recurring patterns of interaction shaped by social environments and cultural norms (Schmitt, 1998). These behaviors often translate into tangible actions, such as civic engagement and peer communication (Rossi et al., 2016). Without segmentation among operators, support organizations such as the KAP, KSRE, and KFB risk wasting resources on generalized programs that fail to meet the needs or interests of any particular group. Therefore, this study aims to inform the development of regulatory adjustments, financial assistance, and training programs tailored to the current capacity and entrepreneurial mindset of Kansas agritourism operators.

Audience segmentation, also known as market segmentation, is a technique used to develop more effective communication by focusing on groups of individuals who share common perspectives and values (Orton et al., 2024; Slater, 1996). As Grunig (1989) states, segmentation is the process of “dividing a population, market, or audience into groups whose members are more like each other than members of other segments” (p. 202). This division allows for the implementation of tailored and effective communication strategies. The process consists of three main steps (Slater, 1996): gathering prior information on audience members’ existing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors; identifying distinct audience segments based on shared characteristics; and determining the optimal message targeting strategy to address the correct segments. Audience segmentation of agri-entrepreneurs has been previously applied to broader agricultural contexts, such as climate change-related communications (Arbuckle et al., 2017; Orton et al., 2024), landholder management of invasive species (Hine et al., 2019), and research, development, and extension in the Australian dairy industry (Waters et al., 2009).

Audience segmentation has been used within the tourism literature solely to segment tourists (Baby & Kim, 2025; Lwoga & Maturo, 2020; Sullins et al., 2010; Varmazyari et al., 2018; Zeng & Chen, 2020). No known research has applied audience segmentation techniques to agritourism entrepreneurs to identify target audiences for governmental and industry support programs. Targeting the specific needs of the operators, rather than focusing on the visitor experience, can inform more effective strategic initiatives for the Kansas agritourism industry. This transition enables support programs to align their resources directly with the entrepreneurial realities of the operators they serve. Thus, we draw on the literature on entrepreneurial psychological characteristics to develop key constructs for our audience segmentation to inform

agritourism-specific organizational support (Araujo et al., 2023; Baum & Locke, 2004; Cardon & Kirk, 2015; Huang et al., 2016; Li et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to successfully execute behaviors required to produce a given outcome (Bandura, 1997; Newman et al., 2019). This construct is linked to policy and civic engagement, primarily by acting as a motivator and predictor of participation. When individuals feel capable of understanding and influencing political and civic processes, they are more likely to engage in those processes (Chu et al., 2025). The government itself plays a key role in promoting entrepreneurial self-efficacy through developmental initiatives (Saif et al., 2024).

Entrepreneurial Persistence

In addition to an entrepreneur's initial belief in their ability to execute behaviors, persistence in volatile industries, like agriculture, is essential in understanding their propensity to be involved in policy discussions that promote business survival (Holland & Garrett, 2013; Russell, 2025). Government and industry support boost entrepreneurial persistence by providing crucial grants to overcome hurdles, technical assistance trainings, and the provision of stable regulatory environments (Shao & Wang, 2023). An entrepreneur's proactive attention to government policies facilitates activities that lead to enhanced business performance and survival (Dai et al., 2022).

Entrepreneurial Alertness

Entrepreneurial alertness is tied to an individual's ability to process economic conditions, specifically in spotting and acting on potential opportunities (Khalid et al., 2025). Alert entrepreneurs actively scan for information, allowing them to detect and interpret multi-dimensional changes, from shifting consumer demands to technological breakthroughs (Tang et

al., 2012). Additionally, entrepreneurs with increased alertness may be more in tune with policies that directly impact their operations or opportunities to develop policies that support their success (Arisha et al., 2025). By keenly observing windows of opportunity, alert entrepreneurs are positioned to actively shape the policy discussion, lobbying for or proposing new policies that directly benefit their firm or industry, thereby transforming restrictive policy environments into strategic assets (Kingdon, 2011).

Other Variables

In addition to the variables used to form the audience segments, we also describe other relevant characteristics of the audience members, including their demographics, communication preferences, trust in information sources, and willingness to engage in societal behaviors. For this study, it is imperative to understand the influence of social environment and cultural norms on the willingness to engage in the focal societal behavior: the operators' civil engagement and perceived interest in influencing programming (Huang et al., 2016). Essary et al. (2022) and Hine et al. (2014) further corroborate the use of demographics and other psychographic characteristics as suitable variables for cluster analysis.

Purpose and Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to identify and recommend strategic initiatives for Kansas agritourism support programs to effectively develop and support agritourism operators, fostering their sustainability, growth, and the expansion of the sector. This project aims to use entrepreneurial characteristics, perceived trust, communication preferences, and demographics to describe clusters of agritourism operators more willing to be involved in programming development. The following research objectives guided the study along this purpose:

RO1: Identify audience segments based on entrepreneurial self-efficacy, persistence, and alertness

RO2: Describe the identified audience segments' demographic characteristics

RO3: Describe the identified audience segments' communication preferences

RO4: Describe the identified audience segments' trust in information sources

RO5: Describe the identified audience segments' willingness to engage in societal behaviors

Methods

To develop strategic recommendations for entrepreneurship-based agritourism resources, we distributed an online quantitative survey instrument via Qualtrics to assess respondents' perceived entrepreneurial self-efficacy, persistence, alertness, trust in information sources, communication preferences, and willingness to engage in societal behaviors, such as involvement in agritourism policy development. The data in this study are part of a larger two-part study designed to understand the barriers and opportunities experienced by agritourism operators in Kansas, which received Kansas State University Institutional Review Board approval (IRB-13365) prior to data collection (Appendix H).

Population and Sample

The population consists of established and prospective Kansas agritourism operators, with participants recruited via purposive and snowball sampling. This non-probability approach was used to purposefully recruit participants who were 18 years of age or older and either operated an existing agritourism business or self-reported an actionable interest in establishing one. Actionable interest is researcher-defined in this study as an individual who will establish an agritourism business in the next five years and has begun the conceptual process of agritourism

business establishment. This method was chosen because the study requires participants who possess knowledge specific to the current agritourism industry. Purposive sampling is effective when research objectives involve a specialized population that cannot be easily identified through general sampling methods (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Furthermore, snowball sampling was used to address the geographic dispersion of operators. By leveraging networks of initial participants to identify others, this method allowed us to access hidden or hard-to-reach populations (Ting et al., 2025).

Following Dillman et al. (2014), a four-stage contact strategy was implemented to optimize participant engagement and minimize non-response bias. Beyond the initial invitation, follow-up reminders were distributed to non-respondents at 8, 15, and 19 days. Recruitment began on November 17 and concluded on December 12, 2025, with the final sample derived from two sources:

1) Kansas Farm Bureau: Participants were recruited through collaboration with the KFB's Director of Policy Development. The Kansas Farm Bureau recruited participants through its weekly e-news publication on Dec. 2 and Dec. 9 ($N = 11,000$). More frequent emails were also sent to a subset of members who expressed interest in agritourism ($N = 20$).

2) Kansas Agritourism Program: A recruitment solicitation, including the digital flyer and direct survey link, was distributed to a list of 418 active, registered agritourism operations. This direct email campaign followed the same multi-contact schedule (8,15,19 days) to ensure consistency across both recruitment platforms.

Similar sampling procedures have been used to collect agritourism information due to the lack of a comprehensive list of operators engaging in or interested in establishing agritourism operations

(Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009; Hollas et al., 2024; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). A total of 138 individuals engaged with the survey, yielding 93 usable responses for the final analysis. Based on a sample size calculation for an unknown population, 97 responses would be required to maintain a 10 percent margin of error at a 95 percent confidence level (Althubaiti, 2022; Cochran, 1977). While the final sample ($N = 93$) falls just short of this specific threshold, it achieves a calculated margin of error of 9.96 percent (Webster & Carpenter, 2021). Given the exploratory nature of this research and the proximity to a 10 percent margin of error, the dataset was deemed robust by the research team for the intended statistical analyses. Furthermore, the use of targeted samples of this size is consistent with entrepreneurship research where access to specific populations is limited (Cardon & Kirk, 2015).

Usable responses were deemed acceptable for respondents who answered “Yes” to the qualifier questions regarding farm ownership and current agritourism operation status or actionable interest. Additionally, incomplete responses or responses from those who sped through the survey (under two minutes) were removed (Greszki et al., 2015). Three individuals answered ‘No’ to participation; 15 were not current owners; five were not interested in establishing an agritourism operation within the next five years; one individual sped through the survey; and 21 individuals did not complete the survey ($n = 45$). Based on the number of respondents who started the study and those retained in the final sample, the survey completion rate was 67 percent.

The average age of agritourism operators was $M = 57.14$ ($SD = 11.91$), with ages ranging from 31 to 81. Most respondents identified as female (50%), Caucasian (94%), and held a bachelor’s degree (33%). Participants were primarily from the Northeast region (45%), followed

by the South Central region (24%). Table 3.1 presents additional demographic characteristics and the percentages for all completed responses.

Table 3.1

Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristic	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Female	46	50%
Male	43	46%
Prefer not to say	4	4%
Nonbinary/third gender	0	0
Race/Ethnicity		
Caucasian	87	94%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2	2%
Other	2	2%
Black or African American	1	1%
Hispanic/Latino	1	1%
Asian	0	0
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0
Education Level		
Some education	2	2%
High school diploma	14	15%
Trade School	8	9%
Associate's degree	10	11%
Bachelor's degree	30	33%

Master's degree	21	23%
Professional or advanced degree	8	9%
Region ¹		
Northeast	41	45%
South Central	23	24%
North Central	16	17%
Southeast	7	8%
Northwest	5	5%
Southwest	1	1%

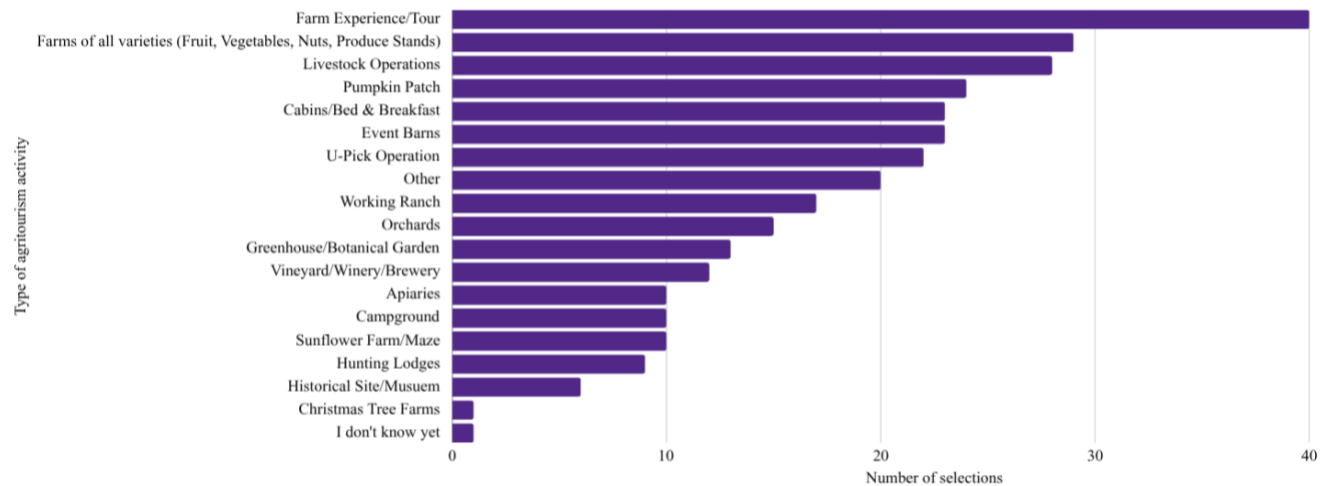
Note. $N = 93$

¹ Respondents were asked to select their county of residence, which was converted into regions.

Figure 3.1 describes the type of recognized agritourism activities respondents were involved in or interested in. Nearly two-thirds of respondents selected more than one type of agritourism operation classification ($n = 67$; 72%). The average number of agritourism activity classifications was $M = 3.44$ ($SD = 2.64$). The most popular agritourism activity chosen was *farm experience/tour* ($n = 40$), while the least popular activity was *Christmas tree farming* ($n = 1$). This aligns closely with the activities of current Kansas Agritourism Program registrants (Kansas Tourism, n.d.).

