

## **Segmenting Agritourists: Implications for Marketing and Collaborative Partnerships**

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## **Introduction**

Agritourism is the relationship between agriculture and tourism industries in an effort to develop and market value added agricultural products and experiences to tourists (Norman, 2003). Agritourism research has traditionally focused on the development of farms as tourist attractions (Nickerson, Black, & McCool, 2001). However, little research has been done regarding agritourist's behavior (Chang, 2003) and the importance of agritourism collaboration with the tourism industry (Che, Veeck & Veeck, 2005).

Small family farms located near tourism destinations along coastal South Carolina seek sustainability through selling their products to tourists through a combination of forward, e.g., direct farm sales and roadside markets (McGehee & Kim, 2004), and backward linkages, e.g., local restaurants and grocery stores (Telfer & Wall, 2000). The purpose of this paper was to develop agritourism market segments of coastal visitors to South Carolina, to describe the demographic and trip characteristics of these segments, to identify potential agritourism partners based on visitor behavior along South Carolina coast and how segmenting agritourists will lead to better partnerships and collaboration.

## **Methods**

Visitors to four coastal South Carolina counties were intercepted at 21 sites between July and October 2004. The proportionate stratified sampling strategy resulted in a sample frame of 1,601 coastal visitors. These individuals were mailed a self-administered questionnaire followed by a reminder postcard and follow-up survey instrument. From the 1,601 contacts, 681 questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 42.5%.

## **Results**

Six agritourism activities (purchase local food at roadside stands, eat at food festivals, purchase local products to take back home, visit a local farmer's market, visit wineries, visit a brewery) were measured on a five-point (1=Never to 5=Always) Likert type scale. Factor analysis resulted in two dimensions that explained 42.0% of the variance. The two dimensions were purchasing local foods (Cronbach's alpha=0.683, M=2.69) and visiting brewery/wineries (Cronbach's alpha=0.670, M=1.86). The two dimensions were used to group respondents into a two by two matrix. The four segments were Agritourism Enthusiasts (32.2%), high on both dimensions; Agrifood Enthusiasts (20.2%), high on purchasing local food and low on visiting brewery/wineries; Agridrink Enthusiasts (14.4%), low on purchasing local food and high on visiting brewery/wineries; and Latent Agritourists (33.1%), low on both dimensions. Agritourism and Agridrink Enthusiasts were found to have significantly higher household incomes, to have a college or post graduate degree and reported traveling with friends more frequently. Agritourist and Agrifood Enthusiasts were more likely to stay at a resort, Latent Agritourists at motels and Agridrink Enthusiasts preferred to stay at friends and relatives.

To identify potential agritourism collaboration partners a series of Chi-square analyses were conducted that examined the relationship between agritourism segments and participation in 39 activities. The Chi-square tests revealed significant associations in 14 of the 39 activities (see Table 1).

Table 1: Activities respondents participated in during most recent trip to South Carolina Coast found to be significant between segments

