

# THE LEADERS OF GEORGIA AGRITOURISM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

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(Under the Direction of Dennis Duncan)

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to better understand the day to day operations, best practices, and challenges of Georgia's agritourism industry. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the research objectives were obtained by interviewing the owner/operators of eight leading businesses in the agritourism industry across the state of Georgia. Agritourism businesses were identified for inclusion in the study by being an active member of the Georgia Agritourism Association, being a working farm that produced an agriculture product, and also offers activities for children. The quantitative questions show how each business is structured in regards to the number of years in business, number of employees and the educational experience of each owner/operator. The qualitative questions provided an in depth look at the leaders in Georgia's agritourism industry and allowed the researcher to learn about the day to day operations of their businesses, how they arrived where they are today, and what makes them successful.

The common themes during the interviews were passion for agriculture and working with people, the high potential for Georgia's agritourism industry, and the difficult people that one must encounter in the industry. This study gives those interested in the agritourism industry the knowledge and understanding of what is involved in operating an agritourism business. This research explains the difference between farming and agritourism and the common issues that arise when making the transition, the importance of working well with customers, and the importance of starting small and growing organically.

**INDEX WORDS:** Agritourism, Small Farm, Large Farm, Theme

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction of Agritourism**

According to the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, the history of agritourism dates back to the late 1800's, but the term agritourism was not introduced until after 2000 (Carver, 2013). Agritourism is defined by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (2013) as "The act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness operations for the purpose of enjoyment, education or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation" (p. 1). It is defined by the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (2013) as "a business on a working farm, ranch, or other agricultural enterprise that offers an educational and fun experience for visitors while generating supplemental income for the owner" (p. 1).

There are many different types of agritourism businesses. Some focus on outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and camping. Others cater specifically to adults, like vineyards with wine tours. For this study agritourism is being defined as a working farm that produces a crop to sell retail or wholesale and provides an educational or entertainment component for children, such as a field trip, corn maze, u-pick, or a petting zoo.

Agritourism is an opportunity for farmers to differentiate their business in order to be able to farm and increase their profitability (Anderson & Hines, 2007). It is getting harder and

harder for small farmers to compete with large farming operations. In fact it is almost impossible to survive as a small farmer unless you have another source of income. Many farmers have full time jobs and only farm on the weekends or in the evenings (Mace, 2005). Agritourism is an opportunity for these farmers to continue to farm and make enough money to stay in business and keep the family farm (Villano, 2007).

Agritourism is an avenue for farmers to look at when having trouble with low commodity prices and high input costs, which make it difficult to be profitable (McGehee, 2007). Moving from a small farming operation to an agritourism business is not as simple as putting up a sign and inviting people to visit your farm. Traditional farmers work by themselves or with a small group of people planting and harvesting their crops with mechanized equipment. Becoming an agritourism business requires farmers to deal with people and sometimes large groups of people. It requires farmers to become managers of people, in addition to managers of the farm.

### **Background of the Study**

The state of Georgia is rich with agriculture with over 10 million acres of farmland in production (Ag Classroom, 2010). Different regions allow Georgia farmers to grow a variety of crops such as peaches, apples, blueberries, peppers, melons, tomatoes, peanuts, and cotton. Throughout history farms have continued to get larger, which makes it hard for smaller farmers to compete. As of December 1, 2012, the Atlanta Business Chronicle states that Georgia's population is over 9.9 million, 5 million of which live in the metro Atlanta area (2012).

There are small farmers across the rural parts of the state that are either struggling to compete with the larger farms or are looking for a way to subsidize their farm income (Evans & Hodges, 2006). People in the city are looking for agritourism businesses in order to get out of the city, learn about the food they eat, and have a good time doing it, while small farmers need to

transform their business into an agritourism business in order to keep their farms in operation. People living in the larger cities are becoming more aware of being healthy and eating right, but a lot of them do not understand where their food comes from or how it is grown. There are farmers in the rural areas that have a passion for agriculture and for teaching it to others, so as the demand for agritourism increases small farms can benefit from agritourism (Carpio, Wohlgenant, & Boonsaeng, 2008).

### **Description of Study**

Who owns and operates the top agritourism businesses in the state of Georgia and what are their thoughts on the industry? Georgia's agritourism industry needs to hear from its top producers in order to understand who they are and to learn about their history, issues, successes and their perspectives on this industry in Georgia. Learning from those who have been in the industry for a long time is a great way for those who are starting up or have only been in business for a short time.

Learning more about the established agritourism businesses in the state and more about who is operating them can teach people what educational level is needed to have in the industry, and what age are most people in the industry. It can also help them to understand how or why others entered the industry and how they operate their businesses. It will offer ideas to existing businesses that they haven't thought of yet.

Georgia has an opportunity for farmers and/or people interested in agritourism, but they need guidance, direction and education (Wolfe & Bullen, 2009). It is not possible for a farmer or business looking for a new opportunity to start an agritourism business and be successful on their own. There is little knowledge or understanding of what is needed to help agritourism businesses be successful.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to take an in depth look at Georgia's agritourism industry in order to understand the inner workings of their operation. Those farmers or entrepreneurs with a desire to start an agritourism business will have personal testimonials about the industry itself and about what it takes to be successful. They will understand the challenges that these businesses face in addition to their best practices.

One way to educate new agritourism businesses is to take advice from those with experience and with those who have been successful. There is not a training guide for teaching people starting an agritourism business that shows them a step by step process for how to be successful. There is information for new start-up businesses about marketing, sales, hiring employees, inventory control and other business related topics that can be beneficial to any start up business including an agritourism business. There are differences in the agritourism business and other businesses. There are even differences between an agritourism and tourism business.

The fact that Georgia is very different than all of the other states must be addressed. One of the main differences will be dealing with people. For example, the city of Atlanta contains over half a million people, and a lot of them are not from the state of Georgia. There is a great opportunity of potential customers in the city of Atlanta.

Another reason for this research study is to expand Georgia's agritourism industry. In order to grow the industry there needs to be more people getting into agritourism. People are only willing to travel a certain distance in order to spend a day at an agritourism location. It is risky for a family to drive an hour to visit an agritourism location if that is the only location in

that area. It is less risky for a family to drive to an agritourism location that is surrounded by three other agritourism locations within 15 miles. In order for one agritourism business to be profitable it needs to have other businesses close by in order to draw more people.

Small farms need to look at agritourism as a viable option. The problem is that small farms play a large role in regards to the economy in a small town. People in small towns are moving to larger towns or big cities in order to find jobs and agritourism can be used as an option to diversify employment opportunities (Dooley, 2011). This research is designed to help small farms by keeping one of their main industries, agriculture, profitable.

Georgia's Agritourism industry needs to do more marketing in urban locations and take advantage of this opportunity. The idea that people in general are becoming more aware of what they eat and there is a strong demand for fresh, healthy food. One of the goals of this research is to learn how to market and promote Georgia agritourism as a way to buy local fresh fruits and vegetables, have fun as a family, and learn about agriculture. There are large cities of people who are not aware of Georgia's agritourism industry and if they knew about it, they would probably participate.

Farmers in Georgia need to be educated about the opportunities of agritourism. An agritourism business is a lot different than traditional farming. There is much more interaction with people and much more regulations and it is important that these farmers receive the proper training. Basic business classes would be very helpful, especially classes that focus on customer service, human resources, marketing and leadership.

## **Objectives**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to take an in depth look at Georgia's agritourism industry in order to understand the inner workings of their operation. Specific objectives of this study included:

1. Describe the day to day operations and business practices of an agritourism business in Georgia; and
2. Describe practices of current Georgia agritourism businesses as being key to their success.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

This qualitative study is specific to the participants interviewed; therefore the findings of this research should not be generalized to the entire state of Georgia or any other larger population. Each participant was selected based on a number of criteria which may not reflect all agritourism businesses and their responses and opinions may not be shared by all of the owner/operators of agritourism businesses within the state of Georgia. It is assumed that each participant answered each question honestly and was based on their specific experiences and backgrounds. The researcher's experiences and background could have affected the interpretation of the data collected during this research. This was documented using a researcher subjectivity statement presented in Chapter 3.

## **Assumptions of Study**

The following assumptions were made by the researcher during this study: There is a need for research that looks more in depth into the agritourism industry. Additionally, each participant



will provide the most quality and honest answer possible to each question. Finally, the questions asked during the interviews will stay the same throughout all eight interviews.

### **Definitions of Terms**

Agritourism: “An activity, enterprise or business that combines primary elements and characteristics of agriculture and tourism and provides an experience for visitors that stimulates economic activity and impacts both farm and community income” (Wolfe & Bullen, 2009, p. 3).

Traditional Farm: “Traditional Farming is completely different from organic farming, which are not allowed to use fertilizers and pesticides, traditional farming allows you to use such things, and is a lot cheaper than organic” (Wiki Answers, 2013, p. 1).

Small Farm: Has gross sales less than \$250,000 (USDA, 2012).

Large Farm: Has gross sales between \$250,000 and \$499,999 (USDA, 2012).

Qualitative Research: “Research providing detailed narrative descriptions and explanations of phenomena investigated, with lesser emphasis given to numerical quantifications -- methods used to collect qualitative data include ethnographic practices such as observing and interviewing” ([www.education.com](http://www.education.com), 2013, p. 1)

U-pick: “Where customers can harvest the produce they want to buy” (Definitions.net, 2013, p. 1).

Themes: Abstract constructs that link not only expressions found in texts, but also expressions found in images, sounds, and objects (Ryan, 2003).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **The Agritourism Industry**

Small farms and large farms are different in the way they do business, but agritourism is an opportunity for both. This strategy has the potential to generate income while reducing risk, since it often combines on-farm work with off-farm activities. This can make the farm household less dependent on factors (such as the weather) beyond their control (Brown & Reeder, 2007). Most people think that agritourism is usually done on small farms, but agritourism does not have to be limited to only small farms. Large farms are often dependent on crop prices and the weather; agritourism allows them to diversify their business. Agritourism can be a valuable entrepreneurial diversification strategy especially when there are so many factors beyond anyone's control (Brown & Reeder, 2007).

Both peer reviewed articles and articles related to the agritourism industry were taken into consideration during this literature review. There was a limited amount of data related to the agritourism industry in Georgia, but there was however a large amount of information about the agritourism industry as a whole. The research that relates specifically to states focuses mostly on the Northeast, the Southeast and California. All of the topical articles and peer reviewed articles are from the year 2000 until the current year, 2013. The following review of the literature has been broken into sections that correlate to each one of the questions asked during the interviews.

Those sections include age, level of education, needed education, college majors, gender, average annual gross income, number of employees, reasons for starting an agritourism business, greatest challenges, greatest benefits, needed leadership characteristics, recommendations, customer information, opportunity in Georgia, and information about other states.

### **Age**

According to Brown and Reeder (2007), farm operators that have diversified their businesses and are receiving extra income from agritourism tend to be average 60 years of age. The average age of a farmer is 56, which means that farmers looking for alternative income sources are a little bit older. Bagi and Reeder (2012) found that farmers ages 65 and older were heavily involved in agritourism operations compared to other farm activities. According to a study done by Mace (2005), the average age of agritourism owners was 52.

The study conducted by Mace (2005) was conducted at a conference set up by the Kansas Department of Commerce, in which 85 agritourism business owners from Kansas and six other states were surveyed. This study focused more on the state of Kansas and not the U.S. as a whole. One study was conducted in 2007 and another in 2012. In each study, age of the operators was taken into account. When looking at these two research studies it looks like one study shows the average age to be 60 and another 65, but it actually is a similar study conducted five years later. This concludes that the average age of agritourism operators is not increasing, but that those who participated in the research five years ago are still in their same role. The most recent data describes the average age of an agritourism owner/operator as 65 (Bagi & Reeder, 2012).

### **Highest Level of Education**

In the same study conducted by Bagi and Reeder (2012), they found that about 70% of farmers had some college education. Brown and Reeder (2007) found that 44% had college degrees. Compared to farmers as a whole, those involved in the agritourism industry are more educated (Brown & Reeder, 2007). Mace (2005) showed that 55% of the 85 surveyed had college degrees.

### **Needed Education for those in the Agritourism Business**

Agritourism is different from traditional farming because it involves dealing with customers on a regular basis. It is important for farmers to educate themselves and their employees on how to correctly operate a safe and successful business when transitioning from a farming operation to a customer centered agritourism business. Dooley (2011) studied the laws relating to agritourism for each state that had them. At the end of the research she gave recommendations for operating an agritourism business in regards to registration, marketing, funding, activities and many more. One area applied specifically to the education on those in the agritourism industry. Dooley's (2011) recommendations are as follows:

“Any agritourism operator must complete at least twenty hours of continuing education credit during the first year in which the agritourism activity operates and ten continuing education hours during every subsequent year of operation. The commissioner [council or department] shall publish listings of the approved locations, subjects, presenting organizations, and all other requirements for agritourism operators to complete such training through the Commission's website, with the County Extension Office, and with non-profit organizations within the state affiliated with agriculture. Any agritourism employee who directly or indirectly may affect the agritourism participants' health,

safety, welfare, or ability to participate in the activity through an act or omission must receive at least five hours of off-farm continuing education credit during each year of employment at the agritourism site through the same approved providers set by the commissioner [council or department]. An additional twenty hours of working instruction or demonstration must be provided and documented by the agritourism operator at the agritourism activity site within ninety days of the employee's start date” (p. 482).

### **Majors**

Barbieri (2008) claims that farmers involved in agritourism are more likely to hold business degrees. Other than Barbieri there was no other literature that detailed the specifics of what college degrees those in the agritourism industry had received.

### **Male/Female**

No research was found that related specifically to women or men in the agritourism industry. The 2007 Census claims that more women are getting involved in the agriculture industry, but this data was not specific to the agritourism industry, but to the entire agricultural industry as a whole (USDA, 2007).

### **Average Annual Gross Income**

The agritourism industry is growing and so are the dollars. Income from agritourism reported in the 2007 Ag Census had grown to \$2.3 million in the U.S. —an exponential ten-fold increase compared to that reported five years earlier (Merrill, 2012). The number of farms involved in agritourism and recreational services in the nation totaled 23,350. The value

of sales for these farms was \$566.8 million (Holland & Burch, 2009). That averages out to be \$24,274 per farm. On a national level the agritourism industry is growing.

Most of the research in regards to the income and the agritourism industry focuses on specific states. In 2007, 685 California farms reported a total of \$35 million in revenue related to agritourism (Rilla, Hardesty, Getz & Georg, 2011). That averages out to be about \$51,094, per farm. California is known for its ability to grow unique crops, and also for their vineyards. Approximately 2,300 Vermont farms (about one-third of the state's total) are engaged in agritourism, generating on average nearly \$8,900 in agritourism income per farm annually (farms with 500 acres or more produce an average of \$15,300) (Evans & Hodges, 2006). The number of farms involved in agritourism in Tennessee was 510. These farms reported more than \$6.5 million in sales, with average sales of \$12,759 per farm (Holland & Bruch, 2009).

A specific example in California is that 150,000 people paid admissions to visit the farm which added \$600,000 additional revenue to the farm (Lobo, Goldman, Jolly, Wallace, Schrader, & Parker, 1999). This shows that if a farm can create activities for the public and market it properly then people will pay for that experience.

McGehee (2007) found that agritourism only adds an additional 5% of extra revenue to a farming operation. This confirms that agritourism is not meant to take the place of farming for an established operation, but it is meant to add additional revenue.

### **How Many Employees**

Most agritourism operations do not require a large number of employees. According to Das & Rainey (2010) the low employment number are because of two reasons. First, a majority of the agritourism operations are usually small to mid-sized farms that do not require a large labor force to operate. Second, most of these farms are under family management and

do not typically hire significant hired labor, although family members spend more time towards managing the agritourism activities. According to Das and Rainey (2009), agritourism can help reduce the rate of unemployment in rural communities. For example, in a study based on California operations the farms averaged 6.3 employees mostly for working on the agritourism activities (Rilla, Hardesty, Getz, & George, 2011). The reason agritourism can reduce unemployment in smaller communities is because agritourism operations support local businesses.

### **Reason for Starting an Agritourism Business**

Mace (2005) found that 78% of the people surveyed agreed that farming and ranching alone do not provide adequate revenue. He goes on to state that this is the reason for the increasing numbers of farmers working off the farm to earn extra income. Although there are a number of different definitions for agritourism, most of them involve conducting different activities on a farm in order to produce supplemental income (Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, 2013).

### **Greatest Challenges of Operating an Agritourism Business**

A survey conducted by Rilla, Hardesty, Getz and George (2011) found that permitting, environmental health regulations, liability and insurance were the biggest challenges. The survey was conducted with those already in the agritourism industry and those considering entering into agritourism. Kuehn and Hilchey (1999) conducted a study and found that the top five concerns of the owner/operators of an agritourism business were, liability and liability insurance; marketing, promotion and advertising; labor cost and issues; government regulations, and taxes. A study conducted in Pennsylvania found that the biggest difficulty

for the owners and operators in the agritourism industry were high insurance and liability risks (Centner, 2010).

Other challenges that are facing the agritourism industry do not involve the state. According to a study on the agritourism industry in Kansas, problems that they are facing involve population and clusters. There are farms in Kansas that are far from cities with large numbers of people. This makes it harder for farmers to draw people to their farms because people are only willing to drive a certain distance to visit (Bernardo, Valentin, & Leatherman, 2004). It is risky for a customer to drive a long distance for only one thing. If there are more things to do in that area or if there are other agritourism farms to visit, customers are more likely to come and visit (Bernardo, Valentin, & Leatherman, 2004).

Another issue that is common to agritourism businesses is limited internet access. In rural areas it is often hard to get an internet connection. For an agritourism business the internet is how farmer's market and promote their products (Dooley, 2011). Customers may e-mail questions to the business and farmers need to be able to respond to their customers in a timely fashion. If a community doesn't have access to the internet then it can greatly restrict the growth of an agritourism business (Dooley, 2011).

### **Greatest Benefits of Owning and Operating an Agritourism Business**

There was no specific research in regards to the benefits of owning and operating an agritourism business. Earning more income and creating additional revenue for the farm would be a given, but there was no detailed information that related directly to this topic directly.



### **What Leadership Characteristics are Needed in the Agritourism Industry**

An agritourism business is very dependent upon the community. It is important to get involved in community activities and civic organizations such as the Rotary Club, Kiwanis, and to join the Chamber of Commerce (Wolfe & Bullen, 2009). It is important to be known in the local community and a great way to do that is to not only get involved, but to also invite people to conduct large events at your farm. This will allow more people to become familiar with your business and give them a taste of the facility and the activities they can take part in (Wolfe & Bullen, 2009).

It is important that those in leadership roles at an agritourism business have basic business skills in addition to farming. Bernardo, Valentin, and Leatherman (2004) recommend that a leader with the agritourism industry must be skilled in advertising, promotion, and hospitality. These traits are important to the success of an agritourism business. Brown and Reeder (2007) claim that successful agritourism leaders have outgoing personalities, attractive properties, an in-demand product, and an established customer base. Wolfe and Bullen (2009) elaborate more on the specific characteristics that the owner/operator of an agritourism business stating that:

“You must critically evaluate your personality traits. Several personality traits are common among successful entrepreneurs. Successful entrepreneurs tend to be risk takers, lifetime learners, independent, responsible, patient, efficient, resourceful, determined, self-confident, creative, perseverant, objective, proactive, strong leaders and effective goal-oriented communicators” (p. 2).

### **What Would You Recommend to Someone Starting an Agritourism Business**

Wolfe and Bullen (2009) encourage startup agritourism business owners to visit other successful businesses. They recommend farmers visit other locations during the peak of the season in order to see how successful operations are run on a daily basis. They also recommend that agritourism business owners visit operations during the non-peak season and sit down with the owners and operators in order to ask questions, so as to learn more about the behind the scenes processes. It is also important to find a business that would be similar and also to visit multiple businesses across the state in order to get a few different perspectives (Wolfe & Bullen, 2009).

### **Information about Customers Who Visit Agritourism Business**

Customers that visit agritourism locations are not that different from most people, but Brown and Reeder (2007) conducted a study on the people who visited agritourism businesses. Their research showed that 81% of people who visited these businesses came on their own and not with a larger group. Brown and Reeder (2007) reported that:

“According to the 2000 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE2000) the average agricultural recreation customer is in his or her early forties and has a median family size of 3. These farm recreationists typically work 40 hours per week, and their family income level of about \$50,000 is similar to the national average. They tend to have higher levels of education than the general U.S. population, with 93 percent of respondents having at least a high school degree, compared with 76 percent nationwide. And, overall, more than a third of respondents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared with just 1 in 5 for the Nation as a whole” (p. 7).

The researchers also concluded that the most popular activities during a visit to an agritourism location were the petting zoo and the scenery (Brown & Reeder 2007).

### **Future of the Agritourism Industry**

The 2007 census of agriculture claims that:

“Agricultural operations in the United States are becoming more diverse as farmers and ranchers look beyond commodity production to find new ways of generating income. Producers are finding that diversification can make their operations more profitable by providing additional income from agri-tourism and recreational services, government support, direct-to-consumer sales, and sales of value-added and specialty products, including certified organic products” (USDA, 2007, p. 1).

The 2007 census of agriculture goes on to say that even though the number of agritourism and recreational farms declined 17% since 2002, the average income generated by these farms more than doubled (USDA, 2007).

Lyson and Gupill (2004) claim that if current trends continue, the landscape of agricultural production could be characterized by many small, civically oriented enterprises in and around metropolitan areas and a few very large, geographically concentrated commodity producers. Farmers are realizing that they can draw customers from metropolitan areas and that they can make money doing it they are changing the way they do business. In a study by Rosset (2000), he claims people today have a more personal connection to food stating that:

“Most consumers have little connection to agriculture and food production. As a consequence, they have little connection with nature, and lack an appreciation for farming as cultivation of the earth for the production of food that sustains us.

Through farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture, and the direct

marketing strategies of small farmers, consumers are beginning to connect with the people growing their food, and with food itself as a product of a farmer's cooperation with nature" (p. 78).

Information like this has played a large part in the way people view agriculture. In order to help, the 2008 Farm Bill has enhanced the Farmers' Market Promotion Program in an effort to shorten the food chain and bring farmers and consumers closer together. It has added an agritourism promotion program that is eligible for funding (Dooley, 2011).

The agritourism industry can have a major effect on a small town's local economy. Rosset (2000) states that:

"In farming communities dominated by large corporate farms, nearby towns died off. Mechanization meant fewer local people were employed, and absentee ownership meant farm families themselves were no longer to be found....while in towns surrounded by family farms the income circulated among local business establishments, generating jobs and community prosperity" (p. 79).

This type of information should encourage small towns to encourage farmers to engage in the agritourism industry. In a study conducted by Mace (2005), 80% of the farmers and ranchers surveyed agreed that agritourism is important to their community's economic survival. Agritourism can have a large positive effect on the economy of a small town or community. It is important for those in leadership roles in these towns and cities to be aware of this and help to develop this industry in their area.

The agritourism industry in the U.S. is expected to grow 30% each year for the next decade (Das & Rainey 2009). There has been a tremendous amount of growth in regards to dollars and more and more communities are starting to realize the benefits. In a study

conducted by Kuehn and Hilchey (1999), 64% of farmers had plans to expand their business, 34% planned on investing more into their business and 21% were going to hire more employees. The research shows that these plans from 1999 were achieved and that the agritourism industry is continuing to grow and it is becoming more and more profitable.

### **Agritourism Opportunity in Georgia**

There are currently over 47,000 farms in the state of Georgia, which means that there is a great opportunity for agritourism businesses because people in the big cities are looking for places to visit (Ag Classroom, 2010). They want to get out of the big city and try something new. Agricultural recreation customers are mostly urban, with nearly two-thirds living in metro counties (Brown & Reeder 2007). City-data.com (2011) shows that Georgia has 19 cities that have a population of over 50,000 people. According to Adam (2001), u-pick operations do best when they are located within an hour's drive of a population center of at least 50,000 people. According to the Texas Transportation Institute's 2011 Urban Mobility Report (2012), Atlanta came in first for longest average weekday commute at one hour each day.

Georgia is known for its ability to grow a variety of fruits and vegetables. According to Georgia ag.com (2013), blueberries, peaches, carrots, olives, blackberries, apples, strawberries, grapes, eggplant, cucumbers, tomatoes, cantaloupe, watermelon, squash, sweet corn, Vidalias®, bell peppers, pumpkins, muscadines, snap peas and greens are all grown in Georgia at different times of the year.

Agritourism allows families to not only do something different, but to also do something educational, together as a family (Stone, 2007). McGehee (2007) states that consumers want to get the most for their money when they purchase produce and value-added

agricultural products and crafts, but they may also want to experience life on the farm and find ways to reconnect with family. Spending time on a farm allows someone who lives in a more urban area to experience something that they have never experienced before. It also gives them a chance to get away from the big city to a slower pace of life and still have a good time.

A 2001 survey by the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, shows that the top two reasons that people visit agriculture-based tourism destinations is to enjoy the scenery and to learn where food comes from (Brown & Reeder, 2007). People in urban communities do not have access to the amount of nature and land that agritourism farms do and there is a growing desire to travel to a farm to experience the wide open spaces and to see nature in its truest form.

The second highest reason to visit an agriculture-based tourism destination was to learn where food comes from (Brown & Reeder, 2007). There was a time when the majority of the people in America were involved in farming and producing food. Today, less than 2% of the U.S. population is farmers, which means that people growing up today don't have the same opportunity as earlier generations had in regards to being more familiar with agriculture. Eckert (2007) explains that city folks are four generations removed from the farm. Adults who have some knowledge of agriculture want to educate their children, but they are living in a large city or an urbanized community. Agritourism gives these parents an opportunity to educate their children in a family friendly and fun environment.

Another reason that Georgia has an incredible opportunity for agritourism, is because of its location and the amount of people that are traveling to Georgia to visit and those who are traveling through on their way to Florida. In regards to agritourism in White County, GA, Tom O'Bryant said, "Tourism is our strength, agriculture is our strength. It makes sense to

marry those two to build an agritourism industry” (Wilder, 2009, p. 76). According to the USA today (2011), 60 million people visit Georgia each year.

There are people in urban cities that have a negative view of farms and how they operate. California Agriculture (1999) states that, “it (agritourism) may provide economic incentives and reduce friction in the agricultural-urban interface” (p. 20). Most people who feel negatively about agriculture base their feelings on what they see on television, read, or hear from other people. Agritourism has an opportunity to teach, educate, and change a person’s perspective on agriculture by allowing people to experience agriculture first hand. It also allows them to gather their own perspective from their personal experience.

New reports are being published on healthy living and healthy eating, which is causing people to become for health conscience, especially when it comes to what they eat. Research shows that there is a perception with conventionally grown food is not as healthy and does not taste as good. This idea opens the door for restaurants to serve locally grown food and it also encourages people to look at buying fresh produce within the state (Inwood, Sharp, Moore, & Stinner, 2007).

As people become more and more health conscience they will start investigating locally grown produce and also give them another reason to visit farms around the state. They feel more comfortable buying the produce because they either picked it themselves or they saw where it was picked and packaged. The agritourism industry needs to promote the fun opportunities for children and also the fresh produce that it sells.

Due to Georgia’s thriving agriculture and tourism industry, agritourism businesses have a high probability of survival. Agritourism has the ability to generate more revenue from tourist and provide more tax revenue for rural cities and communities within the state.

## **Other States**

Georgia's agritourism industry is growing, but it is still in its early stages of development. Other states in the U.S. are farther along in their development of their agritourism industry, so it is important for Georgia to look to other states for guidance and direction on how to take advantage of this incredible opportunity. For example, one of the first things a state does to promote agritourism is to start a sign campaign. Georgia started its signage program about two years ago. Georgia has a long way to go in order to catch up with the rest of the country in regards to the development of its agritourism program.

When there is something new on the market or there is a new fad there are people who want to take advantage of it. Due to the growth of the agritourism and the opportunity that is offers, farmers are calling their operations agritourism businesses only because there are no regulations to stop them. The South Carolina agritourism statute highlights an important facet of agritourism: it is a supplemental activity for farmers to diversify their production. They do this in order to keep people who don't farm from taking advantage of any state promotion for the agritourism industry. This is why it is important for each state to define agritourism, in order to create a consistent look and feel to the agritourism businesses in each state. The state of Delaware set a minimum size of farms on which agritourism activities may be conducted at ten or more acres. This keeps everyday people with large back yards from purchasing a few goats and other farm animals and calling themselves agritourism. This is another reason that the state needs to step in at some point in order to set proper standards otherwise anyone everyone will call themselves an agritourism business and reap the benefits. Kentucky has one of the most developed laws in the country in regards to agritourism. In fact, Kentucky's Department of



Agriculture's Office for Agricultural Marketing and Product Promotion created a Division of Agritourism. The Division of Agritourism was created to promote and grow the agritourism industry in the state (Dooley, 2011).

States should play a large role when building and growing their agritourism industry. When determining what activities will qualify as agritourism, states will need to determine their primary goal in exposing consumers to farms. States should limit the scope of rural agritourism operations to those agricultural activities conducted on a farm or ranch by a farmer or rancher in order to further the intent and purpose of supplementing farm income (Dooley, 2011).

### **Summary**

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature of the agritourism industry and the state of Georgia and other states that were applicable to this study. The literature discussed the people within the agritourism industry, activities that are conducted at an agritourism business, and the effects that a business like this can have on a community and a state. The literature discussed the agricultural industry in states across the US and how that industry has been affected by agritourism.

Chapter 3 will explain the methods used to achieve the research objectives. It will also discuss how the qualitative research method was used, the step by step process that each participant went through, how the data was processed and interpreted, and how the data was analyzed.

## CHAPTER 3

### GENERAL METHODOLOGY

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to take an in depth look at Georgia's agritourism industry in order to understand the inner workings of their operation. The literature only offers a general idea of activities involved in an agritourism business and general information about the people who operate the business. The goal of this study is to determine not only what is involved in operating an agritourism business, but how the business arrived at where it is today and what decisions were made to get it to this process. This chapter will discuss the selection process, the interview process, and how the data was analyzed.

Specific objectives of this study included:

1. Describe the day to day operations and business practices of an agritourism business in Georgia; and
2. Describe practices of current Georgia agritourism businesses as being key to their success.

These objectives met by the eight participants will answer the quantitative and qualitative questions found in Appendix A.

By obtaining the answers from the instrument the research objectives were met. Once the research objectives have been met, those interested in starting an agritourism business or those already involved in the agritourism industry can take the best practices that are being used by Georgia's leaders in the industry and use them in their business. Readers can learn and take advice from the top agritourism businesses in the state.

### **Qualitative Research Justification**

According to Merriam, "qualitative researchers seek to understand the world from the perspective of those in it" (1995, p.56). For this reason a qualitative research approach was selected. Using a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the agritourism industry from those who have multiple years of experience in the field.

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

When using qualitative research, it is possible for the past experiences and bias of the researcher to have an effect on the results of the study. In order to increase the internal validity of the researcher the following section explains to the reader the background of the researcher to help understand how the data was interpreted (Merriam 1995). The subjectivity statement is as follows.

The researcher spent every summer growing up helping on his uncle's blueberry farm. The farm started as a u-pick farm and evolved into paying people to pick the blueberries and deliver them to customers. The researcher's job through the years consisted of picking blueberries, packaging blueberries, making deliveries and assisting the needs of customers. The researcher enjoyed working with the customers and to hear them talk so passionately about the blueberries and how much they enjoyed coming out to pick them. Through this

experience the researcher learned about agriculture and how crops are produced and harvested, and also learned the inner workings of a small farming operation and what it takes to make it successful. The researcher began to get more and more involved in the marketing and decision making of the business over time.

Due to the researcher's interest in agriculture and business, he decided to attend Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC) and major in agricultural business. The more classes the researcher completed associated with agriculture and business the more interested he became. Through different activities the researcher was involved in, he was able to meet people around the town and a few farmers. The researcher enjoyed talking with and getting to know the farmers, but also enjoyed learning about their businesses. He graduated from ABAC in 2002 with an Associates in Agricultural Business.

The researcher did not take classes during the summers while in college and this gave him the chance to work for the University of Georgia Extension Service in Burke County. His role in this job was to work with the County Agents as their assistants. In this role the researcher had a chance to meet many farmers and to help them by testing their soil and scouting their cotton. In addition to working with farmers he also had the opportunity to work on an experiment farm where he learned more about different crops and to do different types of tests.

The researcher started the University of Georgia (UGA) in August of 2002 to earn a Bachelor's of Science in Agriculture in Agricultural Business. While at UGA he began to learn more about the business side of agriculture. In addition to attending classes, he also worked 20 hours per week at the University of Georgia Meat Science Technology Center. During this job the researcher was responsible for slaughtering and processing steers, hogs,

and lambs. Once the animals were processed, they were vacuum sealed and sold to students on campus. During these two years he was able to expand his knowledge of the agricultural industry. He also had the chance to work on a dairy farm for a day. It was an eye opening experience to learn how a dairy farm operates. The researcher graduated in May of 2004 with a B.S.A in Agricultural Business.

Two weeks after graduation, the researcher started working for AGCO Corporation in Duluth, GA. Moving to Duluth, GA was a big transition, since he was used to growing up in a small town. Duluth is 30 miles north of Atlanta and is influenced heavily by being so close. The people in the city are much different from those in smaller towns. From 2004 to 2006, the researcher worked in the product distribution department. His job was to work with agricultural equipment dealerships in North America to help them order, answers questions about, ship, and find high horsepower tractors. In this job he worked with many different dealerships across North America over the phone. Over the two years the researcher began to get to know some of them well enough to learn that they were farmers before they came to work at the dealership or that they were working at the dealership during the day and they farmed at night and on the weekends.

From 2006 to 2008 the researcher moved to a different department within AGCO and worked as a trainer of the different computer software programs that AGCO offered to its dealers. In this position the researcher was able to visit dealerships across the country and conduct trainings at dealerships. The researcher was also able to conduct larger, group trainings as well. This job allowed him to see and learn about agriculture across the country. He had opportunities to visit with and talk face to face with dealership employees and some of which had farming experience.

In 2008 the researcher was promoted to a training supervisor. He learned about the importance of leadership and how to manage groups of adults. In 2010 the researcher transitioned into the sales department and became an Inside Sales Manager. In this position he was responsible for over 50 accounts or dealerships. The job consisted of helping them sell, advertise, market, and promote AGCO's products in addition to growing their businesses by selling more equipment. All of the dealerships the researcher worked with were on the smaller scale ranging from \$2 million to \$200,000 in gross sales of AGCO's products. Since the accounts were smaller, business was conducted over the phone. The researcher began to build relationships with them over time and learned about their agricultural background.