Figure 3.1

State-Recognized Agritourism Activities Classification



Note. $N = 93$. Agritourism operation classification was measured using a *select all that apply* approach, so the total ($n = 313$) exceeds the sample size. Larger figure depicted in Appendix L.

Instrument Development

Data were collected through a series of questions derived from prior literature (Baum & Locke, 2004; Cardon & Kirk, 2015; Huang et al., 2016; Li et al., 2020) to acquire relevant information to form the audience segments. To ensure face and content validity, a panel of experts reviewed the survey instrument for content accuracy, clarity, readability, accessibility, and survey flow (Dillman et al., 2014). The panel of experts was comprised of faculty in agricultural communications, horticulture and natural resources, cooperative extension, entrepreneurship, and management, in addition to a final review from the Kansas Farm Bureau Director of Policy Development. Prior to launching the survey questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted with respondents from the Missouri Farm Bureau ($N = 16$) to ensure reliability of the adapted and developed scale items (Dillman et al., 2014). All scales, except for persistence, were found to be reliable, meeting the threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.7$ (Nunnally, 1978; Taber, 2017). Although the persistence scale yielded a lower coefficient ($\alpha = 0.47$), the construct was included in the final survey instrument due to the content's applicability to the target population and use in previous literature (Baum & Locke, 2004; Cardon & Kirk, 2015). A *post-hoc* reliability test

established a Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.7$ for all constructs, ensuring all scales were reliable (Nunnally, 1978; Taber, 2017).

Data Collection Procedure and Variables

To complete the questionnaire, the respondents were first directed to a landing page detailing project information, confidentiality, potential benefits, and risks to participation. Following the landing page, potential participants were asked to consent to the survey prior to moving forward. They were then asked to respond to a series of questions to form and describe their audience segments, including entrepreneurial self-efficacy, persistence, alertness, trust in resources, communication preferences, and willingness to participate in policy development. The complete questionnaire is provided in Appendix K. Respondents then answered questions regarding their demographics and were asked two free-response questions regarding improvements to Kansas agritourism support programs. Finally, the respondents were thanked for their time and directed to a separate Qualtrics survey to collect personal information for the survey incentive, a random drawing for a YETI cooler and a matching travel mug set. This information was not connected to the participants' responses and was immediately destroyed following the raffle drawing.

Audience Segmentation Variables

The agritourism entrepreneur segments identified in this study were developed based on prior literature which encouraged the use of psychographic characteristics as segmentation variables, rather than general demographic characteristics (Orton et al., 2024; Warner et al., 2016). The variables collected in the survey questionnaire reflect the entrepreneurial psychographic characteristics driven by the prior literature to develop audience segments. We describe these variables in detail below:

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy was measured and accounted for in the audience segments due to its relationship with civic engagement and willingness to accept help from government and developmental initiatives (Chu et al., 2025; Saif et al., 2024). Self-efficacy was measured using four statements adapted from the constructs of Li et al. (2020) and Zhao et al. (2005) to fit the agritourism population (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$). Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the following (1= *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*): “I am convinced I can successfully discover new agritourism business opportunities”; “I am convinced I can successfully offer new experiences and/or products”; “I am convinced I can navigate business barriers on my own”; “I am convinced I can successfully market new offerings”. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy was measured by calculating the mean score of the four statements ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.85$).

Entrepreneurial Persistence. Entrepreneurial persistence is enhanced by support from both governmental bodies and industry partners. These partners provide three key resources: financial grants to overcome economic barriers, technical assistance programs for skill development, and predictable regulatory conditions that mitigate operational uncertainty (Shao & Wang, 2023). Entrepreneurial persistence was measured through four statements adapted from Baum & Locke (2004) and Cardon and Kirk's (2015) constructs to adhere to the agritourism population (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$). Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the following statements (1= *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*): “When faced with a barrier in my current/future business, I know how to navigate it using my previous knowledge”; “When faced with a barrier in my current/future business, I know who to go talk to”; “When faced with a barrier in my current/future business, I know I can go online and find a solution”; “When faced with a barrier in my current/future business, I always find ways to solve the issue”. While the

scale has low reliability in the pilot test (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.47$), a *post-hoc* reliability test found the scale to be reliable with a Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$. Entrepreneurial persistence was measured by calculating the mean score of the four statements ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.67$).

Entrepreneurial Alertness. Entrepreneurial alertness is an entrepreneur's ability to actively scan and search for information, allowing them to identify significant shifts in regulatory environments (Tang et al., 2012). Further, alert entrepreneurs may be more willing to seek governmental support or to participate in actively shaping policy development (Arisha et al., 2025; Kingdon, 2011). We measured alertness through three scales, adopted from Araujo et al. (2023) and Li et al. (2020), *scanning*, *association and connection*, and *evaluation and judgement* (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.70$). Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the following statements under the *scanning* scale (1= *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*) (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.73$): "I frequently seek out interactions with potential or current customers to learn new information"; "I frequently interact with established agritourism operators to learn new information"; "I browse the internet often looking for new information"; "I read articles, publications, and/or newsletters often to learn new information"; "I watch videos and explore social media posts often to learn new information".

Respondents were also asked to rate their agreement with the following statements under the *association and connection* scale (1= *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*) (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.70$): "I am good at navigating gaps in information"; "I am comfortable using my previous knowledge to 'connect the dots'"; "I am comfortable using my past entrepreneurial experiences to 'connect the dots'". Finally, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the following statements under the *evaluation and judgement* scale (1= *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*) (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$): "I can distinguish when an experience and/or product will be successful

or not”; “I am confident when choosing new business opportunities”; “When presented with new opportunities, I am able to recognize the most successful option”. Entrepreneurial alertness was measured by calculating the mean score of the eleven statements ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.47$).

Other variables

In addition to our segmentation variables, this study sought to describe how audience segments varied by demographic variables, perceived trust in agritourism support organizations, communication preferences, areas for support, and willingness to engage in societal behaviors, such as involvement in agritourism policy development. These scales were also included to enhance support resources for agritourism directly.

Trust in agritourism support organizations. In the current Kansas agritourism landscape, three organizations act as key industry support: the Kansas Agritourism Program, which provides online marketing and limited liability protection; K-State Research and Extension, which offers access to research-based information and local education; and the Kansas Farm Bureau, which lobbies for agricultural policy and connects agritourism operators to Farm Bureau Financial Services as primary insurers. Four scale items were developed for each respective organization. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the following four statements (1= *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.92$): “I trust that the [organization] is engaging in policies, procedures, and systems that benefit the industry”; “I trust that the [organization] is doing everything possible to effectively communicate with me”; “I trust that the information given to me from the [organization] will help my business succeed”; “I trust the [organization] is advocating for my needs as an agritourism operator”. Trust in agritourism support organizations was measured by calculating the mean score for each organization across the four statements: KFB ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.89$), KSRE ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.03$), and KAP ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.05$).

Communication preferences. To further our understanding of agritourism operators' willingness to participate and use resources, we asked respondents to answer a seven-item scale regarding their likelihood of using the following methods to gather information for their agritourism business (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$). Respondents were asked to rate the likelihood they would interact with the following resources (1 = *Very unlikely*, 5 = *Very likely*): "To get resources through online formats (e.g. YouTube Videos, online seminars, workshops)"; "To learn from organizations/industry partners"; "To learn from extension resources"; "To learn from other agritourism operators"; "To interact with other agritourism operators through online forums (e.g. Facebook groups, Instagram, Reddit)"; "In-person events to speak face-to-face to other operators"; "In-person courses dedicated to navigating agritourism challenges".

Willingness to participate in societal behaviors. To develop effective communication that targets interest in policy development and the use of agritourism resources, we also asked participants about their willingness to engage in societal behaviors (Huang et al., 2016). For our study, we specifically asked about their willingness to participate in the development of agritourism policy. To do so, we adjusted Huang et al.'s (2016) scale to assess participants' anticipated involvement in developing agritourism policy (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$). Respondents were asked to rate the likelihood they would interact with the following statements (1 = *Extremely unlikely*, 5 = *Extremely likely*): "Support agritourism policy advancement within the Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB)"; "Vote to support policies promoting agritourism expansion in state and county elections"; "Vote for candidates that support agritourism expansion"; "Visit other agritourism operations within the state"; "Donate to an organization that supports agritourism initiatives"; "Attend agritourism-relevant policy discussions"; "Support an agritourism-specific advocacy group that will solely address agritourism challenges".

Areas for support. To best inform strategic communications that enhance agritourism operations, we developed a specialized scale to identify the specific needs of Kansas agritourism operators. While not a primary objective of the study, the scale was created in response to insights from the preceding study (Reyes, 2025), which highlighted a lack of targeted resources. To ensure the instrument's validity, the scale was reviewed by a panel of experts from agricultural communications, extension, entrepreneurship, and management. The scale was deemed reliable in pilot (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$) and *post-hoc* testing (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$). Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the following seven statements (1= *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*): "I need support with business planning (includes building executive summaries, financial projections, etc.)"; "I need support with marketing and promotion"; "I need support with funding/grants"; "I need support with legal/regulatory guidance"; "I need support with insurance"; "I need support with networking opportunities"; I need support with professional development and business training opportunities". Areas for support were measured by calculating the mean score of the seven statements ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.78$).

Data Analysis

To develop the audience segments, data were analyzed in SPSS V.30 using a two-stage cluster analysis approach (Yim & Ramdeen, 2015). This method leverages the strengths of both hierarchical and K-means clustering to ensure a stable, interpretable solution. First, a Hierarchical Cluster Analysis (HCA) using Ward's Method with squared Euclidean distance was performed. Ward's method was selected because it is designed to minimize within-cluster variance, thereby effectively uncovering distinct, cohesive groups within a population (Everitt et al., 2011; Ward, 1963). A visual inspection of the agglomeration schedule and dendrogram was used to identify the number of clusters representing the maximized dissimilarity in the data

(Everitt et al., 2011; Ward, 1963; Yim & Ramdeen, 2015). Following the HCA, a K-means clustering analysis was conducted to assign respondents to observed cluster segments. This iterative process ensures each individual is assigned to the cluster with the closest mean, thereby maximizing the internal validity of the segments (Gibson et al., 2021). Raw scores were utilized for all clustering variables as they were measured on identical five-point Likert scales. Alpha level of significance was set a priori at $p \leq 0.05$.

To validate and describe the resulting clusters, a series of descriptive crosstabs and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed. Eta squared (η^2) was used as the effect size measure to determine the practical significance of group differences, interpreted as small (0.01), medium (0.06), or large (.14) (Cohen, 1988; Miller, 2016). Statistical assumptions were met for all analyses. For crosstabulations, independence of observations was maintained, and expected cell frequencies were monitored to ensure the validity of the chi-square test. For ANOVAs, normality and independence were confirmed; homogeneity of variance was then evaluated using Levene's test (Field, 2018). When this assumption was met, standard One-Way ANOVA results were reported. For variables that violated the assumption of equal variances ($p < .05$), the Welch's t-test was utilized. In cases in which statistical significance is not indicated, the highest means of that cluster are presented.

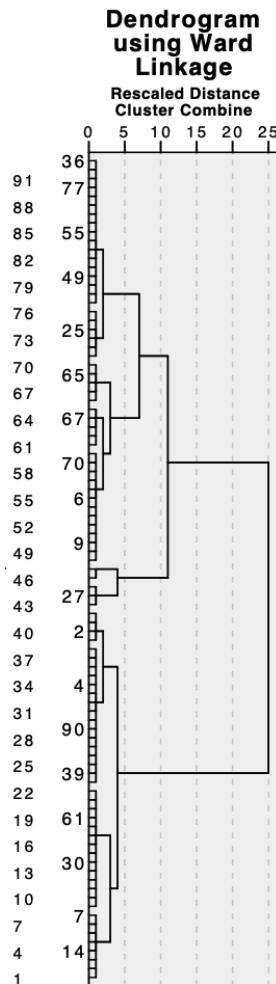
Results

RO1: Identify audience segments based on entrepreneurial self-efficacy, persistence, and alertness.

A two-stage cluster analysis was conducted to group similar participants based on their self-reported scores for entrepreneurial self-efficacy, persistence, and alertness. First, an HCA was performed to determine the optimal number of clusters, as illustrated in the final dendrogram.