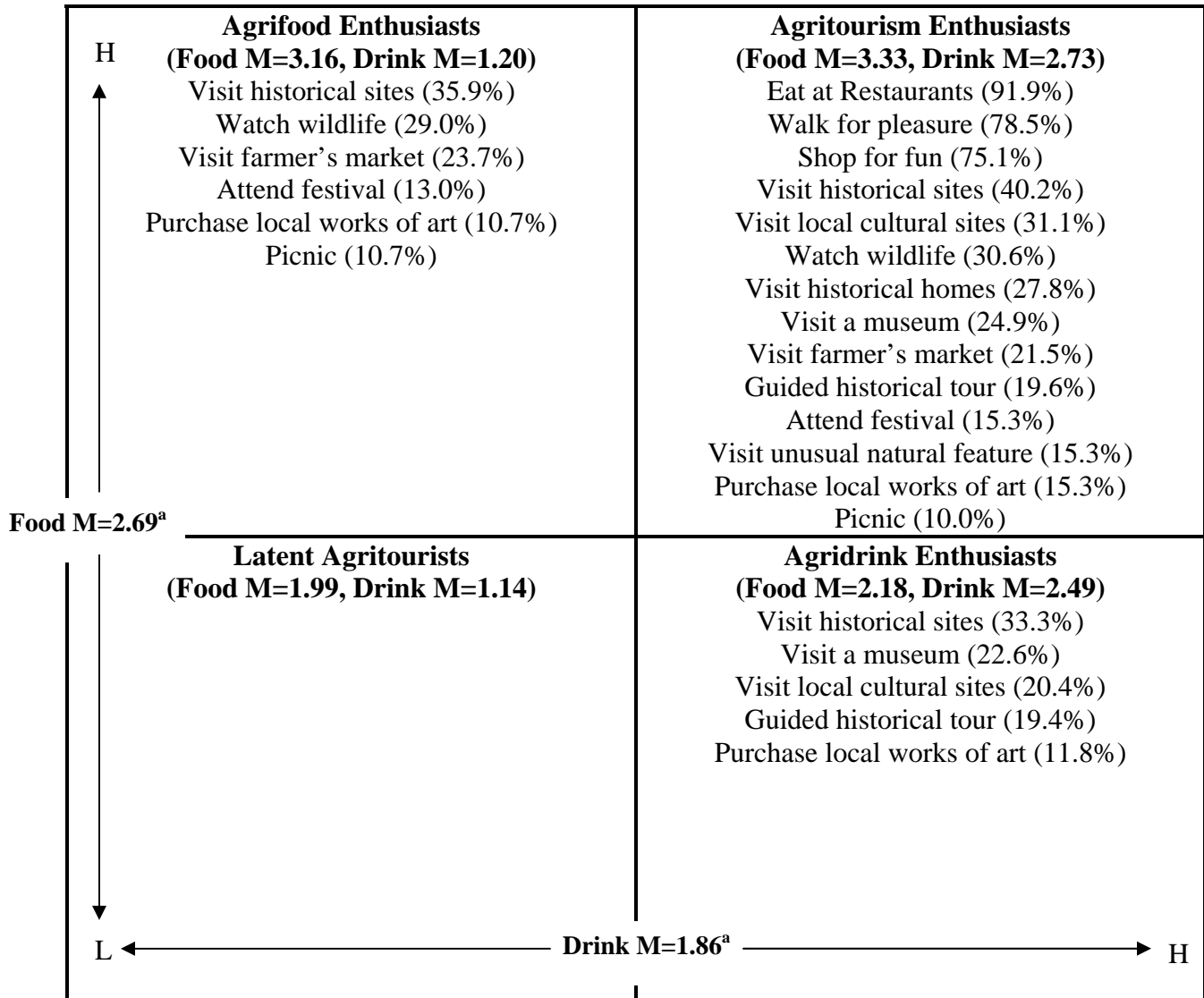
<b>Activity</b>	<b>% of Population</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Eating at restaurants	87.2%	8.077	.044
Walking for pleasure	71.3%	9.292	.026
Shopping for fun	67.9%	8.092	.044
Visiting historical sites	32.9%	13.534	.004
Watching wildlife	24.0%	14.556	.002
Visiting local cultural sites	19.2%	35.764	<.001
Visiting a museum	18.9%	10.695	.013
Visiting historical homes	18.2%	22.978	<.001
Visiting a local farmer's market	15.3%	27.902	<.001
Guided historical tour	13.6%	17.395	.001
Attending a festival	10.4%	13.207	.004
Purchasing local works of art	10.2%	14.657	.002
Visiting an unusual natural feature	9.3%	14.400	.002
Picnic	6.6%	15.468	.001

Fairly distinct differences emerged between the four segments regarding activity participation. Figure 1 lists activities by agritourism segment that each agritourism segment was more likely to participate in than the study population. The Agritourism Enthusiasts were more likely than the population to participate in all 14 activities, providing many forward and backward linkage opportunities for small family farmers to reach this segment. Agrifood Enthusiasts were experiential tourists, emerging as more likely than the population to participate in activities unique to the destination (e.g., visit farmer's market and attend festivals). Agridrink Enthusiasts emerged as more likely than the population to participate in cultural activities. Several activities were common between Agritourism Enthusiasts and either Agridrink or Agrifood Enthusiasts providing opportunities to reach two segments through these activities or locations. The activities that emerged common to Agritourism, Agridrink and Agrifood Enthusiasts were visit historical sites and purchase local works of art.

### **Applications**

The results of this study can be used by coastal South Carolina farmers to develop and market local agricultural products and experiences more effectively to agritourism activity segments through a combination of forward and backward linkages targeted to Agritourism, Agrifood and Agridrink Enthusiasts. This study found that targeted partnership opportunities exist between local farmers and agricultural producers and representatives of the region's tourism industry based on coastal visitor leisure behavior. Specifically, potential collaboration exists with regional parks and natural areas, local festivals, museums, historical and cultural sites, tours and homes, farmer's markets, art galleries, shopping and retail areas and restaurants. Based on the results of this segmentation study, further research opportunities may exist in determining agritourists awareness of and motivation for participation in agritourism activities.

Figure 1: Activities each segment was more likely to participate in than the average visitor



<sup>a</sup> Food and Drink means based on five-point (1=Never to 5=Always) Likert type scale

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