While researching the agritourism industry in the state of Georgia the researcher was encouraged to attend the Georgia Agritourism Association meeting in 2012. At this meeting he was able to hear from numerous agritourism business owners across the state. The researcher learned more about the agritourism industry in Georgia by attending this meeting. He was able to meet and hear from four of the participants in this study before defining the criteria to select each of the participants.

After being in the agricultural industry for over ten years, the researcher had a good enough understanding of the agritourism industry to create his own expectations of what the outcome of the questions would be. The researcher's expectations are as follows:

**Age** – The researcher expects that the average age of the owner/operators will be in the early 60's. This is based on the fact that most agritourism businesses at one time were fulltime farm operations. These businesses turned into agritourism business over time, which means that the

owner/operators have probably been farming most of their lives if not their entire lives.

Another reason is that some people in the agritourism industry got into it because they had a fulltime job that they retired from and have been farming their whole lives on the side. Now these retirees want to make a living off of their farm and they see agritourism as a way to do that because their farms are fairly small.

**Highest Level of Education** – The researcher expects that 90% of those interviewed will have college degrees because Americans have been pushed to further their education.

Farming has become much more complex over the past few decades and now it is a lot like running a small business. There is a need to have some sort of education in order to operate and manage a business with such a unique infrastructure. Also the businesses being interviewed are the more successful businesses in the state, so it is easy to assume that a higher level of education has contributed to their success.

**College Major(s)** – The researcher expects that the most common degrees will be related to agriculture or business. The researcher expects that most of the people involved in agritourism have some sort of agricultural background and if they were going to do anything with agriculture then it would make sense for them to major in a field that relates to either agriculture or business.

**Male/Female** – The researcher expects that because most of the people in the agricultural field are male that at least 90% to be male. Women could play a valuable role in the agritourism industry because they are probably better at dealing with difficult customers and keeping things in order than most men. With that being said there is still a very high probability that most of the owner/operators will be male.

**How long have you been in business** - Although the agritourism industry is still in its infancy, the businesses that were interviewed are considered to be successful, so they must have been in business long enough to become successful. The researcher expects that the average timeframe that the participants have been in business will be 10 years.

**Average gross income per year** - Due to the success level of the owners businesses being interviewed, the researcher would expect the average gross income for these businesses to be around \$100,000.

**How many employees (full-time, part-time)** - As stated before, since most of these operations are more successful than others in the state, the researcher would expect them to have more employees. Agriculture is a unique industry in the fact that there are some times of the year when no crops are being planted or harvested and things tend to be slow. During the middle of planting or harvesting things can be busy from an agriculture standpoint. In regards to customers, the researcher would expect there to be more visitors with people traveling and parents looking for activities to do with their children. For these reasons the expectation would be that there would be a large amount of part-time workers during the busy seasons and less full-time workers. The researcher believes that there would be an average of 10 full-time employees and 40 part-time employees.

**What does an average day look like on your farm** - Since the interview will be conducted with the owner operators, the researcher expects that the average day for the interviewees will consist of managerial decisions for the business, dealing with difficult customers, managing the employees to a degree and also conducting some of the actual farming when needed. It will be requested that the interviewee will answer the question based on a day during a busy part of the season. Due to this request, there is a risk that the interviewee will simply answer



that they do whatever needs to be taken care of to keep things moving. At this point the researcher will ask the interviewee to elaborate.

**Why did you start an agritourism business** - There is a general understanding that most agritourism businesses are started because a farm needs to diversify in order to make more money. The researcher expects that the most common answer will be to provide supplemental income for the farm. The researcher believes that most people in the agricultural industry are passionate about agriculture and there is an expectation that a small number of the farms started an agritourism business in order to teach people about food, where it comes from, and how to eat healthy.

**What are the greatest benefits of owning/operating an agritourism business** - As stated earlier, most people in the agricultural industry are very passionate about agriculture. Knowing this, the researcher expects that the most common answer will be in regards to the customer. The benefits will be related to educating the customer, providing the customer a service, or allowing the customer to experience something new. There is an expectation that some of the interviewees will mention the extra income, but it is low.

**What are the greatest challenges in owning/operating an agritourism business** - Ironically, the researcher expects that customers will also be related to the greatest challenges as well. Although agritourism businesses owners are passionate about agriculture and teaching others about it, customers can also be very hard to deal with. There is an expectation that some of the interviewees will mention the employees being a challenge, but the main challenge is believed to be dealing with the difficult customers.

**What advice do you give to others who are considering the agritourism industry** – The researcher expects that the advice given from these successful agritourism business owners and

operators will be related to the agricultural products themselves or information related to starting any small business. The small business information would be in regards to people to talk to, processes that one would need to know about starting a new business that are unique to an agritourism business, and how to manage ones money. The expectation is that there would be much more advice given in regards to a startup agritourism business, but there should also be some in regards to the farming side of the business because most of the interviewees are expected to be farmers at one time or another.

**How do you measure success** – The researcher expects that most of the participants will measure success based on their customers. The more happy customers that a business has the more successful that it tends to be. The agritourism industry is like most all businesses in the fact that the customers are the main focus. There are some interviewees that will answer the questions with money or profits, but the expectation is that most of the interviewees will consider the customer in response to the question.

**What leadership characteristics must a person have in order to operate a successful agritourism business** – The researcher expects the most common answer to be in regards to managing people. The agritourism business is about people, employees and customers both. In order to have a successful operation it is important to be able to manage people effectively.

**What future do you see for the agritourism industry in the state of Georgia and why** – The researcher expects the majority of the interviewees to say that the agritourism industry has a successful future, but the why answer will vary. The most common why answers are expected to be in regards to the expanding population within the state and the fact that it is so young. The fact that it is still very new means that it has a lot of room to grow and the fact that the state's population continues to grow will have a positive effect on the agritourism industry. It is expected that people's desire to eat healthier and the increased desire to be connected with

local farmers could come up during the interviews, but neither one is expected not to be the most common.

### **Research Design**

The foundation of this qualitative study was to gain new insights, develop new perspectives, and discover the existing problems of those in the agritourism industry (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Interviews are the most common way to collect qualitative data (DiCicco- Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interview process allowed the researcher to obtain specific information from specific people in the industry. One of the objectives of the study was to determine the best practices of an agritourism business and one way to get that information is through an interview.

Each interview was conducted at the participants place of business in order to make them feel at ease and to be considerate of their schedules. This was to make sure the participant felt at ease. The goal was to conduct each interview face to face, but due to scheduling conflicts two of the interviews were conducted over the phone. During the interviews conducted over the phone the participants were at their place of business. Once the participant agreed to participate in the research study the researcher e-mailed a copy of the research objectives with a list of all the questions that would be asking during the interview and also explained that the interview would be recorded. At the beginning of each interview each participant was given a copy of the research objectives, a list of the questions that had been e-mailed out weeks before the interview took place, and the researchers contact information. The researcher briefly explained the purpose of the research and told them that the interview would take between 20 and 30 minutes. Before the tape recorder was started the

participant was told that all of their answers were confidential and that if they did not feel comfortable answering any of the questions they could simply say the word “pass.”

In order to produce accurate and credible results from the interviews, each participant was e-mailed a copy of the data collected. Once the interview was transcribed verbatim, the researcher went through and took out all of the confidential information that would identify the participant or the participant’s place of business. In addition to receiving a copy of the transcription, each participant also received a copy of the researcher’s interpretation of their answers. The researcher went through all of the recordings and took out any information that did not pertain to the question asked. For example, stories that explained or elaborated on the answer, and identified the specific answer to the question. Each participant was asked in the e-mail to review the transcription to verify that all of the information pertaining to them or their place of business was removed and to verify that my interpretation of their answers was correct and if they wanted to change their answer they were given an opportunity to do so (Appendix F).

### **Purposive Sampling**

The goal was to find the top Agritourism business owners in the state of Georgia and interview them one on one and ask each of them the same eight questions and compare their answers. The primary list of potential interviewees was taken from the Georgia Agritourism Association (GAA) website. The list contained each of the Agritourism businesses that were members of the GAA in 2012. The first criterion for the participants was that each of them were members of the GAA. The secondary criterion was the website. Members of the GAA that did not have websites were not added to the list of farms to visit. Since less than ten businesses would be interviewed, businesses that showed little to no investment into their

website were eliminated from the list. The third criteria was that the farm had to have at least one agricultural product that it produced, otherwise be a working farm, and also have an activity for children. Without visiting each farm before the selection, this decision was based on information from the website.

The researcher defined a farm product as everything from apples and peaches to beef cattle and peppers. The researcher defined children's activities as everything from corn mazes and school field trips to bungee jumping and train rides. The fourth criterion was to get confirmation from those who worked in Georgia's agricultural industry. A list of potential interviewees was emailed to Mrs. Olsen, the Director of Education for the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association. She had spent time at most of the farms on the list and verified that all would be good farms to visit. Mrs. Olsen recommended two agritourism business be added to the list. The two farms were added to the list after meeting all of the same criteria the other farms went through. These two farms were not on the original list of GAA Members because the owners of each farm were on the GAA's Board of Directors. The researcher also e-mailed the list of potential participants to Ms. Mary Boland, Executive Director of the Georgia Agritourism Association. Mary Boland forwarded the list to the GAA Board of Directors to confirm that there were no potential participants that would not be beneficial to the research. The fifth criterion was not to have more than one farm in the same location. For example, there are multiple apple orchards in North Georgia, all of which are members of the GAA and have good websites. The goal of this research study was to understand the agritourism industry across the state, so ideally there

would be a mix of businesses in different areas across the state of Georgia. The final criterion was that the businesses owner needed to have the time and desire to participate in the research. Each of the eight participants met all six criteria.

Once the list contained the best candidates the researcher called each farm and talked with the farm manager and asked if they were interested in participating in the study. One of the owners said they were not interested in participating in the study. During the first contact over the phone, the business owners contact information was requested and they were provided with a brief explanation of the study. October is a very busy month for most of the agritourism businesses, so each person was advised to check for e-mails with more information to follow up with a day and time to do the interview. Each participant received a copy of the questions that were going to be asked during the interview to allow them to prepare their answers beforehand. It also allowed them to review the questions in case there were any questions that were unclear or that they did not want to answer.

The owner/operator was selected for two reasons. The first reason is because they would have been with the business for a while or have grown up in the business, as most of them are family owned operations. This would mean that they are knowledgeable of the day to day operations of their business. The second reason for selecting the owner/operator is because they have a vested interest in not only their business, but also the industry as a whole to grow, which would make them more willing to participate in the research.

### **Instruments Used**

An RCA hand held audio recorder was used during each interview in order to record and be able to transcribe. The researcher used an interview guide that was reviewed by the

committee members in order to verify that they would assist in meeting the research objectives. The instrument found in Appendix A was used during the interviews.

These questions were both quantitative and qualitative and were designed to gather the most in depth data possible and to encourage the participants to elaborate and explain why they answered the way they did. After these questions were reviewed by the research committee and received approval, they were sent to the University of Georgia Review Board (IRB). IRB approved the questions on September 9, 2012 (Appendix E).

### **The Interview Process**

The scheduling of each meeting was either done by e-mail or phone. Once the date and time was set, the researcher's intention was to travel to each farm to conduct all of the interviews face to face. Six of the interviews were done face to face on the owner/operator's farm and two were done over the phone. One of the phone interviews was done because the interviewee was leaving the country for an extended period of time and the other phone interview was conducted because of time constraints. In order to learn as much as possible, the researcher toured each farm that was being interviewed in an effort to learn more about how they ran their business, the cliental, and what activities the business had to offer its customers. During three of the interviews, the owner/operator gave the researcher a personal tour of their facility. This was educational and allowed the researcher to understand more about the day to day operations of the business and to build some rapport with the interviewee. Four of the locations were visited before the interview and the researcher took a self-guided tour of the each operation. There was only one farm that was not visited before the interview.

Shortly after the tour of the facility, or shortly after arrival to the six face to face interviews, the interviewer and the interviewee would sit down in an office and go through

the questions. The two interviews conducted over the phone were conducted with while the researcher was in his office with a speaker phone and the interviewee was called. Before the interview started the interviewee was made known that the conversation was going to be recorded and also advised that any questions that they did not want to answer for any reason they could simply say “pass.” They were also told that all of the information collected would be confidential. During the interviews each participant was made aware that the interviewer would be transcribing the conversation and e-mailed them a copy of the transcription. The participants were encouraged to read over the transcriptions in order to make sure all of the information was correct and it also allowed them to make any changes that they felt necessary.

On average the interview lasted about 30 minutes. The shortest one was 17 minutes and the longest was 67 minutes. During the demographic questions the answers were straight forward, but on the qualitative questions there were multiple occasions where the interviewees were asked to elaborate. The only question that was passed was the question about average gross income. Two of the participants did not want to answer that question.

### **Transcribing**

After the interviews were recorded, they were transcribed. The first five interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Due to time constraints the last three were sent off to a company called *Verbalink* that specialized in transcriptions. The transcriptions were kept confidential and they were uploaded to the company’s website. A person from *Verbalink* transcribed the data and emailed it back within five business days. The process for the first five interviews was to first transcribe the conversation word for word. The next step was to edit the information. The editing consisted of not only finding misspelled words, but also ensuring that the written words would make sense to a reader. Sometimes verbiage that is used



during a conversation is not as clear when written down. The editing also consisted of making sure any personal information was deleted. For example, the name of the business or the county which it was located was eliminated in order to keep everything confidential.

The researcher also took out any words or phrases that would be considered filler words or words simply used in conversation. Words such as, “um,” “alright,” “ok,” “I mean,” “you know,” and other words that did not add substance to the research were taken out. During the interviews it is important for the interviewer to stay engaged during the conversation in order to keep the interviewee feeling at ease and comfortable. Throughout the interviews the interviewer would respond to the interviewees comments with words like, “Alright,” “okay,” “interesting,” and “um, hmm.” These words and phrases were also taken out of the transcriptions in order to not take away from the research.

Once the first editing was complete then the transcription would be printed out and followed along while the audio recording played to verify that the information was still accurate and that the main point was captured in the transcription. Notes for changes that needed to be made were made on the paper and then the transcription was updated. For the three transcriptions that were sent off to [verbalink.com](http://verbalink.com), the researcher started with the editing process and continued in the same format as the other five transcriptions. The researcher printed each of the transcriptions from *Verbalink* and listened to the audio recording while following along word for word. The important part about transcribing is not only getting the right word, but also hearing the tone in which the statement was said. No changes were needed to the transcriptions from *Verbalink* because they identified any and every change in tone and also any background noise.

## **Data Analysis**

Once the data was retrieved and compiled, the researcher began the domain analysis by looking for common themes throughout the interviews (Merriam, 1995). Themes are defined as abstract constructs that researchers identify before, during, and after data collection (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This method is referred to as open coding, which is defined as inducing themes from texts (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The researcher used systematic color coding to differentiate the themes. The process started by analyzing each of the participant's answers and locating the main theme of the answer. Once the theme was located it was highlighted with a specific color, and then the researcher proceeded to the next participant's answer for the same question looking for the theme. If the theme matched the previous participant's answer then it was highlighted with the same color. If it was different then it was marked with a different color. After highlighting each participants theme all of the answers were laid out on a table and the common colors were grouped together and became a theme that was used to meet the research objectives. While analyzing the data the researcher also identified quotes from the participants that would add credibility and richness to the data collected. These quotes are seen in chapter 4 with the rest of the research results.

## **Summary of Methodology**

This chapter was designed to explain the methods by which the research was conducted. Chapter 3 also explained the research design, procedures, and the data analysis. The reliability of using the qualitative method was addressed along with the reliability of the interview process. Chapter 4 will contain all of the results from the interviews.

## CHAPTER 4

### INTERVIEW RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to get a much more in depth look at Georgia's agritourism industry. After conducting eight interviews with the owner/operators of the top agritourism businesses in the state of Georgia certain themes became evident while analyzing the data. These themes were used to meet the objectives of this research.

This chapter contains the data that was gathered once each of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed. The themes are listed in order from the most common theme to the least common theme from how they appear in the original interview. Raw data fell within a theme if it was a topic or idea that was mentioned during the interview by multiple interviewees. Domain analysis was used to summarize the overarching themes. The themes are presented by how they relate to each of the research objectives.

### Quantitative Results

In order to better understand the farmers being interviewed and to gain a perspective on their agritourism business, eight quantitative questions were asked. The answers to the quantitative questions are as follows.

The first four questions focus on the individual being interviewed and the results are as follows. The average age of the participants was 46 (SD=14.714). All of the participants were part owners of the business (Table 4.1). Two of the participants were female and six were male. Of those that were interviewed, one had their doctorate, two had a high school

diploma, and five graduated from college with a bachelor's degree. The college majors varied between the participants. Of the six that graduated from college only two participants received degrees in agriculture.

The last four questions focused on the participants business and the results are as follows. All of the businesses had been in operation for over a year and the average time they had been in business was 15 years ( $SD=8.552$ ). Two of the participants chose to pass on the question regarding their annual average gross income because they did not feel comfortable sharing this information. During one of the interviews the researcher did not ask the question and therefore did not obtain a response. Of those that answered the questions the annual gross income ranged from \$30,000 to \$7 million. The median annual gross income was \$450,000. The number of full-time employees of the businesses researched ranged from 0 to 60. The average number of full-time employees was 14. Two of the businesses did not have part-time employees. Including all of the businesses the number of part-time employees ranged from 0 to 250. The average number of part-time employees was 65.

Table 4.1: Answers to the Quantitative Questions

Table 4.1: Answers to the Quantitative Questions								
Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Major	Years	Avg. Annual Gross Income	Full-time	Part-time
Participant #1	42	Female	High School	NA	2	\$30,000	1	0
Participant #2	68	Male	Ph. D	History	2	NA	2	0
Participant #3	33	Male	High School	NA	23	\$7 million	40	40
Participant #4	59	Female	B.S.	Accounting	19	\$450,000	0	30
Participant #5	27	Male	B.S.	Agribusiness	13	\$200,000	1	4
Participant #6	59	Male	B.S.	Forestry	20	Pass	3	60
Participant #7	34	Male	B.S.	Ag Communications	22	Pass	60	250
Participant #8	48	Male	B.S.	Child Psychology	19	\$1.5 million	8	140

## **Research Objective 1**

Research objective one consisted of describing the day to day operations and business practices of an agritourism business in Georgia. After transcribing each interview, the researcher extracted the answers from each interview and compared it to all of the other interviews. Common themes were taken from the interviews and are listed below. A theme is a topic or idea that was mentioned during the interview by multiple interviewees. If a statement was made during the interview that applies and better explains the theme, then a quote was included to add richness to the data.

The goal of objective one was to describe the things that happen on a daily basis. Any theme found throughout each interview was used to describe an idea, behavior or practice that occurs at the interviewed businesses. The quotes listed below were used to give deeper understanding of the theme and how it was stated during the interview. For some of the themes there were multiple quotes that are listed by participant number.

### **FREEDOM**

Participant # 3: “There’s a lot of freedom. I mean, yeah, it’s a lot of hard work, but there’s a lot of freedom involved with it too.”

### **BIG CHANGE**

Participant # 4:

“First of all you need to examine yourself and decide if you are a people person because if you’re not, you don’t need to be in this business. That’s hard for a lot of farmers because most farmers are men and they like to farm and that’s what they’re good at, but they might not be good at dealing with the public and you have to be.”

Participant # 6:

“You can’t just take Old Joe that’s been planting corn all his life and expect him to do good dealing with customers. Let’s say you’ve been growing corn and soy beans and you’re going to go from that to agritourism, you’ve changed completely. Now you’re in customer service and people management. This has nothing to do with farming.”

### ACTIVITIES

Participant # 1: “We do a lot of field trips, but sometimes schools will book trips for an entire grade level.”

Participant # 2: “Most kids don’t know the difference between how a tomato is grown and how an onion is grown. They don’t know where milk comes from. They think it comes from Kroger.”

Participant # 3:

“We were doing field trips and the first field trips we were doing, we were doing them for free and we were seeing like 300 to 400 kids a year. Then we started charging \$3.00, a whopping \$3.00, and the first year that we charged people, we saw like 1200 kids. We saw more when we started charging. Now we are at \$5.00 and that’s really too cheap. We are going to have to go up, but that goes along with letting people experience your farm... Next year our corn maze is going to be open 7 days a week. It's going to be open Monday, it's going to be open every day during the month of October. Because of the demand and all the different fall breaks everywhere.”

Participant # 4:

“Through the week we do school field trips and senior tours. So we have a lot of kids, who come here from schools across the state. Primarily from the Atlanta area. And we give them a really educational, but fun field trip. They get to milk a real cow, take a wagon ride, go to the petting farm, all that kind of thing, and play on the playground. That's what we do through the week.”

Participant # 5:

“I think that with so many young people, especially these days, just not knowing where food comes from, how it's grown and everything that goes into it. I think that it's always going to be something that's going to be taught in schools. In other words, I think there's always going to be a business there for field trips and educational tours. If you got a field trip, you've got more employees there, more duties obviously and you kind of have a little bit busier day ahead of you.”

Participant # 8:

“These people run around still charging \$4.00 a kid for field trips. They could double that overnight. I mean every school in the whole world will pay \$8.00 for a field trip. You got to recognize that you have something valuable even though you take it for granted.... We would have to say a 400-person company picnic here close to this barn, on the outside, inside, somewhere. We'd have a 150-person company picnic somewhere else on the farm. We might have six birthday parties going on.... I decided to bring the two counties together and try to do a fundraiser to help them and do fireworks on the farm and be a

signature event for us so that companies would know who we are. That's how we started. We started advertising a week before the event and 8,000 people showed up. We had enough food for 1,500. \$10.00 a car, no matter how many were in there was how we did it. Now it's \$25.00 a car, no matter. School bus, \$25 to get in. We still do that 17 years later.... One of the things we love to do is, on our hayride wagon, we've got a basket. We say, "Okay, how many of you know what the byproducts of the cattle industry are?" Well, Nike tennis shoe of course, a Coach purse, of course, a leather belt, yeah. Well, what about these gummy bears? What about this toothpaste? What about this makeup? What about this sheetrock? What about this Jell-o? You don't think about that. They're fascinated these ladies that they've smeared cow on their face, a byproduct of it. Teaching them the education, teaching people something that's just a fundamental, natural truth that certainly the Bible talks about."

### QUALITY PRODUCT

Participant # 3:

"These folks tote our peaches or our strawberries around and when they get a flat of strawberries or a bucket of strawberries, a basket of peaches. They tote it around like a trophy.... Again if it's that thing of strawberries or a basket of peaches, it's gonna be the best quality that we can possibly put out there... I just want every box and every basket to be perfect and I think ultimately that pays off when you hear people bragging."



## MARKETING

Participant #1: “I would love to be more involved in farmers markets because I tell people there is not better marketing and opportunity than having that traffic of people and have face to face contact and try to get there e-mails and stuff like that.”

Participant #2: “My major job is the marketing. Trying to develop the website, contacting people,...”

Participant # 3:

“I do our Facebook page and I like taking a picture out there of some peaches or pumpkins or whatever and I like just seeing, it takes like 5 minutes and there will be 100 likes on it or 15 comments.... I feel like the agritourism venues are the face of agriculture in Georgia that we have to have our best foot forward.”

Participant #5 – “I would consider the demographics. I would consider my market. First thing I would do is say, "Who am I catering to?"... So, consider where you're at, your location, and how you can get people to you and what that's going to take.”

Participant # 6:

“You almost need to have a degree in marketing or hire an expert marketing person. I don't care what you grow, if you grow a bazillion peaches and you can't get them sold, it's not going to do any good. If you put up the nicest agritainment, if you put up a great corn maze and you can't get people out there to walk through it, you just failed. So you've got to have a great marketing person.”

Participant # 7: “We generally plan out marketing well in advance.”

## SUPPLYING THE MARKET

Participant #3:

“There's kind of 2 peaks. so you've got a peak in July and August and that's peach season. That's when we're picking 500 bushels of peaches a day. And a lot of different fruits and vegetables. Squash and beans and blackberries. At that point we'll have 30 some odd people working on the farm and we've got 2 or 3 different crews, going in different directions and a lot of it has to do with what the market needs that day. What they sell short on the day before....Getting the product up here to the shelves. You kind of have to start planning on Monday and Tuesday for what you are going to be doing for next Friday, Saturday and Sunday.”

Participant # 5:

“We'll have a crew of about 8 out there every day just picking and they typically can pick everything we need for the store by noon. So, we'll have employees come in and start picking. Employees will come to the store and open up the store at 8:00am and the first thing they do is start going through strawberries and packaging them in our boxes and putting them out on display in the store.... As far as the store operation goes, they're just checking out customers, doing inventory on all the products, ordering things and that kind of thing. You know general management of the store. It just depends, Edmund, it's not like running a McDonalds where you have, where you are

doing the same thing 365. You're changing everyday down there. You know strawberries are a short season, blueberries are a short season, all of these things are short seasons and sometimes you got strawberries and blueberries. Sometime you got strawberries, blueberries, and peaches.”

Participant #7: “Replenishment, making sure the shelves are stocked full and making sure everything is clean. It's a lot of preparations, standing around, making sure your product is displayed properly in an adequate supply.”

#### WHOLESALE ORDERS

Participant # 5: “An average day during strawberry season, we start picking strawberries about 7:30am and we'll have a crew of about, you know depending on if we have any type of big orders or anything like that.”

#### LIABILITY

Participant # 4: “Another challenge is the liability of having large crowds on your farm.”

Participant # 6: “If you are going to go into this industry, you better have incredible liability insurance because people are looking for a way to sue you.”

#### WORKING WITH FAMILY

Participant # 3:

“The benefits are, that's my grandma that was in here and she works every day. My granddad, they still work every single day. Just working with family and I think that it probably more prevalent in the farming community... There are challenges to owning and operating a family operation. There are knock down

drag out's and you don't have a choice but to make up or bite your tongue, one or the other. It's one or the other. You either make someone see it your way and come together on an issue or either just bite your tongue and don't even talk about it."

### POLITICAL ISSUES

Participant # 2:

"For some reason zoning, most agritourism business, if you dug deep you would find out that they are not zoned and that is going to be an issue that going to be faced here in Georgia..... I think the state legislators going to have to get involved. There is just too much zoning discretionary, it's a local problem and a county problem. So if you are depending on your county officials you could be in trouble."

### FULFILLING

Participant # 2: "A lot of people have worked just as hard at other jobs and I don't think they are getting the satisfaction I've seen."

### LIMITED TIME

Participant # 1: "having enough time in the day to get everything done, making sure everything is very aesthetic and well-kept so that the public sees and has a good first impression."

Participant # 3:

"Somebody that's considering agritourism, I'd say don't consider it if you don't want to put in 60 to 70 hours per week. I mean, don't even think about it. Because if you want to have a pick your own strawberry patch, listen,

strawberries don't wait. They are going to get ripe and you've got to sell them.

You've got about 2 days to get someone out on your farm filling up buckets. If you want to have a corn maze, be ready to come over, if you're going to stay open until 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock on Saturday nights, be ready to be up at 8:00am on Sunday Morning cleaning toilets. I mean, try to hire it all done and see how much money you make.”

Participant # 5: “The biggest thing is time.... Finding the time to hire the right people, to have the right marketing scheme's, implement new features, new events, things like working on the website. Stuff like that. You know, finding time to do all that is tough.”

#### THINGS OUT OF THE FARMERS CONTROL

Participant # 1: “People don't understand that this is a true working farm and that we are just not available to you and I am not able to provide everything that you want like a supermarket does. We grow the food so sometimes we have an abundance and sometimes we don't.”

Participant # 5: “If it rains, you know the weather is a big factor on what you do that day.”

Participant # 7: “It is a challenge when you have some weather related event, you got an activity scheduled and the rain rolls in and cancels it, or you're going out promoting strawberries, and then due to a situation your berries aren't producing for this crucial two week period.”

Participant # 8: “If the weather's nice it's not raining anywhere, we'll have as many as say, 7 to 8,000 people here.”

#### HIRING EMPLOYEES

Participant # 4: “Finding good employees. All of ours are part time, so that makes it even more difficult to find help. And that's another reason that we concentrate just on the weekends

because we are able to pick up workers on the weekends that may have jobs through the week.”

Participant # 8:

“You can have a train. You can have a \$500,000 something. If you have the wrong person running it, forget it. You have got to have the right person.... It's a wonderful place to employ someone. Whether it's a stay-at-home mom or what I enjoy is, these senior citizens that know this stuff. They grew up with it, and they have a passion for showing somebody and teaching them what it's about, so that you have a chance to employ these people where they might be sitting at the house. It doesn't matter if they were a mill worker their whole life, they grew up on a farm.”

#### CUSTOMERS

Participant # 1: “You have to be very social, you have to be able to respond to unique inquiries you have to have patience some people can really drive your patience.”

Participant # 2: “Meeting a lot of nice people...Dealing with that many thousands of people in such a short period of time, it's very stressful.”

Participant # 4: “You have to be a people person. You have to get along with people, but at the same time you have to have a really firm hand in dealing with employees and problem customers as well. It's kind of a balance there and kind of hard at times.”

Participant # 6:

“It's changed over the years. When I started out, dealing with the customers and building friendships and having folks really come out and enjoy the farm. That

was a huge benefit and one of the reasons we really enjoyed it. Over the last 20 years the clientele has changed and the people just aren't as nice and easy to deal with as they used to be...The biggest challenge is going to be the people management skills. If you can't manage people and that includes the employees and customers, you better hire somebody that can....There's a lot more customers that no matter what you do you can't make them happy....If it's a pick-your-own operation, the people will step right on the strawberries, on the bed. They'll have their kids climbing up in the trees and they break the limbs off a peach tree. They'll pick apples, and, oh we got too many, they'll just drop the apples on the ground. They had a fun time picking them, but they don't want to pay for all of them. That type of just disrespect. Oh, yeah. They wouldn't hesitate to take one bite out of a peach and throw it on the ground. They wouldn't hesitate to take a bucket of strawberries and just dump them out because the kids picked them and they don't look good. They're going to dump them out if there is any little problem.”

Participant # 8:

“We learned quick that we can't compete with Friday night football and Atlanta traffic. The people that would come and spend money were from Atlanta, nobody local came. That's when I started focusing on these larger towns because I knew they had more available cash and they didn't mind driving...To spend time thinking of ways to make people smile and be happy is very rewarding.”

## **Research Objective 2**

Objective number two was to describe the practices that were the keys to each businesses success. Each of the themes was based on direct quotes from the interviews and can be used to explain what some of the practices that made them successful.

### **DESIRE TO BE HEALTHIER**

Participant # 3: “People want to be healthy. They want to be healthy. There are just so many nutritional benefits to locally produced goods. Most of these people know it.”

Participant # 5: “We were talking earlier about how everybody's on this health kick now and we're going to a big "green" phase. People will want to know where there food comes from more and more.”

### **VISIT OTHER BUSINESSES**

Participant # 1: “I think that there is no lesson better learned than seeing what other people have done and hearing what their mistakes have been.”

Participant # 6: “I’d also visit other farms. That’s what everybody does. They go to different farms and see what they’re doing.”

### **RETURN BUSINESS**

Participant # 5: “Now obviously, we want people to come out and have a good time and if we are making all the money in the world and everyone that leaves here is unhappy and we’re not getting return business, then I don’t think it’s much of a success.”



## START SMALL AND GROW SLOW

Participant # 2:

“I’m just a little bit worried because most people don’t want to start small, they want to go into it and have everything that you’ve developed over the last 40 years, you know, all at one time. You can’t do that because you learn as you go. You make a lot of mistakes and you learn from those mistakes and if you just go into it whole hog to begin with you’re going to make a lot of mistakes and that will reflect on all of the agritourism businesses. If someone gets really bad hurt because of your negligence that reflects on everybody who’s in that business.”

Participant # 8:

“The first thing I tell folks is to keep it as simple as possible.... We try to measure as much as we can and being able to recognize, like we have on one of our surveys it says, "How did you learn about our farm?" Did you learn about us on a radio ad or in a newspaper or a magazine article or whatever it happens to be. We have them where they can circle them. I can't remember where it landed this year, but last year, the number one thing was we come every year. Number one thing was we come every year. You can create a family tradition and that's why those people need to realize they got to grow it slow, because it takes a generation to do it.”

## BEING DIFFERENT

Participant # 7: “Your location is key and your story. You need a good story perceived or real.”

Participant # 8:

“What is it that you have that’s special? Are you fantastic at decorating? Then let that be what you’re known for. Do you have a historic era about your farm? What’s the story in your family? Is this the third generation? Is it a centennial farm? Are you a fourth generation? People love that and that’s marketable. What is your own identity? Use that as the fundamental, cornerstone and then work from there.”

## HIGH POTENTIAL AND GREAT OPPORTUNITY

Participant #1:

“Georgia just has so much land still and there is so much potential to do so many different things and there are new things popping up like the olive trees and the olive oil that’s down in South Georgia.... I have a huge passion for agritourism because I think it exposes and connects people to the farms.”

Participant # 2:

“Agritourism can make agriculture fun and profitable...Organic gardening is what people are looking for and if you can tie that into agritourism, and it doesn't have to be a corn maze or even a pumpkin patch, it could be a farm tour. People want to come and see a farm. They like to go out and pet the goats, pick eggs, or gather eggs, and touch animals. They need a connection back and if you could group it in

to showing them whatever farming activity you are into whether digging potatoes, pulling onions, and you can show them the activity.”

Participant # 3:

“The demand was just never there to do something like this up until the past 8 or 9 years...Know up front that you are going to work. Have clean bathrooms and always put your best foot forward. I feel like agritourism venues are the face of agriculture in Georgia and we need to have our best foot forward. Let other people know that we, as agritourism businesses, are decent folks and that our concerns are their concerns. Work together because there are enough people in the state of Georgia for all of us to have our customers.”

Participant # 5:

“I think that it’s very bright. I think that agriculture is our number one industry and tourism is number two, is that right? You would think that a marriage between those would be successful...There are many interstates in Georgia, and there’s so much traffic heading to Florida and back and forth and we’ve got a hugely populated city in Atlanta that can really support so much if we just take advantage of it.”