Figure 3.2

Final dendrogram result of clusters based on entrepreneurial self-efficacy, persistence, and alertness



Based on these results, a K-means clustering analysis was used to assign each participant to one of the two unique segments. To validate these clusters, ANOVAs were conducted, confirming that each variable contributed significantly to the cluster formation, with all variables showing statistically significant differences between groups at $p < 0.001$ (Everitt et al., 2011). The final cluster analysis centers (Table 3.2) revealed two distinct segments based on the entrepreneurial self-efficacy, persistence, and alertness. Cluster 2 ($n = 48$) shows higher levels of

self-efficacy ($M = 4.30$; $SD = 0.42$), persistence ($M = 4.14$; $SD = 0.53$), and alertness ($M = 4.13$; $SD = 0.45$) than Cluster 1 ($n = 45$). One-way ANOVA confirmed that these differences were statistically significant across all variables ($p < 0.001$). Specifically, self-efficacy demonstrated the strongest differentiation between the two groups, accounting for 52% of the variance ($\eta^2 = .52$). However, large effect sizes were observed for both persistence ($\eta^2 = .22$) and alertness ($\eta^2 = .17$), indicating strong practical significance between clusters.

Table 3.2

Final Cluster Analysis Centers Resulting from K-Means Analysis ($N = 93$)

	Cluster 1 ($n = 45$)		Cluster 2 ($n = 48$)		F (1, 91)	p	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD			
Self-efficacy	3.08	0.73	4.30	0.42	99.68	<.001	.52
Persistence	3.51	0.67	4.14	0.52	25.86	<.001	.22
Alertness	3.74	0.42	4.13	0.45	18.62	<.001	.17

Note. **Bold** represents the highest mean in that cluster.

RO2: Describe the identified audience segments' demographic characteristics

After identifying the audience segments through K-means clustering, we sought to understand how these segments differed by demographic characteristics. Table 3.3 presents the demographic characteristics of the two clusters. A Pearson's chi-square test was run for age ($\chi^2(4) = 3.46$, $p = 0.48$), nationality/ethnicity ($\chi^2(4) = 3.92$, $p = 0.42$), and education level ($\chi^2(6) = 9.18$, $p = 0.16$). For gender, a marginal trend was observed, yet is not considered statistically significant under the $p \leq 0.05$ threshold ($\chi^2(2) = 4.97$, $p = 0.08$). Specifically, Cluster 2 had a higher percentage of female respondents (58.3%), while Cluster 1 was composed of more male respondents (58%).

Table 3.3*Cluster Membership Demographic Characteristics (N = 93)*

Demographic Variable		Cluster 1 (n = 45)		Cluster 2 (n = 48)	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Female	18	40%	28	58.3%
	Male	26	58%	17	35.4%
	Non-Binary/ Third Gender	0	0	0	0
	Prefer not to say	1	2%	3	6%
Age ¹	18-34	2	4%	1	2%
	35-44	4	9%	5	10%
	45-54	14	31%	12	25%
	55-64	9	20%	16	33%
	65+	17	38%	14	29%
Race/Ethnicity	Caucasian	42	93%	43	90%
	Black or African American	0	0	1	2%
	American Indian or Alaskan Native	0	0	2	4%
	Asian	0	0	0	0
	Hispanic/Latino	1	2%	0	0
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0
	Other	2	4%	2	4%

Education Level

Some education	2	5%	0	0
High school diploma	7	16%	7	15%
Trade school	2	5%	6	13%
Associate's degree	4	10%	6	13%
Bachelor's degree	17	39%	13	27%
Master's degree	7	16%	14	29%
Professional or advanced degree	6	14%	2	4%

¹Respondents were asked to enter their age in years. After we recorded this number into five categories.

RO3: Describe the identified audience segments' communication preferences

To better understand agritourism operators' engagement with communications, it is essential to identify the most effective delivery method for each segment. Below, we present the likelihood of using various communication preferences for each identified cluster group (Table 3.4). A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference for "To get resources through online formats (e.g., YouTube Videos, online seminars, workshops)", $F(1,91) = 4.62$, $p = 0.03$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$. The observed effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.05$) represents a small-to-medium effect, accounting for 5% of the total variance following Cohen's (1988) benchmarks. No other one-way ANOVA test indicated statistical significance amongst clusters.

Table 3.4

Cluster Memberships Preferred Communication Sources (N = 93)

	Cluster 1 (<i>n</i> = 45)		Cluster 2 (<i>n</i> = 48)		F (1, 91)	<i>p</i>	η^2
Communication Preference	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
To get resources through online formats	4.16	0.67	4.46	0.68	4.63	0.03	0.05
To learn from orgs/industry partners	3.96	0.74	4.08	0.87	0.58	0.45	0
To learn from extension resources	3.53	1.04	3.77	1.06	1.20	0.28	0.01
To interact with other agritourism operators	4.00	0.98	4.13	0.89	0.42	0.52	0
To interact with other agritourism operators through online forums	3.67	1.15	3.67	1.21	0	1.0	0
In person events to speak face-to-face to other operators	3.56	1.14	3.77	1.23	0.77	0.38	0.01
In-person courses dedicated to navigating agritourism challenges	3.53	1.01	3.65	1.06	0.27	0.60	0

Note. **Bold** represents the highest mean in that cluster.

In addition to asking respondents to identify their preferred mode of communication, we also asked about areas where the most support is needed. Below, we present the likelihood of using various communication preferences for each identified cluster group (Table 3.5). A one-way ANOVA did not indicate statistically significant differences between clusters across most channels; however, Cluster 1 showed higher means across all support areas. A significant difference was observed for “I need support with legal/regulatory guidance” ($F(1, 91) = 4.01$, $p = 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$), accounting for 4% of the variance. Cluster 1 demonstrated a greater need for this specific support area ($M = 3.93$; $SD = 1.03$) than cluster 2 ($M = 3.48$; $SD = 1.15$). However,

both clusters expressed the greatest need for “I need support with funding/grants”: Cluster 1 ($M = 4.09$; $SD = 1.27$) and Cluster 2 ($M = 4.00$; $SD = 1.05$).

Table 3.5

Cluster Memberships Needed Areas for Support (N = 93)

Needed Areas for Support	Cluster 1 ($n = 45$)		Cluster 2 ($n = 48$)		F (1, 91)	p	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD			
I need support with business planning	3.22	1.15	3.10	1.31	0.21	0.65	0
I need support with marketing and promotion	3.78	1.2	3.54	1.11	0.98	0.32	0.01
I need support with funding/grants	4.09	1.27	4.00	1.05	0.14	0.71	0
I need support with legal/regulatory guidance	3.93	1.03	3.48	1.15	4.01	0.05	0.04
I need support with insurance	3.58	1.34	3.33	1.34	0.77	0.38	0.08
I need support with networking opportunities	3.51	0.97	3.46	1.13	0.06	0.81	0
I need support with professional development and business training opportunities	3.31	0.87	3.17	1.33	0.38	0.54	0

Note. **Bold** represents the highest mean in that cluster.

RO4: Describe the identified audience segments’ trust in information sources

In order to understand agritourism operators’ engagement with communications, it is essential to understand what organizations operators trust the most. Below, we present the levels of trust for each identified cluster group (Table 3.6). A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference between clusters for trust in K-State Research and Extension (KSRE), $F(1, 91) = 3.57$, $p = 0.04$. The calculated effect size was $\eta^2 = 0.05$, which, according to Cohen (1988), represents

a small-to-medium effect, indicating 5% of the variance. Specifically, Cluster 2 reported a higher mean trust in KSRE ($M = 3.72$; $SD = 1.05$) than Cluster 1 ($M = 3.27$; $SD = 0.96$). Notably, across both segments, the Kansas Agritourism Program (KAP) emerged as the most trusted information source: Cluster 1 ($M = 3.78$; $SD = 0.88$) and Cluster 2 ($M = 3.86$; $SD = 0.92$), showing no significant difference between groups ($p = 0.68$). The Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB) received the lowest relative trust scores amongst clusters, Cluster 1 ($M = 2.97$; $SD = 1.06$) and Cluster 2 ($M = 3.13$; $SD = 1.05$).

Table 3.6

Cluster Memberships Trusted Organizations (N = 93)

Organization	Cluster 1 (n = 45)		Cluster 2 (n = 48)		F (1, 91)	p	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD			
Kansas Farm Bureau	2.97	1.06	3.13	1.05	0.49	0.49	0
Kansas Agritourism Program	3.78	0.88	3.86	0.92	0.18	0.68	0
K-State Research and Extension	3.27	0.96	3.72	1.05	4.57	0.04	0.05

Note. **Bold** represents the highest mean for that cluster. Average scores based on question stem “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding [Organization]”.

RO5: Describe the identified audience segments’ willingness to engage in societal behaviors

To understand the civic engagement of Kansas agritourism operators, we assessed operators’ willingness to engage in societal behaviors. Below, we present the mean likelihood of participation between the two segments (Table 3.7). A one-way ANOVA indicated no statistically significant differences between the two clusters across the seven items measuring audience segments’ willingness to engage in societal behaviors. However, the results suggest although the segments differ in their internal entrepreneurial mindset, they share a unified

commitment to civic engagement. Respondents in Cluster 1 indicated a high willingness to engage in agritourism-related actions, particularly “Voting to support policies promoting agritourism expansion in state and county elections” ($M = 4.27$; $SD = 0.75$) and “Voting for candidates that support agritourism expansion” ($M = 4.33$; $SD = 0.77$). Cluster 2 indicated a similar willingness to engage in societal behavior, illustrated through “Vote for candidates that support agritourism expansion” ($M = 4.54$; $SD = 0.68$) and “Voting to support policies promoting agritourism expansion in state and county elections” ($M = 4.52$; $SD = 0.71$).

Table 3.7

Cluster Membership Willingness to Engage in Societal Behaviors (N = 93)

	Cluster 1 (n = 45)		Cluster 2 (n = 48)		F (1, 91)	p	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD			
Support agritourism policy advancement within the KFB	3.42	1.16	3.46	1.17	0.02	0.88	0
Vote to support policies promoting agritourism expansion in state and county elections	4.27	0.75	4.52	0.71	2.80	0.10	0.03
Vote for candidates that support agritourism expansion	4.33	0.77	4.54	0.68	1.91	0.17	0.02
Visit other agritourism operations within the state	4.04	0.82	4.08	0.82	0.05	0.82	0.03
Donate to an organization that supports agritourism initiatives	3.33	0.85	3.65	0.93	2.83	0.10	0.03
Attend agritourism-relevant policy discussions	3.49	0.97	3.79	0.92	2.39	0.13	0.03

Support an agritourism-specific advocacy group that will solely address agritourism challenges	3.76	0.93	3.92	0.99	0.65	0.42	0
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Note. **Bold** represents the highest mean in that cluster.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe distinct segments among Kansas agritourism operators to inform strategic support communications tailored to operators' entrepreneurial characteristics. While extensive literature exists on segmenting agritourism tourists (Baby & Kim, 2025; Lwoga, 2020; Sullins et al., 2010; Varmazyari, 2018), research has largely overlooked the psychological profile of agritourism operators. This study addresses that gap, providing a tangible foundation for exploring the internal drivers of these entrepreneurs while identifying some of the most effective methods of organizational support. By using audience segmentation, we gain a better understanding of operators based on their psychological and behavioral mindsets (Warner et al., 2016). Therefore, agricultural organizations focused on agritourism development can design targeted resources essential to the long-term sustainability and viability of the state's agritourism industry (Orton et al., 2025).

The results of the K-means cluster analysis revealed two distinct clusters, which, while demographically similar, possess different psychological profiles. We review key characteristics of each identified cluster and provide recommendations to inform strategic support communications and resources tailored to each specific group.

Cluster 1

Respondents in Cluster 1 demonstrated greater caution than those in Cluster 2, characterized by choosing stability over risk. Their lower levels of self-efficacy and persistence suggest these operators may feel overwhelmed with the changing demands of agritourism. While

these individuals are not looking for the next best thing for their specific operation, they are actively seeking to understand emerging industry trends. Therefore, we've named this cluster, "The Rooted Residents". The Rooted Residents are passionate individuals who may not have the skills or confidence to pivot when issues arise, as evidenced by higher averages in the areas that require support. Specifically, these operators expressed the need for resources focused on grant acquisition, marketing and promotion, and legal and regulatory guidance.

