



SUPPORTING LOCAL AGRICULTURE

The Potential of an Open Farm Day Event

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Supporting Local Agriculture: The Potential of an Open Farm Day Event

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to determine how an open farm event could help support the agricultural sector in the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region through identifying the ways in which such events are perceived to impact consumers, participating farmers, and the agricultural sector overall. An exploratory study was undertaken using semi-structured interviews with two target population groups: organizers of open farm events from across North America, and farmer/producers in the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region.

This study finds that open farm events can potentially support the agricultural in a number of ways, some of which apply to the economic sustainability of the sector and some to its social sustainability. This study identified factors seen as having a direct impact on consumer purchasing behaviour, supporting the sector in an economic way, and factors seen as increasing social support of the agricultural sector and improving integration between urban and rural residents. These findings have implications for the organization of an open farm event in the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region, including how an event should be organized to achieve specific objectives.

The generalizability of this study is limited because of the small number of respondents involved.

This research contributes to the understanding of how experiential educational events in agriculture can affect attendees and participating farmers/producers, as well as the agricultural sector as a whole. It is primarily of value to those organizing open farm events (or other educational, on-farm events), whether they are governmental or private organizations. It is also potentially useful to the tourism industry and, more generally, the agricultural industry.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The Central Okanagan is home to a diverse agricultural sector with a long history (Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission [COEDC], 2018). While there is currently a trend towards “local” food (Hesterman & Horan, 2017), farming communities, including that of the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region,¹ face challenges. These challenges affect both the supply and demand side of the agricultural economy. The purpose of this research is to discover whether an open farm event might help address some of these challenges here in the Central Okanagan Economic Development region and if so, in what ways. This chapter details the background of the research project, briefly discusses some prior research, provides the purpose of the research project, and describes its significance. This is followed by a description of the nature and scope of this report.

1.2 Background

Consumer demand for locally produced food products has been increasing and is predicted to continue doing so (Hesterman & Horan, 2017). It has also been suggested that Canadian consumers are willing to pay a premium for products identified as local (BMO Financial Group [BMO], 2012; Campbell, Lesschaeve, Bowen, Onufrey, & Moskowitz, 2010). British Columbian consumers are among those willing to pay the highest premiums (BMO, 2012). This trend towards higher demand for local products and consumer willingness to pay indicates that there are opportunities for local food producers, but challenges remain.

The aging-out of farm operators is one such challenge. The agricultural sector in Canada saw a decline in the number of farm operators from 2011-2016, as well as a rise in the average age of farm operators (Statistics Canada, 2017). In British Columbia, this trend is exaggerated, with the number of farm operators declining at approximately double the national rate and a slightly higher average age of farm operators (Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission [COEDC], 2017). The situation in the Central Okanagan region is similar (COEDC, 2017). This

¹ The Economic Development Region includes Kelowna, Lake Country, West Kelowna, Peachland, and South East Kelowna (Personal Correspondence, Myrna Stark Leader, October 4, 2018)

aging of the farming community is a concern for the long-term sustainability of the agricultural sector in Canada overall, and in British Columbia and the Central Okanagan in particular.

Further challenges for local food producers center on consumers. An important factor in whether consumers purchase local food products is convenience (Stephenson & Lev, 2004; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). While consumers may indicate that they are willing to pay more for locally produced food, they are not necessarily willing to go out of their way to find it. Stephenson & Lev (2004) suggest that either local food must be made more convenient, or consumers must be convinced to change their shopping habits.

Trust is another important factor in whether consumers choose to buy local products (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). According to research conducted by The Canadian Centre for Food Integrity [CCFI] (2017), consumers do not necessarily view the Canadian food system as trustworthy.