Participant # 7:

“I think agritourism offers the aspect of taking advantage of a niche market with consumers interested in visiting the farm. It allows growers and those passionate about the land to still farm, but it also take advantage of some retail sales that are generated from that... I think we're still kind of in our infancy and hopefully we'll continue to grow.”

Participant # 8: “I think it’s bright, I think it’s a fantastic future. I think it’s a youthful future....I would say that Georgia has as much potential as anybody because we’ve got the coast, the mountain, the rivers and so much diversity.”

### CREATIVITY

Participant # 5:

“I think one of the biggest characteristics is a good imagination, well there's a few things. A good imagination and, not that I have one, but fortunately for me my wife has a great imagination. She's very creative and she can come up with things that I would never think of. For the Fall Festival she came up with a big pit of corn. You just pour corn in there and they did scarecrow decorations and stuff like that.”

Participant # 8:

“I'd spent most of my time focusing on company picnics and one of the reasons I wanted the field trips was so I could send stuff home with the kids to let their moms and dads know that this place does company picnics. You really had to get creative and figure out how are you going to do this (agritourism) because we're, again, down here in nowhere.”

### WEBSITE

Participant # 1: I feel we have a very well developed website, we have tried to answer just about every question we get asked, on the website.

## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

### Participant # 3:

“Most farmers are proud of what they have and to let people experience it and one of the beautiful things is.... one of the greatest things I've figured out over the past 10 years was an experience is, that's what it is. They don't take anything home with them. I sell it to the next person. I sell the same thing to the next person and what I really like is when a family of 4 pays me \$48 down at the corn maze and they walk out and they're smiling from ear to ear and tell you "oh my gosh, this was the greatest thing in the world." They want to hug your neck cause of their experience. Makes you feel like you accomplished something and then you look behind them and that corn maze is still there and the hayride tractor is still there and you get to sell it to the next family of 4. I'm not trying to sound greedy about it, but I'm selling an experience.”

### Participant # 5:

“I love for kids to come off the interstate and they may be from Canada and have never seen a cow before and whenever they park they open the door and they see a cow and they just freak out. I think it's the best feeling in the world. So I love for people to come and have a good experience on the farm.”

### Participant # 6:

“I think that's going to become more and more of a trend. I think that people are going to want to take their kids to farms and experience life on the farm. It used to be everyone experienced life on the farm. In my grandfather's day everybody

grew up on the farm, everybody had a garden, and now just so many people don't. Both their parents work in town and they don't get to get outside and see animals and they don't get to see things being grown. I feel like there always going to be a future in agritourism.”

Participant # 8:

“One of our big things is when we teach our employees, we tell them you've got one opportunity to make a lifetime memory and agritourism gives you an amazing canvas through which to do that.... If you hear, "I had a great time. The weather was beautiful and, golly, the food was good and it was just really a great day," that's a great, you can be happy about that. When it says, "I haven't experienced a place like that since I was a child and my husband and I came with our grandchildren and we had to pull them away and I have Facebooked all 400 of my friends since I left here and we can't wait to come back," then she's describing a since I left here and we can't wait to come back," then she's describing a transformation. She was transformed back to her childhood and now she's sharing that with her children or grandchildren. That's transformational and to me that's where the blue ribbon reward is.”

#### TRAINING AND MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES

Participant # 5:

“If you're in that leadership role you have to be sure that all your employees are saying the right things. Know everything there is to know about your product line. I don't want somebody coming in to buy a box of peaches and we've got five varieties there and my employee did not know the difference in any of them. Just thinking it's a peach.”

Participant # 7: “Nobody, I don’t care how good the employee is, is going to operate your business like you or those with a vested interest. It’s important to try to incentivize all employees to do their best.”

Participant # 8:

“We have to teach these people that and it gives us the whole thing. It gives us rewards because we're teaching people something. We're teaching, not only our guests but we're improving, hopefully, the etiquette of our employees... I think you have to care for your employees and your people genuinely.... It's hard for me to imagine that if you've got the right people and the right passion with the people involved, it's hard for me to see in this day and time an agritourism flop.”

#### ATTENDING CONFERENCES

Participant # 1:

“There are conferences now that are being held at a local level and at a state level and they are at a national level. Try to see if you can attend some of those and get some ideas and work to be different from other people, but then again don't re- invent the wheel as other people show success in something see how/what is best for you.”

Participant # 2: “I don’t know if you’re aware of the agritourism association in Georgia. I think that’s a good starting point for anybody who is interested. They should attend their meetings and it’s a good place to network with other agritourism operators.”

## FINANCES

Participant # 5: “If I've got nine acres of strawberries and we only sell X pounds that we could have gotten by with just 2 acres of strawberries, that was a complete failure.”

Participant # 7: “It's not all about the dollars, but we're a for profit business.”

Participant # 8: “I think that you've got to have a good handle on your bottom line, on what your costs and your charges are and are you making a profit, because so many of us get excited about the smiles and the crowds and all that and we forget to make money.”

## DIVERSIFICATION

Participant # 3: “About 10 years ago every month there was an article in a magazine about diversifying your farm.”

Participant # 6: “I started out in agritourism, and I've just diversified and expanded it.”

Participant # 8:

“The whole drive was just to diversify the farm and that was a good fit for my personality and interests as well as the farm owners... We got to diversify, the diversifying of agritourism. We'd diversified cattle with this. We got to diversify it, so if all we are is a corn maze, we still have a season and who cares if it falls down. Then we can put hay bales out there and rent paintball guns or something. We'll come up with something to do. That's what we did. We bought paddleboats. We did a better job with our petting zoo. There's a whole series of things that we thought that we could afford, and it wasn't huge but, we just took the money that we've been making and added that.”



## **Summary**

Chapter 4 presented the results of the interviews as they related to the study's objectives:

- 1) Describe the day to day operations and business practices of an agritourism business in Georgia;  
and
- 2) Determine the best practices for Georgia's agritourism businesses as being key to their success.

Chapter 5 will analyze the results of the interviews in comparison with the literature review in order to draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the results of the study.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research was to take an in depth look at Georgia's agritourism industry in order to understand the inner workings of their operation.

Specific objectives of this study included:

1. Describe the day to day operations and business practices of an agritourism business in Georgia; and
2. Describe practices of current Georgia agritourism businesses as being key to their success.

This chapter will present the results of the research and explain how they affect those in or considering the agritourism industry and recommendations for future research.

#### Review of Methods

This research was conducted using the case study method. The participants were purposively selected specifically based on their involvement in the Georgia Agritourism Association (GAA), their website design, and their location within the state. Each participant agreed to be interviewed at their place of business over the phone. The interviews were designed to last between 20 and 30 minutes, but some of the participants elaborated more about their experience and business than others. The interviews ranged from 18 to 67 minutes with

the average being 33 minutes. During the interviews the participants were asked questions about themselves and their business (Appendix A).

Each interview was transcribed verbatim and was analyzed using a domain analysis. The researcher analyzed each of the qualitative questions individually and determined a series of main themes which emerged from the data. Once the main themes were identified for each question, they were compared to the other participant's responses to the same question in order to find the most common theme for each question. The common themes were then used to complete objectives two and three. To ensure reliability of the data, each transcription and a copy of the researcher's interpretation of the answers to the interview questions were e-mailed to each participant. The participants were asked to read over the transcript to make sure there was no identifiable information present and they were encouraged to look over the researcher's interpretation of their answers (i.e., the overarching domains) and make changes as needed.

### **Summary of Findings**

As a result of this study, readers know more about the owner/operators, their day to day operations, and the best practices of Georgia's agritourism leaders which they believe have contributed to their success. The data collected through literature reviews and interviews will give people an understanding of who are the owner/operators of the agritourism industry and information about their businesses. The data will show readers things that can only come from the experience that the interview participants have had. All of the interviewees combined have about 120 years of experience in the agritourism industry. Combining the data from the literature with the data collected from the interviews show someone interested in the agritourism industry or starting an agritourism business insight of the day to day activities and some best practices.

## **Quantitative Results**

It was important to the research to understand more about the participants and their businesses. The following section compares the data collected in the quantitative portion of the study to the literature reviewed.

Age: The researcher found that the average age of the participants would be in the early 60's and the articles that were found suggested that owners and operators of agritourism businesses were 65 years of age and older (Bagi & Reeder 2012). Mace's (2005) research showed that the average age of agritourism business owners was 52. Of the eight participants the average age was 46. This would suggest that in the state of Georgia younger farmers are taking advantage of agritourism. One fact to remember is that three of the owner/operators that were interviewed were in their late twenties and early thirties. These participants made comments throughout the interview that their fathers and grandfathers still worked at the business.

Gender: According to the 2007 census (USDA) claims that more women are getting involved in agriculture and two of the interviewees were female. Research shows that 11% of farm operators were women in 2002 (Trauger, Aschs, Barbercheck, Brasier, & Kiernan, 2010). After conducting the interviews, the researcher deduced that there seemed to be specific people that were tasked with doing interviews because they were better at them or more qualified. In the case of the two female participants this was not the case. Both of the females owned and operated their businesses with their husbands. It seemed that the husbands did more of the farming work and they focused more on the customers.

Education: Brown and Reeder (2007) claim that people involved in the agritourism industry are more educated than regular farmers. Of the eight participants, six had college

degrees. The research conducted by Mace (2005) showed that only 55% of those surveyed in his study had college degrees.

**Years in Business:** There was a wide range of years that the participants had been in business. It ranged from two to twenty-three years. The participants that have been in business longer had a higher gross income.

**Gross income:** The literature looked at states like California, which averaged \$51,094 per farm and Tennessee that averages about \$12,759 per farm (Rilla, Hardesty, Getz & George, 2011; Holland & Bruch, 2009). The annual gross income of all the farms that answered the question ranged from \$30,000 to \$7 million. There are a few factors that need to be taken into consideration. First of all the data is based off of gross income and not net income. Net income shows if the business is actually profitable or not. Selling multiple products or having a high volume of visitors can produce an increase in revenues, but the next question would be how much does it cost. The next thing to consider is the location. Some of the operations with larger gross income are on major highways and interstates, while some of them are in small towns and do not have as high of traffic flow. Some of the businesses with higher gross income are in smaller towns and not on major roads.

**Employees:** Previous research gave reasons why the expected number of employees would be small. Although there were several businesses that only required a small number of employees, most of them required a large group of employees. One of the reasons relates to the crop that is being produced. In Georgia, some of the crops that are grown can require a large number of people to be able to harvest them. Other businesses have a high volume of visitors that require a large number of employees to be able to monitor all of them and keep

them safe. This confirms that there is a need for management and leadership training to teach these business owners how to deal with such a large staff.

## **Qualitative Results**

### **Research Objective 1**

Research objective was to describe the day to day operations and business practices of an agritourism business in Georgia. The following section concludes the results of research objective one.

#### **FREEDOM**

Participant # 2 mentioned that being an owner/operator of an agritourism business requires hard work, but also offers freedom. This is similar to other businesses because the owner/operator has the ability to make their own schedule. The difference with an agritourism business is that it is a seasonal business. When the crops are ready to be harvested not only does the farming operation get busy, but this is usually when the customers will come to visit the farm to participate in activities and purchase produce.

#### **BIG CHANGE**

Participant # 6 describes an agritourism business as being in “customer service and people management.” It is important for a farmer to understand this transition. All of the businesses studied, except for one, changed from a farming operation to an agritourism business. It is important to understand that farming is very different from customer service. Wolfe and Bullen (2009) create a list of questions that farmers should ask themselves before they transition to an agritourism business and the questions ask the owner/operator if they are a people person and enjoying spending time with large groups of people. Agritourism is very

different from farming and it is important to understand that the farmer will be spending many hours with large groups of people.

### ACTIVITIES

In order to draw people to the farmer's place of business it is important to have the proper activities. The most common activity that was mentioned from the participants was field trips. Participant # 8 mentioned that it is important to realize that the farm has something to offer and that most schools are willing to pay \$8.00 for a field trip. Most definitions of agritourism mention people visiting working farms for educational purposes (Kentucky Department of Agriculture, 2013; Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, 2013). Field trips are an example of educational purposes and have potential to be profitable. There is a great opportunity for field trips because, according to participant # 5, so many children do not know where food comes from and that means that there will always be a place for educational tours. Tours do not have to be limited to only field trips for children, but this is the most common.

Important things to understand about field trips are that they will require more employees to assist in helping the children, they offer a great opportunity to advertise, and they help get the farms name into the community. Participant # 8 offers company picnics at his farm in addition to field trips. Participant # 8 sends each child home with a coloring book containing information about the farm and also a list of upcoming events. The idea is that the parents will look at the child's coloring book and learn more information about the farm and what activities are happening. Offering field trips allows the farm to get involved in the local community, which will hopefully bring more people out for things other than field trips.

Participant # 4 makes sure to give a very educational and fun field trip. This is important because if the parents and teachers do not consider the field trip educational then they will not bring back future classes. If the field trip is not fun then the children will not want to come back. It is important to offer both an educational and fun field trip. Participant # 8 makes his hay rides educational for all of the riders by asking questions about the byproducts of the cattle industry.

Other activities include fireworks, corn mazes, u-pick, hay rides, birthday parties, company picnics and pig races. It is important to offer activities like these to draw people out to the farm. A large part of the day to day activities are conducting activities and planning for them.

### QUALITY PRODUCT

Participant # 3 and 5 mentioned the importance of having a quality product to offer to the customers. The product could be peaches and strawberries or even ice cream that customers are willing to drive out of their way to buy. Participant # 5 mentions in the interview that one of the advantages of having an agritourism business is that they are able to get a premium price for their product. He mentioned that their business has charged the same price for the last 5 years. If you want people to pay a premium price for your product then the customer much perceive it as a quality product. An agritourism business is a working farm and it is important to stock the most quality product on the shelves.

### MARKETING

Marketing is a major component of the owner/operator of an agritourism business. Six of the participant mentioned marketing in their interview, which means that it a very important part of the business. Participant # 6 understands the seriousness of marketing stating that,



“You almost need to have a degree in marketing or hire an expert marketing person. I don’t care what you grow, if you grow a bazillion peaches and you can’t get them sold, it’s not going to do any good.”

Participant # 7 states that they plan out their marketing well in advance. Multiple participants use signs and billboards to advertise their agritourism business. This works well for them because their business is close to a major highway or interstate. Location will have an effect on how the farmer markets their business. Wolfe and Bullen (2009) state that, “A business without a sign is no business at all.” Participant # 3 uses Facebook to do most of their marketing, but participant # 1 focuses more on the personal face to face interaction. One important thing to remember before the farmers starts marketing is to consider the demographics and who they are marketing the business to.

#### SUPPLYING THE MARKET

The majority of the farms had a market which they sold produce and other items. During the peak of the season it is important to harvest the crops and also make sure that the shelves are stocked. This will require additional employees, but the amount will depend on the size of the operation. It is not only important to make sure the shelves are stocked, but participant # 7 recognizes the importance of making sure everything is clean and displayed properly.

The store operations also include checking inventory, ordering more of a product if it is running low and taking care of customer’s needs in the store according to participant # 5. In this business it is important for those in the market to inform those harvesting are aware of what the market needs. Participant # 3 mentions that the harvesting depends on what the market needs.

## WHOLESALE ORDERS

A few of the businesses interviewed are large enough that they not only sell produce to customers through the market, they also sell produce wholesale to local restaurants, and businesses. It is important to know what wholesale orders have been placed and to plan harvest time accordingly. This could also require additional employees during peak seasons.

## LIABILITY

Rilla, Hardesty, Getz, and George, (2011) found that liability was one of the biggest challenges for agritourism businesses. The data did not show that liability was a major challenge, but three of the participants mentioned it during the interview. Participant #6 stated that, “If you are going to go into this industry, you better have incredible liability insurance because people are looking for a way to sue you.” If farmers are going to transition their farm to an agritourism business it is very important to have liability insurance.

## WORKING WITH FAMILY

Participant # 3 explained the advantages and challenges with working with family members. When transitioning from a farm to an agritourism business, some farmers will hire family members because they worked on the farm originally or because the agritourism business needs additional employees. Three of the participants mentioned working with family members, but participant # 3 mentioned that sometimes things can get heated, so it is important to “make up or bite your tongue.”

## POLITICAL ISSUES

Kuehn and Hilchey (1999) found that labor cost and government regulations were among the top five concerns of the agritourism industry. The interviews showed that there were issues with labor, water, and zoning. These are items that it is important to become

knowledgeable about before getting involved in the agritourism industry. Participant # 2 thinks that the State Legislators are going to have to get involved to resolve some of the political issues in Georgia.

#### FULFILLING

Participant # 2 mentioned that working on an agritourism business can be fulfilling and satisfying. In the agritourism industry it is easier to see the fruits of your labor.

#### LIMITED TIME

One thing to understand about the agritourism industry is that it takes a big time commitment. Participant # 3 states, “don’t consider it (the agritourism industry) if you don’t want to put in 60 to 70 hours per week.” Two of the other participants mentioned the difficulty of accomplishing all of the tasks that need to get done.

#### THINGS OUT OF THE FARMERS CONTROL

Like with any agricultural based business the weather can play a huge role. Four of the eight participants mentioned that the rain and weather can have an effect on an agritourism business. It is important to schedule events on the farm for customers to come out and enjoy, but it is also important to realize that sometimes these events will be rained out or that the crops might not be ready in time. This can also become a factor within the market. If there is not enough rain to make the crops grow then there is limited supply for the market and for people to purchase. Participant # 1 explains that, “People don’t understand that this is a true working farm and ... I am not able to provide everything that you want like a supermarket does. We grow the food, so sometimes we have an abundance and sometimes we don’t.”

## HIRING EMPLOYEES

Another important part of the daily activities for an agritourism owner/operator is to hire employees. As we have seen from previous themes some farmers hire their family members, but participant # 8 is willing to hire anyone from a stay-at-home to a senior citizen. Participant # 8 goes on to recognize the importance of hiring the right people for the right activities. Two of the businesses chose to do most of their activities on the weekends, so they are able to hire part-time workers looking to make some extra money.

## CUSTOMERS

Customers were the most common theme throughout the interviews. This was probably due to the fact that the agritourism industry focuses mostly on customers visiting the farmers operation. Customers were considered one of the greatest benefits of working in the agritourism industry and also one of the greatest challenges. As mentioned before, it is important to know if the farmer enjoys working with people or not. According to participant # 8 working with people and trying to happy can be very rewarding, but participant # 6 explains that the customers have changed over the past 20 years and now they are difficult to deal with. It is important to know how to manage people if a farmer is going to participate in the agritourism industry. Participant # 4 confirms this stating, “You have to get along with people, but at the same time you have to have a really firm hand in dealing with employees and problem customers as well. It’s kind of a balance there and kind of hard at times.”

## **Objective 1: Summary**

The most common daily practices are conducting different types of activities and dealing with customers. These two themes will be dealt with on a regular basis with any agritourism business. Other daily activities will include supplying the market, filling

wholesale orders, marketing, hiring employees, providing a quality product for the customers and also trying to manage the farmer's time properly in order to get everything accomplished. It is important to understand the business practices discussed by the participants such as, realizing the amount of freedom, fulfillment and the big changes that coincide with an agritourism business. It is also important to be aware of the liability and political issues involved in the agritourism industry. The last business practice is to remember that the farmer cannot control the weather and to realize that some things are unable to be controlled.

### **Research Objective 2**

Objective number 2 was to describe the practices that were the keys to each businesses success. The following section concludes the results of research objective one.

#### **DESIER TO BE HEALTHIER**

Two of the participants commented about customers desire to be healthier has had a positive effect on their business. Participant # 3 states, "There are just so many nutritional benefits to locally produced goods. Most of these people know it." Participant # 5 mentions that everyone is "on this health kick now," which means that agritourism has an opportunity to take advantage of customers desire to be healthier. Agritourism markets that focus their attention providing healthy food and promote healthy living are attracting health conscious adults. This can increase sales and visitors not only to the market, but also to the other activities on the farm. For this reason it is important for an agritourism business to promote the health benefits of their produce and products in their markets.

#### **VISIT OTHER BUSINESSES**

Wolfe and Bullen (2009) discuss the importance of visiting other agritourism businesses in order to learn more about the industry and also to observe how other farmers manage their

operations. Participant # 1 encourages anyone considering the agritourism industry to visit other businesses explaining, “I think there is not lesson better learned than seeing what other people have done and hearing what their mistakes have been.” A key to success is not make mistakes, so if a farmer can learn what mistakes have been made by others in the industry then it will be beneficial. Participant # 1? mentioned that if it’s possible to work at another agritourism business for a day. This gives the farmer an opportunity to not only see what activities are offered and how the market is setup, but it allows them to understand what goes on behind the scenes and how to work with the customers.

### RETURN BUSINESS

A key to success is to develop a way to measure success. The majority of the participants used customers as an indicator of their success, but some of them focused strictly on the money. Participant # 5 focuses his success on return business saying, “...if we are making all the money in the world and everyone that leaves here is unhappy and we’re not getting return business, then I don’t think it’s much of a success.” It is important to develop a system to track customer visits in order to learn more about who the customers are and where they are from and also to track if there is any return business.

### START SMALL AND GROW SMALL

Participant # 8 tells agritourism business owners the importance of keeping the business “as simple as possible.” He also goes on to explain the importance of growing the business slowly, “because it takes a generation to do it.” Participant # 2 is concerned that some of the agritourism businesses are not going to start small and it will have a negative effect on their business, but also the agritourism industry as a whole. She goes on to state that the main reason a farmer does not want to start too big too fast is because “...you learn as you go. You make a

lot of mistakes and you learn from those mistakes...” and if an agritourism business starts of too big from the beginning then the mistakes can be costly. Another key to success is to start small and grow the business slowly.

### BEING DIFFERENT

Although it is important to visit other agritourism operations in order to learn what activities they offer and how they operate their business, it is very important to be different and have your own identity. Participant #7 states, “You need a good story, perceived or real.” Participant # 8 encourages agritourism businesses to have their own identity. Not only is it important to offer different activities than other businesses close by, it is also important to have a story or an identification that customers will remember. Participant # 8 continues explaining that “People love that and that’s marketable.”

### HIGH POTENTIAL AND GREAT OPPORTUNITY

There is a great amount of potential and opportunity for an agritourism business in the state of Georgia according to the participants. Participant # 1 states, “Georgia just has so much land still and there is so much potential to do so many different things and there are new things popping up...” and participant # 8 explains, “Georgia has so much potential as anybody because we’ve got the coast, the mountains, the rivers and so much diversity.” Participant # 5 focuses on the amount of people coming through Georgia and the large city of Atlanta contributing to the opportunity for agritourism. He states “There are so many interstates in Georgia, and there’s so much traffic heading to Florida and back and forth and we’ve got a hugely populated city in Atlanta that can really support so much if we just take advantage of it.” The diverse terrain, high traffic, and large cities create an opportunity for success in the agritourism industry in Georgia.

According to the Georgia Farm Bureau (2011) agriculture is one of Georgia's largest industries and participant # 3 claims, "I feel like agritourism venues are the face of agriculture in Georgia and we need to have our best foot forward." If agritourism is the face of Georgia agriculture and if Georgia's agritourism industry continues to grow, then this will positively affect the agritourism industry. Participant # 2 states that "People want to come out and see a farm," and that is why he believes that there is great opportunity for success in Georgia's agritourism industry.

### CREATIVITY

Creativity is beneficial to an agritourism business. It takes creativity to create activities at an agritourism location and to be different from the business in close proximity. Participant # 5 gives credit to his spouse for being the creative one. He states that it's important for the owner/operator of an agritourism business to have "a good imagination, not that I have one, but fortunately for me, my wife has a great imagination. She's very creative and she can come up with things that I would never think of." Participant # 8 explains that it is important to be creative especially if the business is located far away from a large city.

### WEBSITE

Wolfe and Bullen (2009) mention the importance of having a good website in order to market and advertise the farmer's agritourism business. Participant # 1 mentions that she tries to answer the most common questions on the website in an effort to reduce the number of emails and phone calls. A website is also a great place to post pictures and to give customers an opportunity to offer feedback.



## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Although most agritourism sell products, it is also an opportunity to sell an experience. Participant # 6 states “I think that people are going to want to take their kids to farms and experience life on the farm.” This shows that customers are not only looking for fresh produce, but they are also looking for an opportunity to experience life on a farm.

Participant # 3 explains the benefits of selling an experience. He states that with an experience, “They don’t take anything home with them. I sell it to the next person.” Participant # 8 takes the idea of having an experience on the farm to a higher level. He is looking to create an transformational experience. He states “When it (a customer testimonial) says, “I haven’t experienced a place like that since I was a child and my husband and I came with our grandchildren and we had to pull them away and I have Facebooked all 400 of my friends since I left here and we can’t wait to come back,” then she’s describing a transformation.” The better the customer experience at the agritourism operation, the more likely they are to return and the more successful the business will be.

## TRAINING AND MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES

Another key to success is managing the employees properly. Participant # 5 trains his employees to be knowledgeable about the business and the products. He wants to make sure that the employees are “saying the right things,” and that they know all of the varieties of peaches. This teaches that it is important to teach and train employees what and how things are to be done.

Participant # 7 explains that unless employees have a vested interest in the business they need to be incentivized to do their best. Participant # 8 states in regards to leading the employees, “I think you have to care for your employees and your people genuinely.” These are

two different ways to train and motivate employees, but for each of these successful businesses the methods have worked.

The best way to manage employees of an agritourism operation is to use a servant leadership management style. Jones (2012) conducted a qualitative study with 21 senior managers regarding servant leadership and one of the themes produced from the study was that customer satisfaction increased when the servant leadership method was applied. Cathy (2011) states that “servant leadership is the most effective form of leadership” (p. 9). The agritourism industry is one that focuses on the customers. Barrett (2011) states that happy and motivated employees offer that same goodwill to the customer. If the managers of an agritourism business focus on serving the employees then according to Barrett, the employees will serve the customers in the same manner. Increasing customer satisfaction will help enhance the success level of an agritourism business.

#### ATTENDING CONFERENCES

Attending conferences offers an opportunity to learn more about the agritourism industry and according to participant # 2 “it’s a good place to network with other agritourism operators.”

#### FINANCES

The ability to manage finances is important in an agritourism business. Participant # 8 explains “I think you’ve got to have a good handle on your bottom line, on what your costs and your charges are and are you making a profit, because so many of us get excited about the smiles and the crowds and all that and we forget to make money.” It seems that in this industry it can

be easy to get caught up in working with the customers, but it is important to have someone in charge of the finances that keep the business in operation. Participant # 7 states “It’s not all about the dollars, but we’re a for profit business.” It is important to find the balance between being profitable and satisfying the customer.

### DIVERSIFICATION

Diversification was a common theme throughout the interviews and the literature (Mace, 2005). The literature focused on farmers diversifying their farms in order to stay in business or to become more profitable. One of the participants started his operation as an agritourism business, but all of the other participants diversified their farming operations into an agritourism business. During the interviews two of the participants mentioned that the diversification didn’t stop when they started participating in agritourism. They discuss the importance of continually diversifying the business with new activities, new crops and new products. Another key to being a successful agritourism business is to continually create new activities and opportunities for the customers

### Objective 2: Summary

Objective number 2 was to describe the practices that were the keys to each businesses success. The practice was to understand the opportunity for the agritourism industry. The state of Georgia shows great potential because of its large cities and strong, diverse agriculture across the state and also because of peoples desires to be healthier and know where there food came from in addition to the desire for a farm experience. At the beginning it is important to start small, visit other agritourism locations, attend conferences, and have a quality website. Once the business is established the keys to success include diversifying, managing the finances properly, training and motivating the employees using incentives and caring for them, and being different

than the businesses close by. Other keys to success are being creative and creating a customer experience that will keep the customers coming back year after year.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to take an in depth look at Georgia's agritourism industry in order to understand the inner workings of their operations. The data collected from the interviews allowed both objectives to be achieved and offered a detailed look at the inner workings of eight agritourism businesses in Georgia. This in-depth look explains more than what activities take place during the day at an agritourism business. It explains why certain activities are offered and how the business has evolved over the years to arrive at where it is today. The results of this study offer information about each businesses' key to success and how each key has helped them grow their business and become more successful.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to take an in depth look at Georgia's agritourism industry in order to understand the inner workings of their operation. Using information from the literature, the interviews, and the visits to the agritourism businesses, the researcher created a list of recommendations for anyone starting an agritourism business or considering a transition to an agritourism business. These some of the recommendations are based on the research themes, but the majority are based on practices discovered reading the literature and talking with the participants. The recommendations are as follows:

Assess the Situation: From the interviews conducted three of the participants mentioned the importance of taking a step back and consider if agritourism is the right option. Participant

# 6 encourages those entering the agritourism industry to make sure they understand that it is totally different from farming. The participant shared that, just because someone is good at farming does not mean they will be good at an agritourism business. An agritourism business focuses on dealing with people. It is important for a farmer to ask themselves if they are good with people and do they enjoy working and dealing with people. It is important to consider the transition from farming and working with a very small group of people to dealing with thousands of people all day long. Hatch (2004) gives suggested steps in planning an agritourism business and the first step is to complete a personality assessment. If the farmer answers yes to all of the questions then there is a strong possibility that farmer will do well operating an agritourism operation. The assessment questions are “Do you enjoy people? Are you a good communicator? Are you patient? Are you organized? Can you adapt to change?” (Hatch, 2004).

The next thing to consider is how much time and energy can be invested into an agritourism business. According to participant # 3, a person must be ready to work 60 to 70 hours weeks. Participant # 4 mentioned that during the weekends sometimes she goes to bed after midnight and then is back working at 6:00 in the morning. Farming is hard work and time consuming, but it is seasonal and at times there are breaks. Participant # 5 mentioned that the store is open 6 days a week, so it is hard to get have time off. It is important to realize up front that it is going to take a lot of time to operate an agritourism and require a large amount of interaction with customers. Another thing to assess is the location. What is the demographic that the business will be selling to and where will the customers come from? If located outside of a big city, the farmers need to learn how to draw customers to their farm. If the location is far

away from a big city, it will take more creativity to draw customers to the business. It is good to be within an hour's drive of city of more than 50,000 people (Adam, 2001).

Education: Participant # 8 and participant # 2 mentioned reading different books and magazines to help them in their business. Participant # 8 focuses more on reading books about customers and customer satisfaction, while participant # 2 focuses more on reading more agricultural bases literature, such as Farm Journal, Progressive Farmer, and news that focuses on agricultural. Reading books about promotion and advertising a business would be advantageous. It also is beneficial to educate yourself about agricultural in Georgia and what crops grow best in what climate, so that the farmer knows what agricultural products will grow and sell in that area. It would be important for the farmer to educate himself about the zoning laws in the area, liability insurance, and how much it costs. The farmer will need to educate himself about the farming operation in order to learn its history and what makes it unique. This will be the characteristic that the operation uses to build its identity. Another way to learn is to visit other agritourism operations. This will allow the farmer to see what other operations are doing and how they run their business.

Get Involved: The first thing to get involved in is the states agritourism association and attend their meetings. This will give owner/operators an opportunity to network with other agritourism business owners and allow them to ask question and discuss business practices. Another group that would be beneficial to get involved with is the North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association. This will offer a greater understanding of agritourism on the national level. It is also important to get involved politically within the local community. It is also important to get to know the county agents, so when the farmer has questions or needs help they will know who to go to.

Finances: Participant # 5 mentioned that starting an agritourism business will take a great amount of time and money. Participant # 6 started out as an agritourism business and he said that it is much easier to transition a farm into an agritourism business than it is to start from scratch. It is important to know that it can be expensive at the beginning, so the participants recommended starting small and learning as you grow. Starting small means starting with a roadside market or a u-pick operation and expanding from there. Participant # 4 mentioned starting small and not going into big debt to start a business. Participant # 3 spoke about a couple up the road that tried to start an agritourism business and it did not make it and they lost thousands of dollars. Start small in order to learn from the mistakes and it is less risky.

Starting the Business: An agritourism business must have good liability insurance and be ready to handle emergency situations. Participant # 8 states that,

“You start having people, you're going to have a heart attack. I'm telling you, in every crowd there's three great big giant obese women with weak ankles and they are going down, they just do. One little thing, crack, their ankles go. Then nowadays, kids, they drink four PowerAde's and they're dehydrated because it's all electrolytes, so they're not drinking the water. They're getting off the couch. They're coming out here and it's 101 degrees. They're passing out left and right. How are you going to handle all that?”

This is great advice from someone who has had some emergency situations at their business and has been in business for almost 20 years.

Start with field trips. All of the participants mentioned doing field trips for local schools. It is important to make these field trips fun and hands on, but also educational. Otherwise they will not come back. Participant # 8 thinks that \$8 per student is a good

cost for a field trip and that almost all schools will pay that. He also mentioned during his interview that he used field trips to advertise other events on his farm.

Birthday parties and other events are a good idea because people are paying to rent your land in order to have a party and it is not as labor intensive. Participant # 1 mentions that there is a lot of opportunity with birthday parties and other events on the farm. Having themed weekends is also a common practice that the farms are doing in order to bring in customers. If you decide to have a market it is good to have products other than your own. That way you can still have things to sell even when the growing season ends for that product.

Corn mazes are profitable and can give older children and adults something to do. In your corn maze it is a good idea to have a platform or tower in the middle so parents and grandparents can get on to take pictures. Animals are a great draw because children enjoy seeing and touching the animals. Hay rides are another enjoyable activity that children and parents can both enjoy. Participant # 8 has a bucket filled with questions that are asked on the hay to make it not only fun, but educational.

In regards to the facility, it is very important to keep it clean and presentable to the public. Brown and Reeder (2007) conducted a survey that showed 90% of the 6,400 respondents indicated they enjoyed the farm scenery. This study recognizes the importance of keeping the operation visually pleasing for the customers. Participant # 3 mentioned a few times in his interview the importance of having a nice, clean restroom. It is also important to have a quality product. Grow and produce the best product possible and people will come back for it.



### **Researcher's Reflection on the Research Process**

One of the beneficial parts of the study, for the researcher, was visiting each of the businesses to gain a better understanding of the agritourism industry in general, especially Georgia's. Due to time constraints, two of the interviews were done over the phone. The researcher feels that this had a negative effect on the interview. The participant would have probably elaborated a lot more on their answers and the participant would have been much more at ease during the interview.

The next thing that needs to be changed is the wording of some of the questions. A lot of thought went into creating each of the interview questions, but during the interview some of the questions were unclear and required some explanation. For example, the question How long have you been in business, should have been changed to How long have you been in the agritourism business? Now that the researcher understands more about the agritourism industry the question about average gross income should be changed to, What is the average gross income of the agritourism part of your business?. Some agritourism businesses are actively farming on a large scale and the agritourism part of their business is totally separate. It is important to make the distinction between their farming operation and the agritourism operation when asking questions.