Similar to their counterparts, the Rooted Residents emphasize the use of digital media as a learning tool; however, they are less interested than the Cluster 2. A surprising finding lies in their second preference for information gathering, "To learn from other operators". This result is also consistent with their behavior, as the Rooted Residents exemplified a higher propensity toward "Visit other agritourism operations". This preference is supported by Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and echoes the way farmers at large learn, by seeing the concept in action before initiating the behavior themselves (BenYishay & Mobarak, 2014; Leta et al., 2018)

Additionally, our Rooted Residents display greater trust in the Kansas Agritourism Program, aligning more closely with industry-specific knowledge shared by KAP than from KSRE. Notably, these operators do not fully trust the KFB for agritourism-related resources, yet, similar to Cluster 2, they express interest in engaging with an agritourism advocate. Despite their lower entrepreneurial traits and business confidence, these operators are equally committed to improving their communities as their counterparts. As illustrated by their high propensity towards "Vote to support policies promoting agritourism expansion in state and county elections," and "Vote for candidates that support agritourism expansion", their lack of business confidence does not mean a lack of community care. Our Rooted Residents may not be pushing innovation; rather, they are the steady driving force of the industry.

Cluster 2

Cluster 2 was identified as the higher users of entrepreneurial knowledge, therefore, we've named this cluster "The High-Yield Harvesters". Individuals in this group displayed higher levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and persistence. Operators in this group seek out further areas for growth, as demonstrated by their higher levels of entrepreneurial alertness. These individuals do not wait for opportunity; they go and seek success. Entrepreneurs who are more alert are constantly scanning for new revenue streams or ways to adapt to mitigate potential troubleshooting (Arisha et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2012).

High-Yield Harvesters are interested in continuous learning and information seeking, particularly through their significant preference for "To get resources through online formats (e.g., YouTube Videos, online seminars, workshops)." They are drawn to the ease of online access and are likely to use YouTube and online webinars to get one step ahead of the curve. Moreover, our High-Yield Harvesters act as innovators and early adopters (Rogers, 1962), prioritizing credibility and practical benefits, and require greater trust in partner organizations and industry partners for growth. Interestingly, this cluster shows greater trust in information from KSRE than Cluster 1, highlighting Cluster 2's interest in using local and state cooperative extension services as a primary resource. The High-Yield Harvesters are likely to be more receptive to information focused on securing funding and grants, as well as on marketing and promoting the agritourism operation.

The High-Yield Harvesters demonstrate a community-minded approach to business, rather than a purely self-interested one. This is evidenced by their high level of civic activity, specifically their interest in voting for candidates and engaging in policies that support agritourism. Because this group is actively seeking an industry advocate and trusts the KFB more than Cluster 1, the KFB is uniquely positioned to step in and lead their agritourism advocacy

efforts. High-Yield Harvesters take serving their community to the next level, extending it beyond the parameters of their operations. As demonstrated by their interest in visiting other agritourism operators and operations, the High-Yield Harvesters are at the forefront of discovering agritourism innovation.

Recommendations for Practice

As expected, a “one-size-fits-all” approach is insufficient for Kansas agritourism operators, meaning resources and opportunities must be targeted to fit the individual needs of each identified cluster group. For our High-Yield Harvesters, higher levels of entrepreneurial characteristics indicate a greater interest in challenging, innovative learning. Though both clusters are highly educated, the High-Yield Harvesters may be more apt to receive information that delves deeper into the intricacies of agritourism, such as acquiring funding and grants, legal and regulatory guidance, and marketing and promotion. KSRE is uniquely positioned to fill this gap, leveraging emerging research with access to build targeted materials that engage these innovative operators. These individuals do not need confidence-building workshops; instead, they crave education that advances their operations. The High-Yield Harvesters are excited for more, so it is apt for supportive organizations to provide tiered professional development, pushing harder to tackle topics that emphasize moving forward.

While our Rooted Residents may not display as high of entrepreneurial psychographic characteristics, they are the core of the industry. These individuals are similarly seeking information as their counterparts; however, they are more interested in the present than the future. With this, operators in the Rooted Residents cluster may be more receptive to information and resources that build their self-efficacy. Rather than pushing the next step, information and resources for these operators should prioritize small wins to build confidence. For example, these operators may be more receptive to workshops or resources focused on finding local and state-

wide grants, rather than on acquiring competitive, large-scale federal grants. Likewise, instead of intense workshops with heavy content, these Rooted Residents may be more receptive to short, online workshops that reduce the perceived risks of trying something new.

An interesting opportunity arises from the difference between the two clusters, particularly surrounding how the operators learn. Both the Rooted Residents and the High-Yield Harvesters scored similarly, preferring to gather information from peers. This social learning component offers Rooted Residents the opportunity to learn directly from High-Yield Harvesters. For example, the Rooted Residents may be likely to increase their alertness by scanning the High-Yield Harvesters' implementation of new practices. The findings suggest that organizational support in Kansas must move beyond technical assistance and begin addressing the gap in self-efficacy. By using High-Yield Harvesters as peer mentors, organizations can build Rooted Residents' internal confidence. A formal peer-to-peer network, driven by the High-Yield cluster, could, in turn, result in innovative practices reaching all facets of the industry. Further, this gives KAP, KSRE, and KFB an opportunity to facilitate Rooted Residents' learning directly from High-Yield Harvesters, either through farm visits or continued formal networking.

To enhance support from the three organizations, it is imperative that KAP acts as the driving force for all communications, as operators trust the program the most. KAP can effectively promote the continued partnerships with KSRE and KFB; however, they must continue to act as the primary channel of communication to be effective. KAP must support both clusters; however, they must act as the primary translators for the Rooted Residents. Since these operators exhibit lower levels of entrepreneurial alertness, they may miss market shifts or innovative ideas unless they are explicitly shown. Where the Harvesters may be more likely to synthesize raw information, such as census data or market trends, the Rooted Residents need

KAP to translate it and make it digestible. For example, if new global market trends show growing interest in luxury camping, the Rooted Residents will need KAP to synthesize the information and directly express how this could benefit them if adopted.

As identified in this study, High-Yield Harvesters prioritize high-level entrepreneurial growth. Their presence and receptiveness to targeted resources can be exemplified by the metric patterns of the KSRE and KAP webpages, specifically in content focused on advancing industry trends and technological advancement. Additionally, an operator implementing AI-driven marketing strategies or expanding their enterprise to include a Farm-to-Table, personifies this cluster's propensity for innovation. These individuals can also be seen as outspoken advocates for systematic change and industry advancement as evidenced in their active leadership in local governance initiatives and organizations, and their willingness to engage in strategic litigation to challenge or redefine existing regulatory frameworks. Conversely, Rooted Residents exhibit a propensity for social learning and incremental improvement. Their engagement is most visible through participation in farm visits and networking events, where they can learn directly from other operators. This cluster prioritizes practical, skill-building content, meaning high traffic metrics for introductory resources suggests individuals engaging with this content may fall into the Rooted Resident cluster.

Communication efforts must be concentrated on digital and online resources. Both clusters identified learning from online content was imperative to their continued success; however, as illustrated above, this content must be tailored and varied (Warner et al., 2016). For example, High-Yield Harvesters will be responsive to content promoting innovative technologies and practices, whereas Rooted Residents will be more apt to respond to success stories. This also provides Harvesters with an opportunity to be the focal points for the content shared with Rooted

Residents. If this cluster can see the success stories of fellow operators in similar industry conditions, they will be more confident in adopting those ideas. The content would be most relevant to both segments of agritourism operators if it addresses funding and grant navigation; however, the Rooted Residents will require more support than their counterparts with content on legal/regulatory guidance.

This study challenges the traditional reliance on demographic characteristics for audience segmentation, assuming variables such as age, years of experience, and farm size are the primary predictors of business behavior (Orton et al., 2024). Our findings provide a counter-narrative by identifying two clusters that are demographically indistinguishable but psychologically distinct implying the engine that drives an operation depends heavily on the operator. Aligning closely with Entrepreneurial Cognition and Learning theory (Mitchell et al, 2002; Cacciolatti & Lee, 2015), a human-centered approach to understanding entrepreneurs is essential, especially in segmentation efforts. Specifically, the lower alertness and self-efficacy scores from the Rooted Residents suggest a psychological barrier to information seeking. For example, if KSRE or KAP produces resources solely for the audience at large, an operator with lower internal confidence may perceive those resources as too confusing or out of scope. As these organizations develop resources, it is essential to shift toward a goal that prioritizes communication that builds and nurtures confidence (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024).

Limitations & Recommendations Future Research

The primary limitation of this study is the sample size. As aforementioned, the sample size calculation for an unknown population indicates that 97 responses would be required to maintain a 10 percent margin of error at a 95 percent confidence level (Althubaiti, 2022; Cochran, 1977); however, this study fell under this threshold. Due to the sample size, generalizability is a significant limitation of the study, as the sample was not representative of all

agritourism operators in Kansas. The use of non-probability opt-in sampling is an acknowledged limitation due to the potential for sample bias (Gibson et al., 2021). Additionally, future efforts may benefit from a data-collection period outside holiday seasons and from broader communication, with an emphasis on both online and in-person survey methods, to ensure participation across all regions of Kansas.

A larger sample size may encourage investigation of regional differences as direct influences on entrepreneurial traits and economic performance. This larger sample size may also reveal additional clusters showing the needs of other operators with differing entrepreneurial characteristics. Replicating this study in other contexts outside Kansas may also be advantageous for developing our understanding of the entrepreneurial characteristics of agritourism operators as a whole. To further advance our understanding of the agritourism industry specifically, future observational studies should investigate participants who actively engage in societal behaviors. This work should explore whether those who are active in civic engagement display higher entrepreneurial traits or whether another underlying motivator is at work.

While this study provides a foundational psychological map of Kansas agritourism operators, several avenues for future research remain. Future studies are needed to correlate entrepreneurial characteristics with financial performance to determine the economic impact of the mindset gap (Hardesty, 2018; Putta, 2023; Streifeneder et al., 2022). Likewise, future research should continue to investigate the need for grant acquisition, marketing, and legal guidance, especially as it pertains to the entrepreneurial psychographic characteristics (Collins et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024). Additionally, the gender differences found in this study warrant further investigation with larger sample sizes to determine whether female operators indeed display higher, more unique entrepreneurial characteristics (Laouiti et al., 2022). In light of the

suggestion of formal peer-to-peer learning, future quantitative and qualitative studies should assess the effectiveness of these support efforts. Mainly, these studies should focus on the effectiveness of training, resources, and outward-facing communications tailored to each cluster and further corroborate the use of successful operators as a catalyst for innovation. Future longitudinal studies should further explore the relationship between entrepreneurial psychographic characteristics and the actual establishment of an agritourism business for prospective operators (Urban, 2020). An exploration of visitors' perspectives would be fruitful for understanding the business manifestation of these entrepreneurial characteristics in practice (Tew & Barbieri, 2012).

Conclusion

This study moves beyond the traditional approach to agricultural outreach by examining the entrepreneurial psychological characteristics of Kansas agritourism operators. While prior research has focused on segmenting agritourism tourists (Baby & Kim, 2025; Lwoga, 2020; Sullins et al., 2010; Varmazyari, 2018), this study provides a necessary pivot toward the operator, revealing that the current industry landscape comprises two distinct clusters: the High-Yield Harvesters and the Rooted Residents. These clusters may share demographic characteristics, but they differ in mindset gaps in self-efficacy, persistence, and alertness that shape how they seek information, whom they trust, and how they envision the future of their enterprises. The findings underscore that for the industry to remain viable and sustainable, support organizations like KAP, KSRE, and KFB must look past general demographics and begin addressing the internal entrepreneurial traits of the operators they serve. Leveraging entrepreneurial cognition (Mitchell et al, 2002; Cacciolatti & Lee, 2015) and social learning (Bandura, 1977), organizations can foster community amongst operators, rooted in trust. By

using operators themselves as prime examples of where innovation and risk can take the industry, Kansas organizations can bridge the efficacy gap illustrated in this study. Ultimately, the sustainability of the agritourism industry in Kansas depends not on the quality of operations, but on the psychological resilience and entrepreneurial confidence of the operators who run them. This research serves as a foundational step in ensuring that all Kansas agritourism operators have the tailored support needed to thrive in an ever-evolving, unpredictable agricultural landscape.