There is evidence that direct interaction between consumers and food producers can increase consumer perceived transparency and trust (Garner, 2016; Stebner, Ray, Becker, & Baker, 2015; Ferris et al., 2016). Farmer's markets provide a place where consumers and farmers can interact, and Garner (2016) suggests that these personal interactions increase trust and therefore support for vendors. Bringing the consumer to the farm is another way to facilitate consumer-farmer interactions, and one that has the potential to both increase perceived transparency and educate consumers. Stebner et al. (2015) suggest that bringing consumers to the farm can lead to a perception of transparency, "increased trust in farmers" (p. 52) and improve perceptions of agricultural practices in the case of small, niche market farms. Ferris et al. (2016) found that these effects can hold true for larger, conventional farming operations as well.

The Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission is interested in whether an educational event could bring farmers and consumers together in a way that would help address the issues of consumer awareness (both of the diversity of the local agricultural sector, and business opportunities therein), trust and transparency, and consumer perceptions of agricultural practices in the Central Okanagan Development region. The concept of an Open Farm Day event, wherein farms open their doors to the general public for a day, was put forward by Myrna

Stark Leader, of the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission (Agricultural Support Program).

Stark Leader (personal communication, September 27, 2018) indicated that the main goals of such an event would be to raise awareness of the diverse agricultural businesses (excluding wineries) in the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region, allow consumers an inside look at the technology and processes that local farmers use, and expose consumers to business and career opportunities in the agricultural sector. The goal of the event would be to support the economic and social sustainability of the agricultural sector in the Central Okanagan.

1.3 Purpose

This project is intended to answer whether and how an Open Farm Day could help support the agricultural sector in the Central Okanagan Development Region, and what characteristics are likely to be important to its success. Background research has identified the issue of an aging farm population and the following key factors in consumer support for local agriculture: consumer shopping habits, trust in the agricultural sector and practices, and transparency. These factors lead to the following decision statement and research objectives (RO's).

How can open farm events contribute to the economic and social sustainability of the local agricultural sector?

For the purpose of this decision statement, “local” refers to the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region.

In order to answer the above decision statement, the following RO's have been developed.

RO1: Evaluate the success of open farm events in increasing consumer awareness of local agricultural businesses

RO2: Evaluate the success of open farm events in increasing perceived transparency and trust in local agricultural businesses

RO3: Evaluate the success of open farm events in improving perceptions of agriculture and agricultural practices

RO4: Evaluate the ability of open farm events to improve awareness of business, job, and career opportunities in the agricultural sector

RO5: Identify the key success factors for open farm events

RO6: Identify other potential impacts of open farm events on participating farmers/producers

1.4 Significance

This research builds on previous research into the impact of farm tours, personal interaction with producers, and agritourism. It contributes to the literature on open farm events, of which there is little openly available, and to the understanding of how educational on-farm events in general can affect attendees, participating farmers/producers, and the local agricultural sector in which they take place.

This research is primarily of value to those organizing or planning to organize open farm events, whether they are governmental or private organizations. It is also potentially useful to the tourism industry and, more generally, the agricultural industry.

1.5 Nature and scope of report

This chapter, Chapter One, has provided background for the research project and described its purpose. Chapter Two is a detailed literature review covering applicable prior research. Chapter Three outlines the methodology chosen for the project and explains why this methodology was used. Chapter Four describes the results of the study, and conclusions are discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Studies in farmers' markets, agritourism, consumer perceptions of farming, educational farm events and farm tours indicate that visiting farms can have an impact on consumer perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing behaviour. In order to determine what impact an open farm event could have on the agricultural sector in the Central Okanagan Development Region, as well as challenges and key success factors of events like these, the following decision statement has been developed:

How can open farm events contribute to the economic and social sustainability of the local agricultural sector?

2.2 Definitions

For the purpose of this study it is important to define what is meant by both economic and social sustainability, especially in the context of agriculture.

2.2.1 Sustainability and agriculture

Sustainability in agriculture is understood in diverse ways (Smith & McDonald, 1998; Smit & Smithers, 1993; Diazabakana, et al., 2014), and these differing interpretations are not always compatible with one another (Smit & Smithers, 1993; Diazabakana, et al., 2014; Yunlong & Smit, 1993). It is therefore important to define what is meant by “economic and social sustainability” for the purpose of this report.