Another thing to understand is that some of the participants interviewed did not count themselves as fulltime employees. As the data was being analyzed, the researcher discovered that there were some operations that didn't have any fulltime employees and it was later realized that the participant didn't include themselves as an employee. This did not have any negative effect on the data, but it is important to recognize for further research. This question

might be better asked by saying, How many people total workers to you have, including yourself?

If this research were to be conducted again, the researcher recommends changing the first qualitative question, What does an average day look like on your farm, by adding the phrase during the busy season? Each time after this question was asked the participant would respond with, “that is a tough question because each day is so different.” Changing this question would help make this questions clearer. Another recommendation would be a follow-up question, such as What does an average day look like for you during the busy season? This would allow the researcher to gain information about the day to day activities of the agritourism operation and also learn more about the participant’s job role and their activities throughout the day. This will shed more light on what specific jobs are done during the day.

For further research on this topic, the researcher recommends changing gross income to net income. For the purposes of this research the question about income offered great insight into the finical possibilities of an agritourism business. The concern with asking people about their net income is that it gets a little too personal, but after conducting the research it seems that people who answered the questions did so without any hesitation. Which begs the question, would the participants have been just as comfortable sharing their net income. This would have given even more insight into the finical opportunities in the agritourism industry.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The qualitative research that was completed will benefit Georgia's agritourism industry by identifying where it is now and what potential it has for the future. Reading the transcriptions offers insight into their businesses, but it is not specific enough to allow readers or future agritourism business operators to make business decisions from.

The next study on Georgia's agritourism industry should involve more participants and should use a Delphi study process. The advantage of using a Delphi study is that it would allow the research to begin with the same qualitative questions that were used for this research study for the first round of questioning and then the questions for each of the following rounds will become more quantitative to allow the research to gain the most reliable data possible. The disadvantage of the Delphi study is that there is a high probability that the researcher will have a hard time getting responses from the participants. The research found that during this study it was very difficult to get in contact with each of the participants because they are busy and involved in a lot of activities outside of their agritourism business.

There could be a place for creating a survey using the constructs based on the common themes gathered from the interviews. The researcher would recommend that if a survey was used then it be done at the Georgia Agritourism Association meeting. This would allow the researcher to gather the most credible data possible because all of the participants there would have a vested interest in growing their business and learning more about agritourism in general. The best way would be to pass out the survey and to make it a requirement to return the survey filled out before the participant can eat. Another option would be to offer a gift or a prize to those who return the completed survey.

Interviewing eight participants was a lot of work and took a lot of time, but gave a great foundation in order to build from. Broadening the study to all the members of the

agritourism association would offer some different perspectives and also give you data that you could base business decisions off of. Using Delphi method of research would allow you go ask more specific questions in order to get even more reliable data. Similar questions should be asked at the beginning of the Delphi study, and get more specific throughout the study.

This case study was beneficial for the agritourism industry in Georgia, but it could be even more beneficial for other states. The reason that other states could benefit more is because Georgia is diverse in regards to agriculture. All eight participants focused on different agricultural products. One focused on apples, one on strawberries, another on beef and another on peaches. With different products there are different climates that bring different types of visitors and create unique perspectives. If this same study was conducted in a state that had a similar climate throughout and produced similar agricultural products then this case study should produce similar answers.

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## APPENDIX A

### OBJECTIVES

#### Thesis Objectives:

A case study to better understand the leaders of Agritourism in the state of Georgia.

#### 1. Demographic questions:

- a. Age
- b. Highest Level of Education
- c. College Major(s) (if applicable)
- d. Male/Female
- e. How long they have been in business
- f. Average gross income per year
- g. How many employees (full-time, part-time)

#### 2. Qualitative questions:

- a. What does an average day look like on your farm?
- b. Why did you start an agritourism business?
- c. What are the greatest benefits of owning/operating an agritourism business?
- d. What are the greatest challenges in owning/operating an agritourism business?
- e. What advice do you give to others who are considering the agritourism industry.?
- f. How do you measure success in your business?
- g. What leadership characteristics must a person have in order to operate a successful agritourism business?
- h. What future do you see for the agritourism industry in the State of Georgia? Why?

The objective of this thesis is to understand the leaders in the agritourism industry within the state of Georgia. The objective will be completed after each of the 8 – 10 participants have answered a small number of demographic questions and a few open-ended questions. All of the demographic and open-ended questions will be asked face to face at the participant's farm.

Upon completion of this study, one will be able to understand who the leaders of the Agritourism industry are by reading their biographical information and leadership styles. The reader will learn about the Agritourism industry by reading the answers to their qualitative questions. This study will benefit anyone starting an Agritourism business in the State of Georgia and teach others about new business opportunities available to them in the agricultural industry.

## APPENDIX B

### SCRIPT FOR RECRUITMENT PHONE CALL

Hello, I'm Edmund Byne and I am working with Dr. Dennis Duncan from the University of Georgia to research the Agritourism industry. The purpose of the study is to learn more about the Agritourism Industry in the State of Georgia and the people who lead and operate successful operations in order to help others who are interested Agritourism.

With your permission, I would like to visit your farm/business and spend approximately one hour with you learning about your business. I have prepared a list of questions about your business that I would like to go through. For research purposes, the conversation would be recorded, but if you don't feel comfortable answering a question(s) you don't have to.

I have selected your business because you show to be an Agritourism business in good standing and your business offers an agricultural experience in addition to family fun and entertainment. I found your contact information on the Georgia Agritourism Association website. What would be a good day and time for me to come by and spend about an hour with you?

## APPENDIX C

## EMAIL SCRIPT

\_\_\_\_(Participants Name)\_\_\_\_,

I wanted to confirm that we will be meeting at your farm, \_(Participants Business)\_ ,  
on \_\_\_\_ (Date and Time)\_\_. If something changes please call me on my cell phone at [404-583-4253](tel:404-583-4253). I wanted to send you a copy of the questions so you will be aware of the questions I'll  
be asking. I don't want you to be taken by surprise.

I have attached a copy of the questions and also listed them below. I have also attached a copy  
of a consent form, so that you know why I am doing the study and what the research is for.

1. Age
2. Highest Level of Education
3. College Major(s) (if applicable)
4. Male/Female
5. How long they have been in business
6. Average gross income per year
7. How many employees (full-time, part-time)
8. What does an average day look like on your farm?
9. Why did you start an agritourism business?
10. What are the greatest benefits of owning/operating an agritourism business?
11. What are the greatest challenges in owning/operating an agritourism business?
12. What advice do you give to others who are considering the agritourism industry.?
13. How do you measure success in your business?
14. What leadership characteristics must a person have in order to operate a  
successful agritourism business?
15. What future do you see for the agritourism industry in the State of Georgia? Why?

Looking forward to visiting \_\_\_\_ (Participants Business)\_\_\_\_ and meeting with

you. Thanks for your time,

Edmund  
[404-583-4253](tel:404-583-4253)



## APPENDIX D

### CONSENT FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to take part in a research study titled A Case Study of Georgia's Agritourism Industry, which is being conducted by Edmund Byne with the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication at the University of Georgia (404-583-4253) under the direction of Dr. Dennis Duncan, Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication, University of Georgia (706-542-3898). I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to develop, enhance, and grow of the Agritourism industry in the State of Georgia by educating people interested in the Agritourism industry. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to have my answers to the following 15 questions audio- recorded:

1. Age
2. Highest Level of Education
3. College Major(s) (if applicable)
4. Male/Female
5. How long have you been in business
6. Average gross income per year
7. How many employees (full-time, part-time)
8. What does an average day look like on your farm?
9. Why did you start an agritourism business?
10. What are the greatest benefits of owning/operating an agritourism business?
11. What are the greatest challenges in owning/operating an agritourism business?
12. What advice do you give to others who are considering the agritourism industry?
13. How do you measure success in your business?
14. What leadership characteristics must a person have in order to operate a successful agritourism business?
15. What future do you see for the agritourism industry in the State of Georgia? Why?

The benefit for me is that I will be able to share my experiences in the agritourism industry with a large group of people and help those who wish to learn more about the business of agritourism.

No risk is expected, but if I do not want to answer a question I am not required to do so. If I choose not to answer one or more of the questions I will still be a participant in this research.

No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission. Once my answers to the questions have been transcribed the recording will be destroyed. I will be assigned an identifying number and this number will be used on all of the questionnaires I fill out.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I give my permission for the researchers to use an audio recording device in order to record my answers to be later transcribed and destroyed upon completion of this study.

I understand that I am agreeing to participate in this study by having my answers to the above 15 questions recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

## APPENDIX E

### IRB APPLICATION



Human Subjects Office (HSO)

612 Boyd GSRC • Athens, GA 30602-7411

Phone: 706-542-3199 • Fax: 706-542-3360 • [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu)

DHHS Assurance No.: PWA00003901

## Institutional Review Board (IRB)

## HUMAN RESEARCH APPLICATION

To submit: <http://www.ovpr.uga.edu/hsa/how/application>

**IMPORTANT:** Please respond to all the questions. Do not leave items blank; if not applicable, mark N/A. Please note that incomplete applications may result in delayed review. Click on the hyperlinks (text underlined in blue) to obtain additional information.

**For Human Subjects Office Use Only**

Project #:

Date Received:

Type of Review: ☐ Exempt☐ Expedited☐ Full Board

## Section A: PROJECT INFORMATION

- Study Title:** A Case Study approach to understanding the leaders of Georgia Agritourism
- Application Type:** ☒ New Project ☐ Response to Initial Review (All revisions must be in italics or different font color.)  
☐ 5-Year Renewal; Previous IRB number:
- Principal Investigator:** (Must be UGA faculty or senior staff. See [Eligibility to Serve as PI](#).)  
Name: Dennis Duncan Title: Dr.  
Department Name: Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication  
Mailing Address: 142A Four Towers, Athens, GA 30602  
Phone: 7065428913 UGA E-mail (Required): [dwd@uga.edu](mailto:dwd@uga.edu)
- Co-Principal Investigator:** (Required only if for thesis/dissertation or other student project.)  
Name: Edmund Byrne Title: Mr.  
Department: Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication  
Mailing address: 4067 Suzanne Lane, Duluth, GA 30096  
Phone: 4045834253 UGA E-mail (Required): [byrne@uga.edu](mailto:byrne@uga.edu)
- Anticipated Start Date:** (Must be at least 4 weeks after application is received.) 10/1/2012

## Section B: PROJECT FUNDING

- Funding Status:** ☐ Funded ☐ Pending ☒ No Funding
- Funding Source:** ☐ Internal Account #:  
☒ External Funding Source: NA OSP Proposal or Award #: NA
- Name of Proposal or Award PI** (if different from PI of IRB protocol): NA
- Proposal or Award Title** (if different from title of IRB protocol): NA

## Section C: STUDY PERSONNEL / RESEARCH TEAM

Including the PI, identify all personnel who will be engaged in the conduct of human research. **Important Note:** All researchers listed below are required to complete the [CITI IRB Training](#) prior to submission of this application. This application will be returned to PI for resubmission if training requirement has not been satisfied. To add more names, bring cursor to outside of last row, and press "enter" key.

Name	E-mail	*Institution
Dr. Dennis Duncan	<a href="mailto:dwd@uga.edu">dwd@uga.edu</a>	University of Georgia
Edmund Byrne	<a href="mailto:Byrne@Uga.edu">Byrne@Uga.edu</a>	University of Georgia

\*Submit an [Individual Investigator Agreement](#) for all study personnel affiliated with an institution that does not have an assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections or OHRP (typically, local schools, private doctors' clinics).

## Section D: PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR'S ASSURANCE

As the Principal Investigator, I have the ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the study and the protection of the rights and welfare of human participants. By affixing my signature below,

- I assure that all the information contained in this Human Research Application is true and all the activities described for this study accurately summarize the nature and extent of the proposed participation of human participants.
- If funded, I assure that this proposal accurately reflects all procedures involving human participants described in the grant application to the funding agency.
- I agree to comply with all UGA policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable federal, state, and local laws on the protection of human participants in research.
- I assure that all personnel listed on this project are qualified, appropriately trained, and will adhere to the provisions of the approved protocol.
- I will notify the IRB regarding any adverse events, unexpected problems or incidents that involve risks to participants or others, and any complaints.
- I am aware that no change(s) to the final approved protocol will be initiated without prior review and written approval from the IRB (except in an emergency, if necessary to safeguard the well-being of human participants and then notify the IRB as soon as possible afterwards).
- I understand that I am responsible for monitoring the expiration of this study, and complying with the requirements for an annual continuing review for expedited and full board studies.
- If human research activities will continue five years after the original IRB approval, I will submit a new IRB Application Form. (*Exceptions:* If the research is permanently closed to the enrollment of new participants, all participants have completed all research-related interventions, and the research will remain active only for long-term follow-up of participants; or if the remaining research activities are limited to analysis of individually-identifiable private information.)
- I understand that the IRB reserves the right to audit an ongoing study at any time.
- I understand that I am responsible for maintaining copies of all records related to this study in accordance with the IRB and sponsor guidelines.
- I assure that research will only begin after I have received notification of final IRB approval.

Signature of Principal Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date (mm/dd/yyyy): \_\_\_\_\_

## Section E: CONFLICT OF INTEREST (COI)

1. Is there any real, potential, or perceived conflict of interest on the part of any study personnel (e.g., financial or business interest, stock or stock options, proprietary interest, inventorship, consultant to sponsor)? ☐ Yes ☒ No
2. If yes, please identify personnel and explain. **Important Note:** Please review the [UGA Conflict of Interest Policy](#). Final IRB approval cannot be granted until all potential conflict matters are addressed.

## Section F: LAY PROJECT SUMMARY

Briefly describe in simple, non-technical language a summary of the study, its specific aim(s)/objective(s), and its significance or importance. **Response should be limited to 250 words and easily understood by a layperson.**

Agritourism is tourism that involves farm and agricultural experiences. The purpose of this study is to grow the Agritourism industry within the State of Georgia by learning about the leaders in the industry and how they operate their businesses. This case study will involve interviewing 8 to 10 Agritourism business owners across the State of Georgia. The process will require each owner/operator to fill out the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, answer 7 demographic questions and then 8 open-ended questions related to their business. After the interviews, all of the data will be compiled and analyzed in order to guide those interested in starting an Agritourism business and also enhance the businesses of those already in the industry.

## Section G: HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

- 1. Provide a general description of the targeted participants** (e.g., healthy adults from the general population, children enrolled in an after-school program, adolescent females with scoliosis), **and indicate the estimated total number, targeted gender, and age.** To add a row, bring cursor to outside of last row, and press "enter" key.

Targeted Population	Total Number	Targeted Gender	Specify age or age range
Agritourism Owners and Operators	10	Male & Female	30-70

- 2. Identify the inclusion and exclusion criteria.** If two or more targeted populations, identify criteria for each.
- List inclusion criteria. **Owners and Operators of Agritourism businesses in Georgia**
  - List exclusion criteria.
- 3. If the research will exclude a particular gender or minority group, please provide justification.**
- 4. Will participants receive any incentives for their participation** (e.g., payments, gifts, compensation, reimbursement, services without charge, extra class credit)? ☐ Yes ☒ No
- If yes, please describe. For multiple sessions, include scheme to pro-rate incentives.
  - If offering extra class credit, describe a comparable non-research alternative for receiving incentive.

## Section H: RECRUITMENT AND ELIGIBILITY OF PARTICIPANTS

- 1. Describe how potential participants will be initially identified** (e.g., public records, private records, etc.). 1. Use the list of members on the Georgia Agritourism Association website. 2. Look for Web presence of each member in order to gauge the businesses level of success. 3. I asked an employee of the Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association look over my list to see if my participants would be willing to help with my research. Once a participant meets all three requirements they will be invited to be a part of the study.
- 2. Describe when, where, and how participants will be initially contacted.** The first contact will be over the phone. Once I have made contact with each participant I will use e-mail to set up one on one meeting to collect my data.
- 3. Advertisements, flyers, and any other materials that will be used to recruit participants must be reviewed and approved before their use.** Check all that apply below and submit the applicable recruitment material/s.
- ☐ No Advertising ☐ Bulletin boards ☐ Electronic media (e.g., listserv, emails) ☐ Letters  
☐ Print ads/flyers (e.g., newspaper) ☐ Radio/TV ☒ Phone call ☐ Other (please describe)
- 4. Describe any follow-up recruitment procedures.** After initial contact by phone, I will use e-mail when possible to set up a one on one face to face meeting.
- 5. Describe how eligibility based on the above inclusion/exclusion criteria will be determined** (e.g., self-report via a screening questionnaire, hospital records, school records, additional tests/exams, etc.). I will be targeting businesses with 2 or more full-time employees. Participants will have to be the owners of an agritourism business or an operator in some regard. I will find out who the participants will be when I call their place of business and ask for the owner or the manager of the business.

## Section I: RESEARCH, DESIGN, METHODS AND PROCEDURES

- 1. Describe the research design and methods of data collection.** Each participant will fill out the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and the 15 open-ended questions will be done in an interview format while being audio-recorded.
- 2. If applicable, identify specific factors or variables and treatment conditions or groups (include control groups).** NA
- 3. Indicate the number of research participants that will be assigned to each condition or group, if applicable.** NA
- 4. Describe in detail, and in sequence, all study procedures, tests, and any treatments/research interventions. Include any follow-up(s).** **Important Note:** If procedures are long and complicated, use a table, flowchart or diagram to outline the study procedures from beginning to end. Each participant will be given the Myers Briggs Type Indicator to complete before the interview. The Myers Briggs Type Indicator will be administered through CPP, which is an online survey assessment company. Each participant will receive a personalized link to complete the assessment. Upon completion of the

assessment, I will visit each participant and ask them 7 questions about themselves and then 3 questions about their business.

5. Describe the proposed data analysis plan and, if applicable, any statistical methods for the study. For the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, I will analyze the data by looking for similar results between participants and check for relation to size of the operation. For the open-ended questions, I will compare and contrast the answers between each participant and also in relation to number of employees and size of operation.
6. Anticipated duration of participation.
  - a. Number of visits or contacts: 1
  - b. Length of each visit: 1 Hour
  - c. Total duration of participation: 1 Hour and 15 minutes

## Section J: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

List and describe all the instruments (interview guides, questionnaires, surveys, etc.) to be used for this study. Attach a copy of all instruments that are properly identified and with corresponding numbers written on them. To add a row, bring cursor to outside of last row, and press "enter" key.

Number	Instrument	Brief Description	Identify group(s) that will complete
1	Myers Briggs Type Indicator	A survey designed to discover the leadership style of each participant	All participants
2	Open-ended Questions	I will ask a series of open ended questions about the participant and their business.	All participants

## Section K: RISKS AND BENEFITS

### 1. Risks and/or discomforts

Describe any reasonably foreseeable psychological, social, legal, economic or physical risks and/or discomforts from all research procedures, and the corresponding measures to minimize these. **Important Note:** If there is more than one study procedure, please identify the procedure followed by the responses for both (a) and (b).

- a. Risks and/or discomforts. Some participants might not want to answer some of the questions because they are questions about their personal business and some people would like to keep their business information private.
- b. Measures to minimize the risks and discomforts to participants. Participants will be allowed to skip any question(s) that they do not feel comfortable answering during the interview.

### 2. Benefits

- a. Describe any potential direct benefits to study participants. If none, indicate so. **Important Note:** Please do not include compensation/payment/extra credit in this section, as these are "incentives" and not "benefits" of participation in research; any incentives must be described in Section G.4. To learn more about other similar business in the state of GA. The participants could easily read the results of the research and get ideas of how to enhance their own personal business.
- b. Describe the potential benefits to society or humankind. Increase the number of Agritourism businesses in the state of Georgia. It could teach others how to be leaders in the agritourism industry and also help create leadership training material.

### 3. Risk/Benefit Analysis

- a. Indicate how the risks to the participants are reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits, if any, to participants and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result from the study (i.e., How do the benefits of the study outweigh the risks, if not directly to the participants then to society or humankind?). The risk of being asked a question that the participant doesn't want to answer would only cause the participant to feel uncomfortable for a brief moment, but the information that would be gathered during the conversation could significantly benefit other Agritourism businesses within the state of Georgia.

### 4. Sensitive or Illegal Activities

- a. Will study collect any information that if disclosed could potentially have adverse consequences for participants or damage their financial standing, employability, insurability, or reputation (includes but not limited to sexual attitudes,

preferences, or practices; HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases; use of alcohol, drugs, or other addictive products; illegal conduct; an individual's psychological well-being or mental health; and genetic information)?

No

b. If yes, explain how the researchers will protect this information from any inadvertent disclosure.

## 5. Reportable Information

a. Is it reasonably foreseeable that the study will collect or be privy to information that State or Federal law requires to be reported to other officials (e.g., child or elder abuse) or ethically might require action (e.g., suicidal ideation, intent to hurt self or others)? No

b. If yes, please explain and include a discussion of the reporting requirements in the consent document(s).

## Section L: DATA SECURITY AND FUTURE USE OF INFORMATION

### 1. Data Security

*Check the box that applies.*

☐ **Anonymous** – The data and/or specimens will not be labeled with any individually-identifiable information (e.g., name, SSN, medical record number, home address, telephone number, email address, etc.), or labeled with a code that the research team can link to individually-identifiable information.

☐ **Confidential** – The responses/information may potentially be linked/traced back to an individual participant, for example, by the researcher/s (like in face-to-face interviews, focus groups). **If necessary, provide additional pertinent information.**

☐ **Confidential – Indirect identifiers.** The data and/or specimens will be labeled with a code that the research team can link to individually-identifiable information. If the data and/or specimens will be coded, describe below how the key to the code will be securely maintained.

☐ **Paper records will be used.** The key to the code will be secured in a locked container (such as a file cabinet or drawer) in a locked room. The coded data and/or specimens will be maintained in a different location.

☐ **Computer/electronic files will be used.** The key to the code will be in an encrypted and/or password protected file. The coded data file will be maintained on a separate computer/server.

☐ **Other (please specify), or provide additional pertinent information.**

☒ **Confidential – Direct identifiers.** The data and/or specimens will be directly labeled with the individually-identifiable information.

☒ **Paper records will be used.** The information will be secured in a locked container (such as a file cabinet or drawer) in a locked room.

☒ **Computer/electronic files will be used.** The information will be stored in an encrypted and/or password protected file.

☐ **Other (please specify), or provide additional pertinent information.**

**If "Confidential" is marked, please answer all the following:**

Explain why it is necessary to keep direct or indirect identifiers. In order to get the most valuable information, the participants will know that all of their answers will be confidential. I will be asking the participants some questions about their business and they might not want other businesses to know about their past or present successes and failures. Another reason the direct identifiers are important is so we can know who is who when comparing the qualitative data with the Myers Briggs leadership survey.

Identify who will have access to the individually-identifiable information and/or the key to the code. **Edmund Byne & Dr. Dennis Duncan**

☐ **Public.** Information will be individually-identifiable when published, presented, or made available to the public.

### 2. Future Use of Information

If individually-identifiable information and/or codes will be retained after completion of data collection, describe how the information will be handled and stored to ensure confidentiality. *Check all that apply.*

☒ All data files will be stripped of individually-identifiable information and/or the key to the code destroyed.

☐ All specimens will be stripped of individually-identifiable information and/or the key to the code destroyed.

☐ Individually-identifiable information and/or codes linking the data or specimens to individual identifiers will be retained. **If this box is checked, describe:**

a. Retention period.



- b. Justification for retention.
- c. Procedure for removing or destroying the direct/indirect identifiers, if applicable.
- ☒ **Audio and/or video recordings (if applicable) will be transcribed/analyzed and then destroyed or modified to eliminate the possibility that study participants could be identified.**
- ☐ **Audio and/or video recordings (if applicable) will be retained. *If this box is checked, describe:***
  - a. Retention period.
  - b. Justification for retention.
- ☐ **Other (please specify), or provide additional pertinent information.**

## Section M: CONSENT PROCESS

**Important Note:** The IRB strongly recommends the use of consent templates that are available on the IRB website to ensure that all the elements of informed consent are included (per 45 CFR 116). If more than one consent document will be used, please name each accordingly.

- ☐ **The PI is attaching a copy of all consent documents that participants will sign.**
- ☒ **The PI is requesting that the IRB waive requirement to document informed consent.** A signed consent form may be waived if one of the following criteria is met, *check the box that applies.*
  - ☐ 1. The only record linking the participant and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each participant will be asked whether the participant wants documentation linking the participant with the research, and the participant's wishes will govern; or
  - ☒ 2. The research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to participants and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.

**The consent script or cover letter that will be used in lieu of a consent form is attached.** Yes

- ☐ **The PI is requesting that the IRB approve a consent procedure which does not include, or which alters, some or all of the elements of informed consent set forth in 45 CFR 116, or waive the requirement to obtain informed consent.** An informed consent may be waived if the IRB finds that all of the following have been met:
  1. The research involves no more than minimal risk to the participants;
  2. The waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the participants;
  3. The research could not practically be carried out without the waiver or alteration; and,
  4. Whenever appropriate, the participants will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

**Provide justification for requesting a waiver. The participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire and to participate in a one on one interview. In agreeing to do the survey and the interview they are also agreeing to participate in the study. The answered survey will act as my signed consent script.**

**Describe how, where, and when informed consent will be obtained from research participants (or permission from parent/s or guardian/s and assent from minor participants), if applicable. I will e-mail a copy of the consent form after our first initial conversation over the phone and then I will present a printed copy to each participant before I start asking the qualitative questions during the one on one interview.**

## Section N: VULNERABLE AND/OR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

1. Check if some or all of the targeted participants fall into the following groups. **Important Note:** Some targeted populations require compliance with additional Subparts and the completion of an Appendix or of specific section (see last column).

Population Type	Required to Complete
<input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant women, neonates, or fetuses .....	Appendix for Subpart B
<input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners .....	Appendix for Subpart C
<input type="checkbox"/> Minors	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mentally-disabled/cognitively-impaired/severe psychological disorders	
<input type="checkbox"/> Physically-disabled	
<input type="checkbox"/> Terminally ill	
<input type="checkbox"/> Economically/educationally-disadvantaged	

- ☐ A specific group based on religion, race, ethnicity, immigration status, language, or sexual orientation
- ☐ UGA Psychology Research Pool/Other UGA students/employees
- ☐ Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
2. Explain justification for including the group(s) checked above in this particular study. **NA**
3. Is there a working relationship between any researchers and the participants (e.g., PI's own students or employees)?  
**No**
- a. If yes, please describe. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Describe any additional safeguards to protect the rights and welfare of these participants and to minimize any possible coercion or undue influence. For example, amount of payment will be non-coercive for the financially disadvantaged, extra-careful evaluations of participants' understanding of the study, advocates to be involved in the consent process, or use flyers to recruit participants instead of directly approaching own staff or students. I will tell each participant that all of the information they are giving me is confidential and I will not use their names or the names of their business in my thesis.

#### Section O: COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OR OUTSIDE PERFORMANCE SITE

Check one of the two boxes below:

- ☒ This project does not involve any collaboration with non-UGA researchers or performance in non-UGA facilities.
- ☐ This project involves collaboration with non-UGA researchers or performance in non-UGA facilities (e.g., local public school, participants' workplace, hospital). *If this box is checked, list all sites at which you will conduct this research. Attach authorization/permission and/or current IRB approval. Checkboxes below are not clickable so place "X" before or over the box. To add a row, bring cursor to outside of last row, press "enter" key, and copy/paste the previous cells.*

Name of Institution	Location (County/State/Country)	Authorization/permission letter and/or current IRB approval.
		<input type="checkbox"/> Attached <input type="checkbox"/> Pending
		<input type="checkbox"/> Attached <input type="checkbox"/> Pending

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** If none of the following applies to your research, this is the END of the application form.

#### Section P: METHODS AND PROCEDURES THAT REQUIRE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Check all that apply. **Important Note:** The items listed below are **NOT** an inclusive list of methods and procedures that may be used in research studies. Some procedures require the completion of an Appendix or of specific sections (see last column).

Method/Procedure	Required to Complete
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student research (For student's thesis/dissertation/others).....	Section Q (below)
<input type="checkbox"/> Deception, concealment, or incomplete disclosure .....	Section R (below)
<input type="checkbox"/> Internet research.....	Section S (below)
<input type="checkbox"/> Blood sampling/collection.....	Section T (below)
<input type="checkbox"/> Clinical trial (Drugs, biologics, or devices)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Genetic analyses	
<input type="checkbox"/> Data/Tissue repository	
<input type="checkbox"/> HIPAA (Protected health information)	
<input type="checkbox"/> DXA/X-RAY	
<input type="checkbox"/> MRI/EEG/ECG/NIRS/Ultrasound	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe) _____	

#### Section Q: STUDENT RESEARCH

**Important Note:** The IRB recommends submission for IRB review only after the appropriate committee has conducted the necessary scientific review and approved the research proposal.

1. This application is being submitted for: ☐ Undergraduate Honors Thesis ☐ Doctoral Dissertation Research  
☒ Master's Thesis Research ☐ Other (please describe)
2. Has the student's thesis/dissertation committee approved this research? ☒ Yes ☐ No

#### Section R: DECEPTION, CONCEALMENT, OR INCOMPLETE DISCLOSURE

---

1. Describe the deception, concealment, or incomplete disclosure; explain why it is necessary, and how you will debrief the participants. **Important Note:** The consent form should include the following statement: "In order to make this study a valid one, some information about (my participation or the study) will be withheld until completion of the study."
2. Debriefing Form is attached. ☐ Yes ☐ No; If no, please explain.

#### Section S: INTERNET RESEARCH

---

If data will be collected, transmitted, and/or stored via the internet, the level of security should be appropriate to the level of risk. Indicate the measures that will be taken to ensure security of data transmitted over the internet. Check all that apply.

- ☐ A mechanism will be used to strip off the IP addresses for data submitted via e-mail.  
☐ The data will be transmitted in encrypted format.  
☐ Firewall technology will be used to protect the research computer from unauthorized access.  
☐ Hardware storing the data will be accessible only to authorized users with log-in privileges.  
☐ Other (please describe), or provide additional pertinent information.

#### Section T: BLOOD SAMPLING / COLLECTION

---

If blood will be collected for the purpose of this research, please respond to all the following:

1. Route/method of collection (e.g., by fingerstick, heel stick, venipuncture):
2. Frequency of collection (e.g., 2 times per week, for 3 weeks):
3. Volume of blood for each collection (in milliliters):
4. Total volume to be collected (in milliliters):
5. Are participants healthy, non-pregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds? (Choose YES or NO)
  - a. If no, indicate if amount collected will exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8-week period and if collection will occur more frequently than 2 times per week.
6. Will participants fast prior to blood collection(s)? (Choose YES or NO)
  - a. If yes, describe how informed consent will be obtained prior to fasting.

## APPENDIX F

### EMAIL FOR TRANSCRIPTION CONSENT

#### Research - Georgia's Agritourism Industry

First of all, I want to say thank you for participating in my thesis research. I know that it has been a while since you have heard from me, but I have finally conducted, transcribed, and edited all of the interviews. I have also begun to analyze the answers that you gave and as promised I am sending you a copy of our recorded conversation and a copy of the answers that will be documented in the research.

Attached you will find two documents. One is a copy of the transcript of our recorded conversation. I have edited the transcript and taken out any information that I thought could be used to identify your business. My goal is to keep all of your information as confidential as possible. Please review this document and let me know if there is any information that needs to be removed. I would like to use the transcript in the thesis in order for people to learn and understand more about Georgia's agritourism industry. If you do not feel comfortable with this transcript being part of this research please let me know and I will remove it.

The second document is my condensed interpretation of your answers to the questions that were asked. Please review the second document and confirm that I have interpreted your answers correctly. If you feel that I have left something out or that some of the answers are incorrect please let me know and I will make corrections. If you feel the need to add

additional information please do so. This information will have to be a part of the research, so if there are any issues please let me know and we can discuss.

Due to certain deadlines that I am required to meet, I am requesting that you send me any feedback by March 15th.

If you have any questions feel free to e-mail me or call me. My contact information is as follows:

Edmund Byne

e-mail – [bynee@uga.edu](mailto:bynee@uga.edu)

Cell – 404-583-4253

Thanks for your time and participation,

Edmund Byne

## APPENDIX G

### IRB APPROVAL

EMAIL PROJECT NUMBER: 2013-10023-0

TITLE OF STUDY: A Case Study approach to understanding the leaders of Georgia  
Agritourism

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Dennis W. Duncan

Dear Dr. Duncan and Mr. Byne,

The University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your above-titled proposal through the exempt (administrative) review procedure authorized by 45

CFR 46.101(b)(2) - Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless (i) the information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human participants can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the participants; and (ii) any disclosure of the human participants' responses outside the research could reasonably place the participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the participants' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please remember that any changes to this research proposal can only be initiated after review and approval by the IRB (except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to

the research participant). Any adverse events or unanticipated problems must be reported to the IRB immediately. The principal investigator is also responsible for maintaining all applicable protocol records (regardless of media type) for at least three (3) years after completion of the study (i.e., copy of approved protocol, raw data, amendments, correspondence, and other pertinent documents). You are requested to notify the Human Subjects Office if your study is completed or terminated.

Good luck with your study, and please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Please use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

Regar

ds,

Kate

--

Kate Pavich

Human Subjects Office

627A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center

University of Georgia

Athens, GA 30602-

7411

[kpavich@uga.edu](mailto:kpavich@uga.edu)

Phone: 706-542-5972

Fax: 706-542-3360

<http://www.ovpr.uga.edu/hs>

[o/](#)

## APPENDIX H

## TRANSCRIPTIONS

**Interview #1**

- Edmund - The first few questions are going to be about you, demographic questions.  
We are going to start *with age?*
- Participant #1- 42
- Edmund - You recently had a birthday, so Happy Birthday. *Highest Level of education?*
- Participant #1- One semester in college
- Edmund - *What were you majoring in during your one semester of College?*
- Participant #1- Business Administration
- Edmund - *And you are a Female. How long have you been in business?*
- Participant #1- We have been here 8 years, but it has been evolving as we have been here, so it hasn't always been what it is today.
- Edmund - This is just an average over the years that you have been doing this, but *what would you say the average gross income per year is?*
- Participant #1 - It's so hard because we segregate everything. We segregate the production, like I said before we did horse boarding and lessons and that was completely different from what we are today. We do the birthday parties and we do the field trips. We do team banquets, we've done weddings, we've done... so all of that kind of gets segregated, so if I had to put it in one lump sum...