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Chapter Four - Overarching Conclusions & Recommendations for Kansas Agritourism

Implications & Recommendations

The overarching purpose of this study is to examine the entrepreneurial challenges and opportunities faced by agritourism operators in Kansas that affect business development and long-term viability. To accomplish this purpose, two independent yet interconnected research phases were conducted to identify the entrepreneurial barriers, opportunities, and identities shaping Kansas agritourism. The two phases each addressed a separate purpose with unique research questions and objectives:

From Farmer to Founder: A Qualitative Analysis of Kansas Agritourism Operators’ Entrepreneurial Journeys (Phase One)

RQ1: What career experiences motivate operators to start and sustain an agritourism business?

RQ2: What entrepreneurial knowledge do agritourism operators rely on when considering starting or expanding their agritourism business?

RQ3: How do agritourism operators demonstrate exploitation or exploration modes of transformational learning?

RQ4: What factors influence the transformational learning process of agritourism business operators?

Targeting Growth: Segmenting the Entrepreneurial Drivers of Kansas Agritourism Operators (Phase Two)

RO1: Identify audience segments based on entrepreneurial alertness, persistence, and self-efficacy

RO2: Describe the identified audience segments’ demographic characteristics

RO3: Describe the identified audience segments' communication preferences

RO4: Describe the identified audience segments' trust in information sources

RO5: Describe the identified audience segments' willingness to engage in societal behaviors

Overview of Study Phases

Phase One

Phase one of the larger sequential, mixed-method study identified the factors impacting established and prospective agritourism operators, areas for growth and expansion, and primary motivations behind business establishment. Using seven focus groups and three interviews grounded in the Entrepreneurial Learning Framework (Politis, 2005) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1971; 1977), this study qualitatively described agritourism operators' ($N = 54$) entrepreneurial intentions and internal motivations. Likewise, this study identified major barriers impacting business establishment and expansion, highlighting an instrumental disconnect between available resources and operator accessibility.

Within the focus groups, participants were asked a series of questions regarding their businesses, including their motivations and outcomes, opportunities and restraints, and educational influences. A phronetic, iterative approach (Tracy, 2018) was employed for data analysis, yielding multiple key themes. Regarding the factors influencing operators' willingness to start and sustain their agritourism operations, participants highlighted three major themes: *prior agricultural careers*, *prior careers outside agriculture*, and *technical agricultural education*. Participants emphasized these three themes as influential factors in the establishment and expansion, as they provided operators with the resources and experience to navigate the intricacies of agritourism.

Participants described *previously failed ventures* and *risk management* as the primary entrepreneurial knowledge they depended on when considering starting or expanding their agritourism operations. Their *previously failed ventures* allowed operators to readjust, reconceptualize, and retry previously unsuccessful ideas with the new information gained. Further, this allowed operators to develop their *risk management* knowledge to mitigate issues in their operations while also teaching them when to undertake unpredictable activities. With this, operators heavily depended on feedback from their customer base, identifying the use of *customer-refined activities* as a means of exploitative learning. Over time, this feedback loop between customers and providers fostered trust while also allowing operators to learn and improve on the activities customers expect to experience reliably. Further, it was determined that operators engaged more in explorative learning, primarily through *offering novel experiences* and *exploring marketing and digital education*. Explorative learning provided valuable experiences that fostered creativity and enabled operators to explore new business ideas; this was particularly evident as operators described their interest in adopting new marketing practices.

The operators highlighted seven major barriers that influence the transformational learning process, with particular emphasis on financial barriers, including *unstable federal funding*, *increased taxation*, and *rising insurance costs*. Federally funded grants were described as influential to agritourism establishment and expansion, with many fearing their success is tied to funding that is becoming increasingly uncertain. Further, agritourism's unique positioning under the Department of Commerce, rather than the Department of Agriculture, has exacerbated the disconnect between tax classifications and the resulting rising costs. Additionally, despite limited liability protections, coverage is often insufficient, and many providers simply avoid the unique risks of agritourism. Many participants highlight the role of the Kansas Farm Bureau and

Farm Bureau Financial Services as their primary insurer; however, many note that this cultivates a monopoly in which Farm Bureau Financial Services can take advantage of being the sole insurer of operators in this state.

The federal funding, taxation, and insurance barriers combine to create a need identified by participants for an *agritourism advocacy group*, specifically to address county- and statewide-level governance issues. While they are passionate about advocacy, operators find that being their own advocates is another added responsibility that will become unmanageable. Notably, participants questioned the roles of the Kansas Agritourism Program (KAP) and the Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB) throughout advocacy conversations. Many attributed KAP as an administrative database, with *inaccessible educational resources*, rather than a collective voice for operators. Prospective operators especially noted inaccessible marketing and educational resources as major barriers to entry, specifically citing KAP and K-State Research & Extension (KSRE) as insufficient in this area. In contrast, established operators noted this inaccessibility led them to pursue outside resources, particularly on platforms like YouTube.

Our sample consisted mainly of operators from the Northeast and South Central Regions, yet many participants noted that *regional differences* were a major barrier to agritourism expansion. Those near urban centers faced more conflict with county regulators but could rely on a more consistent flow of visitors. At the same time, those in rural areas could experience less oversight but struggle to maintain a consistent flow of customers. Additionally extrinsic factors, such as the *COVID-19* pandemic, revealed notable differences amongst agritourism activities, as the impacts were felt in varied capacities. However, the factors that impacted the transformational process were not solely negative, as the final theme, *social interactions becoming assets*, highlighted social components throughout the development of an agritourism

operation. Social interactions, whether with their customer base, organizations, or former colleagues, serve as assets for their future business endeavors. Further, the industry connections made serve as instrumental building blocks throughout the life of the operation.

We found a notable interplay among prior experiences, learned knowledge, social connections, and external barriers. Past failures led operators to engage in experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), enabling them to fail, reflect, reconceptualize, and test new experiences. Our findings emphasize that an operator's customer base initiates exploitative and exploratory methods of transformational learning, with a focus on the role of observational learning and customer reinforcement. The agritourism operators in our study are more likely to observe and replicate successful practices of other operators.

Phase Two

The results of phase one identified major barriers as a critical factor in the entrepreneurial journey of agritourism operators, with a particular emphasis on financial and resource constraints. Namely, the operators expressed a clear interest in an agritourism advocate, highlighting a need for a collective voice to effect policy development. Participants question the roles of KAP and KFB, express concerns about technical language in resources, and raise questions about the capacity of cooperative extension agents from KSRE. Therefore, Phase Two sought to identify specific psychological and entrepreneurial characteristics to inform the tailoring of communications and agritourism resources, using a 27-point Likert-type scale administered via KAP and KFB listservs ($N = 92$). This phase employed audience segmentation and cluster analysis to identify distinct segments based on three key entrepreneurial pillars: self-efficacy, persistence, and alertness. Further, the segments were described based on demographics, communication preferences, trust in information sources, and willingness to

engage in societal behaviors, such as increased civic engagement and interacting with potential agritourism advocates.

Two distinct segments were identified: the High-Yield Harvesters and the Rooted Residents. These segments were indistinguishable by demographics but differed in levels of the specified entrepreneurial characteristics. The High-Yield Harvesters were identified as having high levels of self-efficacy, persistence, and alertness, while the Rooted Residents displayed moderate levels of these characteristics. Described as cautious entrepreneurs, the Rooted Residents emphasized the need for peer-to-peer learning, deep trust in KAP, and resources that highlight success stories. On the other hand, the High-Yield Harvesters are described as innovative, ambitious entrepreneurs who need high-level, tiered professional development. These individuals responded well to technical resources from the KSRE and expressed interest in resources that helped advance their operations. Both segments, however, identified a need for support regarding funding and grant education, a continued interest in online resources, primarily videos on platforms like YouTube, and a deep interest in interacting with an agritourism advocate and policies that advance agritourism initiatives.

Overarching Discussion

The two-phase approach comprises two distinct studies aimed at developing resources to support agritourism entrepreneurs in Kansas. The previous chapters discussed each study in detail, yet reviewing the studies together best explains the intricacies of developing targeted resources that collectively apply the findings of the respective studies. Therefore, this section will discuss the collective implications of these findings for future studies and practice.

Participants reported consistent barriers and areas of support across both phases, similar to the findings of Collins et al. (2024). Marketing, funding acquisition, and navigating legal and

regulatory challenges were consistent concerns from operators. Operators primarily raised these concerns when discussing the role of support organizations in the overall development of the agritourism industry. Specifically, operators in both studies highlighted the KAP, KSRE, and the KFB as the most active organizations influencing the development of their operations. Both phases highlight the importance of KAP, as operators collectively recognized the program's role in business decisions. Further, both phases revealed operators are interested in supporting an agritourism advocate, especially in the face of increasing barriers. This specific finding from phase one informed Phase Two's exploration of the KFB, possibly fitting this gap. However, operators across both studies similarly revealed perceived misalignments between expectations and the organization's stated industry intentions.

Both phases highlight the importance of social and peer-to-peer learning as key tools throughout their business development. Operators in both phases emphasized the use of other agritourism operators as primary teachers of agritourism information. They actively seek out knowledge from one another and thrive in situations where peer-to-peer learning is facilitated. Using Phase Two's identification of audience segments, phase one's participants could be grouped into either the High-Yield Harvesters or the Rooted Residents. Attending focus group discussions on the future of the industry may lead one to assume all participants are interested in learning and innovating. However, we argue that the focus group participants were a mix of the two clusters. Some participants who attended the focus group emphasized exploratory learning, aligning with the High-Yield Harvesters. These individuals were excited to discuss new opportunities, such as marketing through social media or adding novel activities to their operations. On the other hand, the focus group also consisted of individuals rooted in exploitative learning styles, using their customers' feedback to refine their existing practices over time. Yet,

consistent with Dooley's (2020) findings, both sets of operators overwhelmingly depend on one another to facilitate development.

While both phases emphasized the importance of peer learning, they differ in their relationship with KSRE. In phase one, operators rarely attributed successful learning to KSRE; in fact, the role of cooperative extension agents was frequently questioned, as many participants felt local agents lacked expertise in agritourism-specific challenges. Conversely, Phase Two participants, specifically the High-Yield Harvester segment, demonstrated interest and trust in KSRE resources. This shift is particularly noteworthy because both phase samples shared similar educational backgrounds, yet their perception of KSRE as a future educational asset differed vastly. A similar evolution appeared regarding civic engagement. While phase one operators rarely discussed shaping policies, a topic mentioned only by those in the Northeast and South Central regions, Phase Two participants in both segments expressed a heavy interest in active civic involvement. Finally, a major difference between the two phases was how the operators described themselves and how we described them. In our study, we identify agritourism operators as fundamental entrepreneurs who are actively engaging in the interdisciplinary practice of agritourism. However, throughout the focus groups, operators expressed agricultural problems as major barriers, not entrepreneurial ones. They still see themselves as farmers and ranchers who engage with agritourism, yet our second phase identifies them as agritourism operators with roots in entrepreneurial expression.

Overarching Practical Implications

Phase One

Phase one identified clear barriers and motivations to the establishment and expansion of agritourism businesses, with a major emphasis on the roles of KAP, KFB, and KSRE in

advocacy and resource discussions. The findings suggest these organizations are not adequately addressing the major concerns faced by agritourism operators, leading them to lose trust and seek outside support. Mainly, they pursue external support from other operators. These connections allow operators to experience successful experiences, while giving them an avenue to workshop and navigate difficulties before they arise. These findings suggest that agritourism operators recognize the opportunity of learning from one another due to the ease of access and can facilitate conversations amongst themselves to navigate barriers. If an operator can get answers directly from other successful operators, why would they navigate complicated, technical resources that do not directly address the ever-present barriers? The results indicate this practice is fostered by a disconnect between statewide organizations that fail to navigate emerging challenges effectively.