The United Nations World Summit defined the three “interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars” (p. 12) of sustainable development as economic, social, and environmental (United Nations General Assembly, 2005). There is some general agreement in the literature that sustainability in agriculture falls roughly into three similar categories (Smith & McDonald, 1998; Diazabakana, et al., 2014; Smit & Smithers, 1993). Although these three categories are interconnected both generally (United Nations General Assembly, 2005) and in agriculture (Diazabakana, et al., 2014), this project focuses solely on the economic and social sustainability aspects. This is not to say that environmental sustainability is not important – as Smith &

McDonald (1998) write, “a system must be ecologically sustainable or it cannot persist over the long term, and thus cannot be productive and profitable” (p. 18) – but that it is not a variable that could be measured in this particular study.

2.2.2 *Economic sustainability*

Diazabakana et al. (2014) state that economic sustainability in agriculture is “generally viewed as economic viability” (p. 22). Smith & McDonald (1998) similarly hold economic sustainability in agriculture to be the ability of farmers to make a living from their agricultural enterprises.

Yunlong & Smit (1993) differentiate between economic sustainability in terms of long-term production (which incorporates an ecological perspective), and in terms of the “economic performance and viability of farming” (p. 304). As the variables studied in this project do not directly influence future productivity, the definition of *economical sustainability as economic viability* will be the one used in this study. Smith & McDonald (1998) put this as the “existence of economic returns which are sufficient to sustain farm businesses, and to adequately reward producers” (p. 505).

2.2.3 *Social sustainability*

Social sustainability in general “relates to people” (Diazabakana, et al., 2014, p. 25). In their review of literature, Lebacque, Baret, & Stilmant (2013) determine that social sustainability definitions generally fall into two categories. The first is described as at the farm level, related to farmers’ quality of life and health, and the second is at the societal level, relating to external societal demands. Smit & Smithers (1993) view the social sustainability of agriculture as “an activity which maintains a particular social system” (p. 502), that of the ‘rural community,’ possibly adding a third level between the individual farm level and society as whole. This understanding defines social sustainability as the maintenance of both a community and perhaps a way of life. This view is backed up by Douglass (as cited in Smith & McDonald, 1998), who defines ‘sustainability as community’ as “maintaining or reconstructing economically and socially viable rural systems” (p. 17).

For the purposes of this report, social sustainability will be discussed primarily from the perspective of those in the agricultural community, rather than society overall. For this

perspective, the definition of *social sustainability as the maintenance of a community* is most applicable. That said, the ability to maintain a community is heavily influenced by outside forces, such as consumer purchasing decisions, policies effecting land use and availability, and market forces that effect the price of land (Allen et al., 1991).

2.3 The importance of agriculture

Agriculture plays an important role in the economic development of countries (Sidhoum, 2018) and, by extension, regions. Although agriculture has often been seen as simply “a producer of food” (Smit & Smithers, 1993, p. 502), it is now a relatively common view that farming contributes not only “food, feed and fibre” (Sidhoum, 2018, p. 273) but a range of both marketable and public goods² to society (Sidhoum, 2018; Renting et al., 2009; Smit & Smithers, 1993; Boogard, Oosting, & Bock, 2008).

2.4 Awareness of agriculture

While agriculture “relates directly and powerfully to the present and future conditions” (Smit & Smithers, 1993, p. 499) of both our economy and society,³ Lafollete et al. (2015) write that the majority of consumers are unaware of agriculture’s importance to economies. If consumers are unaware of the economic impact of their national or regional agricultural sector, it is likely they are also unaware of its other, less obvious contributions to society. This awareness gap is one that could threaten the long-term viability of regional agriculture.