- Edmund - Yeah, just kind of a ballpark idea
- Participant #1 - I'd probably say around \$30,000, but it's just because we really are doing everything on a smaller scale and we don't bring in huge groups, but this year I think that we are going to be bringing in way above that.
- Edmund - Ok, but on average over the last 8 years. Now let me back up just a second. How long have you been, I guess you have always been a farm, how long have you been doing the field trips and having folks come out and actually do that? Because for 8 years you did the horse boarding was a part of that.
- Participant #1 - I would probably say that we actually mastered what we are doing today in the past 2 years.
- Edmund - Past 2 years.
- Edmund - The last demographic question, *how many employees do you have either full time or part time?*
- Participant #1 - We always have had the need of a farm helper and at some times it has been full time living on the farm and sometimes it has been day helpers, day farm helpers, so at the current moment I have like a family living on the farm which she, the wife, and she is the one that helps out on the farm primarily.
- Edmund - So one full time you would say and how many farm hands. You know, like part time.
- Participant #1 - Right now we have one employee taking over the grow part of the farm and then we are going to get a new intern to manage our garden part of

the farm, so as we are growing and growing our stations we acquire more help and more of that help comes in the form of an intern or a volunteer.

Edmund – Good. So you wouldn't actually call them employees, but just people that come in and help out. Good

Edmund - Now this next set of questions I'm going to ask you I want you to elaborate as much as you want to. The goal again is to learn and educate myself and others as much as we can about the agritourism industry in Georgia. *What does an average day look like on your farm?*

Participant #1 - It depends, I mean are you asking about a day when we do a birthday party like on Saturday, is it a day...

Edmund - I'd say when you are in full swing and everything is going at full force, kind of an average day

Participant #1 - For instance, in October is most of our crazy months and the farm is very seasonal. For instance, the summer we have a lot of summer camps and we do a lot of morning field trips for a lot of day cares and the fall time we get a lot of odd request. We have been contracted with the local technical school to host their ambassador meetings and their fall festivals. We have a team and football team banquets and those are usually larger numbers. We do a lot of field trips, but sometimes schools will book trips for an entire grade level, we'll book their fall field trip. So that is primarily the season for the fall. then in the spring

time we, and then of course all the social gatherings will happen whenever, the springtime we mostly are again field trips, and birthday parties a lot and then also our year-round online farmers market, so Tuesdays is the pick-up for the online farmers market and we usually do that in the afternoon. A different employee wakes up every morning and does the milking. It used to be us, but now it has transitioned to her so she milks every morning. We used to do twice a day milking and now we have scaled back to just once a day milking. We feel that it is better for the animals and better for our lifestyle. We also will feed all of the animals in the morning and then they will get their second ration in the afternoon. In between its a lot of answering e-mails and phone calls and inquiries from people just asking all sorts of stuff of what the farm has and explain to them what we have and what we do, even though we have, I feel we have a very well developed website, we have tried to answer just about every question we get asked, on the website.

Edmund -

Which is one of the reasons why I selected this farm. A lot of it was based on the website, I felt like you were more engaged in your business and knew what was going on because of your website, so I've got to commend you on that. So a lot of answering emails and questions and stuff like that. Anything else, on the average day of what goes on here?

Participant #1 -

We get asked to host a lot of different things and we are trying to kind of, for instance we get calls from schools, can you come and do a talk or

their science fair projects, can you come and talk to our environmental club, or we are doing a school garden can you come and talk to the students about what we are growing in the school garden, so I'll get asked for that, we also are hosting a fall festival, we are offering a festival at the school, do you want to be a vendor, we want to do a farmers market, or we want to have a farmers market feel to it. Do you know vendors, do you know this and since I'm so passionate about this stuff, I usually will try to help out and support and do and have presence at the school if I can and that realistically is good marketing for us too. I would love to be more involved in farmers markets because I tell people there is not better marketing and opportunity than having that traffic of people and have face to face contact and try to get there e-mails and stuff like that. It has been a struggle because our Ag production has not been on par to be able to be at a farmers market, but when we used to do farmers markets, we did very well and collected a good database and people would eventually hand out brochures and then people would come to the farm and find us and we'd ask where did you hear about us, people would hear from us because of things that we were out there for. Girl scouts is also one of our major things, girl scouts books us for their local camp, they have a huge event for that and then along with they just did the healthy expo at the environment center. That was a huge hit and there were a lot of people, she

was new to putting it together, so I feed her a lot of resources, sources, and vendor in the area that might benefit her particular program.

Edmund - *Why did you start an agritourism business?*

Participant #1 - Number 1, I have a really good influence from my home country. That's kind of where I got all of my ideas. The coffee region had developed a really neat coffee park in that coffee region of the country. That one is a lot of agritourism and then close to that area they build this agricultural six flags. It was called Banaka and they have everything there. They have the pig stations, they have the goats, they have the cows, they have the donkey's and the kids are able to come and bottle feed them and there is a horse show there is aqua pond and there is a farming inside a greenhouse, they have worm composting. Every little thing is very well put together and it is very aesthetic and it looks very nice. It is like an agricultural six flags. And then I've seen it on small scales too. People just trying to be sustainable farmers and then they would go out there and just spend the whole day at the farm they would be fed, they would be served a meal, which here, serving a meal is a little bit different getting approval with the state and all that. And being able to serve meals on the farm is a little bit challenging, but there they serve meals with the stuff that was grown on the farm itself and then they would do a tour, and show how they were holistic, and how they used all of their resources and that is also, so I saw a lot of those and we saw this opportunity which we helped celebrate our kids birthday party here and

we saw there was land and then as entrepreneurs as we have been in the past and the business that we had in the past and we said that we could convert this and draw the public out here. so we kind of started off doing weekend stuff and we would do pony rides and food vendors coming in and doing a few things here and there and one thing developed into another and we noticed that this was being known as a foodie place and we said no, this is a farm and this is not a restaurant so we had vendors coming for 13 years so got out of that very quickly and that got old cause it was Sundays. So we had no day to rest and so I don't know it was just what I talked about before where we were with Georgia organics and then the mentoring program and just learning about the sustainable agriculture movement the local food movement, the more we are learning about our health and how our food is grown and why these things are so much better and healthier for you. we decided that we want to grow this way on the farm and we start buying organic and that kind of meat it was so expensive so we decided, let's just grow our own food and we have the space so let's just do all these different varieties diverse and then these animals can actually be petted and the breeders. so all of our animals have become very docile animals and come up to the kids and they come up to the people and everything on the farm serves a purpose, it's not for looks and it's not just for petting they actually serve a purpose on the farm on any agricultural level. That's the whole story behind it.

Edmund - *What is the greatest benefit of owning and operating an agritourism business?*

Participant #1 - I would say it's kind of a double-edged sword because I would kind of say the quality of life but sometimes your home is your business with the public entering and exiting so that can sometimes be challenging, but it is very nice that you are able to host a meeting in your own kitchen while you are cooking something, a meal for your kids and you're not that mom that goes by the drive through to get your kids food for dinner. The diversity of your day, your daily routine, it is so packed with, there is never a dull moment there is always something that has to be done around the farm but there is so many people that approach you and say "Man, I wish I had your life, this is what we want to have, this is where we want to be. and you want to empower these people because you know that farmers are diminishing left and right, the small farmer even more so and there is just a lot of people learning about these things and they want to buy a piece of land and they want to grow their own food and you want empower them it's not that difficult, but it can have its challenges, but if you want to do this you want to empower these people to have it and follow their dreams. We did and we actually fell upon it completely and totally backwards and now we coach them to do your research, do your homework, before you purchase it now that you have the time to go take all these learning opportunities go for those because once you have your farm and your animals it's really hard to go for the

learning opportunities. And it is just that you are able to grow your own food, you are able to go and pick it and you are able to determine the outcome of that food source, so there are just so many different qualities and I suppose this is how life was before we were so industrialized and we've just gotten so disconnected from it, that I think that as you mature and you go back to the way things were you realize what we've lost and what traditions have been lost and why we are such a sick society. Everyone's getting sick and we are getting disease and while all that's happening and it is just because of the big disconnect and the mom no longer is in the kitchen and she is out there buying \$1 meals.

Edmund - Ok, so I guess the opposite of that. *What are the greatest challenges of owning/operating an agritourism business?*

Participant #1 - Having enough time in the day to get everything done. Making sure everything is very aesthetic and well-kept so that the public sees and has a good first impression. People don't understand that this is a true working farm and that we are just not available to you and I am not able to provide everything that you want like a supermarket does. We grow the food so it sometimes we have an abundance and sometimes we don't and just sometimes people think that you should have certain hours and you should be available. Keeping that part of the business to the expectations of what your customer expects.

Edmund - You hit on this a little bit, but *what advice would you give to others who are considering the agritourism industry?*



- Participant #1 - To do their homework and to do their due diligence.
- Edmund - Can you elaborate a little bit on that?
- Participant #1 - Yes, I mean they want to visit other like businesses they hopefully most businesses will be very open and welcoming to answering questions. Be prudent of other farmers' time and what they have to give you, but try to see how you can volunteer for a day and see if you can expose yourself to their daily routine and from that you will get to learn and you are also giving back to the farmer for taking his time to actually educate you. I think that there is no lesson better learned than seeing what other people have done and hearing what their mistakes have been and you just try not to do those over again. There are conferences now that are being held at a local level and at a state level and they are at a national level. Try to see if you can attend some of those and get some ideas and work to be different from other people, but then again don't re-invent the wheel as other people show success in something see how/what is best for you. Is it location? Is it your amount of space that you have? What makes you unique and just strong and just capitalize on that and just expand on it.
- Edmund - *How do you measure success in your business?*
- Participant #1 - I would probably say by the following of people, the people that we have in our database has grown to over 5,000. Our Facebook following could be a lot more because we have that much in the database and in our newsletter than we should have pretty much equal

to our Facebook, but we noticed that this is not the same, but we seem to have that peaks peoples interest and we get more likes on Facebook and people tend to follow us. We have a hard time keeping up as much as we want with our social media. Being more consistent with our newsletters and reaching people and telling them what's going on and telling them our story. I'm going on a year now that I've been wanting to have a blog because there is so much that I think there is to talk about, but there is not enough hours in the day to write. So there is just a lot of content that I would love to share with people. I would measure my success that now realize that I have something really more to give people out there and to share with them and when I find the time that I can actually put it together and get back and give it back would be awesome. Workshops, I mean, I could do workshops and people would actually have a huge taking to them and we are trying to figure out how we are going to do that in-between all those things that we are committed too and book ourselves, people are asking and we get request for all these things. when are you going to do this and when are you going to do that and I know that those things were original ideas that I had to go after and now it is just a struggle of how do, how to do everything because then again you want to delegate and grow the business and grow to other people, but the reality is it's, I think in a lot of the farmers that have a lot of leadership in this particular agritourism, we have a hard time delegating to other people who have the same

characteristics they do to carry on the tasks that are needed because you do become a multi-tasker and you are in different places at the same time and you are able to manipulate and some people don't have that talent, so it's hard to delegate that to them.

Edmund - *What leadership characteristics must a person have in order to operate a successful agritourism business?*

Participant #1 - You do, you have to be very social, you have to be able to respond to unique inquiries you have to have patience some people can really drive your patience. A person that wants to come in on a Sunday when you told them that you are closed and it's closed everywhere and they are still coming in your front gate and I want to come after them like seriously, it's our day off, don't we as farmers deserve a day off and it's just a city person that thinks that "why are you not opened for me." I'm here and I drove this long way, so you have to have really good people skills and you do have to, if you are not a good leader then to inquire and to be active and involved with your community, with your government, with all your extension agents and things like that and when they ask upon you for any needs and you are not proactive to say yes and let me see how I can help, then you out then you are going to shoot yourself in the foot and then you are going to have very limited resources because the more you embrace them the embrace you and they count on you for things and

then you... what goes around comes around the more you give the more you do receive.

Edmund - You are doing great. Last question. *What future do you see for the agritourism industry in the state of Georgia and why?*

Participant #1 - I think that there is just so much potential and there again because I bring it back to my country because I see a lot of agritourism developing and bringing the public out to the farm and there is just so much farming all around. People trying to make their farm more viable. So Georgia just has so much land still and there is so much potential to do so many different things and there are new things popping up like the olive gardens, excuse me the olive trees and the olive oil that's down in south Georgia. so that is something innovative people want to go see how that's done and I could see that farm eventually delving into agritourism because people would want to see how that's done and the challenges we have are to create it, make it viewable, make it aesthetic, you know how can we bring these tours in. But just about everything that happens on a farm you can develop it a different way and some people will make it be very diverse like we have made ourselves diverse and some people will focus on one thing and that will be seasonal they won't be open year-round it will open up to the particular season with makes them more beneficial for them and for their timing but there is just so much more opportunity and there is so much more that people could be doing to bring in and that is one of the

things that I try to advocate a lot amongst the small growers because they tend to feel very overwhelmed and not have time for the agritourism part and then kind of tell them well you know this is the return that we have when we host these kind of events, this is the money that we make. wouldn't you want to work a little bit less and see more profit than working yourself to death and at just the production side of things? so we

get a big AH HA from a lot of people who go WOW, Really, but then there follow through might be , we don't know where to even start.

Edmund - Interesting, very interesting. Anything else you want to add to any of the questions that I asked?

Participant #1 - I suppose we covered just about everything. I have a huge passion for the agritourism because I think exposes and connects people to the farms because I am in a very urbanized area and densely populated area and I grew up in this area and I went to school here and these opportunities were not available when I was growing up, so I was completely disconnected until I got into this and who would have known life would have been a 60 degree turn and where I today and doing what I am today because I didn't like cow poop, I didn't like worm I thought they were just EWWW gross and but then as I learned how beneficial they are. I've educated other people and I get a lot of the moms saying "I didn't know all these things" and then they get kind of a little bit of an appreciation and they get a little inspired and you feel like you put a seed in some of

those either kids or the parents or something and I do get a lot of feedback, "Oh my kid came home and they said this" , they said that they know that they can compost they know that they can build their own soil and grow their own vegetables, so when you just learn that you did just a little bit of a small impact on just a few young minds that's pretty big and that always ends with what did you learn today, does anyone want to be a farmer and when they say no, do you think that it would be too much work, yes, well maybe you'll appreciate more where your food comes from and things like that I just kind of all we go back to them and very lightly kind of make suggestions and comments to them that will make them kind of go home thinking about their experience.

Edmund -

I love that you are asking them and engaging them in this conversation and getting them to tell you what they learned. That's really neat.

Participant #1 -

I ask them what was their favorite part and usually they never say the garden so I will ask, "Did anyone like the garden?" "OH yeah we did." They always like the animals and the horse. That is what they mostly like. Some of the boys like the worms and they say that was so neat, but the garden is usually the thing that escapes them the quickest, but I try to engage them back in with it and you know you can do this in your own back yard and it would be pretty simple. So yeah.

## **Interview # 2**

Edmund - We are going to go through these. I'm going to jot down some notes and we are going to go from there. So the first thing *is age?*

Participant #2 - 68

Edmund - Some of the things we've been talking about I'm going to ask you to repeat them and expound on them. *Highest level of education?*

Participant #2 - PHD - In History

Edmund - Next question, *college major?* Your PHD was in history? Participant #2 - Yes

Edmund - In your undergrad and your masters were there different areas of study?

Participant #2 - When you get to your doctorate, you have different fields of history. 19th century Europe, 20th Century Europe, ancient history, American history since 1865, Europe since the 1500's.

Edmund - *You are a Male. How long have you been in business?*

Participant #2 - I've been doing beef and hay for 35 years. I've been doing the corn maze and pumpkin patch for 2 or 3 years. This is my first year in the farmers market, and growing vegetables.

Edmund - In regards to the agritourism, *how long would you call yourself an agritourism business?*

Participant #2 - I would say about 4 years since we have been actually involved in going to the meetings and started my first corn maze and different activities.

Edmund - *How many employees do you have?*

Participant #2 - Well I had 2 this year,

- Edmund - Were those full time or part time
- Participant #2 - They were both full time
- Edmund - Ok, 2 full time employees
- Participant #2 - but I had to let them go because I have suspended the operation pending the outcome of my operation.
- Edmund - alright, 2 full time employees. Ok, that was kind of the demographic part of the study. Now we are just going to make the next few questions are going to be pretty open-ended, so I want you just to, again the goal is just to help the agritourism industry and grow it. So any information you would like to add and expound on please feel free.
- What does an average day on your farm look like?*
- Participant #2 - Well, I typically put in a 10 to 12 hour day. I get up and check the cows, fences, salt, water and everything. And by 8 o'clock my employees come in to run the market and they start with the vegetable. I help where I can. My major job is the marketing. Trying to develop the website, contacting people, I attend the various meetings, chamber meetings, committee meetings, agritourism presidential pathways, things like that.
- Edmund – so during the full swing, you're staying more involved in the marketing and the social events?
- Participant #2 - But I do some of the things that, for example I'm responsible for all the mowing around this area here, around the vegetables. I consider that essential for weed control. I will be responsible for turning on and off



the irrigation on the drip irrigation, on the overhead irrigation. That's typically a 7 day, now we don't have the market open on Sunday, but I'm typically taking care of the irrigation and mowing as necessary.

Edmund - and you have a lot of acreage to cover.

Participant #2 - You know, we do hay and there is hay to be cut and Sunday's we try to go to Sunday School and Church in the morning and the afternoons are fair game. The ox is always in the ditch..

Edmund - especially during the peak of the season, right?

Participant #2 - Right

Edmund - *Why did you start an agritourism business?*

Participant #2 - Well, I really just wanted to have

fun. Edmund - Ha Ha Ha – ok

Participant #2 - When I retired for the second time, we had enough income from retirement and civil retirement income. We didn't have to really have to do anything, I could have stayed with my cows. I had been looking at various activities and I just wanted to learn how to do new things and as I said, I really felt like it would provide a source of income not only for the farm, but also for our farms education center which is the non-profit. One of the major problems in this area is that we have very little farming activity and so as a result we have very few people who know how to do things, including myself. So by hiring people to come in as part of the center they could teach people how to do things and

hopefully grow agriculture. One of the things that can keep people out of agriculture is that they don't know what to do, when to do it, how to do it. You can read all kinds of books, but it not all the same thing. If you had a mentor and then you could work alongside and come over say well I'm plowing up my ground for this and this and do a step by step sort of thing and then do a self-taught sort of thing. My goal through the center, and also through the farm tours and field trips is to teach school kids and other people about agriculture. And this is purely, not for profit, purely to teach people.

Edmund - *What are the greatest benefits of owning and operating an agritourism business?*

Participant #2 - Accomplishing Something - A lot of people have worked just as hard at other jobs and I don't think they are getting the satisfaction I've seen. Things grow and how they grow and how they work. When I was in the Navy and other jobs, you get to the end of the day and try to figure out what did I really accomplish today. Sometimes it was hard coming up with a meaningful answer. But I would come home at 5 o'clock in the afternoon and get on my tractor and start pulling the cutter conditioner and 2 or 3 hours later you've got that field cut. You can look back and say; well I have some positive accomplishments here.

Edmund - Right, that's good. So the flip side of it, *what are the greatest challenges of owning and operating an agritourism business?*

Participant #2 - Well I've already talked to you about the political issues. For some reason zoning, most agritourism business, if you dug deep you would find out that they are not zoned and that is going to be an issue that going to be faced here in Georgia. For some reason County Commissioners are afraid of some of us. Other challenges, unless you are in an area where there are other people doing that it's hard to get information. I go over to Alabama a lot and visit groups and farms over there. I get more of my information out of Alabama than what I do out of Georgia.

Edmund - Really? Ok

Participant #2 - The Alabama extension service, at least in that part of the county of the state, is much more involved in, I'm going to call it the organic gardening side of it. Alabama doesn't seem to be as big on the agritourism size as Georgia. There are corn mazes over there and pumpkin patches.

Edmund - Interesting. *What advice would you give to others who are considering the agritourism industry?*

Participant #2 - Make sure that you've got the zoning that allows you to do it. Sometimes, in this case, it's always easier to get permission beforehand then to come back in later. Usually if you have a problem later it's a result of a complaint and you are starting on the wrong side. So if you start positively and work with your local schools and start small, so you don't threaten people in agricultural areas. I realize the problems that

county officials have, they don't know what a corn maze is and they don't know what it's going to develop into and they don't know what farmer uses a farmers markets and it may develop into something that is undesirable. Other people say, well not everyone is as responsible as you are. So it's hard and I don't know how to do that. It just depends on your county and who you're doing this with.

Edmund - Can I ask you to elaborate a little bit where you said "Start Small?" What would be the benefit of that and why would you encourage somebody to start small?

Participant #2 - Well, like start with roadside stands, and then expand it. Start with your own products and certain vendors. I could have started this 4 years ago with a much smaller scale operation selling my beef and my vegetables and everything and then go on and expand it to bring in other vendors. Right now I'm restricted to food and food products only. You can't survive, especially during October, November, December, January and February with food products only. Selling your own products. You either have to bring in other products or you have to bring in things like yot melt soap, some kind of handmade crafts and things like that.

Edmund - That's good. *How do you measure success in your business?*

Participant #2 - A successfully operated business depends on what your goals were. A lot of people open up a farm tour and make it non-profit from the beginning, don't depend on income or anything they just do it because

they have the funds. They limit the hours, like they come in on Saturday morning or whenever and so I guess it just depends on your level of what you want it to look like. I used to say, if I have a major flaw, and my wife always snickers at that because she says I have many. If I have a major flaw, if I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it right. You've seen the facility down there, I could have done this building here for half the cost. My wife said, "Why did you have to put in beams?" I said because I thought it looked like an old timey store. She said, "The waynes coating, you could have done this cheaper." But I'm only going to do this once. I don't want to come back and especially... I feel like if I'm going to do something I'm going to do it right.

Edmund - do it right the first time.

Participant #2 - and sometimes it costs a little more money. I'm basically doing it for my pleasure, more than I am trying... and I do want to get a realistic rate of return out of it, but I want to do it right.

Edmund - Ok. The next question is *what leadership characteristics must a person have in order to operate a successful agritourism business?*

Participant #2 - Well, something I obviously do not have, as far as working with the county officials to persuade them to get past the political roadblocks, but I think that it would be your ability to work with your, and this is a general rule, your ability to work with your regulatory agencies, health department and the department of agriculture. I think persistence; you

can't be set back easily. You can't be satisfied with not always changing. Change and agritourism. Agriculture and tourism are the two major industries in Georgia. Especially in tourism you've got to offer people what they want and that means changing. I go to a lot of events, other events. Corn mazes, pumpkin patches and you saw the signs over there. I stole those signs for a local melon patch, with his permission. When I was working there was an organization called CASE. Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. It was for the advancement officers and fundraisers, alumni officers and public relations and we'd get together and we would visit other institutions and like I said we called it CASE, Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, but we really called it Copy And Steal Everything. We borrowed and they knew and they would borrow from us. We would share these ideas. We're really not in competition. I'd love for another corn maze to open up nearby and a pumpkin patch and start competing on attractions and I would hope that we could share ideas. Even share equipment, labor and whatever. I don't know whether that's unrealistic, but that is what I would like to do. If I could get an organic farm started I would encourage other people in this area to do it because I would like for this to be a hot bed for organic farms. Using CSA's especially when you are not dependent on roadside visits, that's a good way. There are more than 100 families in this area. So we could find and share ideas and if you get more people subscribing refer them over and share food.

Edmund - Right. For people who want to order the stuff. Ok, so last question.

*What future do you see for the agritourism industry in the state of Georgia and why?*

Participant #2 - Well, I think it's very ripe. I think small scale agriculture is green. Organic gardening is what people are looking for and if you can tie that into agritourism, and it doesn't have to be a corn maze or even a pumpkin patch, it could be a farm tour. People want to come and see a farm. They like to go out and pet the goats, pick eggs, or gather eggs, and touch animals. They need a connection back and if you could group it in to showing them whatever farming activity you are into whether digging potatoes, pulling onions, and you can show them the activity. Most kids don't know the difference between how a tomato is grown and how an onion is grown.

Edmund - Right. Very True.

Participant #2 - They don't know where milk comes from, they think it comes from Kroger. If they do know it comes from cows, they think chocolate milk comes from brown cows. They don't know that... and I don't know that organic gardening... that you have to do everything organically, but I do certainly think we need to reduce the amount of pesticides and herbicides and teach people how to eat healthy and if you provide them a relatively low cost supply of, I'm going to call them, local fresh foods, they may be organic or not. Where they can get information about, not only the food itself, but how to cook it and that sort of stuff. That is

going to be helpful. Now I'm going to put a caveat in there. I think the state legislators going to have to get involved. There is just too much zoning discretionary, is a local problems and county problems. So if you are depending on your county officials you could be in trouble. Environmental health is a law unto itself and it don't make any... for example, to sell food, any kind, hotdogs, you've got to put it in what's known as a carrying kitchen. Which has the same standards as a restaurant kitchen. So you've got to put in a septic tank that has a digestion and everything. It'll cost you up to \$40,000 to \$50,000.

Edmund - Wow! Just to sell hotdogs?

Participant #2 - Now you can take that same hotdog, and if it's been wrapped up in selifane and stamped that its being done out of the USDA kitchen, you can sell that.

Edmund - Because it's been approved.

Participant #2 - A person could come out here, I mean I could sell it right there at the counter. You could have another place out there where you open it up and put it in and it's a microwave and they can put mustard and all of that stuff on it themselves. That isn't the same as picking a hotdog off of a, you go to any baggers market and get those hotdogs on the rolling bar with the buns steamed and it's not quite the same as taking it out of the selifane and putting it in the microwave. Somehow there has got to be a standardization and a regulation for these sorts of things and if they can't do it, you can't do it but some people can and some people can't.



It all depends on the county you live in and the health department.

Some people say our county is really, really tough. She says she's fair.

I said that may be, but I can do things up in other county's that I can't do down here. She says that she just goes by the book. I said they've got a different book.

Edmund - Ha ha. Well those are all of the questions that I wanted to ask you, is there anything else you want to add or elaborate on about the agritourism industry in general?

Participant #2 - No, I just think that agritourism can make agriculture fun and profitable. Edmund - That's a great point.

### **Interview # 3**

Edmund - Alright, so we are going to start off with *your age?*

Participant #3 - I'm 33. Be 34 in May.

Edmund - ok. *Highest level of*

*education?* Participant #3 - High School

Diploma Edmund - ok. So you didn't go to

college? Participant #3 - I went and quit.

Edmund - When you started college *what were you majoring in?*

Participant #3 - Business

Edmund - *You are Male. How long have you been in business? Your Farm?*

Participant #3 - Our farm, like I said, the farm has been in my family for 100 years. My granddad has been operating on his own for like 58 years. He was operating initially like the first 20 some odd years, 25 years under his

own name , and then the market here. The market has been established for 33 years.

Edmund - Now, I'm going to ask you to elaborate a little bit on that. When you say the farm, was that simply the agricultural side of it or were there also field trips and things like that or was there a little bit of the tourism involved in there?

Participant #3 - No, well very little tourism part, other than just being a produce stand on the side of a major road in Georgia and just to be honest with you the most tourist that we were getting were people that needed to use the bathroom, for about the first 10 years or so. And that was really the case, he's been selling fresh fruit and vegetables for all of his career, like 58, right around 60 years. But at a different location. It was under an orchard and his uncle had an orchard, so we moved out here and he wanted to kind of change the name and a new name come about. It was named after some members of my family, so that kind of stuck together. Yeah, there's always been. For the past 33 years that this place has been here, there has always been people who were traveling to the mountains and leaf looking and that or going to the mountains on their vacation coming up from Atlanta that stopped here, but you got to think too, you know, that Atlanta population, for instance, 33 years ago is nothing like what it is right now, so you got a whole lot more people coming this way then originally.

- Edmund - Alright. This is just an average gross, but the *average gross income per year?* Just kind of a ballpark figure of the business.
- Participant #3 - About \$7 Million
- Edmund - *How many employees, full-time and part-time?*
- Participant #3 - Year-round about 40.
- Edmund - 40 full-time, part-time or both combined? Participant #3 - Year-round, 40 full-time
- Edmund - full-time, ok.
- Participant #3 - and then we'll be up to, total, then we'll have another 35 or 40 part-time people during the, you know, either on the farm, or weekend help here at the market. Or seasonal help. You know that people want to make extra money on the weekends. A lot of people like to work Saturday's and Sundays for 2 or 3 months a year.
- Edmund - Yeah, make a little extra money
- Participant #3 - Christmas money, or whatever
- Edmund - Exactly. Ok. So that was kind of the demographic questions. So let's get a little more detailed about your actual business. *What does an average day look like on your farm?*
- Participant #3 - Obviously, that depends on what time of the year it is.
- Edmund - Let's say like during the peak of the season. Like when you guys are in full swing, everything is kind of...
- Participant #3 - There's kind of 2 peaks. so you've got a peak in July and August and that's peach season. That's when we're picking 500 bushels of peaches a

day. And a lot of different fruits and vegetables. Squash and beans and blackberries. At that point we'll have 30 some odd people working on the farm and we've got 2 or 3 different crews, going in different directions and a lot of it has to do with what the market needs that day. What they sell short on the day before. What, maybe it's a particular variety of peaches. Maybe its squash. You go pick squash first instead of beans. That sort of stuff. Or it may even be, we got a wholesale order of blackberries that needs to be picked because they are going to pick them up here at 10 o'clock in the morning. So a lot of that, and that's actually my favorite time of the year, is harvesting and that's hectic and its really fast pace, just from one crop to the other. The market here, it's amazing really. It's busy all week long, 7 days a week, but the bulk of the traffic is Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Most people travel, especially Saturday and Sunday making day trips and special trips up here. We have become, like I mentioned a while ago about the bathrooms, we have become a destination now, instead of a clean bathroom on the side of the express way. A lot of people were coming up from Atlanta and hanging out. They go back here and they sample 3 or 4 different kinds of peaches and they say "we're going to walk around and look at some other stuff" before they make their decision they come back here and buy them a couple pies, eat them a pie or two or some ice cream or a bag of boiled peanuts and then they go back. They are spending an hour and a half here. They're not walking in and buying and

walking out for the most part. They're spending time here, but then, like I said, you really get slammed on those weekends there's no parking places and buggies everywhere, but it's a good problem to have, that your products are in that high of a demand. Does that kind of answer the question?

Edmund - Just to recap, an average day during the peak of the season is a lot of folks coming in during the weekend, but also a lot of harvesting, a lot of getting the crops, what crops are needed out of the field into the place here.

Participant #3 - And it seems like, as far as from my aspect of it, and I'm kind of the go between, between the farm and the market. Getting the product up here to the shelves. You kind of have to start planning on Monday and Tuesday for what you are going to be doing for next Friday, Saturday and Sunday. And if you think about it too, the fresh squash for instance, I mean if I pick squash on Monday, maybe I shouldn't stretch it out this long, but if I pick squash on Monday and I sell it on Friday its probably still fresher than what Kroger or Publix has. You see what I'm getting at?

Edmund - Exactly.

Participant #3 - Do I have it every single one of them down on the calendar that I'm going to pick this at 10:15 on so and so morning? No, I don't have it like that. It's about what the market needs.

Edmund - Now in regards to an average day, you mentioned there were 2 peaks?

What was the next one?

Participant #3 - There a little bit of a lull during September. You got the month after, the first full month of school and this and that. Labor Day weekends obviously a big weekend when everybody's up and down the road, but you start hitting that last week of September and then you are at another huge peak, October's our biggest month. July and October are our biggest 2 months that we have in the year. And, October, your trying, we're harvesting pumpkins on the farm, we're harvesting a few apples. We don't grow a whole lot of apples, but we are doing a few apples and we grow a lot of muscadines, we are picking muscadines well, like I mentioned earlier. We're kind of cleaning up on vegetables. We do plant some late season stuff, beans and squash and that. But the kind of the dynamic changes out here at the market too. You got the church bus, church groups, senior citizens that are going leaf looking. Other travel groups, bank groups and stuff like that. It's a great location, obviously, right here, it's the gateway to the mountains if you're going. One of the amazing things is that a lot of people are amazed whenever I do speak at events. I have so many Floridians that walk through our corn maze. You got to figure and start thinking about Fall Break for all the different schools systems across the whole southeast. Some of them are as early as the last week of September. A lot of them make it four day weekends. We really don't think about that as Georgians. We really don't think about that, we think about going to Florida for long

weekends. They come up here and you are really surprised at how many younger kids are here during the middle of the week. Actually, it's even changing our corn maze for us. Next year our corn maze is going to be open 7 days a week. It's going to be open Monday, it's going to be open every day during the month of October. Because of the demand and all the different fall breaks everywhere. People are looking on our website and they're sending questions to us on Facebook, looking on our website, "Why aren't ya'll open on Monday's?", "Why aren't ya'll open on Tuesdays?" at the corn maze. We know your market is open, and we love it, but our kids want to go to the corn maze. So we are actually going to switch it to 7 days a week and we will see how that works. I may go in the hole doing it, but I think it's going to be alright. I think the demand is there after 7 years I've been putting it off for the past 2 years and I think next year is the year to make it a go.

Edmund -

*Why did you start an agritourism business?* Or I guess a better question for you might be, why did you turn this into an agritourism business?