Yet where operators primarily struggle falls into two categories: financial constraints and insufficient resources. While this study does not look at the economic components of business expansion, we do highlight the real impact of these financial barriers on overall business development efforts. Prospective operators were motivated by the potential benefits of agritourism as a means of income diversification, especially for reinvigorating family farms and local farming operations. However, many established operators expressed fear and discontent regarding federally and state-funded grants, citing instability as a primary limitation. This concern proved well-founded: at the time of this study, the current administration had frozen federally funded grants for conservation and organic agriculture, as well as contracts involving diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) or environmental justice (Kurn, 2025; USDA, 2025; Youngblood, 2025). Such funding is particularly critical because agritourism businesses often leverage federal, state, and private grants, especially from the USDA, to fund development,

marketing, and infrastructure improvements (Rahe et al., 2024). Without this essential funding, those seeking to establish or expand their operations cannot overcome financial barriers to entry. Meanwhile, existing grant recipients, particularly those operating under reimbursement contracts, experience significant financial strain as they await delayed or frozen funds.

Beyond these financial pressures, operators struggle to access usable resources for business development. Marketing materials and educational resources often employ overly technical language or lack agritourism-specific content, leaving operators without practical guidance. Many operators in the early stages of their operations said resources are too complex or do not address the barriers to establishment. In contrast, seasoned operators believe available resources are insufficient and delivered in time-consuming formats. Further, operators stated forward-facing communications, such as the Kansas Tourism website, are geared toward visitors, not operators. When resources are available, they are buried within the website, posing a clear barrier for those operators with limited time for agritourism-related research. This educational disconnect calls into question the effectiveness of current resources and the intended audience. The findings from phase one indicate engagement efforts are not sufficiently meeting the needs of agritourism operators. Participants questioned the support of statewide organizations, mainly expressing discontent or distrust. However, the operators noted that this does not discourage business development but rather shifts their perspective to one of lean and learning from their counterparts. These connections not only help them navigate barriers but also act as primary motivators for persistence. Operators thrive on customer feedback and community engagement, yet they worry that external obstacles will hinder their ability to network effectively.

Phase Two

The previous study highlighted the limitations of agritourism expansion and establishment, mainly concentrated on financial and resource barriers. In these conversations,

statewide organizational programs were questioned about their effectiveness and their role in mitigating barriers. An identified need for an agritourism advocate to address issues encouraged the second phase of this study to investigate both the operator's intrinsic beliefs and the extrinsic support of organizations. As expected, a universal approach to resources is insufficient, though overutilized across support organizations. This study specifically challenges conventional methods of message delivery; treating these individuals as a single, homogeneous group ignores the specific entrepreneurial characteristics that help them succeed.

Rather, this study's findings emphasize tailored resources and communications are necessary to support the establishment and expansion of agritourism businesses. The KAP must continue to be the primary messenger for all things agritourism, given operators' perceived trust and willingness to engage. Content and resources created by KAP, however, must emphasize the operator, rather than the visitor. Further, KAP is instrumental in maintaining relationships among operators, KFB, and KSRE, but must act as a filter for information, ensuring operators accurately synthesize KSRE-developed resources. Additionally, KAP's continued relationship with KFB can help restore trust amongst operators and the farm bureau. KFB's role in advocate conversations was questioned throughout both phases, yet its unique position as an advocate for farmers and ranchers across the state highlights a potential growth opportunity. Operators are willing to support and be active in civic engagement, but the organization needs to listen to and address tangible issues facing their businesses.

The significant finding of entrepreneurial differences between the two identified clusters defends the shift to tailored communications. While format and behavior are consistent across the two groups, they exhibit clear differences that must be addressed by supporting organizations. Our findings suggest KSRE is best positioned to serve the High-Yield Harvester

segment by leveraging academic data and institutional resources. In turn, the High-Yield Harvesters themselves become the best option to inform resources tailored to the Rooted Resident segment. These groups are tightly intertwined and indistinguishable in their demographic characteristics, but they display an opportunity for a closer, symbiotic relationship. On theoretical grounds, this study challenges the reliance on demographic characteristics for audience segmentation to predict business behavior. In a social, peer-to-peer context, this study highlights the need for continued connection between operators, as highlighted in the previous phase.

Overarching

Operators in Kansas are navigating agritourism barriers in spite of, rather than because of, state-wide organizational support. These findings demonstrate agritourism operators are increasingly adopting resilience strategies in the face of external factors, such as leaning on social networks and outside organizations. This movement away from statewide organizational support is not a move away from education, but rather a response to overly technical, visitor-centric, and insufficient resources. The industry itself is shifting into a self-educating ecosystem, where peer-to-peer networks have replaced traditional educational structures as the primary engine of agritourism business sustainability (Wasim & Youssef, 2023).

This research advances our understanding of rural development, organizational leadership, and entrepreneurial psychographics by identifying friction points in the current industry landscape. This work primarily provides empirical evidence on the impact of macro-level factors, such as federal funding freezes and agribusiness insurance, on micro-level decision-making. Additionally, this study contributes a new dimension to our understanding of forward-facing communications. By conveying the lived experiences of agriculturalists with varying career backgrounds and educational levels, we posit that resources are insufficient unless

they are designed with specific populations in mind. Further, the results of both studies revealed individuals value organizations and academic institutions, however, rely on the practicality of peer-networks and customer bases to navigate day-to-day barriers.

The use of a sequential exploratory mixed-methods approach was critical in transforming subjective narratives into a valid industry profile. Phase one served as a diagnostic tool, uncovering the industry's emotional lived experiences with particular emphasis on operators' fears and weaknesses. These qualitative insights allowed for the identification of variables, such as potential advocates and areas in need of support, that a standard quantitative study would have overlooked. Yet, combining this methodology with a subsequent qualitative study enables us to assign statistical weights necessary to generalize these findings. Phase Two confirmed the interest of civic engagement and peer-to-peer learning was not a phenomenon but a potential shift across sampled operators. Together, this methodology also revealed a critical paradox: the gap is not foundational, but rather an issue of miscommunication.

Lastly, this study fortifies and extends the theoretical frameworks on which it was established. The entrepreneurial learning framework (Politis, 2005) posits that the transformation of experiences into usable knowledge is guided by entrepreneurs' learning methods: exploitative and exploratory. While this study corroborates this construct, the framework does not incorporate the impact of social networks on this transformation process. Where the framework identifies outcomes of previous events, or career trajectories, we posit community and networks also influence the transformation of knowledge. Further, this study challenges the reliance on demographics for audience segmentation. By identifying clusters that are not separated by their demographics but rather by their psychographics, this research suggests the true driver of an operation is the individual mindset of the operators themselves.

Recommendations

Research

Due to the niche nature of agritourism, research from an operator's perspective is relatively underexplored in an agricultural context. Mainly, these operators are lumped into broader agri-entrepreneurship research or examined only through a broad lens. Specifically, based on our phase one findings, further research should examine the impact of regional and state differences on entrepreneurial motivations, barriers, and characteristics. Future studies could investigate the roles of geography and connectivity in agritourism success. By comparing other regions with high and low concentrations of agritourism businesses, research can identify differences among operators based on their proximity to other operations, major thoroughfares, and urban populations. In addition, an economically driven study can highlight the actual financial costs associated with inaccessible resources, a lack of agritourism advocates, and other extrinsic barriers. By assigning a financial value to the barriers, statewide organizations and the Department of Commerce can see the true economic impact.

Regarding the results of Phase Two, a sequential, mixed-method study similar to this one is necessary to defend and demonstrate the effectiveness of tailored communications as a driver of on-the-ground resources, based on the identified segments. Moreover, a future content analysis of existing resources can identify those that already align with the identified audience segments. Additionally, a future study can investigate visitors' perspectives on the varying levels of operators' entrepreneurial characteristics. This research can determine whether the High-Yield Harvester does, in fact, have higher-level, innovative experiences, or whether there is an underlying reason why the Rooted Residents do not, beyond the terms of our study. While our identified segments varied minimally by demographics, a slight gender difference suggests that future studies should address gender influences on entrepreneurial characteristics.

Both studies lacked representativeness due to their small sample sizes. Future studies should employ a range of data-collection methods. While we used focus groups, future work can shift to conducting site visits and interviews to be more accessible to operators who cannot afford to leave their operations. Further, opt-in sampling can introduce sample bias (Gibson et al., 2021), but a mix of online, mail, and in-person surveying could address this bias while encouraging participation. Future studies should emphasize research recruitment communication in accessible, public locations, both online and in-person. Finding common meeting places for agritourism operators can increase participation while also exposing researchers to the real-life contexts in which these businesses thrive.

Practice

Based on the findings of both studies, similar recommendations can be made for practitioners, specifically regarding the development of future resources, potential advocates, and modes of communication. Below, we detail recommendations for practices for statewide organizations, peer-to-peer learning, and potential agritourism advocates.

Statewide organizations - KAP

Phase one highlighted the external barriers faced by agritourism operators, particularly financial constraints and accessibility issues. The KAP should prioritize developing an agritourism operator-specific website that would address key barriers while providing operators with a centralized location for all agritourism-related resources, organizations, and guidelines. With this in mind, the content should not be tailored to the general agritourism audience, but rather uniquely tailored to meet operators at any stage of their business lifecycle. For example, website headings can read, “Getting started in agritourism,” with a drop-down list of state-recognized agritourism operations, details on limited liability protection, acquiring signage, and county regulatory codes. Another dropdown can be titled “Marketing and promoting your

agritourism business,” including basics of social media, basics of photography and videography, using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as assets, and building a brand. A more complex section, tailored to the High-Yield Harvesters, should include a tab titled “Current market and industry trends” with a dropdown containing USDA market figures, stock market trends, and trade market shifts. Followed by a section tailored to the Rooted Residents, a tab titled “Working with existing resources”, consisting of information on rules for infrastructure redevelopment, contacts for farm-tool and equipment repairs, and successful operator testimonials.

The modes of communication influence overall resource use. On this new website, KAP should particularly emphasize shorter, easy-to-access videos that can be reposted on popular platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram reels. This content should be short, concise, and entertaining. Currently, Kansas Tourism has agreements with micro-influencers within the state to facilitate visitation and outward communications (Kansas Tourism, n.d.). Expanding these agreements to include educational objectives would enable cost-effective production of dual-purpose content. Such content could simultaneously serve as a vicarious learning tool for operators by modeling successful agritourism practices while serving as authentic promotional material to attract prospective tourists.

Statewide organizations – KSRE

Following the recommendations for the KAP, KSRE can be productive in creating usable, technically sound resources for operators, particularly those in the High-Yield Harvester cluster. There should be a particular emphasis on current barriers impacting operators, such as education tailored to grant writing, navigating biosecurity and environmental impacts with increased visitation, and technical assistance with agritourism practices, such as beekeeping. The Civic Urban Farmer Program, developed by UC Davis Western Institute for Food Safety and Security and UC Cooperative Extension, provides a framework for a train-the-trainer model to

deliver technical assistance to farmers for specialty crop production (Garcia & Reyes, 2022). By providing a combination of technical expertise, in-person workshops, and virtual self-paced workshops, a similar program implemented by KSRE would promote sustainability and resilient agritourism initiatives.

Current cooperative extension agents and local offices are ill-equipped to navigate current agritourism barriers. Given that agents must be well-informed about various components of Kansas agriculture, it would be beneficial for them to attend agritourism discussions and interact with the industry at a fundamental level. An opportunity arises for agents to facilitate visits with local agritourism businesses and connect with their county's operators to deepen their understanding of potential barriers and opportunities for growth.

Statewide organizations – KFB

Evident through both phases, operators do not fully trust the KFB as an agritourism advocate. This would make it difficult for the organization to secure support as an advocate, given its polarizing role in the state. Despite this, the organization should continue to internally advocate for consistent insurance rates through Farm Bureau Financial Services. Many operators are discontent with current insurance rates, and rather than raising premiums because they are the sole insurer in the state, they should advocate for lower rates that promote expansion. Further, the KFB could partner with other potential advocacy groups to leverage their political power to influence a shift back to the Department of Agriculture, a clear definition of agritourism and state-wide recognized activities, and consistent regulatory guidelines.

Peer-to-peer learning

The findings of these studies emphasized the role of networking and peer-to-peer learning. Operators enjoy connection and emphasize learning from others as an instrumental way to develop entrepreneurial knowledge. Peer-to-peer learning can be fostered by leveraging

connections amongst recognized organizations. As aforementioned, NAFDMA and FVC were presented as organizations that operators already trust, with current operators as active members. A potential advocate and the KAP should partner with these organizations to facilitate farm visits, video testimonials, and online forums. By facilitating farm visits, Rooted Residents can see success stories firsthand, while High-Yield Harvesters can gain inspiration for future opportunities for their businesses. Video testimonials posted on platforms like YouTube can provide an accessible, referenceable, and tangible manifestation of success in agritourism. Operators can learn about other businesses across the state, meet new people, and network in the comment section. They can continue these conversations on online forums like Reddit or create Facebook groups that facilitate question-and-answer sessions with successful operators.