In discussing the social context of sustainability in agriculture, Allen et al. (1991) mention that what farmers produce is “heavily influenced by consumer decisions” (p. 4). In the current world of globalization and imports, it follows that consumer decisions also – whether they are aware of the fact or not – have a significant impact on *where* farmers produce, in a global, national, and regional sense, and therefore in which locations agricultural communities persist. This leads to the question of consumer awareness at its most basic level, as if local consumers are unaware of local producers and what is available from them, these products will not be among those they

² E.g. “landscapes, food safety and local food security, farmland biodiversity and enhancing the quality of the environment” (Sidhoum, 2018, p. 273).

³ Smit & Smithers (1993) include all three categories of sustainability – i.e. economic, social, and environmental, but as this study focuses on economic and social sustainability those are the two mentioned.

consider when making purchasing decisions. Consumer awareness can also create consumer demand (Wittman, Beckie, & Hergesheimer, 2012). Agritourism is believed to increase awareness of local agriculture (Tew & Barbieri, 2012), but it is unknown whether an open farm event in the Central Okanagan Development Region is likely to have the same or a similar result. These factors lead to the first research objective:

ROI: Evaluate the success of open farm events in increasing consumer awareness of local agricultural businesses

2.5 Trust, transparency, and consumer perceptions

Trust is important for businesses in general and for farmers in particular: Jarosz (2000) writes that “primary among the influences ensuring the viability and vibrancy of regional food networks are the social relations of cooperation and trust” (p. 279), and Feldmann & Hamm (2015) found that “trust in the [local] food supply chain” is one of the predictors of local food purchases.

The Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI) (2017) conducted a study on transparency and trust and found that while the percentage of Canadians who feel the food system in Canada is on the right track increased from 2016 to 2017, 43% remain unsure. This indicates that trust in the agriculture at the national level remains an issue, and “a favorable, or at least neutral, opinion of agriculture by consumers is critical to the viability and sustainability of the industry” (LaFollette et al., 2015, p. 163). The CCFI (2017) also reported that consumers consider farmers to be the second most responsible for being transparent.⁴ While providing information can help with increasing perceived transparency, “perhaps less obvious to some is the importance of open dialogue and engaging consumers” (CCFI, 2017, p. 11).

2.5.1 Building trust

Wittman et al. (2012) found that farmers value direct marketing for the opportunity for interaction with consumers, which participants in the study believed helped educate and build trust with consumers. Personal interactions were considered important enough that farmers

⁴ Food processors/manufacturers were considered the most important (CCFI, 2017).

would participate in farmers' markets even if this was not economically rewarding, partly for the opportunity to engage with local consumers and increase market exposure.

Farm tours have been shown to increase perceived transparency and thus trust in the farmers who were involved (Stebner et al., 2015). This trust can extend to the sector as a whole (Stebner et al., 2015). This leads to the question of whether an open farm event in the Central Okanagan Development Region is likely to be similarly effective in fostering consumer perceived transparency and trust, and thus the second research objective:

RO2: Evaluate the success of open farm events in increasing perceived transparency and trust in local agricultural businesses

2.5.2 Changing perceptions

Farm visits and educational tours have the potential to improve consumer perceptions of agriculture and agricultural practices, including animal welfare practices (Ferris et al., 2016; Stebner et al., 2015; Smith & Ferris, 2016) and food safety (Ferris et al., 2016). This leads to the question of whether an open farm event could have a similar effect in the Central Okanagan Development Region, and the third research objective:

RO3: Evaluate the success of open farm events in improving perceptions of agriculture and agricultural practices

2.6 Farming as a business

The aging out of farm operators is a trend nationally (Statistics Canada, 2017), in British Columbia, and in the Okanagan, where the trend is exaggerated (COEDC, 2017). This implies that it is important for the long-term viability of the local agricultural community to attract people to the industry and increase awareness of careers within the sector.