Participant #3 -

I ask myself that all the time. It would be easier just to farm. I started when I first came back to work here 11 years ago. I started reading about, like I said I'm not college educated, so I kind of had to be self-educated and go talk to other operators and stuff across the country, not just here in Georgia. There's a couple things, I don't how know how you look at what kind of magazines you look at. The magazines I look

at are agricultural magazines. I don't know if you remember about 10 years ago every single article, every month there was an article in a magazine about diversifying your farm. You need to diversify, you need to diversify, so we started diversifying. We started planting other crops. We were primarily peach growers, ok. Then the next thing that you start seeing, this is about, I'm going to say, about 6 or 7 years ago, you start seeing "experience your farm." You start seeing an article every month about experiencing your farm, so I'm begging my dad, mom, granddad and uncle ya'll need to let me put a corn maze in. We were doing field trips and the first field trips we were doing, we were doing them for free and we were seeing like 3 to 4 hundred kids a year. Then we started charging \$3, a whopping \$3, and the first year that we charged people we saw like 1200 kids. We saw more when we started charging. Now we are at \$5 and that's really too cheap. We are going to have to go up, but that goes along with letting people experience your farm. Now you are seeing in the same magazines and it doesn't have to be Progressive Farmer it can be Forbes magazine for that matter talking about branding your company, branding your business, and this and that. So I tried to play along because it looks like a good plan to me. Really I didn't even have a plan, so it looks like it worked out. But again, like the agritourism part, I guess that more falls into the diversity part and the experience part. And I don't know if 10 years ago, here in the southeast, I don't know if the demand was there for that farm



experience. These things kind of started out, operations where they let you pick your own pumpkin or you pick your own apples or hay rides or corn mazes or whatever. Those type things actually started up north around Pennsylvania and Virginia and all up in there, Ohio and places like that and its migrated down south. There is a lot of reasons really, most farmers are proud of what they have and to let people experience it and one of the beautiful things is. "Don't go quoting me on this in the Atlanta Journal saying this right here, but with an experience, ok, one of the greatest things I've figured out over the past 10 years was an experience is, that's what it is. They don't take anything home with them. I sell it to the next person. I sell the same thing to the next person and what I really like is when a family of 4 pays me \$48 down at the corn maze and they walk out and they're smiling from ear to ear and tell you "oh my gosh, this was the greatest thing in the world." They want to hug your neck cause of their experience. Makes you feel like you accomplished something and then you look behind them and that corn maze is still there and the hayride tractor is still there and you get to sell it to the next family of 4. I'm not trying to sound greedy about it, but I'm selling an experience. and I don't think that I'm smarter than my granddad or my dad or my uncle. The demand was just never there to do something like this up until the past 8 or 9 years, so that's my whole take on it.

Edmund - That's good. *What are the greatest benefits of owning and operating an agritourism business?*

Participant #3 - This one, and most of them are, I think are family owned and operated a lot of them are. I guess you are probably figuring that out with all your interviews. The benefits are, that's my grandma that was in here and she works every day. My granddad, they still work every single day. Just working with family and I think that it probably more prevalent in the farming community. I don't know, I grew up in this industry. I don't know about another industry, but what I'm saying is I think that you want to work to be able to give something your kids. Leave them with something that they can get their hands on besides a bank account. It'll be up to them what they want to do with it. I feel like we make jokes about it a lot of times, "We've created a monster," right here and I feel like I've got a chain around my ankle from June until now, or April, the strawberries, but from April until the end of October. There's a lot of freedom. I mean, yeah it's a lot of hard work, but it's there's a lot of freedom involved with it too.

Edmund - I guess on the flip side of that, *What are the greatest challenges of owning and operating an agritourism business?*

Participant #3 - You've got labor, because that's like first and foremost to me is the whole labor deal. Because I want to be thought of as a production farmer first, over the agritourism farmer. That whole labor deal is a killer. I mean we've got to have a reliable workforce. We just do. I

sound like a Farm Bureau or some other lobbying group or something. Water issues. Those are always important to farmers. Local Challenges, I think for us, it may be a little bit different because we've been here for 33 years. Our county, surrounding counties, man they love us. You know, we've got 700,000 people a year coming in here and there's probably just 100,000 of them from our county. I mean, there's DeKalb, Fulton, and like I said all those Floridians. They are coming by here that otherwise a Floridian doesn't have a reason to stop in our county on the way to the mountains other than to stop at our farm. So it's a good deal. A lot of people do with agritourism entities, or whatever have problems locally with zoning and stuff like that. We've never really run into an issue. For the most part everybody's been good. Our city's been good to us, our county, great.

And it doesn't help my granddad's, and now I'm getting politically now, but my granddad's always been politically involved and served on the county commission and that sort of stuff. There are challenges to owning and operating a family operation. There are knock down drag out's and you don't have a choice but to make up or bite your tongue, one or the other. It's one or the other. You either make someone see it your way and come together on an issue or either just bite tongue and don't even talk about it. That's hard, but I think ultimately the benefits far out way the challenges, I think.

Edmund - Ok that's good. *What advice do you give to others who are considering the agritourism industry?*

Participant #3 - I'm reading ahead to that number 13, so this is going to kind of coincide with it a little bit. I always tell people, "my family, we're crazy, we work like dogs." Ha ha. I mean we work 70 hours or more a week. Somebody that's considering agritourism, I'd say don't consider it if you don't want to put in 60 to 70 hours per week. I mean, don't even think about it. Because if you want to have a pick your own strawberry patch, listen, strawberries don't wait. They are going to get ripe and you've got to sell them. You've got about 2 days to get someone out on your farm filling up buckets. If you want to have a corn maze be ready to come over, if you're going to stay open until 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock on Saturday nights, be ready to be up at 8:00am on Sunday Morning cleaning toilets. I mean, try to hire it all done and see how much money you make. I'll be a janitor or I'll be a field hand picker, or I'll be the spokesperson for our farm in a suit and tie if I have to be. I'll do whatever I have to do, but I think its a product of our society is people don't want to work and I think a lot of the times, I've seen, I've got some young folks, young couple, that live less than 2 miles from where we are sitting right now, and they were going into the bee business and pick your own blackberries, and some vegetables to sell at some local curb markets. One season. That was it. Thousands and thousands of dollars invested. And this is a young couple that didn't have thousands and

thousands of dollars to invest. They sold to her sister and her brother-in-law. Just know, that's that main thing, just know if you considering getting into agritourism that you are going to work. Any kind of agriculture, I don't care if it's agritourism or what. What I see, probably the most common trait across all of these folks that you're interviewing including myself is they'll clean the toilets or they'll stand at the podium and be the face man of an operation. I think that's probably pretty common. The may need to be questions number 16, Have you ever cleaned the toilets at your operation? Ha Ha. Does that answer number 12 for you?

Edmund - Yes, it does. Ok, next question. *How do you measure success in your business?* What makes you at the end of the day say, "Hey, today was successful day or successful year?"

Participant #3 - 2 things I like to seeing. I like the fact that when I see someone get off a hayride down there walk past the corn maze ticket office and say "man, we had such a good time. Thank you for doing this." and they don't even have anything in their hand like I told you a while ago. "Thank you for doing this." Thank you for paying me. But then also the deal with the, I mean these folks tote our peaches or our strawberries around and when they get a flat of strawberries or a bucket of strawberries, a basket of peaches. They tote it around like a trophy. I have very little interaction with the customers, I'm in the face of the public during September and October at the corn maze and that's

enough for me. On Sunday afternoons I'll come out here if I don't have anything pressing on the farm. I'll sell some peaches or talk to customers or whatever, cause they like, that's the thing they like about this place. It's that the families out there, and they get to talk to somebody that's hands are dirty, they like that. If it's not one of us, then we're just right around the corner. We're not sitting in some office somewhere like that. I like seeing those people, it makes me feel good to get those comments on Facebook, like "Oh my God this is the best peach I've ever eaten in my life, I cannot believe it." I like, I do our Facebook page and I like taking a picture out there of some peaches or pumpkins or whatever and I like just seeing, it takes like 5 minutes and there will be 100 likes on it or 15 comments. I don't know if that is really a measure of success. Obviously. I had a guy tell me last weekend that he's a multi-millionaire, but he told me that to make a lot of money you don't have to be a jerk to make a lot money. Making money is kind of like a score card to him. It's like keeping score. I guess I don't make enough money to let that be my score card. Yet. I mean that's the other thing, What my dad, my uncle, and my grandparents, I'm lucky in the fact that they don't just shot my ideas all to crap and tell me I'm stupid. As a matter of fact my daddy and my uncle, they gotten to where they pump me up more than anything else. I am never satisfied, never. It's like I told you, I hate leaving something on the table. I cannot stand screwing something up. Again if its that thing of strawberries or a basket of peaches, its gonna be the best quality

that we can possibly put out there. And you ask my Hispanic guys that work for me on the farm. I pick a lot of peaches, now strawberries, I haul a lot of strawberries. That kills my back. I just want every box and every basket to be perfect and I think ultimately that pays off when you hear people bragging.

Edmund -                    Alright, this is kind of a big one. *What leadership characteristics must a person have in order operate a successful agritourism business?*

Participant #3 -            One of the most, the very simple one. I told you I'm not college educated, but I've been to 50 leadership classes with the Chamber of Commerce, with Farm Bureau, Georgia Farm Bureau, everything else. The most basic one, we had a family argument a couple of weeks ago and it was a blew up mess. It was ridiculous, it was borderline a catastrophe for this whole operation, but it at the end of the day you know what it boiled down to, a lack of communication. There has to be an open line of communication and a good leader needs to be able to communicate, I feel like people, maybe I expect too much out of people, my granddaddy tells me I expect way too much. But I have this simple belief that grown-ups can look each other in the eyes and whether or not they disagree or agree or whatever, we need to look each other in the eye and tell each other how we feel and what is going to happen here. Don't start crying, don't do this, or let's talk about it, let's figure it out. Let's get it done and move on. I think that, I never, I never, my brother-in-law, he would tell you that I was lying here, but

the only time I blame stuff on him I'm just kidding around. I want to take all the responsibility, I'm never, I don't know what kind of personality trait that is or characteristic, but I'm going to take responsibility. I think too many times people look for a way out. "Who can I blame this on, can I blame this on the bank?" "I'm losing my house because of the bank." Or "My sprayer machine tore up because I didn't grease it." "Tractor company should have known better than to send me this spraying machine that has a grease fitting on it." That sort of stuff, I mean personal responsibility, being able to take responsibility. Not only, take responsibility for what you do, I think you need to take responsibility for everybody under you. Ultimately I think that when you get people buying in to your way of thinking, you ultimately you have to take less responsibility for what they do, because they'll start taking responsibility for it. They'll start saying, "Man I screwed this up." I don't know if responsibility is a characteristic or not, but that's 2 of the things that I think of, just owning up to something and communicating. And then again, I never, you hear this all the time you hear people say, "I don't ask anybody to do something that I wouldn't do." There's a lot of people that say that, but that's not really how it is. My family opens everyday and we close every day. You sacrifice a lot for your kids, or whatever, but we do a lot of the work that not because we don't know how to delegate, but because we want our employees to have family time. Where making, obviously



me and my dad, my uncle, my granddad, we make the bulk of the money around here, but we need to be the one's doing, I'm not saying the bulk of the work, I'm just saying, I think that sets a good example. If we're willing to go the extra mile a lot of times our employees are too.

Edmund - So last question. *What future do you see for the agritourism industry in the State of Georgia and why?*

Participant #3 - I think that its going to keep on growing, really, I think. The agricultural industry in general is up. It's going to keep growing and I think that agritourism is going to follow that. Is it going to change? Are we going to go from having corn mazes to, I don't know. Up north, some of these farms have Geo Cashing a lot of them have Geo Cashing and stuff like that. You know, what's the next big thing, I have not idea. If I knew, I wouldn't let you record it. Anyway, I think it's a bright future by asking just about anybody. With the whole local grown deal, I don't see that going anywhere. I think the local grown deal is here to stay, so I think that you are going to see a whole lot more CSA's, you're going to see a lot more of the weekend curb markets and the don't necessarily have to be weekend. They can be afternoon curb markets around these towns and stuff. You'll see markets, a lot of markets like this over the next 10 years pop up. I don't know, but with this economy like it is to build something like this, it would cost millions. That's kind of on the production side of it, but like I told you when I first started talking, I feel like that when

someone comes directly to a farm to buy produce that I think that's considered agritourism. I think it is anyway.

Edmund - Now you mentioned a lot of reasons as to, where you see it growing. You see it continuing to grow, you see a bright future for it, but why do you think that?

Participant #3 - Well the main reason is because I think the south is a hot spot to be. I think people are going to continue to move to the south. Migrate this way from up north and from out west. Because of a lot of things. Because of our weather, because of taxes, stuff like that, but the whole local grown deal too, I mean. People want to be healthy. They want to be healthy. There are just so many nutritional benefits to locally produced goods. Most of these people know it. That's one of the strange things to me. A lot of times I think business owners they, I don't think people look down on their customers, I just think that they may, if its a tire store, for instance, maybe the guy that owns a tire store he doesn't think that his customer knows as much about the tires as he knows. Or the fruit and vegetable farmer who is retailing his fruits and vegetable he doesn't think that his consumers knows as much about..., but actually in a lot of cases the consumer knows more about it than he does. Because they know where all the anti-oxidants are, they know the fact that a tomato that is picked when it's red has about 4 times more vitamin D in it than a tomato that picked with, you know they know these things and we don't give them credit. I think that its just like

everything else in the world, your question is why, I could talk about why for the rest of the night, but I mean think about these blogs and Pintrest, Facebook. It's just at people's fingertips. Information is right there. I mean, how much junk do we read on foxnews.com everyday, I read every one of their articles. I don't just read the top 2 that's about the election, I read them all the way down to the bottom and the bottom one a lot of times it's about some, something to do with the USDA or something like that. All that information is so easy to get. I think that going to have a lot to do with it. It's easier to stay in contact with your customers, it just is. That's hard for the older generation to see too. I had to drop a pretty penny on that website and this company that we are using is \$500 a month for hosting, search engine optimization, internet marketing, you know all that crud.

Edmund - But that's what your customers are looking for.

Participant #3 - You've got to have it. I mean, it blew my granddad's mind back in September. The folks came up here and gave me my little quarterly report of how many people been on our website, insane. My granddad wants to throw the computer out and he gets tired of one of our employees here, she's always answering e-mails. He says "I'm so sick and tired of that." But I tell him she has too, you don't understand, she has to.

Edmund - You've got to stay connected with them. I know I'm taking up a lot of your time here, so I'm going to close out with this. The goal of this

study is to grow, to encourage the growth of the agritourism industry in Georgia. Anything else you would add to these questions or anything else you would just say about or to the agritourism industry in Georgia?

Participant #3 – I'm going to give you my little stump speech that I gave last year in Savannah. I got to speak in Savannah about 4 years ago or 5 years. It was the first time ever got to speak anywhere. 5 or 6 years ago. I felt like I'd arrived. I made it to the big stage. I think that, a while ago I was talking about people, if you are considering the agritourism industry you need to be, you need to know up front you are going to work. This is not some grand show place, but it's not trash either. I'm saying, have clean bathrooms, put your best foot forward. The little things like that right there. If you're going to have a corn maze, how about let's make sure that there aren't people out there destroying your corn and throwing it up in the air trying to hit other people with it because what if someone's never been to a corn maze and they go into a corn maze and some little rowdy teenagers are tearing down corn and throwing corn up in the air and jumping out and scaring people who don't what to be scared. They're probably never going back. That's my whole point. Have your best foot forward. Do your best, everybody can't have a operation like ours, or like some of the other big agritourism businesses in Georgia. On the flip side of that is everybody can't have a broiler operation or a soybean or peanut farm. This is my favorite line right here. I feel like the agritourism

venues are the face of agriculture in Georgia that we have to have our best foot forward. They're not going to go tour a broiler operation, or a peanut operation, a cotton operation. That's not how this works. Those things are nice and I love peanuts and I love my shirts made out of cotton and I love eating chicken. I'm not going to go walk through a chicken house and pay money to do it. It's not going to happen. I just feel like that a lot of time farmers in general as a whole get a bad reputation on environmental issues, labor issues. Oh man, they want to hire all these illegal Mexicans and work them like slaves and this and that. Let's use what we have, those 700,000 people who are coming into our farm every year, those 8,000 that are friends with us on Facebook, those 120,000 that got on our website this year, let those people know that we are decent folks. Our concerns are your concerns. Those types of things. You see what I'm getting at.

Edmund - I see what you're getting at. It's not just the industry and the business, it's the presentation. You're representing agriculture, you're representing Georgia and yourself at the same time.

Participant #3 - And I think that, too many times over the past 20 years that farmers kind of worked against each other. "My peaches are better than yours, my strawberries are better than yours. I'm not telling you what I did to my strawberries to make them sweeter or whatever." Work together. There's enough people in the state of Georgia for all of us to have our customers.

**Interview #4**

Edmund - Alright, I think we're in business. Thanks for talking with me. We'll start from the top. *Age?*

Participant #4 - 59

Edmund - *Highest level of education?*

Participant #4 - Bachelor's

Degree. Edmund - *Your major?*

Participant #4 - Accounting

Edmund - *You are female.*

Edmund - *How long have you in business?*

Participant #4 - Since 1946, my dad started it in 1946 and after college, I came back to the farm in 74.

Edmund - *How long would you consider this to be an agritourism business?*

Participant #4 - Since 1993.

Edmund - Since 1993, ok. *Average gross income per year?*

Participant #4 - \$450,000

Edmund - \$450. *And how many employees full-time and part-time?*

Participant #4 - There's no full-time except for myself and my husband. Part-time varies between 10 and 30. On the weekend or weekday.

Edmund - Is most of that part time during the peak of the

season? Participant #4 - Yes

Edmund - Those are the demographic questions. Now as we go through these next few questions I'm probably going to ask you maybe to elaborate

in different areas and things like that. *What does an average day on your farm look like on your farm?*

Participant #4 - I assume you want during the

season. Edmund - During the peak of the season.

Participant #4 - Alright, because it's really different in the winter than in the fall. During the fall, well it depends if it's a weekday or weekend because it's totally different. Through the week we do school field trips and senior tours. So we have a lot of kids, who come here from schools across the state. Primarily from Atlanta area. And we give them a really educational, but fun field trip. They get to milk a real cow, take a wagon ride, go to the petting farm, all that kind of thing, and play on the playground. That's what we do through the week. Besides having the market and the bakery open. That's open every day, 7 days a week. We open September 1st and won't close until the end of November. So we are open 3 months. We're open a short period of time, but once we're open, it's fast and furious. We're wide open. On the weekends, starting the weekend after Labor Day, we have on the farm festivals, we call it our apple picking jubilee. And we have 8 weekends of that. All of the weekends in September except for Labor Day and all the weekends in October.

Edmund - So every weekend its slam packed.

- Participant #4 - Yeah, and that's where we do the bulk of our business. In those 8 weekends is 90% of our business is those 8 weekends. So it's really, really crazy and intense, a lot of stress.
- Edmund - I bet.
- Participant #4 - It is. We have U-pick apples, we do Wagon rides, we have live entertainment on the stage, pig races, lots of playgrounds, jumping pillow, that kind of thing. We cook food outside and in here as well and that's what we do. It's a lot of work. We start before daylight and its 12, 1 or 2 in the morning before I go to bed for those 8 weeks. It's hard. It'd be nice if you could spread it out through the year, but that's just the nature of the business. People want to come here in the fall, so that's just how it is. We have tried over the years, we grew strawberries, we grew peaches to extend our season and that didn't work. We were just exhausted by the time fall started and you don't need to go into this exhausted. You need to be excited...ha ha. So we just, we pushed all of our peaches out, we stopped doing anything in the summer as far as with the public and starting just concentrating mainly on the fall, on making that bigger and better and more fun and its worked out well for us.
- Edmund - And the only product that you guys have is just apples?
- Participant #4 - Just Apples. And everything related to apples. It's all about the apples.
- Edmund - That's neat. Next question, *why did you start an agritourism business?*



I guess in this case it might be why did you turn this into an agritourism business?

Participant #4 -

Well, to make a long story short. When my dad started, years and years ago, it was primarily wholesale. Of course it was smaller back then and we sold to trucks, fruit stands and things like that. Then they developed a coop, where at one time there were over 50 members of the coop and our town was where they packed and shipped apples all across the country. Our area was the first in the country to harvest apples because this is about as far south as you can grow them. So we were ahead of Washington and California and New York all those states as far as ripening. And that was before they developed storage where they were able to keep them year-round. So the really good profitable margin for growers here. And then Washington developed CA stores, controlled atmosphere stores, so they're able to keep their apples year-round from one season to the next. So about the time we were beginning harvest, they were dumping last year's crop at whatever price. So that killed our market and most growers just quit, they just went out of business. We didn't, we found other markets. Fruit stands, grocery stores, whoever we could sell them to. Primarily wholesale still, but as time went on there was just less and less of profit margin in that and the last few years we were just losing money or not making any money. So we decided to, we had to do something different or quite. So we went after the McDonalds market which is young families with kids. We started

with the petting farm and school field trips. Really small and over the years we've just added different activities every year as we could afford. We haven't into any big debt and just one year whole hog into everything. We've just added a little bit as we could over the years and this is where we are now.

Edmund - That's neat.

Participant #4 - That's that main reason we went into it was the money. I mean, we just couldn't make it.

Edmund - You had to differentiate in regards to what was happening.

Participant #4 - We had to find a new market. And that's where it is now.

Edmund - That's really interesting. *What are the greatest benefits of owning and operating an agritourism business?*

Participant #4 - Meeting a lot of nice people. 99% of our customers are very nice and we do, on a personal level, we interact with them a lot and then you can make a living doing this.

Edmund - Well I guess the flip side of that is *what are the greatest challenges of owning and operating an agritourism business?*

Participant #4 - Dealing with that 1% who are not nice. Ha Ha Ha. It's always a challenge. Well just dealing with that many thousands of people in such a short period of time, it's very stressful. Finding good employees. All of ours are part time, so that makes it even more difficult to find help. And that's another reason that we concentrate just on the weekends because we are able to pick up workers on the weekends that may have

jobs through the week, you know. Government regulations gets to be more and more and more paperwork and that's just time out of my day that's for nothing. You know. Another challenge is the liability of having large crowds on your farm. I guess that's that biggest challenges.

Edmund - *What advice do you give others who are considering the agritourism industry?*

Participant #4 - Start small, visit a lot of other agritourism places, to kind of adapt their ideas to what will work for you. Don't copy your next door neighbor, try to be different. Come up with your own ideas. Don't go into huge debt cause it may not work out and just kind of do things as you can. First of all you need to examine yourself and decide if you are a people person because if you're not you don't need to be in this business. And that's hard for a lot of farmers because most farmers are men and they like to farm and that's what they're good at, but they might not be good at dealing with the public and you have to be.

Edmund - Ok, that's good. That's great advice. This is for your agritourism business specifically. *How do you measure success?*

Participant #4 - Happy visitors and money in the bank. Ha Ha Ha. That would be my two benchmarks, I guess.

Edmund - *What leadership characteristics must a person have in order to operate a successful agritourism business?*

- Participant #4 - Well, you have to have a leadership personality. A take charge type personality. You cannot be timid or shy. You have to be a people person, you have to get along with people, but at the same time you have to have a really firm hand in dealing with employees and problem customers as well. It's kind of a balance there and kind of hard at times.
- Edmund - to find where that balance is
- Participant #4 - But that's a challenge.
- Edmund - That's good. Ok, last questions. *What future do you see for the agritourism industry in the state of Georgia and why?*
- Participant #4 - I really don't know. It is a viable alternative for extra income. My fear is that the two will separate and you will just see the tourism without the agri, you know, and I would hate to see that, because I think we need to do everything we can to save our farms. You know, the real farms. And I think there needs to be a really, more precise, definition of what agritourism is. If it's just a store it not agritourism, you know. I don't think the state has defined that precisely enough, right now. You see a lot of, like at Publix or whatever you may see a traveling petting farm or something, you know, there, but that's not the same as actually going to a farm and seeing something growing and picking it yourself, you know, actually going out to a farm. I would hate to see that go away in favor of Six Flags, you know what I mean.
- Edmund - Just a tourism location.

Participant #4 - So, I think that people love it, I think that there's a demand for it, there's a demand for more of it. So, I think it is a good thing to have and it can be good, it can grow. I'm just a little bit worried about most people don't want to start small, they want to go into it and have everything that you've developed over the last 40 years, you know, all at one time. You can't do that, because you learn as you go. You make a lot of mistakes and you learn from those mistakes and if you just go into it whole hog to begin with you're going to make a lot of mistakes. And that will reflect on all the agritourism businesses. If someone gets really bad hurt or because of your negligence that reflects on everybody who's in that business. So as long as everybody who's going into it does a good job it will help everybody and there's room for that, but I guess my greatest fear is that, you'll just see pop-up copycat type things that are not real farms and they don't do a good job either. I don't know if that answers your question or not.

Edmund - It does. The goal of the study is really to learn about the agritourism industry and to hopefully help grow the agritourism industry. Is there anything else that I haven't asked or that you just want to share about the agritourism industry?

Participant #4 - Well, I don't know if you're aware of the agritourism association in Georgia.

Edmund - Yes mam.

- Participant #4 - Ok, well I think that's a good starting point for anybody who in interested they should attend their meetings and it's a good place to network with other agritourism operators. That's where I would start and another excellent place to go, I guess, would be the North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association. That's long, long name of that group, but they've been together for many years, I guess 20 now, and it's North American, it's not local, but they have a conference in different state every year and along with that a bus tour so you can actually go to different farms and get ideas.
- Edmund - Not only on the state level, but on the national level.
- Participant #4 - It's on the national level. And that is excellent. And you can just go on their website and find out all about them, but that's how I really got started was going to those conferences because they're far and ahead of anything that was going on here at the time. I've been to them everywhere. It's a really good source.
- Edmund - How long have you been a member of that group or have you been attending those meetings?
- Participant #4 - I don't know. 15 years at least. Maybe more.
- Edmund - Ok, that's great.
- Participant #4 - Yeah, but you can get a lot of ideas that you can actually use, you know, they take you behind the scenes with the operators. You can find out where they buy this and that, and mistakes they've made and

it's just really, really, good. The Georgia association is just beginning,  
but this group is awesome.

Edmund - That's great. That is great. Anything

Else? Participant #4 - No, I don't think so.

### **Interview #5**

Edmund - The first question is *age*?

Participant #5 - 27

Edmund - *Highest Level of education?*

Participant #5 - Bachelor's Degree

Edmund - *What was your*

*major?* Participant #5 - Agribusiness

Edmund - *and you are Male.*

Edmund - *How long have you been in business?*

Participant #5 - The store, is that what you are referring to?

Edmund - Let me rephrase that. *How long has your farm been in the  
agritourism industry would you say? An agritourism business?*

Participant #5 - Let's see, we started growing strawberries for the public in 1999. So,  
how many years is that, 13.

Edmund - Yeah, about 13 years.

Participant #5 - So, about 13 years.

Edmund - Now this is for the business, and this is just kind of a ballpark  
average that you can come up with a number for the *gross average  
income per year? How much does your farm do?*

- Participant #5 - Now you are talking about the market? Edmund - The agritourism part of it.
- Participant #5 - Because you've got that commercial part of our farm, and then we have the market which is the agritourism spot down there.
- Edmund - For the sake of this research let's focus on the agritourism part and go from there.
- Participant #5 - On average, gross income, I'd say \$200,000.
- Edmund - *How many employees do you have full time and part time?*
- Participant #5 - We've got one full-time employee in the market and I've got 4 part-time employees. You know Edmund, it's kind of hard to separate it. A lot of times employees from the farm itself will have to do things for the market. It's kind of hard to draw that line, it's not really black and white. For instance, I'll have a crew come in and plant strawberries and some of my employees here at the farm will prepare the dirt and the whole growth process takes place here on the farm. You understand what I'm saying?
- It's kind of hard...
- Edmund - to separate the two out?
- Participant #5 - Right. If you're factoring in all of that and associated that with the market, because the strawberries and all that is just for the market purpose, your employee total goes up. You know you have seasonal workers and things like that.



Edmund -. Let's back up and let's say your farm as a whole. Let me understand the business a little bit more, the farm is producing products for the store, but also selling those products to the public as well?

Participant #5 - We are row crop farmers. We grow about 3000 acres of cotton, peanuts, tobacco, watermelons, that kind of thing. The market is kind of a side business, ok. The market is an agritourism location that we sell all of our produce. Like strawberries, blueberries, we have peach orchards, blackberries; we'll grow sweet corn, tomatoes, all kinds of vegetables, just for the market. Ok. Now the market doesn't own tractors, equipment, things like that. So I guess, you know, if you had to separate it, and draw a line, you could say that the market rents certain equipment from the commercial part of our farm to do certain tasks just for the market.

Edmund - Ok.

Participant #5 - I know it's confusing. We're not as black and white as some of the other agritourism businesses across the state.

Edmund - I see what you're saying. It's a little bit different here; you guys are pretty much like two full-time operations. Ok, then we'll just leave the market as kind of a separate thing with one full-time employee and then 4 part time.

Participant #5 - I'll do the best I can to kind of balance it out. It's a different dynamic then your typical farm where all they do is there thing.

Edmund - Yeah, it's the way you guys do your business. That's good, so that is kind of the Demographic part. Now these next few questions are going to be a little more open-ended. I'll probably ask you at times to elaborate on different things. Let me look over to make sure I covered all of the demographic questions. Again the purpose of the research is understand the agritourism industry more and to help its growth. So these questions are more just your input and feedback and things like that. The question is *what does an average day on the farm look like?* And when I'm thinking average day on the farm, I'm thinking peak of the season and let's just look at the agritourism part of your business.

Participant #5 - The peak of our season would probably be like strawberry season. An average day during strawberry season, we start picking strawberries about 7:30am and we'll have a crew of about, you know depending on if we have any type of big orders or anything like that, we'll have a crew of about 8 out there every day just picking and they typically can pick everything we need for the store by noon. So, we'll have employees come in and start picking. Employees will come to the store and open up the store at 8:00am and the first thing they do is start going through strawberries and packaging them in our boxes and putting them out on display in the store. We've got a big cooler in the back that we keep any of the other vegetables that we picked in the past week or so. They'll take all that out. Get the store ready for the day. They'll make, if there's not already ice cream made, those ice cream machines that we

have, have a storage compartment in the top to keep it cold overnight, so if there is not enough in there, if there's not some already made, they make the ice cream first thing in the morning. That's one of our big draws, you know. It's crazy to think, but a lot of people drive, I've seen countless people drive, it's about a mile and a half to 2 miles from the interstate from here, they'll drive for a \$2 cup of ice cream. It costs \$3 in gas to get over here. Some people just have that time and that's how they want to spend their day and that's what keeps up in business. I've seen several people that will drive for just a small cup of ice cream. Usually we don't have a lot of customers come in that early in the morning, but about 10 o'clock things start picking up at the store and then you'll have some interstate traffic start rolling in. And we rely mostly on the interstate; we don't get a ton of local traffic. We're not in McDonough or something like that where we have a large population. But we do have a few local people that come and pick their own strawberries. Like I said, by noon or so, we normally got all the strawberries we need and if there are any field trips, which is, probably in April we have probably about 3 field trips a week. We have spring field trips and fall field trips, so about October we have about 3 per week and in April we probably have about 3 per week. If you got a field trip, you've got more employees there, more duties obviously and you kind of have a little bit busier day ahead of you. As far as the store operation goes, they're just checking out customers, doing inventory on all the products, ordering things and that kind of thing.

Edmund - Just managing the store.

Participant #5 - You know general management of the store. It just depends, Edmund, it's not like running a McDonalds where you have, where you are doing the same thing 365. You're changing everyday down there. You know strawberries are a short season, blueberries are a short season, all of these things are short seasons and sometimes you got strawberries and blueberries. Sometime you got strawberries, blueberries, and peaches. Every day is different. If it rains, you know the weather is a big factor on what you do that day. There are tons of variables in this, so it's hard to say this is what we do every day.

Edmund - But that's what an average day looks like during the peak of the season. Participant #5 - Yeah. For the most part, yeah.

Edmund - Alright, let me ask you, *Why did you start an agritourism business?*

Participant #5 - Diversification. Basically. We've always grown cantaloupes, watermelons, and we've always had like a garden just for our family. We've got a pretty big family, so we would have tomatoes and peas and stuff like that and, we said well why don't we grow some strawberries. We had some people in the community asking for it. So we started growing strawberries. At first it was just a local thing, but I-75 cuts our farm in half. Half's on this side and half's on the other side. Whenever my granddad bought this farm, I-75 was there, but it was a dirt road. He told me stories before about how they would be gathering tobacco on this side of I-75 and the tobacco barn was on the other side of I-75

and they had to be careful whenever they crossed the road he said, because every couple of minutes a car would come by. Ha Ha Ha... That kind of blew my mind, you know. It's grown a lot since then and I say that to say this, it was a burden and a hindrance to them, to my grandfather that it was there. I mean, it took up part of his farm land and he had to cross it to gather his tobacco. You have to water or irrigate. It was a problem for him, but, you know, nothing you can do about it. It's not going to go anywhere and in fact it only grown and it's grown a pretty considerable amount. My dad and I were sitting there and he said, let's take advantage of it. You can't do anything about it, so let's take advantage of it. That's what we did. That's why we made the market. That's why we built the store. To tap in to some of the traffic that comes through. Instead of it taking away from the farm, why not gain from it. That's kind of the idea there.

Edmund - That is really neat. Ok, let's keep going. *What are the greatest benefits of owning and operating an agritourism business?*

Participant #5 - I think the people you meet. There are tons of benefits. I mean, I love seeing the people. I love for kids to come off the interstate, and they may be from Canada and have never seen a cow before and whenever they park they open the door and they see a cow and they just freak out. I think it's the best feeling in the world. So I love for people to come and have a good experience on the farm. This farm is very important to me, I'm the 5th generation and so for me to be able to carry it on and have

other people enjoy it's a blessing and an honor to have people do that.

And there are other factors, my wife likes it because I bring home fresh sweet potatoes, strawberries, or peaches every day. If you're trying to be a small grocery store at times you always have this stuff at your feet.

That part of its cool. Like I said, just meeting so many people, unique people, from all over. It really broadens you. We've gotten to do some neat things with the community and anytime we have an event, like our fall festival here about a month ago. It's just a neat thing for the community. For them to come out and be on a farm and experience some things out here. All that's just a lot of fun. You know it's like I said, its a huge benefit to be able to set your own prices. All this stuff that we're growing just for the market. As a farmer, on a commercial scale, you are a price taker. You don't control the prices. But with the retail store there, our strawberries have, you know a flat of strawberries have. We've gotten the same price for this past year as we have for the past 10 years. So it hasn't fluctuated, so that's absolutely a benefit to be able to set your own prices. Not having to be watching the market, cotton market fluctuate up and down all the time like you do, so that's definitely nice.

Edmund -

That's good. Ok, well I guess the other side of that question, *what are the greatest challenges of owning and operating an agritourism business?*

Participant #5 - The biggest thing is time. For us anyways, because we have a whole other business that is really the backbone of the farm. Finding the time to hire the right people, to have the right marketing scheme's, implement new features, new events, things like working on the website. Stuff like that. You know, finding time to do all that, is tough. When you're farming on the scale we are and then trying to have a pretty big business just on the side. That's a challenge and also. With farming, not that you very really have much time off, but sometimes, especially this time of year when you get done harvesting, you may take a Saturday off or a Sunday off or something like that. That store is always there and always ticking, so it always requires attention. That's another factor that you have to consider. Right now, the challenges that you have to deal with outside factors like the interstate. Did you get off on the interstate right out here?