Agritourism Advocate

In the context of advocacy, these symbiotic relationships are influential in building trust and confidence. It is essential that an agritourism-specific advocate be established. The Kansas Farmers Union, the National Farmers Union, and the Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association are well-positioned to serve as advocates for agritourism operators, given their foundational understanding of agriculture and existing advocacy efforts. Yet, these potential advocates must meet agritourism operators where they are. Operators are enthusiastic about supporting a potential advocate, but these organizations must address key barriers to maintain that support. Particularly, operators express the need for advocates to address a clear, consistent definition of agritourism and the subsequent tax classifications. Further, these advocates must push for a variety of insurance providers to mitigate the risk of a potential monopoly, as well as call for state and federal grants to support development efforts. Finally, practitioners must encourage an investigation into moving agritourism back under the Department of Agriculture, as the needs identified by operators seem to exceed the Department of Commerce's understanding of the

combination of agriculture and tourism. This potential advocate can leverage the High-Yield Harvester's interest in civic engagement to mobilize advocacy initiatives and depend on the Rooted Residents for consistent support. Ultimately, the continued success of Kansas' agritourism industry depends on its supporting systems and the willingness of its operators to communicate, adapt, and overcome barriers.

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Appendix A – Recruitment Flyer

AGRITOURISM

FOCUS GROUPS



Do you want to help forge the future of Kansas agritourism?

Join us!

Join us for a 2-hour focus group where you will be asked to share your goals, challenges, and insights on establishing, expanding, and promoting agritourism businesses in Kansas.

Why participate?

- Influence the development of agritourism resources that meet the needs of your business
- Learn more about the resources offered by the Kansas Agritourism Program
- Meet with other Kansas agritourism operators
- Meals will be provided

**14 FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS WILL BE HELD ACROSS KANSAS
INCLUDING TWO ZOOM MEETINGS**

Any questions?

Contact Mia Reyes at miareyes@ksu.edu

For additional information and to sign up:

Scan this QR code



THIS PROJECT IS FUNDED BY THE KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEMS GRANT.

Appendix B – Recruitment Email

AGRITOURISM FOCUS GROUPS



Share your goals, challenges, and insights on establishing, expanding, and promoting your agritourism business

14 focus group meetings will be offered across Kansas, including **two** online Zoom Meetings

[CLICK HERE TO RSVP](#)

And see more event details

Meals will be provided

Space is limited to prospective and current agritourism business operators

THIS PROJECT IS FUNDED BY THE KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEMS GRANT

Appendix C – Quantitative Questionnaire

We'd like to know a few things about your background to help us better understand who attended these meetings.

Do you currently operate an agritourism business in the state of Kansas?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, is your business registered with the Kansas Agritourism Program?

☐ Yes ☐ No

What is the zip code of your agritourism business? _____

How many years have you operated this agritourism business? _____

What percentage of your household income comes from agritourism? _____

If any, what percentage of your household income comes from farming or ranching (not including agritourism income)? _____

What is your current age in years? _____

What is your gender identity?

☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other (please specify) _____

Which of the following races/ethnicities do you most identify with?

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native

☐ Asian

☐ Black or African American

☐ Hispanic

☐ White

☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

☐ Other (please specify) _____

Please return this handout to a facilitator before leaving the meeting.

Appendix D – Consent Forms



College of Agriculture
Department of Communications
and Agricultural Education

Focus Groups – Forge the Future of Kansas Agritourism

What is this research studying? The purpose of these focus groups is to develop a deeper understanding of barriers that impact the expansion of established agritourism businesses in the state of Kansas. Additionally, these meetings will act as an opportunity for prospective agritourism business operators to voice concerns regarding business establishment.

What would I do if I participate? During the focus group, you will be asked to answer questions about your attitudes, experiences, and preferences about the research topics. The focus group meeting will take no more than 2 hours.

How will I benefit from participating? By participating, you will receive a meal, get the opportunity with other Agritourism operators, and learn more about resources provided by the Kansas Agritourism program. Your participation will provide valuable information that will be used to cultivate stronger statewide resources and educational content to promote sustainable economic development in the state. There are no foreseeable risks to your participation.

Can I quit if I become uncomfortable? Yes, absolutely. Your participation is completely voluntary. Participating is your choice.

How are you protecting privacy? The audio for this interview will be recorded, but your personal information, like your name and anyone else's name, will not be shared and will be stored separately from the recording. As the researchers, we will do everything possible to separate your identity from the results of this research. We ask that each of you keep what others share in this session confidential. No one other than the researchers associated with this project will have access to the raw data. All related documentation will be secure in the researcher's locked office on a password-protected computer. Audio files will be destroyed after being successfully transcribed and focus group (de-identified) transcriptions will be deleted 2 years after the final date of this project. It is possible that your responses, without your personal information, could be stored and used for future research studies without asking for further consent.

Who can I ask questions to? The study is being conducted by Dr. Nellie Hill and Mia Reyes from the Department of Communications and Agricultural Education at Kansas State University. If you have any questions, contact Dr. Hill at nhill@ksu.edu or Mia Reyes at miareyes13@ksu.edu. Kansas State University also has a Research Compliance Office which can be contacted at (785) 532-3224 or comply@k-state.edu.

This project is funded by the Kansas State University Global Food Systems grant.

By signing your name below, you indicate you have read this document and agree to participate.

Participant signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E – IRB Approval



TO: Nellie Hill
Communications & Ag Education

Proposal Number: IRB-12233

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 06/10/2024

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Encouraging Agritourism Business Expansion in Kansas."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written – and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §104(d), category:Exempt Category 2 Subsection ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 06/11/2024 12:42 AM ET

Appendix F – IRB Approval, Modification



Office of Research Integrity,
Compliance and Security

TO: Nellie Hill
Communications & Ag Education

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 02/18/2025

RE: Proposal #IRB-12233, entitled "Encouraging Agritourism Business Expansion in Kansas."

MODIFICATION OF IRB PROTOCOL #IRB-12233, ENTITLED, "Encouraging Agritourism Business Expansion in Kansas"

EXPIRATION DATE: Exempt

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) has reviewed and approved the request identified above as a modification of a previously approved protocol. **Please note that the original expiration remains the same.**

All approved IRB protocols are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced in-progress reviews may also be performed during the course of this approval period by a member of the University Research Compliance Office staff. Unanticipated adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB, and / or the URCO

It is important that your human subjects activity is consistent with submissions to funding / contract entities. It is your responsibility to initiate notification procedures to any funding / contract entity of any changes in your activity that affects the use of human subjects.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 02/18/2025 6:38 PM ET

Appendix G – Facilitator Guide

Agritourism Focus Groups – Kansas GFS

Focus Group Protocol (At-Large Facilitator)

Time	Process
0 min. – 15 min.	Welcome (Nellie Hill-Sullins): • <i>Introduce self and others in the room</i> • <i>Thank participants for attending</i> • <i>Thank the host for accommodating the meeting</i> • <i>Highlight the importance of agritourism operators to the vitality of Kansas communities.</i> • <i>Mention previous study of agritourism operators in the state, and how the results informed these focus groups</i> Purpose: The purpose of these focus groups is to develop a deeper understanding of barriers that impact the expansion of established agritourism businesses in the state of Kansas. Additionally, these focus groups will allow prospective agritourism business operators to voice concerns regarding business establishment. These meetings aim to use operator opinions to cultivate stronger statewide resources and educational content to promote sustainable economic development in the state. Agenda (point out it's in their packet): • Break into small groups of 5-8 people • 3 rounds of small group discussion around key questions related to your successes, challenges, and needs as a prospective or established agritourism operator in Kansas ◦ Each round will be about 15 – 20 minutes long • Conclude by _____ time (<i>write in per event</i>) Roles: • At-large-facilitator: Ensure the conversation stays focused within the boundaries of the stated objectives of the meeting. Responsible for moving the group through this process. Keep time and progress through questions. • Small group facilitators: Encourage full participation and contribution by each person in the group, ask follow-up questions that dig deeper into the key question, or request examples. Take brief notes. Recording & Consent: • So that each voice can be heard, and so that discussion in each group is documented accurately and without misinterpretation, <i>the small group discussions will be audio-recorded. However,</i>

	names and other identifying information will be separated from the audio recording to help protect confidentiality. • Request signature on consent form. ◦ <i>Remember to gather's forms</i> Highlight: These discussions are taking place across the state and will be shared with the Kansas Agritourism Program and Kansas State Research and Extension, to inform the development of outreach and education to better serve agritourism operators like you. Today is not about consensus. We at K-State and the Kansas Agritourism program want to hear from you and gather as many different perspectives as possible. If there is something else you want to share with us that you don't get a chance to say, please use your agenda sheet to provide those thoughts. Give sheets to your small-group facilitator at the end of the meeting. Ground Rules to help facilitate discussion: <i>Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy Ground Rules</i> <table><tr><td>• Seek understanding and common ground.</td></tr><tr><td>• Expect and explore conflicting viewpoints.</td></tr><tr><td>• Give everyone opportunity to speak.</td></tr><tr><td>• Listen respectfully and thoughtfully.</td></tr><tr><td>• Offer and examine support for claims.</td></tr><tr><td>• Appreciate communication differences.</td></tr><tr><td>• Stay focused on issues.</td></tr><tr><td>• Respect time limits.</td></tr></table> Is everyone okay if the facilitators share responsibility for enforcing these ground rules?	• Seek understanding and common ground.	• Expect and explore conflicting viewpoints.	• Give everyone opportunity to speak.	• Listen respectfully and thoughtfully.	• Offer and examine support for claims.	• Appreciate communication differences.	• Stay focused on issues.	• Respect time limits.
• Seek understanding and common ground.									
• Expect and explore conflicting viewpoints.									
• Give everyone opportunity to speak.									
• Listen respectfully and thoughtfully.									
• Offer and examine support for claims.									
• Appreciate communication differences.									
• Stay focused on issues.									
• Respect time limits.									
20 min. – 25 min.	Break into Small Groups • <i>Small group facilitators lead group to meeting areas</i> • <i>Introduce yourself</i> • <i>Start recording device</i> • <i>Ask introductory question of the group</i>								
25 min. – 35 min.	Introductions (Small Group Facilitators) • Let's start by getting to know a little bit about each other. Please tell us your name, where your operation is and briefly about your agritourism business, such as what activities or experiences you provide. • If you a prospective agritourism operator, please describe the agritourism business you are considering starting								

35 min. – 55 min.	Round 1 – Motivations and Outcomes <i>Studies find that agritourism businesses are more successful compared to other farm ventures. The operators' goals are not only to diversify their existing businesses and increase income but also to create businesses that can be passed on to later generations.</i> • Why did you or do you want to start an agritourism business? ◦ [Follow up] What's your motivation? • What do you hope will be the legacy of that agritourism business? • What opportunities do you see as helping you to grow your agritourism business? • What do you get, or do you foresee getting, out of having an agritourism business?
55 min. – 75 min.	Round #2 – Opportunities and Restraints <i>Research shows that agritourism operators share similar barriers and challenges to operating an agritourism business. These barriers, such as attracting new customers through targeted promotional materials, adapting to new technologies, infrastructure costs, and government regulations, pose significant stress for operators. We would like to understand what specific issues current operators face and how these issues affect the day-to-day operations of your business. [For prospective agritourism operators] We would like to know what specific challenges impact your decision to start an agritourism business. Please explain this thoroughly but focus on what's essential.</i> • ≈ ◦ What, if any, specific challenges are you facing in effectively marketing your business and attracting new customers? ▫ Do you face any difficulties adjusting to new technology and techniques? ◦ What, if any, financial difficulties do you experience related to your agritourism business? ◦ What, if any, regulatory barriers do you experience related to your agritourism business? (zoning laws, land use restrictions, or health and safety regulations)

	• What future challenges do you anticipate facing?
75 min – 95 min	Round #3 – Educational Influences <i>Entrepreneurs such as yourselves are constantly adapting to new and unforeseen challenges. We would like to learn more about the experiences that ultimately allowed you to be successful in your current operational state. Understanding the challenges and experiences that affected your business journey allow us to cultivate resources that can help other operators in similar positions. Please explain this thoroughly but focus on what's essential.</i> • Before starting your agritourism business, what made you feel ready to take that step? ○ Examples: Beliefs, knowledge, experiences ▪ [Follow up] What about that [their answer] gave you the confidence to start • What resources have been the most helpful to you in overcoming challenges to establish or expand your agritourism business?