British Columbian farm vendors in one study identified labour availability as an important limiting factor in producing local food, and participants from British Columbia and Alberta in the same study listed a declining number of farmers among factors that affect the supply of local food (Wittman et al., 2012).

One of the important factors contributing to the viability of regional agricultural communities is healthy relationships between suppliers, producers, and retailers (Jarosz, 2000). It is unknown whether an open farm event could provide an opportunity for farmers to build relationships with local retailers or other businesses.

One study found that participation in a farm tour resulted in increased awareness of farming as a job (Stebner et al., 2015). This, and the other factors outlined above, lead to the fourth research objective:

RO4: Evaluate the ability of open farm events to improve awareness of business, job, and career opportunities in the agricultural sector

2.7 Format of open farm events, and characteristics important to their success

No research regarding the comparison of various formats of open farm events or evidence regarding what characteristics are likely to be important to the success was found, which leads to the fifth research objective:

RO5: Identify the key success factors for open farm events

2.8 Other potential impacts

Agritourism can impact farm businesses in various ways, and not all are related to the short-term gains in revenue attributable to diversifying into non-farm activities. These impacts include the potential to capture new markets (Tew & Barbieri, 2012), the potential to shift long-term consumer purchasing behaviour towards more local products (Kim et al., 2018), and finally “an agritourism experience might influence consumer behaviour towards local food by highlighting its contribution to the local community” (Brune et al., 2018, p. 5). Whether these effects are due to repeated visits, the types of agritourism activities engaged in by the consumer, or some other variable is not clear.

Evidence from a study on interaction at farmers’ markets also suggests that personal interaction between farmer and consumer can result in supportive relationships that not only increase trust,

as mentioned earlier, but improve farmers' ability to survive crises (Garner, 2016). It is again unclear whether repeated interaction is necessary or whether an open farm event could foster similar relationships.

Finally, there may be impacts on agricultural participants in open farm events not identified in the literature thus far and not anticipated by the student researcher. This unknown combined with the preceding factors leads to the sixth and final research objective:

RO6: Identify other potential impacts of open farm events on participating farmers/producers

2.9 Conclusion

Agriculture faces challenges at the international and regional level, and local producers are important to the economic and social character of regions. An open farm event has the potential to support the local agricultural sector, but it is important to discover what challenges such an event is most likely to be successful in addressing, how it might do so and what characteristics are likely to contribute to its success. The research to answer these questions is built around the following research objectives:

RO1: Evaluate the success of open farm events in increasing consumer awareness of local agricultural businesses

RO2: Evaluate the success of open farm events in increasing perceived transparency and trust in local agricultural businesses

RO3: Evaluate the success of open farm events in improving perceptions of agriculture and agricultural practices

RO4: Evaluate the ability of open farm events to improve awareness of business, job, and career opportunities in the agricultural sector

RO5: Identify the key success factors for open farm events

RO6: Identify other potential impacts of open farm events on participating farmers/producers

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The methodology for this study was designed with three goals in mind: to ensure themes specific to the research objectives were covered, to allow for unexpected themes to emerge in a natural way, and to enhance the richness of the results. This chapter will outline the research design, how samples were selected, the data collection method, instrument evaluation, and analysis.

3.2 Research design

Due to the lack of research specifically into the impact of open farm events on both participating farmer/operators and the agricultural sector this research was exploratory in nature. As exploratory research naturally lends itself to qualitative analysis (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013) research was designed with qualitative analysis in mind. Because of the limited availability of specifically applicable research, it was also designed to allow for information not anticipated by the student researcher to emerge. This required a research design that accommodated questions that directly related to the research objectives and for information to surface in a natural way. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their ability to support both (Galletta, 2012).

3.3 Sample design

This study involved two target populations:

1. Organizers of open farm (and similar) events in North America, and
2. Farmers/producers in the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region

Including perspectives from two separate target populations enhanced the richness of the research results and helped ensure the research was applicable to the region of interest.