Edmund - Yeah.

Participant #5 - Did you see all the work they're doing there? Edmund - Yeah.

Participant #5 - It's a disaster and they've been working on that thing for the last couple of months and it'll probably take them another year. That right there has almost crippled the market.

Edmund - Really?

Participant #5 - Yeah, people just don't want to get off. I mean, I'm the same way when I'm traveling down the interstate. If you don't have to stop somewhere,

if you're just doing it for leisure purposes. I mean, I wouldn't get off at something like that, it's just a mess. You have outside factors like that you have to deal with. Obviously when you're dealing with the public, you're not always going to make everybody happy. There's going to be certain things that you make some people happy and other you just can't please. I'll give you an example, we started selling wine and normally you wouldn't think that would be an issue, but down here we're in the Bible belt. I had a lot of local feedback that was just really negative. Because whenever you get a wine license to sell wine out here, it's in the paper. So I just got tons of negative feedback. "I just can't believe that you're going to sell wine," "I'll never shop there again," that kind of thing. So you know, dealing with the public, it can be a challenge at times to keep everybody happy, that's for sure.

Edmund -

That's a really good example. Ok, next question. *What advice would you give to others who are considering the agritourism industry?*

Participant #5 -

I would consider the demographics. I would consider my market. First thing I would do is say, "Who am I catering to?" I would tell them that it's going to take money, it's going to take time, and it's going to take a lot of both to get any business started, but especially a business like ours. Where to really draw people, because as you can see we are really out here in the country, basically in the middle of nowhere. If it wasn't for the interstate here, a lot of people wouldn't even find us. But when you're out like this you have to give people a reason to come to you. We



don't have the pleasure other farms where you are literally on the highway. So, consider where you're at, your location, and how you can get people to you and what that's going to take. Is that going to mean you're going to have to spend X amount of dollars on animals and a petting zoo and building a barn? You have to consider all of that. There's just tons and tons that goes into it. It's easy to set up a building and sell your produce, but what are you going to do when the produce is gone. That's the big thing. What are you going to do whenever peach season is over with? Are you just going to close the doors? And a lot of people have found, in doing this, that's the best thing for them. Is to just close the doors until next season. And that may work for some people, but if you're going to try and be open year-round like we are, you have to have a draw. Whether it be events, like I said, to get people out to the farm, or whether you go down a whole different avenue. You can try to push internet sales and gift baskets and fundraisers and that kind of thing. You need to have a plan for it.

Edmund - That's great advice. Ok, *How do you measure success in your business?* At the end of the day, end of the year, what makes you say my agritourism business has been successful?

Participant #5 - Number one would be moving all of our produce, all of our product. If I've got nine acres of strawberries and we only sell X pounds that we could have gotten by with just 2 acres of strawberries, that was a complete failure. I base it off of that. Money, you have to pay the light

bill every month. You have to pay your bills every month. If you are not paying your bills then you're not very successful. I know that's rhetorical, but I think that is the biggest factor for if you're a success or not. Now obviously, we want people to come out and have a good time and if we are making all the money in the world and everyone that leaves here is unhappy and we're not getting return business then I don't think it's much of a success. I would say, seeing the same faces every year, knowing that every time they drive by from Ohio or Florida they stop. Having that return business, I'll say that's a good indicator of success.

Edmund - That's a great point.

Participant #5 - As you know, in business it's a lot easier to keep a customer than it is to make a new one.

Edmund - You're exactly right. That's good also that you can remember faces of people through the year. You have to have a good mind to do that. That's great. We're getting close. *What leadership characteristics must a person have in order to operate a successful agritourism business?*

Participant #5 - I think one of the biggest characteristics is a good imagination, well there's a few things. A good imagination and, not that I have one, but fortunately for me my wife has a great imagination. She's very creative and she can come up with things that I would never think of. For the Fall Festival she came up with a big pit of corn. You just pour corn in there and they did scarecrow decorations and stuff like that. That's a big

characteristic. You have to be comfortable with the public. You have to be comfortable with speaking in front of groups of people. Not just for advertisement purposes, for like radio spots and stuff like that. I'm not saying you have to be well spoken to be successful because you absolutely don't, but I think that it helps. The communities view on you and customers, whenever they come in the store their view. If you are comfortable in front of people, well spoken. I think absolutely that's a big factor. You have to be not harsh, but stern with employees. You're making first impressions on these people whenever they walk into your store and if you're in that leadership role you have to be sure that all your employees are saying the right things. Know everything there is to know about your product line. I don't want somebody coming in to buy a box of peaches and we've got five varieties there and my employee did not know the difference in any of them. Just thinking it's a peach. Being able to lead your employees, I think that's a big factor as well.

Edmund - Ok, so the last question. *What future do you see for the agritourism industry in the State of Georgia and Why?*

Participant #5 - I think that it's very bright. I think that agriculture is our number 1 industry and tourism is number 2, is that right?

Edmund - Yep, I think you are exactly right.

Participant #5 - You would think that a marriage between those would be there and would be successful. Back to the interstate, there are many interstates in Georgia, and there's so much traffic heading to Florida and back and

forth and we've got a hugely populated city in Atlanta that can really support so much if we just take advantage of it. I think that it's kind of scary for a lot of people, especially down here. They kind of looked both ways when I built that big store down there and everyone wanted to know if it was going to be a gas station or a grocery store for milk, eggs, bread, and stuff like that, and I said "No, No, we're not going to do that." "It's not going to be like a Jiffy store, it's just going to be an agritourism location." A lot of people have never even heard that term, but I believe in it. I believe that it can be successful and that with time, developing a customer base that it really can be successful. We were talking earlier about how everybody's on this health kick now and we're going to a big "green" phase. People will want to know where there food comes from more and more. I think that with so many young people, especially these days, just not knowing where food comes from how its grown and everything that goes into it. I think that it's always going to be something that's going to be taught in schools. In other words, I think there's always going to be a business there for field trips and educational tours. I don't think that part of it is going to go anywhere. I think the traffic is not going to slow down at all. If anything it's going to increase a lot. That tends to make me think that agritourism's going to be here as long as you got something for them when they get here. Somebody that drives 2 miles to a farm that they don't

know where they're going, they're looking for an adventure. They're looking for an excursion and when they get that far they're going to buy something. Or they're going to remember it. I think that's what sets us apart from any other industry. Because every BP station looks the same and every McDonalds looks the same. My store is totally different than whoever, fill in the blank. I think that's what unique about it, is that there's no brand name farm market out there. I think that's going to become more

and more of a trend. I think that people are going to want to take their kids to farms and experience life on the farm. It used to be everyone experienced life on the farm. In my grandfather's day everybody grew up on the farm, everybody had a garden, and now just so many people don't. Both their parents work in town and they don't get to get outside and see animals and they don't get to see things being grown. I feel like there always going to be a future in agritourism. I hope, Ha ha.

Edmund - I'll close with this, again the goal of this research is to just learn and educate people about the agritourism industry. Anything else you want to add? Or say here's one more piece of information that you want to offer?

Participant #5 - No, not particularly

Edmund - Yeah, we covered a lot.

## **Interview # 6**

Edmund - I am recording the conversation so I can transcribe it and put it in the research.

Participant #6 - Okay.

Edmund - *Your*

*age?* Participant #6 - 59.

Edmund - *Highest level of education?*

Participant #6 - College plus. I got a Bachelor of Science, but then I've got some other education on top of that.

Edmund - Okay. *What was your major in college?*

Participant #6 - Forestry.

Edmund - Okay, *And you are a male.*

Edmund - *How long has your farm been a agritourism business?*

Participant #6 - 20 years.

Edmund - 20 years. *What is the average gross income per year over the past 20 years, on average, of your farm?*

Participant #6 - Pass.

Edmund - *How many employees do you have, full-time and part-time?*

Participant #6 - Anywhere from 3 full-time to 60 part-time.

Edmund - 60 part-time. Okay. Those are the demographic questions. Now these next few questions, I might ask you to elaborate on things. Again, the idea is to grow and to help give information that will help the growth of

the agritourism industry in Georgia. The first question, *what is an average day on your farm look like at the peak of the season?*

Participant #6 - Dealing with customers. Mainly dealing with customers and keeping them happy.

Edmund - That's pretty much what an average day looks

like? Participant #6 - During the peak of the season, yeah.

Edmund - *Why did you either change your farm into agritourism or why did you start the agritourism business?*

Participant #6 - I wanted to grow produce. I wanted to grow something, so I wanted to get into farming. That's the reason I got started. I started out in agritourism, and I've just diversified and expanded it.

Edmund - Most of the other farms that I've worked with they had farms and they turned them into agritourism businesses. You just started as an agritourism business?

Participant #6 - Yeah, I just started a farm from scratch as agritourism. It's a whole lot easier if somebody already owned the land, granny or granddaddy or your dad or somebody owned the land. And then some kid comes and decides to do the agritourism. It's a whole lot easier than trying to buy land and start from scratch.

Edmund - Very true. *What are the greatest benefits of owning and operating an agritourism business?*

- Participant #6 - It's changed over the years. When I started out, dealing with the customers and building friendships and having folks really come out and enjoy the farm. That was a huge benefit and one of the reasons we really enjoyed it. Over the last 20 years the clientele has changed, and people just aren't as nice and easy to deal with as they used to be. We used to have older customers that knew how to come out and pick fruit. They had more respect for land and farms and different things you did. They understood some about farming because somebody in their family had grown up on a farm or at least had a garden. And people nowadays, they don't know anything about a lot of agricultural stuff. They may not know the difference between a lamb and a goat, you know. Some of the kids come out they don't know much of anything, and they're harder to deal with. Less respectful folks come out today. And so it's taken a lot of the joy out of doing what I do. People are not as nice.
- Edmund - Okay. Well, I guess that kind of leads into the next question. *What are the greatest challenges of owning and operating an agritourism business?*
- Participant #6 - Dealing with the people. I talk to a buddy of mine, well, actually I've got a bunch of friends that I talk to in the industry. We all deal with the same customers that are almost impossible to deal with. In fact one guy, he told me toward the end of the season he doesn't go deal with the problems anymore because he'll just blast somebody. He has to let



his wife deal with customers who are total jerks. There's just a lot more of them now that if you gave them \$100.00 bill they're going to complain because it's wrinkled. There's a lot more customers that no matter what you do, you can't make 'em happy. That's the greatest challenge. I can take that on into a lot of different industries, whether you grow peaches or apples or strawberries or sweet corn or whatever. If it's a pick-your-own operation, the people will step right on the strawberries, on the bed. They'll have their kids climbing up in the trees and they break the limbs off a peach tree. They'll pick apples, and, oh we got too many, they'll just drop the apples on the ground. They had a fun time picking them, but they don't want to pay for all of them. That type of just disrespect.

Edmund -

I didn't realize that people would do that to someone else's farm.

Participant #6 -

Oh, yeah. They wouldn't hesitate to take one bite out of a peach and throw it on the ground. They wouldn't hesitate to take a bucket of strawberries and just dump them out because the kids picked them and they don't look good. They're going to dump them out if there is any little problem. In our industry I've been doing it and have enough friends that are in it and if you're going to go into this industry you better have incredible liability insurance because people are looking for a way to sue you.

- Edmund - That's good advice. I hate that people are out there like that. I wish it was just people who enjoyed agriculture and wanted to learn something and see something, but those people are out there.
- Participant #6 - Well, it's the folks that go in and pour some water on the floor at Wal- Mart and act like they slid down and broke their leg. They fall or lay down acting like they slipped on the water. I've got a good friend in Virginia and a lady was walking across his parking lot, tripped and fell down and broke her hip and sued him. He did nothing wrong. Got another buddy, a lady bumped her shoulder on the door, sued him because the insurance company paid out the claim instead of going to court and spending \$20,000.00 on legal fees. They paid and they know it was fraudulent, but it's easier to pay it off than go to court.
- Edmund - Right. It's cheaper that way.
- Participant #6 - But now they've fostered an entire industry of scam artists because they know if it's under about \$4,000.00 or \$5,000.00, the insurance company's just going to pay it off. We'll go get a lawyer. A guy in Texas, he told his insurance company he'll handle it 'cause they won't pay it off. And he got his lawyers and sent their lawyer a letter saying, we're going to take you to court over this. And guess what, they dropped the case because the lawyers knew they didn't have a case. The ones with the scam, they figured they'd collect a quick \$5,000.00, split it

with the client, but when they realized they were going to have to go to court, they dropped it.

Edmund - I guess I didn't realize it had gotten that bad even in the agritourism industry. You know, I guess you think with big companies, people are trying to take all their money, but even small businesses, too.

Participant #6 - Oh, yeah.

Edmund - Well, moving on. *What advice would you give to others who are considering the agritourism industry?*

Participant #6 - If you are going into the side of it from a pick-your-own type farming operation, then you can't just take old Joe that's been planting corn all his life and expect him to do good dealing with customers. Let's say you've been growing corn and soy beans, and you're going to go from that to agritourism, you've changed completely. Now you're in customer service and people management, this has nothing to do with farming. Agritourism has to deal with customer service and dealing with the folks that have never been on a farm. They don't know what they're doing. I had a kid stick his finger in a horse's mouth. He'd gone to the dentist the day before. He wanted to see the little horse's mouth, a miniature horse, horse's teeth. Stuck his finger in there and the horse bit his finger. The dad took him to the hospital. It didn't even break the skin. And I had to get on the phone talking with animal control and the vets and everything else for two hours on a busy Saturday, and there wasn't a thing wrong

with him. This guy was looking for a way to sue me. You're into dealing with customer service now. It's not farming. You are in customer relationships and marketing and everything else. You got to be prepared for all the other things that come with it.

Edmund - That's very interesting. Now somebody who is going from being a farmer and farming a crop, and then going into the agritourism business and making that transition; are there any classes or education or things that person could do to help prepare them?

Participant #6 - I'd go to as many agritourism type meetings as I could. I'd also visit other farms. That's what everybody does, they go to different farms and see what they're doing.

Edmund - Okay. Now, specifically for your business, *how do you measure success?* What makes you at the end of the day or at the end of the year say this was a successful day or a successful year?

Participant #6 - Oh, used to be enjoying the people. Now it's whether I made any money or not. At the end of the year, did I make a profit? Am I going to be able to pay my bills or not?

Edmund - *What leadership characteristics would you recommend a person have in order to operate a successful agritourism business?*

Participant #6 - You've got to be a great manager of people. You better be a great manager of finances. You almost need to have a degree in marketing or hire an expert marketing person. I don't care what you grow, if you

grow a bazillion peaches and you can't get them sold, it's not going to do any good. If you put up the nicest agritainment, if you put up a great corn maze and you can't get people out there to walk through it, you just failed. So you've got to have a great marketing person. You need to be very good at managing money and expenses. If you're a lousy money manager, you've, just like any other business, if you're lousy, I don't care whether you go in a restaurant business or agritourism or start a little, small engine repair shop, you got to figure out how to at the end of the day, end of the year did you make more money than it cost you to run the business? The biggest challenge is going to be the people management skills. If you can't manage people and that includes the employees and customers, you better hire somebody that can.

Edmund -

That's good. That's great advice. The last question, *what future do you see for the agritourism industry in the state of Georgia and why?*

Participant #6 -

I think that competition could possibly ruin it for everybody. You get too many corn mazes, you get too many petting zoos, and then it cuts into everybody else's business that is going to be a problem. You're talking about expanding the agritourism, that's what could happen. I know that several farms have popped up around me and it's taken a lot of my business. I've seen that happen in several areas.

Now one thing you've probably seen back up in Ellijay. You've got about eight or ten pick-your-own apple agritourism places. Well,

because that's a destination because there's a lot of folks up there, the combination of farms helps them, I think. They have a big apple festival and all that kind of stuff. So in that situation I think it's a positive thing. I know in North Carolina the strawberry growers up there, they had some tobacco money and the government money was used to help farmers. They were trying to figure out how to replace the loss of tobacco income and there were so many strawberry farms that went in, pick-your-own strawberry farms that went in that they ended up cutting prices to where they just killed each other. And nobody's making money because of the price of strawberries. Somebody's got 30,000 pounds of strawberries they got to get sold, and everybody else is selling them for \$1.00 a pound. Well, I'm going to drop mine down to \$0.90 a pound. And then when they do that, then they're dropping it down to \$0.80 everybody's,

Edmund - Yeah, everybody's cutting each other's throats.

Participant #6 - That is going to be a problem. And the other problem is going to be, and we're already seeing this, is more and more government regulation. And they're going to put a lot small folks out of business. They're already trying to do it with the strawberry industry with all these new regulations that have come in on that. Your local governments are going to try to squeeze every dime of tax money they can out, and state regulations, EPA regulations, workers comp. Any kind of regulation that's going to have an effect on state, on sales tax, on property tax, all

that kind of stuff is going to squeeze the farmers out of business sooner or later. Whether it's tomatoes coming in from Mexico or whether it's... A lot of the agritourism farms they're smaller farms, they can't eat some of these costs. So I'll give you another example. This last year, as far as government regulations and the folks running the government, they decided the state of Georgia's going to pass a new tough immigration law. And the fellow in South Georgia had 120 people coming out picking sweet corn every day. The law went into effect, that next week he had 20 people show up. All the Mexicans and all the labor force left the state of Georgia, so he had 20 folks show up. He went and bought a sweet corn picker, and so there's 120 people that don't have a job. And those 120 people could have easily been people that are on our welfare system that don't have anything to do. There's jobs out there, but the Americans don't want to do them. These new regulations, there's no reason that the folks on the welfare can't pick peaches or watermelons or sweet corn or dig ditches or put roofs on houses. They're all taken by Mexicans now. There's that labor side of it that you also have to deal with. The solution was to take prisoners and folks on parole and let them go out to somebody's farm and help pick blueberries or sweet corn or whatever. Number one, they wouldn't work, but number two, what farmer, most of them are family run businesses and that's where his family is. Who wants a bunch of felons or prisoners out there and the

people on parole? They've already shown they're irresponsible and break the law. Who wants them running around their farm?

Edmund - And who wants them to know where you live?

Participant #6 - Most farms, you've got barns that are open and have equipment in there and all kinds of other stuff that could be stolen. Well, shoot, we'll be back there on a Saturday night and we'll steal all the chainsaws and everything else the farmer's got.

Edmund - Now let me ask you to elaborate on one thing. You mentioned that the competition could ruin the agritourism business, but in Ellijay it was effective in actually helping that market industry grow. Why is it different in some areas than others?

Participant #6 - Well, in Ellijay, that's north Georgia mountains where they can grow apples. If you want to go get apples, that's really the place to go. And because the farms in a joint effort can do advertising together and marketing together, you know, if they can have two million people go up to Ellijay in September and October instead of 500,000, then everybody benefits. In other words, let's see how many folks we can get up to our area. Then hopefully everybody will have, you know, a good number of folks stop by their farm. But now I'm sure that there's some farms that have gone out of business because of the competition. I know there's a place outside of Seattle where there's several pumpkin farms that have band together as about five or six farms. And they've



decided to do joint marketing and stuff together. And that's a situation where it has worked. I don't see that happening in most industries. That's, a very difficult thing because you're competing for the same customers. Now if you're trying to draw people from a long distance, it may work. But if I'm in Macon, Georgia and I've got a corn maze or I've got a pick-your-own peaches or whatever, and I'm trying to get people out to my farm, they're going to be local. So if there's three or four corn mazes in Macon or Augusta or you pick the town there's only a limited number of folks that are going to go out to a corn maze. It's not like folks are going to drive from Atlanta to Macon to go to a corn maze because there's other corn mazes closer by. I don't care how much marketing that group does together, they're not going to be able to get people to drive 45 minutes or so to go to a corn maze, for example, or to go to a pick-your-own pumpkin patch, but the only place in the state that can grow apples is north Georgia. Same thing in the fall, people go to north Georgia to see the mountain, see the leaves and everything. Well, if you got a pumpkin patch or a corn maze up there, you're going to benefit, not because you're a great pumpkin patch, but because in the fall the leaves turn pretty colors and people drive to the mountain. So to try to do that is a joint effort where there's a limited number of customers, that's going to be real hard to do.

Edmund -

That's a great point. Well, that's all the questions that I had. Is there anything you wanted to add or say in closing?

- Participant #6 - No, not
- really. Edmund - Okay.
- Participant #6 - You know, I don't want anybody putting in another farm near me. But I don't want to give you my address either. But that's my struggle. If I help teach other folks how to do what I do for a living, then what's going to keep somebody from going five miles down the road and saying, "hey, I'm going to put in agritourism business here," then I've got more competition. So I think it's good in one way as long as it doesn't kill my business. That's the hard thing about being helpful with something like this.
- Edmund - Very true. The goal of this study is to grow the agritourism industry, and I guess through the research and what I'm learning is that in some places where, more places like in Ellijay, more opportunity draws more people to that place. Whereas other places create more competition.
- Participant #6 - I've got a buddy in a small town. He's got about two and a half acres of pick-your-own strawberries. If somebody else right near him decided to start an agritourism business. Let's say they got a better location and more visible on a main road decided they're going to put in strawberries, that's going to kill him. It might put him out of business, or he may just have to downsize to one acre. There's only so much he can do to make his product better than the other guys, assuming both people grow good strawberries. Now if you go up in

the north Georgia Mountain and some guy's got little bitty, old, nasty looking apples, and somebody else has got big, beautiful apples, yeah, they're going to end up going to the pretty farm every year. It's just like you going out to California, you're going to buy wine, where are you going to go? All those vineyards in Napa Valley, that's the wine country. People fly from all over the world to go there and because it's not just one farm. There's all these great farms, and they can band together and sell wine. People come to their farms and tour them. They have tour buses show up. It's all about competition and getting your product sold.

Edmund - I guess a little bit of marketing as well. Making sure you got yourself marketed or presented in the people's mind the way you want.

### **Interview #7**

Edmund - The first few questions are going to be demographic questions, questions about and your business or whatever. Any question that you don't want to answer, simply say pass or I don't want to answer, and we'll move onto the next one.

Participant #7 - You may need to give some clarification of the questions. Age? Are you asking me specifically what is my age?

- Edmund - Yes, sir. The goal is to interview the owner/operators of each agritourism business. It's to help get an average of what the average age is of people in the industry.
- Participant #7 - Well, I'd just be honest with you. You're interviewing one of a pretty big team here. We have, not only my family, but we also have taken some partners on in the last six years. For the record, I am certainly not the only owner nor operator, but I can give you my perspective and my situation and you feel free to probe or ask any questions that are not clear in, in regard to the response.
- Edmund - That's fine. We can do that. Now so far, the age has just been for the specific person who I've interviewed. So that's the way we'll continue to do the research.
- Participant #7 - *My age is*
34. Edmund - Okay.
- Participant #7 - I graduated from UGA with an *Ag Communications degree* and an *Ag Business minor*. *Male*. Hopefully that was obvious.
- Edmund - Yes, sir.
- Participant #7 - I graduated from UGA in 2002 and have pretty much been back full time since then. I had looked at some other opportunities and had really kind of come back to the farm on a temporary basis and just evolved into a full- time role and been onboard ever since.

- Edmund - Now the question, *how long have you been in business?* It's more how long has your farm been in the agritourism business?
- Participant #7 - We really backed into the agritourism business. We are commercial and still are commercial farmers of peaches and pecans and my family built a new packing facility for peaches in 1990, I believe. The location of the new facility was near the Interstate. When they did, again, this was a little before my time, when they did they had the foresight of putting in a little retail market. It was only seasonal during our harvest season and consisted of really nothing more than a three tiered basket of different sized basket of peaches. We opened up in May; closed down in August and began finding some success and getting quite a few people stopping by for those sweet, fresh Georgia peaches. We put in a little ice cream machine and, and needless to say that was a big hit. Then came cobblers and peach popsicles and so forth. So around '96 we made our first expansion. The expansion included really nothing more than a little more organized market. We had a buffet style line that we served the ice cream and cobbler out of fresh fruit, things along those lines. Still we're doing the seasonal program. We started bringing a few products, jarred goods and things along those lines. We discussed staying open year-round, but it would get so dreadfully slow after the season, we just couldn't make it. Then that just continued to grow, slowly but surely, we got a little busier, again, we're busting at the seams, so we made another pretty significant expansion in 2000. We

had a little better layout of where the kitchen was, the mail order bin, what was where, and I think at the time, what's the draw, not necessarily at the time, it still is, it's people, coming to our farm and enjoying crops we grow or whatever the menu suggests, things that we made. It was some perception/reality of enjoying a fresh peach ice cream on the farm. I think that's still what drives our business. Our retail market is an extension of our packing line. While we're packing, customers can actually walk up and view the line and get a good idea of what's going on. I think that's been extremely important in getting customers to come back and have that farm fresh feeling. A big expansion in 2000, and we put in a little more formal restaurant. Again, continued to grow a little bit. In 2010, we had our last expansion which was basically air conditioning the facility, and again a little restructure, adding a little space. We had since put in a corn maze, I say since. That corn maze was actually probably five, six years ago. I did the corn maze and strawberries as well. We put in a you pick strawberry patch probably ten years ago.

The idea of both of those is try to get that traffic count up outside of our busy season. Our traditional busy season is really the end of May through July. That's only a handful of months. Then you've got the rest of the, seasons, time of year is really the challenge to bring people out there. We're always looking for things we can do in what we consider our off season that could attract more visitors. I start walking through the questions, and again,

if you have any questions, I would certainly welcome you to interject. If I skip something or need to elaborate a little bit longer.

Edmund - Let's walk through this one at a time. *What is the average gross income of your farm?*

Participant #7 - I'm going to pass on that one.

Edmund - That's fine. *How many employees do you have?*

Participant #7 - Their seasonal. You would say our peach season, which is our peak season on labor, we would be maybe 250, 230, something like that. Full time, we're probably 50.

Edmund - 50 full time?

Participant #7 - Yeah, 50 to 60.

Edmund - So now we're getting into looking at the questions I'll probably get you to elaborate a little bit more on. This is specific to your farm. *What is an average day look like during the peak of the season?*

Participant #7 - The peak of the season is, needless to say, extremely busy. We extend our retail operating hours from 10:00 to 6:00 right now, I think, and to 9:00 to 7:00 during our busy season. We're constantly getting product in every day from tomatoes and sweet onions. Obviously peaches are picked daily, but other crops as well. We try to focus on more specialty items as far as our produce market at the retail level goes. We don't

necessarily focus on the salad bar items. We kind of do the Georgia staples and the sweet corn, the melons, the cantaloupes, tomatoes, Vidalia onions, peas, things that really suggest that it's harvest season in Georgia. Not to say there's not opportunity with those things, we just haven't found it. We seem to do well with, certain growers we've partnered with, and we just feel like we have a consistent, good product. Weather dictates a lot, but we feel like we're getting the best we can and that's consistent. At the retail level, getting started is really replenishment. I would say important things are sourcing of product and making sure you got a good supplier that gives you consistent product and timely deliveries and a fair price. That's pretty standard in any business. Replenishment, making sure the shelves are stocked full and making sure everything is clean. We always put together a little schedule of packing to make sure everybody's on the same page when we get customer requests about, this, that, and the other. I would say our agritourism business is not done like any other retail business. It's a lot of preparations, standing around, making sure your product is displayed properly in an adequate supply. Marketing plan, things along those lines are set up well in advance. Really not a day-to-day function. I'd say it's important. Something that certainly needs a lot of attention, but we generally, plan out marketing well in advance. We focus on billboards here because we're, again, near the interstate. Everybody's situation is a little bit different, but we do a lot of work with billboards because we have



such high visibility relative to the cost. We're always trying to get involved in local events and other things and get the name out there. As far as starting an agritourism business, again, that was a little before my time, but my dad and his brother had some foresight. They recognized an opportunity and I'd say gambled a little bit and took advantage of it and found some success with it. Really hats off to those guys. I didn't have much to do with establishing the agritourism business.

Edmund - That's really interesting about just that's why they started because they had the foresight and that's where the industry was going.

Participant #7 - Well, I don't know so much as that. I mean, as much people stopping by and being interested in what was going on. Hey, what's that going on up there? Well, it's a packing line. Can we take a look? Yeah, sure. Really it all started when they built this facility. Someone recognized that to have an extension that is accessible for the public. Most people would say, well, goodness. The last thing I want is someone up in my business. It makes you stay on top of stuff. And you take the good with the bad. Every now and then you'll have someone up there see something that you wished they wouldn't have seen. But the good far outweighs the bad. Again, you have to prepare for that stuff. Benefits of –

Edmund - *Yeah, greatest benefits. Let's go through them.*

Participant #7 - Owning, operating agritourism business. I think the benefit of owning your own business would be really comparable. You're in control somewhat and you kind of reap what you sow. Suggesting that, you get out of it what you put in it. That's not always the case. There's been some unfortunate circumstances where people have put their whole lives in the business and have not been able to make it work. I think a benefit is when it does work, it's fulfilling. Now again, not only in agritourism. I think agritourism offers the aspect of taking advantage of a niche market with consumers interested in visiting the farm. It allows growers and those passionate about the land to still farm, but it also take advantage of some retail sales that are generated from that.

Edmund - Okay. *Well, I guess the other side of that, what are the greatest challenges?*

Participant #7 - Challenges, the bad. I said you take the good with the bad. It is a challenge when you have some weather related event, you got an activity scheduled and the rain rolls in and cancels it, or you're going out promoting strawberries, and then due to a situation your berries aren't producing for this crucial two week period. A lot of it is just dealing with public and all that I mentioned prior revolves around that is, when you tell people something, obviously they have expectations and don't realize that it's not all in your control. Disappointing the public is not a good thing. It can be discouraging, challenges, dealing with employees.

I relate this as to, most all small business owners is employees can be challenging. The good ones are great and the bad ones are difficult at times. Nobody, I don't care how good the employee is, is going to operate your business like you or those with a vested interest.

Edmund - Interesting. *What advice do you give to others who are considering the agritourism industry?*

Participant #7 It's important to try to incentivize all employees to do their best. That would be a piece of advice of giving others is to bring in good people. If you're in a situation where you've got a really important job or position and you don't feel like you're getting the best, you need to make another move because the business owner generally can't control or operate every aspect of it, so it's important to have someone you can trust. If it means paying them a little bit more or, or offering some sort of incentive to get the job done, I think it's a small price to pay, for a tremendous amount of help and, and hopefully success.

Edmund - Alright, well, speaking of success, *how do you measure success in your business?*

Participant #7 - We're pretty much P&L statements. Really that's what it's all about is obviously making money and, we like to, take care of our employees, and that certainly, I think it speaks a lot about working here is because, we have very little turnover. Some of the people we've had have been here for a long time. I would say most of the people we've had have been here ten years plus.

Edmund - That's great.

Participant #7 - That is encouraging and I think that's a measurement of success. It's not all about the dollars, but we're a for profit business. We have partners we need to etch or two. For us that's a big part of it. Obviously you like to have a good image and bring people out, but if you're doing that and you're not making any money, then I don't know that we can call that a success. Others may, but I'd say it'd be few and far between.

Edmund - It's also hard to stay in business if you can't keep the lights on, right? Participant #7 - That's exactly right.

Edmund - *What leadership characteristics must a person have in order to operate a successful agritourism business?*

Participant #7 - I don't know. I mean, that's a tough question. I don't even know if leadership characteristics or leadership as a characteristic is even a necessity. I think that may be a bonus, but I don't know that leadership is necessarily a requirement. I think it's more of a passion. You've got to be willing to put in the work and the time and be patient and, depending on your location, some of these can be costly. The ideal situation would be to discover that you were in a good position of consumers that are able to spend and willing to stop by. I think we're in a little bit of a different situation because we're close to the interstate. Well, if you're travelling down the interstate, most people

would agree, we're not close to the interstate relative to what is considered close when you're travelling. We've been fortunate to bring people out this far from the interstate. I don't think it has anything to do with leadership but I think it has to do with what we offer. People look at this as kind of a quick getaway from their travel. The farming operation, the packing side of it, I think, is really exciting. I've been here on the weekend and seen 50 people up on the catwalk at any time watching the peaches flow and trying to understand the grading and sorting process. Back to your question, I don't know that leadership characteristics are necessarily as big of a requirement as, hard work, time, a little bit of money and, and passion. Those are things that I think are really important.

Edmund - That's a very interesting perspective. That's good.

Participant #7 - Leadership characteristics is kind of a tough question to answer really in general. Leadership in itself may be a characteristic of a successful trait of those with success. We'll think on that one, and if anything comes to mind that I think is extremely apparent, I'll let you know.

Edmund - I appreciate that.

Participant #7 - *Agritourism in Georgia*

– Edmund - Yes, sir.

Participant #7 - We've taken such big steps it seems like in the last five years of acknowledging the industry exists. Big steps. We're kind of

discovering that there's people out there, not only in Georgia, but across the country that do what we do. Not necessarily us, but as an industry of agritourism or, or agritainment sites, whatever the terminology is, we feel like or have thought over the years that, we've got a little niche deal and we're in this deal by ourselves. Then all of a sudden you got, you there's businesses very similar to ours across the country, and Georgia included. I think the collaboration is important. You're starting to see that in Georgia with the establishment of the tourism/trade association that agritourism business owners have been instrumental on. I think the goals of those association of the industry has increased traffic and awareness. I think there's a lot of opportunity for that. I think we're still kind of in our infancy and hopefully we'll continue to grow.

Edmund - That's a great

perspective. Participant #7 - Yeah.

Edmund - Okay. Well, now the point of the research is really to teach and educate people about the agritourism industry in the state of Georgia. Is there anything else you would like to add other than what you said about the agritourism industry in general?

Participant #7 - I don't know. I think I elaborated quite a bit. I don't have anything, front of mind that I think is groundbreaking. Again, the opportunity is there. I don't believe that the market's saturated by any stretch of the

imagination. Your location is key and your story. You need a good story perceived or real. You need something that people can feel good about and like I said, you can visit the web site and maybe glean some information about some other things that are going on.

Edmund - Yes, sir. Well, I can't thank you enough for your time. I really appreciate it.

### **Interview #8**

Edmund - We'll take them one at a time. The first few questions are demographic. We always talk with owner/operators of these farms and learn a little bit who is operating these businesses. *Your age?*

Participant #8 - I am 48.