	○ Examples: people, educational content, programs, etc. • What learning resources are missing from what's available to help you be more successful? ○ [Follow up] When you think about these resources, how do you prefer to interact with them? (In terms of the format, frequency, source of information) ▪ Examples: What formats do you prefer: written, video, K-State online Course, etc., or Instagram, Facebook, TikTok? ○ [Follow up] How often would you like to see this content?
95 min – 110 min	Wrap-Up (Nellie Hill-Sullins) • Return to large group • <i>Ask participants to complete the questions on their agenda sheet and add any comments they still want to make.</i> • <i>Gather agenda sheets</i> • <i>Thank participants for their time and comments</i>

Appendix H – IRB Approval



Office of Research Integrity,
Compliance and Security

TO: Nellie Hill
Communications & Ag Education

Proposal Number: IRB-13365

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 11/04/2025

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Entrepreneurial Drivers for Agritourism Policy Advancement: A Quantitative Analysis."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §104(d), category:Exempt Category 2 Subsection ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 11/04/2025 5:55 PM ET

Appendix I – Survey Recruitment Email

Email Kansas: Quick Survey to Form the Future of Kansas Agritourism

Hello,

I'm Mia Reyes, a graduate student researcher at Kansas State University, asking you to participate in a survey about the future of agritourism in Kansas.

Are you currently operating an agritourism business, or considering starting one in the next five years? We need your expertise!

Your experience and insights will directly inform how organizations, like Kansas Farm Bureau and the Kansas Agritourism Program, can better support agritourism operators like you through advocacy, resources, and strategic initiatives.

How do you participate? Complete an online questionnaire that will take ~15 minutes of your time.

What do you get out of participating? Upon completion of the survey, you're invited to enter to win a Yeti cooler and travel mug set. Our results will also inform efforts to improve the ability of Kansas agritourism operators to start and expand their business.

Whether you're running a farm market, offering farm tours, operating a corn maze, hosting events, or just exploring agritourism possibilities, **your perspective is valuable**. This research has been approved by K-State's Institutional Review Board, and participation is completely voluntary and confidential.

Take the survey now by clicking here.

Reminder emails will be sent in the coming weeks.

I appreciate your time and consideration. If you have questions, please reply to this email and I'd be happy to help.

Mia

Appendix J – Survey Recruitment Email Flyer

The flyer is set against a background image of a red barn with a blue pickup truck parked in front of it. The text is overlaid on this image. At the top, it asks if the reader currently operates an agritourism business or is looking to start. Below this, in large, bold, white capital letters, it says "WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU". This is followed by another question: "Can you help us identify the ways the Kansas Farm Bureau can help you?". Then, it states that Kansas State Researchers are studying the issues of agritourism business expansion and promotion. Next, it mentions that the study is funded by the Kansas State Global Food Systems Grant. Below that, it offers a raffle prize of a Yeti Cooler and travel mug set upon completion. A QR code is positioned to the right of the text. Below the QR code is a small white box with the text "Scan the QR code to take the survey!". At the bottom, it asks for questions or comments and provides the contact information for Mia Reyes at miareyes13@ksu.edu.

Do you currently operate an agritourism business or are looking to start?

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Can you help us identify the ways the Kansas Farm Bureau can help you?

Kansas State Researchers are studying the issues of agritourism business expansion and promotion.

This study is funded by the Kansas State Global Food Systems Grant.

Upon completion, enter a raffle for a Yeti Cooler and travel mug set!

Have questions or comments about this study?
Contact Mia Reyes at miareyes13@ksu.edu

Scan the QR code to take the survey!

Appendix K – Survey

2/23/26, 1:02 PM

Qualtrics Survey Software

Introduction

Thank you for choosing to participate in this survey.

What is this research studying? The project is called “Fields of Opportunity: A Mixed-Method Analysis of Sustainable Agritourism Development in Kansas.” We hope to identify areas where the Department of Commerce, Kansas Agritourism Program, and the Kansas Farm Bureau can support the establishment and promotion of agritourism operations in the state.

What do I get out of participating? Upon completion of the survey, you will be asked to enter your personal information in a separate survey to be entered into a raffle for a Yeti Cooler set. This set will include a cooler and matching travel mugs.

Can I quit during the study? Yes, you can quit at any time. Kansas State University’s Institutional Review Board has reviewed this research project and has identified no dangers to participation. Participating is your choice.

How long will participation take? The questionnaire will

https://kstate.yu11.qualtrics.com/Q/EditSection/Blocks/Ajax/GetSurveyPrintPreview?ContextSurveyID=SV_6X8EtTBzcjQ6FzU&ContextLibraryID=UR_bnQBC5... 1/20

take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Are you protecting my privacy? The questionnaire will not contain your name or any identifiable personal information. Your name will not be linked to any material in reports, publications, or presentations. No one other than the researchers associated with this project will have access to the raw data. The personal information needed for the Yeti Cooler set will not be tied to your answers here.

What will happen to my data? Your personal information will not be collected as part of the research; however, data collected here will be used for future research studies.

What are the benefits and risks of participating in this research? There are no anticipated risks from participating in this study; however, the information you provide will help us identify ways to help agritourism operators with challenges. We appreciate your time and effort with this research study.

If I have questions, who can I ask? Please contact **Mia Reyes** at **miareyes13@ksu.edu** or **Dr. Nellie Hill-Sullins** at **nlhill@ksu.edu**.

For questions about K-State human subjects research, contact **Lisa Rubin** at **rubin@ksu.edu**, **785-532-3224**, or

Makenna DeHart in the ORICS office at
makenna@ksu.edu.

Participation Agreement/Qualifying Statements

Do you agree to participate in this study?

- ☐ Yes, I agree to participate AND I am 18 years of age or older
- ☐ I am younger than 18 years of age
- ☐ No, I do not agree to participate in this study

Are you the **owner** of your agricultural operation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Demographics

In which Kansas county is your **primary** farm/operation located? Federally recognized indigenous nations are included.

What type of **agricultural operation** are you involved in?
(Select all that apply)

- ☐ Livestock Production
- ☐ Commodity Crop Production
- ☐ Pasture/Range Production
- ☐ Specialty Crop Production
- ☐ Forestry
- ☐ Other (please specify)

How many **years** have you worked in production agriculture?

Do you **currently** operate an agritourism business?

For the purposes of this survey, agritourism is defined as a form of commercial enterprise that links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism to attract

visitors onto a farm, ranch, or other agricultural business to entertain or educate the visitors while generating income for the farm, ranch, or business owner. Examples include, but are not limited to: petting zoos, wineries, lodging accommodations on a working farm, U-pick operations, farm tours, pumpkin patches, corn mazes, etc.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How many **years** has your agritourism operation been in business?

Is your agritourism operation registered with the **Kansas Agritourism Program (KAP)**?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Are you interested in starting an agritourism business in the

next **five** years?

☐ Yes

☐ No

What type of agritourism business do you **currently operate or are interested in starting**? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Apiaries
- ☐ Cabins/Bed & Breakfast
- ☐ Christmas Tree Farms
- ☐ Event Barns
- ☐ Farms of all varieties (Fruit, Vegetables, Nuts, Produce Stand)
- ☐ Hunting Lodges
- ☐ Livestock Operation
- ☐ Orchards
- ☐ Pumpkin Patch
- ☐ Sunflower Farm/Maze
- ☐ U-Pick Operation
- ☐ Vineyard/Winery/Brewery
- ☐ Working Ranch
- ☐ Historical Site/Museum
- ☐ Greenhouse/Botanical Garden
- ☐ Campground
- ☐ Farm Experience/Tour
- ☐ I don't know yet

☐ Other

Self-Efficacy

Please indicate the level at which you are able to **navigate new opportunities** for your agritourism operation.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I am convinced I can successfully discover new agritourism business opportunities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am convinced I can successfully offer new experiences and/or products	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am convinced I can navigate business barriers on my own	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am convinced I can successfully market new offerings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Where do you need **support** in order to expand or establish

your agritourism business?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I need support with business planning (includes building executive summaries, financial projections, etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I need support with marketing and promotion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I need support with funding/grants	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I need support with legal/regulatory guidance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I need support with insurance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I need support with networking opportunities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I need support with professional development and business training opportunities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Alertness

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding **information collection** for your agritourism business.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I frequently seek out interactions with potential or current customers to learn new information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I frequently interact with established agritourism operators to learn new information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I browse the internet often looking for new information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I read articles, publications, and/or newsletters often to learn new information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I watch videos and explore social media posts often to learn new information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please indicate your level of agreement with these statements regarding your ability **to spot and act on**

agritourism opportunities.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I am good at navigating gaps in information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am comfortable using my previous knowledge to "connect the dots"	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am comfortable using my past entrepreneurial experiences to "connect the dots"	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding **recognizing success** in your agritourism business.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I can distinguish when an experience and/or product will be successful or not	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am confident when choosing new business opportunities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
When presented with new opportunities, I am able to recognize the most successful option	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Persistence

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding your **resourcefulness** when encountering barriers.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
When faced with a barrier in my current/future business, I know how to navigate it using my previous knowledge	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When faced with a barrier in my current/future business, I know who to go talk to	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
When faced with a barrier in my current/future business, I know I can go online and find a solution	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When faced with a barrier in my current/future business, I always find ways to solve the issue	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Trust & Preferences

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding the **Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB)**.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I trust that the Kansas Farm Bureau is engaging in policies, procedures, and systems that benefit the industry	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I trust that the Kansas Farm Bureau is doing everything possible to effectively communicate with me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I trust that the information given to me from the Kansas Farm Bureau will help my business succeed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I trust the Kansas Farm Bureau is advocating for my needs as an agritourism operator	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding the **Kansas Agritourism Program (KAP)**.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I trust that the Kansas Agritourism Program is engaging in policies, procedures, and systems that benefit the industry	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I trust that the Kansas Agritourism Program is doing everything possible to effectively communicate with me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I trust that the information given to me from the Kansas Agritourism Program will help my business succeed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I trust the Kansas Agritourism Program is advocating for my needs as an agritourism operator	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding K-State Research & Extension (KSRE).					
	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I trust that K-State Research & Extension is engaging in policies, procedures, and systems that benefit the industry	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I trust that K-State Research & Extension is doing everything possible to effectively communicate with me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I trust that the information given to me from the K-State Research & Extension will help my business succeed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I trust K-State Research & Extension is advocating for my needs as an agritourism operator	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Behavior

Please indicate how likely you are to use these **methods of gathering information** for your agritourism business.

	Very unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely or unlikely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
To get resources through online formats (e.g. YouTube Videos, online seminars, workshops)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Very unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely or unlikely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
To learn from organizations/industry partners	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
To learn from extension resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
To learn from other agritourism operators	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
To interact with other agritourism operators through online forums (e.g. Facebook groups, Instagram, Reddit)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In-person events to speak face-to-face to other operators	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In-person courses dedicated to navigating agritourism challenges	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please indicate how likely you are to engage with **agritourism policy development** in the following ways.

	Extremely unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Somewhat likely	Extremely likely
Support agritourism policy advancement within the Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vote to support policies promoting agritourism expansion in state and county elections	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vote for candidates that support agritourism expansion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Visit other agritourism operations within the state	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Donate to an organization that supports agritourism initiatives	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attend agritourism-relevant policy discussions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Support an agritourism-specific advocacy group that will solely address agritourism challenges	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Demographics Pt.2

Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / third gender
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your nationality/ethnic background?

- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other

What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ Some education
- ☐ High school diploma
- ☐ Trade school

- ☐ Associate's degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Professional or advanced degree

What is your age in years?

Open-ended Suggestions

What improvements would you suggest for Kansas agritourism support programs?

What areas should KFB prioritize in supporting agritourism operators or those interested in becoming agritourism operators?



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Appendix L – State-Recognized Agritourism Activities Classification