The target population of organizers was selected for their ability to offer perspectives on the impact of these events not only on consumers attending, but also on agricultural businesses that have participated. As open farm events are spread out across North America, this target population encompasses participants from across North America. Using local farmers/producers

as another target population increased the applicability of the research to the Central Okanagan Development Region and provided important insights into how these events are perceived by potential local participants.

The goal of the study was to include five respondents from each sample population, for a total of ten respondents. Actual respondents included four organizers of open farm (and similar) events from across Canada, and five farmers/producers from the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region, for a total of nine.

3.4 Data collection method

Data was collected for this study using semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their ability to accommodate both questions relating directly to research objectives and to allow unexpected narratives to emerge (Galletta, 2012). Nine interviews were conducted overall (four with organizers of open farm and similar events and five with farmers/producers in the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region). These interviews were conducted by phone or in person by the student researcher. Administering the interviews by phone/in person, rather than in writing (as is more common; Zikmund et al., 2013), allowed for probing for more detailed and applicable information, as well as clarification to reduce the risk of misinterpretation.

Interviews were between 45-60 minutes long and took place in January and February 2019. Research notes were taken by hand during the interviews, and all interviews were recorded on a digital recording device to reduce the possibility of missing or mis-recording data.

As interviews were conducted, questions on the interview guide evolved to become more applicable and relevant to the project and to respondents. While the questions evolved, care was taken to ensure all relevant themes were still addressed. See Appendix A for interview guides.

3.5 Instrument Evaluation

Interview guides for each target population were developed using variables relating to the six research objectives for this project. A comprehensive review process was used to ensure the reliability and validity of the questions included on the interview guides. First, the interview

guides were reviewed by two faculty advisors and subjected to a peer review. Second, the interview guides were pre-tested to ensure questions were understandable (even to those with little knowledge of open farm events) and adjusted after pre-testing. Some questions were eliminated, while others were reworked. A second round of pre-testing was conducted using a farmer and a volunteer with experience in agriculture and knowledge of open farm events, to ensure questions were applicable to the subject matter as well as to the research objectives. Finally, the instrument was reviewed by an industry expert and final adjustments were made.

3.6 Analysis

Analysis was qualitative and thematic in nature. The analysis process was iterative and consisted of three main steps. Data was first open-coded, where codes were created during the analysis process to fit ideas that emerged in each interview. As each subsequent interview was coded and themes began to emerge, prior coded interviews were revisited and adjusted as necessary to better fit emerging themes. Next, codes were grouped into categories and related back to concepts identified in the literature review. Finally, the coded data was examined for relationships between identified themes. See Appendix B for a table of themes and sub-themes.

Identified themes were compared within the two sample groups, as well as between groups, in order to capture themes that differed or were common between the two sample groups.

Demographic questions at the beginning of the interview allowed for some segmentation and comparison between respondents within groups.

Researcher judgement (with input from advisors) was used in cases where no identifiable theme was apparent but important and applicable information emerged that would have been remiss not to include. This is a valid practice in qualitative research, where meaning from data is more important than quantity of data (Galletta, 2012). Themes that did not relate to the research objectives were examined but discarded.

3.7 Conclusion

Care was taken during research design to ensure results were applicable, rich, and produced valid and reliable data.

Sample populations were chosen with an eye to richness of results and applicability of the project to the region of interest, data was gathered in a way that allowed for both specificity and openness in questions, and the interview guides were subjected to a lengthy process to ensure they would result in the type of data needed. The following chapter will describe the analysis of the resulting data based on this methodology, and a discussion of research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

Data collection was conducted as outlined in Chapter Three, using semi-structured interviews. This chapter begins by describing the characteristics of the study participants, who are divided into two groups. It then describes the findings of the study as related to each research objective. Findings are summarized, after which conclusions and recommendations based on these findings are discussed in Chapter Five.

4.2 Characteristics of study participants

The respondents are divided into two groups: four organizers of open farm events and five farmers/producers in the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region, for a total of nine. The characteristics of each are described below.