Edmund - Any question I come across you don't want to answer for whatever reason, simple say pass or whatever and we'll move onto the next one. *Highest level of education?*

Participant #8 - I have a bachelor's.

Edmund - *What was your major in college?* What did you get your bachelor's

in? Participant #8 - I think my major turned out to be child psychology and I had a

double

minor in English literature and philosophy.

Edmund - Alright, *you are a male*. This is more specifically about your operation and more specifically about the agritourism side of it. *How long have you been an agritourism business, would you say?*

Participant #8 - When did we start doing it or when did we really consider ourselves in the business?

Edmund - Let's go with when did you start doing agritourism for what it is now?

Participant #8 - Okay, we started doing little company picnics and stuff like that in '93/'94.

Edmund - The next question, your farm, *what would you say is the average gross income per year on average?*

Participant #8 - You mean of the farm?

Edmund - The agritourism part of the farm.

Participant #8 - It's going to range somewhere between million, million and a

half. Edmund - *How many employees do you have, full-time and part-time?*

Participant #8 - Full-time we have eight. Salaried, year round. Part-time, temporary, seasonal throughout the year, another 140.

Edmund - That's the demographic questions about the business. Now we're going to get into more open-ended questions, so I might ask you to elaborate,



and I might probe a little bit. During the peak of the season, *what's an average day look like on the farm?*

Participant #8 - Well, it's going to depend on the day.

Edmund - When you think like the peak, the height of the season, everything's in full effect.

Participant #8 - Well, I would say a day like hot air balloon day. It would be one of our theme Saturdays. It's a popular theme. If the weather's nice it's not raining anywhere, we'll have as many as say, 7 to 8,000 people here. That 7 to 8,000 people might look like, well this last year we had 7,500 and we didn't have any company picnics. It was just walk-in people, but typically a day, I think because this was an election year companies backed off on doing some company picnics, but typically on a day like that, we would have say a 400-person company picnic here close to this barn, on the outside, inside, somewhere. We'd have a 150-person company picnic somewhere else on the farm. We might have six birthday parties going on. We would have on a Saturday just had 80 or so people spend the night on the Conestoga wagons, and they've left and we're cleaning up for another 80-100 to come back in on Saturday morning. We would have our bed- no-breakfast would be reserved at least. We'll have three by springtime, but we have two guesthouses. We call the bed-no-breakfast and we have people in those. Then we'd have everybody else

that was here which would be 7,000 people. You could have as many as 8,000 or 9,000 people. There's going to be a combination of those things that's going on. Then we also have, in addition to those we'll have live music and we'll have with the theme, we usually try to have activities that kind of match that theme. Day of the cowboy, you'd have somebody teach the kids how to rope a steer head on a hay bale or something like that so.

Edmund - All right, the next question, why did you start an agritourism business? I guess in your case it would be why did you turn this into an agritourism business?

Participant #8 - The whole drive was just to diversify the farm and that was a good fit for my personality and interests as well as the farm owners. They're all about people and experiences for people and they were very hesitant. They did not support this at all to start with and I just did it without telling them. That's kind of how that worked out. When I finally had to explain this additional revenue that was showing up in miscellaneous income, I told them what I was doing and the owner said, "That'll never work. I don't want to discourage you, but I'm telling you nobody's coming to our farm to do something like that." He said, "If you can come up with enough money to make it work, I'll let you feed it and do it, but I'm not giving you any money to do it." He'd go to some auction and buy a tractor-trailer load of shelves or something. Hey, what am I going to do with them? I'd use what I could but there's a whole load.

He gets carried away at these auctions and I love him for it. That's an example of something he might buy. Well, I'd have a big yard sale and I'd be selling some shelves. I need that money. I would invest it and put it back into the agritourism, for coloring books or whatever. We started differently. We started as a place to host company picnics. That was why we started because I felt like I didn't know about the other opportunities. I thought people have such an interest in coming here and the very first function that we ever did was a Sunday school class and then somebody in that Sunday school class had a little business, and they wanted to have their company picnic here and somebody's wife in that group worked somewhere else that was bigger and they wanted to have theirs here. It was company picnics. I didn't know what agritourism was. I didn't know any of that, that we were actually beginning to develop something as it turns out. Participate with others across the state in doing it. We kind of backed into this differently. We started doing company picnics, and we're very successful with it. We started drawing people out of Macon a little bit, especially companies that would have an office in Macon, Atlanta, and Columbus. We were perfect for them. We're right in the middle of that triangle. We started with that and we got to the point where we were probably doing a quarter million to \$300,000 in gross.

Edmund -

Off the company picnics?

Participant #8 - With no infrastructure. That's with Jiffy Johns and using the cowboys for labor. A real skeleton type deal. Then when 9/11 came, I did start tapping around with the field trips at one point because I thought it would be easy to do and I could time the seasons. That was going very well but, once 9/11 of 2001, company picnics went straight down and that was gone. I'd spent most of my time focusing on company picnics and one of the reasons I wanted the field trips was so I could send stuff home with the kids to let their moms and dads know that this place does company picnics. That was a little bit of a motivator for me to get a button or a coloring book home with the kids, the moms could be going through it, and dads. When that dropped off like it did, field trips sustained us for a little bit, but then here comes this fuel crises about 2004. I had to get creative and come up with bus bucks. School bus bucks. If you live this far away, we'll give you \$20 per bus to subsidize your fuel costs. If you live 40 miles away, we give you this much money. If you live over an hour, 60 miles away, we give you this much money. We did this because all the school systems' excuse was we can't afford the fuel. Well, in doing that and calculating the mileage and gallons per mile used on a bus, it dropped the fuel price for the school down to below a 10-year low, about \$2.00 a gallon. It took that excuse away from them for the teachers to argue, if we go here, they pay for part of our fuel. For me, it was just a few dollars off of a classroom. It really helped. You really had to get creative and figure out how are you

going to do this because we're, again, down here in nowhere. We did things like that. Then in 2005, I really had to make a decision with the owners. Are we going to feed this or are we going to shut it off? Let's just forget it, just cows because we've never stopped being serious about being cattlemen. They said, you got so much sweat equity into it, I hate for you to just drop it and they gave me permission to hire somebody to help me specifically for nothing, but paying attention to growing agritourism. That's when we hired our first employee and he's still with us. That was in 2005, so this is his seventh year. Some interesting things happened as well because I had decided that in addition to trying the company picnics and having the field trips, that I would be like Cagle Dairy. They were the only maze in the state of Georgia that I was aware of. They were great folks. They're about the same distance north of the interstate as I am south. I didn't feel like I'd be competition for them. I thought, well, they've got an 8-acre corn maze. If I double that, I'll be the biggest one in Georgia and won't they come. I finally found 16 acres with no rocks in the back, built a 16-acre corn maze, no running water, no lights. Nothing to do but go to the bathroom in Jiffy John. You could buy a candy bar or a Coke and that was it. That was all you could do and it was pitiful. I remember one of the first customers in the door was Scott Cagle. He came to see how we did. Nice guy. He was encouraging "Oh, it's going to get better." He's probably sitting there thinking, "Yeah, they're not taking any business from me." We

had a bluegrass band that we paid \$300.00 for and he just sang to the employees, it was awful, and it didn't get better. We tried Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights in October. We learned quick that we can't compete with Friday night football and Atlanta traffic. The people that would come and spend money were from Atlanta, nobody local came. That's when I started focusing on these larger towns because I knew they had more available cash and they didn't mind driving. In those, 2004/5 early days of having a corn maze we did it again and it was a flop again and being stupid, I did it again, a third time. Thank goodness for hurricane whatever because it came through and knocked the whole maze down and we didn't have a season, and that would've been in 2004. Three, 2003. Alright, 2004 I do it again, fourth year. Great maze, Cat in the Hat. I got in touch somehow through somebody, it's one of those God things, and one of the last heirs of Dr. Seuss gave me permission, when it's secret, you can't get through them except through somebody else, gave us permission to do Dr. Seuss one year. That was it. Written permission. Most amazing Dr. Seuss looking maze, Cat in the Hat that you've ever seen. We didn't even get an aerial photograph and here come two straight line winds within three days of each other, knocked the whole thing down. In 2005, I thought, okay, here you are, God, you're trying to get my attention. Are you trying to convince me to shut it off or feed it? What do I do? That's when I asked the owner for permission to hire somebody to help me and just that being the

focus. They did and we sat down. I said, okay, we gotta have more than a corn maze. That's when we moved the corn maze from the 16-acre place way in the back, and we put it right out there and it's 4 acres is all it is. Less than four acres, probably, because I felt like if we lose a corn maze and we lose a season, then we're not good business people. We got to diversify, the diversifying of agritourism. We'd diversified cattle with this. We got to diversify it, so if all we are is a corn maze, we still have a season and who cares if it falls down. Then we can put hay bales out there and rent paintball guns or something. We'll come up with something to do. That's what we did. We bought paddleboats. We did a better job with our petting zoo. There's a whole series of things that we thought that we could afford, and it wasn't huge but, we just took the money that we've been making and added that. Then that's also when I thought, we got to come up with some themed weekends. If we don't, we're in trouble. That's what really started us into agritourism in a larger way other than failing at it really is what we were doing.

Learning is an expensive education. Then people started to respond, and because of that, then the field trips came. We put company picnics on the back burner because they weren't coming. We started driving stuff home. Hey, come in the fall, in the coloring book. You can come to the farm in the fall. Then the phone started ringing. "Well, I want to come in the summer." "Why don't you let us come in the summer?" We started having a fun in the summertime. Then what about this and

what about that and back in '97 is really when I kind of caught the vision for what we could do. I was the president of the Chamber in one county and I wondered why they didn't talk to the Chamber in the other county because I was a member there. I decided to bring the two counties together and try to do a fundraiser to help them and do fireworks on the farm and be a signature event for us so that companies would know who we are. That's how we started. We started advertising a week before the event and 8,000 people showed up. We had enough food for 1,500. \$10.00 a car, no matter how many were in there was how we did it. Now it's \$25.00 a car, no matter. School bus, \$25 to get in. We still do that 17 years later. That really got my wheels to spinning. If this many people would like to come...

Edmund -

You got to create the right event.

Participant #8 -

That's right. That's how all that started and then we've just matured and then all of a sudden, Cagle's had some changes. The, the matriarch passed away and, one of the sons was in the real estate development and taken some hits and the other one started doing consulting. So there's still a grandson. He's a super guy who's involved there, but it's not what it used to be. We turn around and everybody's looking at us now. Where I used to look at Cagle's and other people that did such a great job. Now all of a sudden I realize, everybody's asking me questions now and I don't know if I'm ready for that. God puts you in those places and that's really how we got started and moved on through there.



Edmund - That's interesting to hear the story. That's really neat. We'll go onto the next one. *What are the greatest benefits of owning and operating an agritourism business?*

Participant #8 - Well, I think that the freedom. The creativity, the freedom to be creative. If you have a gas station, or if you have a chicken farm, you've got purviews and handbooks and rules and, all that, but we're inventing this industry. It takes somebody with a sharp pencil and a creative mind. To spend time thinking of ways to make people smile and be happy is very rewarding. To take an industry that you're passionate about and have expertise in, like cattle, and be able to share it. One of the things we love to do is, on our hayride wagon, we've got a basket. We say, "Okay, how many of you know what the byproducts of the cattle industry are?" Well, Nike tennis shoe of course, a Coach purse, of course, a leather belt, yeah. Well, what about these gummy bears? What about this toothpaste? What about this makeup? What about this sheetrock? What about this Jell-o?

You don't think about that. They're fascinated these ladies that they've smeared cow on their face, a byproduct of it. Teaching them the education, teaching people something that's just a fundamental, natural truth that certainly the Bible talks about. Agriculture is the most analogized thing in the entire Bible. To be able to share in those truths is fun and teaching people about the cattle industry and how freeze branding works versus hot branding or what is a baby calf called? That's an udder and those are

testicles, teacher, and things like that. One of our big things is when we teach our employees, we tell them you've got one opportunity to make a lifetime memory and agritourism gives you an amazing canvas through which to do that. Whether it's teaching someone something that they didn't know or, actually spending time with them and taking them to go see the goats and not pointing to where the goats are. What we teach them is that if a kid has stood in line for 10 minutes to get an ice cream cone and dad's tapping his foot and it's hot and the kid turns around and drops the ice cream cone, don't come ask a supervisor, don't look around for any reason to ask, you stop what you're doing and you go over there and you get on that child's level, you pick that ice cream up with your hands, make a mess if you need to, you throw it away, you grab the kid by the hand if it's appropriate and you say, "Come on, Dad. Don't get upset. You dropped one, too." You break in line and you get that little kid an ice cream cone and you give it to him. Same thing with a Sprite or popcorn or whatever it has to be, snow cone. Because it changes, it completely changes their day and...

Edmund -

And their experience.

Participant #8 -

Right, and that kid might forget what that nametag said, but they'll never forget what you did. That's really a powerful tool because you've got folks that unfortunately are out of their comfort zone in an agricultural setting. I say unfortunately because I wish everybody were comfortable on a farm, but they're not. I tell people that we switched from canned

drinks to bottled drinks because people just aren't smart enough to put a napkin over top of their can drink hole in the fall because a yellow jacket is going to get in there. You're going to swallow it and it's going to sting you. It's going to get you on the lip, on the tongue. People from Atlanta don't even think about that. They think what a rare thing. I'm telling you, third week of October, an open can, there's going to be a yellow jacket in it. You better listen to it before you go drinking on it and see if it's buzzing. Then I think, too, Edmund, is that we've got a great place for folks to work. It's a wonderful place to employ someone. Whether it's a stay-at-home mom or what I enjoy is, these senior citizens that know this stuff. They grew up with it, and they have a passion for showing somebody and teaching them what it's about, so that you have a chance to employ these people where they might be sitting at the house. It doesn't matter if they were a mill worker their whole life, they grew up on a farm. That is the connection, and our purpose statement is uniting families to the land and each other. That's one way that we have of being able to do that. We take a serious look at the people that we hire, and we say, okay, we've got this wonderful, hard-working, in the weather opportunity for these kids to have their first job. We need to train them right. We go through a lot of trouble to say, okay, if you're going to tuck your shirt in right, take your belt off, undo your snap, and tuck your shirt in. Don't finger poke it in. If you made the decision to have a big old' giant tattoo right here that's fine, I don't want to see it.

That's fine, I don't have a problem with that. I got friends with tattoos, nephews and everybody else, employees, but I don't want to see them shined out there. We hired a kid that had a full sleeve. He wore a sock on his arm. Then finally what he did was he got a long sleeved t- shirt and cut off one sleeve. If you're a guy and you want to go to the masquerade in Atlanta, where your earrings there, but not here. If you're a girl, you're welcome to wear earrings, but take your eyebrow ring out, your lip ring, your tongue ring. It's got to come out. We're trying to teach them. Somebody says, thank you, what do you say? What do you hear at Chick-fil-A? It's my pleasure. We teach them the same things, how to be on time, how to make eye contact, how to shake hands. We have to teach these people that and it gives us the whole thing. It gives us rewards because we're teaching people something. We're teaching, not only our guests but we're improving, hopefully, the etiquette of our employees. I want, when somebody puts an application down, or signs whatever's next for them, they put down on their application they were an employee of our farm, I want them, whoever that employer is to say, oh my gosh, I remember this one that I hired from them. That means something. I think we have a responsibility to do the best we can for the customer, but also we've got a lot of responsibilities for the employees that we can't overlook, especially with the demographic we've got.

Edmund -

Right. Okay, on the flipside of that, *what are the greatest challenges of owning and operating an agritourism business?*

Participant #8 - Well, we've talked about some of the greatest challenges in Georgia. Georgia is specifically an anomaly because they are so immature, the state as a state with the industry of agritourism. Highly unorganized. It absolutely has no political muscle whatsoever. I think that's a real issue that there's no definition and so, for instance, I don't have the problem, but if I were going to answer this for a startup, how do you go to an insurance company and ask them to insure your agritourism destination when the state doesn't recognize a definition of agritourism? You're asking them to insure what's not been defined by the state of Georgia and who wants to insure that? I mean it's harder. Now, if there's an agritourism wing to the Department of Economic Development or the Department of Ag that's got some muscle, then they're going to look at it harder, but when you're in Georgia, it's more difficult to be insured, even more so than in other states. I think specifically for us, a challenge that burdens me, it's not a problem. What did you call it? Did you call it a challenge?

Edmund - Challenges, yes.

Participant #8 - One of mine is keeping up with the growth. Being able to offer the experience that we want with people. It used to be that we would train people like I just described to you, we would train 30 people. Now we're training 130 that way. To be able to maintain the culture that we're trying to maintain, where we as supervisors or employers are

using these employees as the vehicle to do good, to smile, to create a good experience in people. I could forward to you, lots of things. Joseph Pine wrote a book, *The Experience Economy*, was his first one, and then the last one that they wrote is, called, *Authenticity*. They talk about how this transition from commodities of, for instance, coffee, to creating experience around pennies worth of coffee where you're selling it for \$8.00 a cup instead of \$.50. There's a profit in both, but people are buying the experience, not the coffee. It's the experience of the place and what you call the coffee and how they make it and the noises and all that. *The Experience Economy* was a great book, but then *Authenticity* was really more how you can be fake real like Disney World is fake, but it's real. You're in it. You're there, but the dangers of being fake/fake or being real/fake, where you say you're this but you're really not, so you're not authentic. What they tap on a little bit in that book is, they have a word for it, but what they're talking about is transformational. You really go from the experience to something that's transformational. What they're describing, I believe, is the cult branding of Harley Davidson or the Boston Red Sox or Case Knife owners or anything like that. It's this cult following. What people are looking for is, they want to feel like they're a better person because they know you. They came to you. They experienced what you have and they want to help their friend be better people by introducing them to you because they had a transformation when they came here. I have a

real keen ear when I'm listening to and reading testimonials on the e-mails. You know we get our share of, "oh, you did a bad job," but overwhelmingly, we get these good testimonials.

If you hear, "I had a great time. The weather was beautiful and, golly, the food was good and it was just really a great day," that's a great, you can be happy about that. When it says, "I haven't experienced a place like that since I was a child and my husband and I came with our grandchildren and we had to pull them away and I have Facebooked all 400 of my friends since I left here and we can't wait to come back," then she's describing a transformation. She was transformed back to her childhood and now she's sharing that with her children or grandchildren. That's transformational and to me that's where the blue ribbon reward is. If you can provide that, you're going to count the money. A lot of people count the money and then say, okay, well, how can we do a better job for the customer? If you can get a transformational experience, then the money is just a natural benefit. I think those are some of the rewards and challenges. How do we do that? You know, how can we do that? I guess that's the easiest way for me to say it. I hope I'm not belaboring that question.

Edmund - No, that's great. The goal is to get as much information as possible about the industry. Those are some really good points. *What advice do you give to others who are considering the agritourism industry?*

Participant #8 - The first thing I tell folks is to keep it as simple as possible and to be what they are. Don't go out and try to be like us. Don't try to go out

and be a Cagle Dairy like I did. What is it that you have that's special? Are you fantastic at decorating? Then let that be what you're known for. Do you have a historic era about your farm? What's the story in your family? Is this the third generation? Is it a centennial farm? Are you a fourth generation? People love that and that's marketable. What is your own identity? Use that as the fundamental, cornerstone and then work from there. If all you do is say, well, I've got these 15 acres and I'm going to go buy a cow train and make me a corn box. Then again, anybody down the road is your competition, but maybe nobody else has something, something cider mill, or this is where the moonshine still was that so-and- so did something with. What story is there that somebody else doesn't have? Then build your identity around your personality, what you love and what you enjoy. Don't come to our farm or someplace like that and say, oh, gosh, because this took 20-something years to do. I've got a picture of our very first field trip experience. It was back there where that dumpster is, and it was in a space smaller than this right here in this corner. The whole experience was smaller than that right there. We had taken pallets and a board and made a little ramp to go up so the goats could come up on large cable spools. We had them stacked up and the goats would jump up then and go across and you had to sit there and watch the goats. There weren't but three or four of them, and you'd shoot the kids through. The big fun was shooting the kids through, so that the pellets wouldn't hit them on



the head. You'd say, "Okay, go." Shoo. The teachers and everybody loved it. It's like, ah, ah. You're just sitting there. It isn't going to happen. You just saw her go over here, so she's not going go again, but she's sitting up there wanting to look.

Edmund - Before the pellets hit you.

Participant #8 - Or the doo doo ball hit you. I actually would get a squirt gun and on the teachers, I'd keep it hid and when they would go under, I'd just pssht, hit them in the head with that thing. Oh man, they were freaking out, they had goat pee on their head. Agh. It was like they thought it was death acid or something. You show them that squirt gun and thinking about that would make the trip for them.

Edmund - Like you said, being unique and doing your own thing. That's great.

Participant #8 - Be your own thing and recognize that it's, you. Let it grow slow. Let it set its own pace.

Edmund - Good. Okay. This is more for your business, but *how do you measure success?*

Participant #8 - I think on those testimonials that I mentioned to you. We try to measure as much as we can and being able to recognize, like we have on one of our surveys it says, "How did you learn about our farm?" Did you learn about us on a radio ad or in a newspaper or a magazine article or whatever it happens to be. We have them where they can circle them. I can't remember where it landed this year, but last year, the number one

thing was we come every year. Number one thing was we come every year. You can create a family tradition and that's why those people need to realize they got to grow it slow, because it takes a generation to do it. We do an egg hunt for free and we've always done it for free, and it was just something for the community. It's just like Journey to the Manger. People will come here that won't go to a church on Sunday, or on Christmas, so if we can plant seeds of salvation, then we try to take every opportunity to do that. I'm fortunate to work for people that put a dollar value on an ability to do that and the opportunity to do it. We do this egg hunt. Now, this year I think we'll probably hide close to 25,000 eggs. It's grown from 40 in the first year to over 4,000 this year. We had a mom came up to me this last year and she said, she had a little toddler, two at the most out there running around and she said, "Oh, I'm having so much fun out here, it's just like I remember it." I said, "Well, what do you mean remembered it?" She said, "I have never ever been to another egg hunt in my life." I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "We never did egg hunts at my house, but this one was free. My parents brought me out here when I was about 10 years old." She was 26, 24 or 26 and bringing her kids, and that's very rewarding and that's success. They come every time and so you're creating a family tradition and you have to recognize that the money follows that. That's rewarding and that people do comment and their comments suggest that, yes, they had a good experience, yes, they had a good time, yes, they perceive it as a

value, yes, and overwhelmingly it's our staff that create that experience. It's not so much the place, it's the kindness in the staff and it's the consistency that they have in every staff member regardless of who they are. That's what makes it, really, and I speak about this a lot in different things. You can have a train. You can have a \$500,000 something, if you got the wrong person running it, forget it. You have got to have the right person. I have a slide that says, how many of you ever read *The Millionaire Next Door*, Dale Carnegie, *Seven Keys at Winning Friends and Influencing People*? You know, these are all business books that you can learn from. Then the next slide is the Bible. I say, "I'm not trying to give you religion. I'm not trying to make you make a decision, but I'm just telling you there are business principles in this book that help us." I point to Matthew chapter 5 where Jesus is saying if somebody slaps you on one cheek, turn the other. If somebody steals your shirt, give them your coat also. Then he says, if someone asks you to carry their load, meaning a Roman soldier, any Roman, could ask them to carry their load to the mile marker outside town and you had to drop what you were doing. He said, if someone asked you to carry their load one mile, carry it a second for them also. We teach the employees, okay, if you show up for work on time, you got your tattoos covered, you got your eyebrow rings out, you got your smile on, you don't have sunglasses, you make eye contact, you shake hands, you got your shirt tucked in, you give everybody fabulous service, aren't you going the

second mile? The whole room is going to go, oh, yeah. I tell them that's what you're being paid for. That's the first mile. That's what's expected of you. You're not doing anything special. You're just you're doing what I'm paying you to do, but it's the ice cream thing. It's the taking them to go see the goats and not pointing to where the goats are. It's those things, those are the second mile. Then you challenge them.

What's going to be your second mile because everybody's second mile is different? How are going to provide second mile service is what we call it? That's really where I get excited. Is being able to watch them do that.

Edmund - Okay, next question. *What leadership characteristics must a person have in order to operate a successful agritourism business?*

Participant #8 - I think you just have to be very flexible is one thing. I think, from a leadership standpoint, you have to care. I think you have to care for your employees and your people genuinely. I think that you've got to have a good handle on your bottom line, on what are your costs and your charges and are you making a profit because so many of us get excited about the smiles and the crowds and all that and we forget to make money. We put a value on that. We say, oh, well, and some of us are afraid to charge. These people run around still charging \$4.00 a kid for field trips. They could double that overnight. I mean every school in the whole world will pay \$8.00 for a field trip. You got to recognize that you have something valuable even though you take it for granted. I think from the leadership standpoint, you have to be flexible

because you're going to have some disappointments and you certainly have to be creative. You got to be thick skinned because people aren't going to like what you think is a great idea. They're going to respond in Federal Notes.

Edmund - That's a good way to put it, Federal Notes.

Participant #8 - That's right. It'll hurt your feelings but you got to keep going, and I think endurance. It's hard for me to imagine that if you've got the right people and the right passion with the people involved, it's hard for me to see in this day and time an agritourism flop. I think it's going to be in the character and motives of person if it's a failure, because, to me, agritourism, you can just about do anything. We started off with company picnics and all. Well, like all these you-pick-its here now and it's because people are wanting to buy something. What do you have to buy? Do you sell your beef? What do you mean you don't have anything to sell? It was by demand. We backed into all that. I think those are some of the highlights on leadership, which is where we are, right?

Edmund - Yes, sir. The last question. *What future do you see for the agritourism industry in the state of Georgia and why?*

Participant #8 - I think it's bright, I think it's a fantastic future. I think it's a youthful future. Farming is always associated with the World War II generation. We so closely associate it with grandparents and things like that. That is

the case, but there's a whole new wave of people, whether they are caught up in organics or they just want the work ethic that comes with living on a farm in a rural community for their children. I think you're going to see folks, maybe leaving corporate jobs and making a go of it whether it's apples or organics or locally grown or whatever it happens to be. There's a guy that I just heard about, now his daddy is filthy rich and he's been running a bed-and-breakfast and a restaurant in some high-end place in Mexico the last few years. His dad got a big cattle farm down the road and so all a sudden, this kid is moving here and he's going to start a big organics operation. I'm not so sure if he's got a passion for it or if it's just the next thing with daddy's money. I don't know him, and I guess we'll find out with time, but he's a great example. I hope he's the real deal, and I hope he's very successful because he is what I believe is exactly what it is. The guy couldn't be hardly 30. He's got a passion for the land. Yes, his father is wealthy and can help him get set up, but there are others out there that don't have that, but they still have that same thing. I think for the future it's that. I hope that politically and litigiously agritourism is going to grow to catch up with the industry. The industry right now is at this level. Organization, support, political muscle, voice, things like that are down here and hopefully we're going to catch up to it, at least get close and I think that's going to happen in the next five years. I hope that you'll see, more educational institutions paying attention to what are the specifics about agritourism. You need to know what pot ash does and nitrogen,

sure, but have you ever thought about how to park 500 cars on your farm? Have you figured out how you're going to feed them? We learned pretty quick that if Bubba's Radiator Company comes, they bring 150 people and Bubba's Uncle Clem has a barbeque restaurant and he gets lost getting here and the food's late and cold, all they remember is they had a bad meal at our farm. There's just so much to think about. Your safety issues. I told you about the little boy that was burned and we had fortunately had enough sense on this one particular day that we had contacted the right people and we had three GPS approved landing sites for these Life Flight helicopters years before the little boy was every burned, just anticipating. You start having people, you're going to have a heart attack. I'm telling you, in every crowd there's three great big giant obese women with weak ankles and they are going down, they just do. One little thing, crack, their ankles go. Then nowadays, kids, they drink four PowerAde's and they're dehydrated because it's all electrolytes, so they're not drinking the water. They're getting off the couch. They're coming out here and it's 101 degrees. They're passing out left and right. How you going to handle all that? There's so much more to know and learn. I've got some friends up in Augusta and they had one little accident that could've been prevented. It was a stupid thing that they didn't train their employee right and then they grossly mishandled it themselves. They weren't sweet. They weren't friendly. They just were worried about the insurance data and capturing this and it snowballed on them, and they just lost heart, started

making weird decisions and, man, they're all but in business anymore. They had a fantastic business. There wasn't anybody there to say to them, "hey, somebody's going to get hurt some day." You didn't mean to do it, but you got to deal with it. I think that's what I hope is that we are more uniform in what people see. It's like we talked about earlier, one devastating injury on, say, one of these little cow trains, that hurts us all.

Edmund - Yep, exactly. It affects the whole industry.

Participant #8 - Then you get some of these people right now and there's actually a group, I'm not going to name them, but there's a place in Georgia right now and they were real estate people and I'm sure they're great folks. I've never met them. They're a little aloof and they had a piece of property that was in a rural area that was not going to be developed. They came visited us anonymously. They visited everybody around, and they took parts of it and created what's really more of a farm-based theme park than it is true agritourism. They grow a little thing, a little corn maze, but they took everybody else's good ideas and had the financial backing to start it and I hope they're successful. I think they're probably representing what they are very well, but I can't say that it's genuine agritourism, but then again, some people would say that we're not.



Edmund - It comes back to the true definition of agritourism and what it is. Well, the goal of this study is to try to educate people on what the agritourism is in the state of Georgia. That was the last question. Is there anything you want to add to this research?

Participant #8 - Yes, I think you've got an easier row to hoe to educate the masses than the influencers. Stereotypically, agritourism is not a huge economic driver. It's extra spending cash for, other businesses up there in north. That's what it is to them. They don't realize what an enormous economic driver it is. The influencers, the people with the yes and no voices for grant funding or the universities, the extension services, the Department of Ag, the Department of Tourism, all that. One of my big things has been to postpone this roadside agritourism signage which was a nice thing and it's a great thing, but you've got a Chevron station in South Georgia with the four signs pointing to Georgia Agritourism and it's so-and-so whatever. And it's a Chevron station that sells local pecans. It's a gas station, and they're endorsing them as agritourism. Now if you have to drive four miles out of your way and you get there and you're disappointed, are you going to follow another agritourism sign?

Edmund - Probably not.

Participant #8 - Heck no. What I've been trying to do is get them to don't stop the program, but just postpone it until we can get a good definition of what is agritourism and then we can also structure the signage program where

there's a set of protocols that you have to meet. You got to have running water. You got to have bathroom facilities. You got to have a parking area that's safe. Lighting. There's just some fundamental things that you got to have to be in business and until we have some kind of cooperative effort between all these agencies. There we can say, okay, yes, a group of peers from the Georgia Agritourism Association has set up some guidelines. They meet the guidelines. The Tourism Department folks have gone and seen them and they've been in business for five years and they're a real deal, and here you go Department of Agriculture, you tell the Department of transportation to set their signs out. That's the way we ought to be, but right now we've got one person in the Department of Agriculture that really doesn't know that much more about what agritourism is than the people you're trying to educate. They're just basically saying, oh, I think that's agritourism, and that's how they get sign up. Changing as far as your role in educating, hopefully you can put a little bit of a slant on comparing it's an easy, easy comparison on what other states are doing for the agritourism industry versus what Georgia's doing. Huge difference. We recently had the SERAC, Southeastern Regional Agritourism Council. Right now, the chairman of that organization is Martha Glass in North Carolina and they do a great job. We had Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, North Dakota, Ohio, because there's no national organization for

agritourism. That's where these professors, these extension specialists, your tourism specialists that have a passion for agriculture, they're coming to that meeting and we had it here. Not one single word was published anywhere in the state of Georgia that that group was here, not one, and that was this last year. Now in 2007 or 2008, NAFDMA which is the North American Farmers Direct marketing Association, which is the global parent for agritourism. That's Europe, Canada, South America, and the United States. People from everywhere. They have a fantastic trade show, they're wonderful. It's a great place to find mentors and learn and come up with good ideas. They actually had their national conference in Georgia, in Savannah, and nobody did anything. Our local paper wrote something about it. They toured the whole state, about 1100 people, I don't remember how many. From all those countries.

Edmund - No one knew about it.

Participant #8 - Do you know what they said when they were done? The worst conference ever. The organizer, he said, "In every occasion" and he'd been doing it 15 years, he said, "In every occasion, having this conference in someone's state, turbo boosts agritourism 10 years ahead within the next year." He said, "That will not happen here." He said, "Politically, you all are invisible." He said, "I feel sorry for you." Those are his words. Those are a direct quote.

Edmund - : There's a lot of work to be done.

- Participant #8 - A lot of work to be done in Georgia. A lot of work to be done. I would say Georgia has as much potential as anybody because we got the coast, we got the mountains, we got so much diversity. We got rivers and so much potential here.
- Edmund - I think so, too.
- Participant #8 - It's amazing. That's where you can make the biggest difference is doing a comparison. Each one of those states went around the table and said, okay, what are you doing, Tennessee? Well, PhD Sally Jo says, oh, our agritourism major is really coming along. Then Department of Tourism lady says, well, here's what we're doing and we got matching funding grants for folks that want to start up an agritourism and for Century Farms we've got this going on and that going on. Then the Department of Ag, well, what do you got going on? Oh, well, we're partnering with the organics people and we're going to partner with this people to help market specifically small farm commodities. All of them, all the way around are like that even Mississippi. They got this PhD that came, she's just learning and she said, I have no idea what I'm doing, but I'm excited and all that. Then comes the Georgia representative that spoke on behalf of, the group there and she goes, "Well, we got a signage program." Of course, their signage program has been in business for years. They're looking at us, like, you just got a signage program? We're like we've got a signage program. They're like, huh? Then we start talking about the primary marketing initiative for the Department

of Agriculture right now which is Georgia Grown which is a phenomenal push. It's a wonderful thing. I'm really excited about it. If I'm selling strawberries, it's going to help me. It's going to help in a lot of ways, but it doesn't do anything for the industry of agritourism. There's a misconception that, well, Georgia Grown has got that covered. Georgia Grown is not doing anything for the definition of agriculture, or anything else. Georgia Grown is the best program that's comes out of the Department of Agriculture ever as far as helping Georgia farmers from an industry standpoint, commodity and brand what is Georgia agriculture. There's none better, but, the signage program doesn't help. It helps identify people, but if their County Commissioner comes after them, then he just uses that as proof that they're really not agriculture, the signs, you see. There's a lot to it. You don't have time for all that, but that's where we are.