4.2.1 Organizers of open farm (and similar) events

A total of four respondents were interviewed in the organizer of open farm events group. These participants were spread out across Canada, with one each from Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia. Respondents were asked a number of demographic questions, including how many farms took part in their event on average, and how many visitors the event received (if measured). This is summarized in the table below.

Table 4-1: Characteristics of organizer respondents

Event	Location	Organization	Scope	Years Running	Participating Host Sites	Attendees ⁵
Alberta Farm Days	Alberta	Steering Committee ⁶	Province-wide	6	120	25,000
Shuswap Farm Tours	British Columbia	Shuswap Food Action Society	Regional	2	13-14	Unknown
Manitoba Open Farm Day	Manitoba	Manitoba Association of Agricultural Societies (MAAS)	Province-wide	10	40-48	6,000-7,000
Open Farm Day	Nova Scotia	Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture	Province-wide	10+	36	15,000

The number of host sites is a better indicator of the size of each event as attendee numbers were rough estimates.

Further demographic questions included how the event was formatted, whether host sites or attendees were charged for participating or attending, and whether any extra activities were included in the event.

All the events were formatted similarly, in that they were primarily self-guided (attendees drove from farm to farm themselves, choosing to visit however many host sites as they wished). The main reasons given for this format were ease of organization and flexibility.

⁵ Attendee numbers are rough estimates, as some organizations only tracked visits (and therefore some attendees would be counted twice or more) and others rely on reports from host sites.

⁶ This steering committee consists of a number of private organizations working with government ministries in Alberta.

No events charged attendees, and only one charged host sites a fee for participating (to cover promotion costs). It is worth noting that the organization that charged host sites mentioned host sites may not be charged for participation if funding was secured to cover promotional costs.

Activities were entirely left up to the participating host sites in three out of four cases. One event required an educational presentation component in order to participate.

Respondents also provided information on the type of host sites that participated in their events. These ranged from small, locally run mixed operations and a few other food producers to a wide variety of host sites including (but not limited to) small mixed operations, direct marketers, cattle ranches, poultry processors, large commodity farms, and other non-farming but agriculture-related host sites such as agricultural museums.

Finally, all events were single-day events with the exception of Alberta Farm Days, which takes place over a weekend.

4.2.2 Farmers/Producers in the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region

Five individuals from this target group agreed to participate in the study. The group included individuals with farming operations (or who worked for farming operations) in Kelowna, Westbank, East Kelowna, and Lake Country.

Respondent operations ranged in size from 13 to 1000 acres and represented a variety of types of operations, including mixed farming, fruit and/or vegetable production, and tree stock.

Respondents also sold product in a variety of ways (sometimes in combination), including direct to consumer, export, and supplying restaurants.

Three of the five operations currently welcome people onto the farm for tours or have done in the past, while the other two did not engage in any form of agritourism. All respondent operations were primarily, or exclusively, farming operations as opposed to making money primarily from agritourism.

4.3 RO1: Awareness of local agricultural operations

Awareness was one of the major themes that emerged during this study, and open farm events were seen as an effective way of raising awareness of local agricultural businesses by both the organizer group and by the farmer/producer group. This increased awareness was seen as benefiting both participating farms and the agricultural sector as a whole.

4.3.1 *Awareness as a benefit of participating*

Organizer and farmer/producer perspectives of open farm events' success in raising awareness were remarkably aligned. Awareness was mentioned by some organizers as one of the main benefits of participating in an open farm event as a host site, and increased awareness emerged as a theme in expected benefits of participation in the farmer/producer group as well. One respondent commented: "It's getting the word out, it's promoting awareness of agriculture. Even if we didn't have any sales for an open farm Sunday, it would still – people would know about you."

Farms with direct sales were seen as benefiting directly through increased awareness by most organizers, primarily through the potential to gain new customers. In other words, awareness was perceived as having an effect on purchasing behavior.

Referring to attendees, one respondent stated that "it encourages them to buy local for sure." Another point that was emphasized was that participation was really "inexpensive exposure" for participating farms.

Increased awareness and the possibility of gaining new customers was also mentioned in the farmer/producer respondent group.

4.3.2 *Effect on agricultural sector*

Increased awareness was seen as a benefit extending to the agriculture sector as a whole, as well as participating farms. One respondent in the organizer group felt that awareness was a stronger factor for the industry as a whole than for participating host sites, particularly as not all host sites

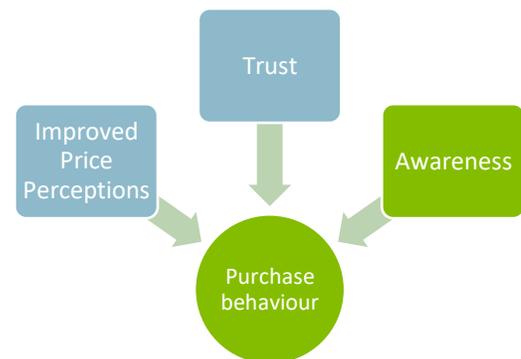


Figure 4-1: Awareness and Purchase Behaviour

were engaged in direct sales, stating: “it’s more a benefit for the industry as a whole ... it’s awareness and understanding of agriculture and what’s happening in the industry.”

The effect of awareness on purchase behaviour may extend to the agricultural sector as a whole as well. In the farmer/producer respondent group, awareness of what can be produced in the Okanagan was mentioned specifically. It was

suggested that if people’s awareness of what can be grown here were improved this would translate to decisions in the grocery store, increasing purchases of local product. One respondent said:

“If we can teach everybody what can be grown here, even when they go to the grocery store, they’re going to look for those items.”

“If we can teach everybody what can be grown here, even when they go to the grocery store, they’re going to look for those items.”

Figure 4-2: Quote about local products and purchase behaviour

4.1 RO2: Transparency

The majority of organizers and of farmers/producers agreed that open farm events were a good way to increase perceived transparency in agriculture. Both groups also agreed that this was likely to increase trust in local farming operations, and potentially the agricultural sector as a whole. This was thought to be primarily due to personal interaction between the farmers and event attendees. While appearing transparent with consumers was also important to most respondents in the farmer/producer group, there was some concern about being too transparent and therefore misunderstood by members of the non-farming public.

4.1.1 *Open farm events and increasing transparency: organizer perspectives*

Overall, organizers viewed open farm events as a very effective method of increasing the perceived transparency of the agricultural sector. There was significant agreement among organizers interviewed that open farm events are a good way of demonstrating transparency to consumers, and that this is a very important part of the event to both the organization and to the participating farmers. It was commented that sometimes, necessary bio-security measures can interfere with this perception for some consumers: “I think that for some of them, when they get into a bio-security system ... you know, hogs or chickens or any of those with bio-security

issues, then people have a hard time understanding that ... some of them immediately go, well, what are you hiding?"

4.1.2 Open farm events and increasing transparency: farmer perspectives

Respondents in the farmer/producer group mostly agreed that an open farm event has the potential to be a good way of demonstrating transparency. That said, some conflicting views on the merits of transparency emerged over the course of the interviews, with some respondents viewing transparency as both beneficial and potentially risky at the same time.

Three of the five respondents mentioned that appearing transparent with customers was important for their operation, with one describing it as a “core piece of the model for success.”⁷ On the other hand, more than one respondent also mentioned the potential for being misunderstood if completely transparent, revealing both positive and negative feelings around the idea of transparency. One respondent stated, “the only issue I would have is visitors knowing that I would use a herbicide, and therefore judging that they don’t want to have anything to do with it, without really knowing anything about the background.” The respondent later mentioned that open farm event could moderate this risk by providing a platform to explain why certain practices were used.

It should be noted that it is possible that the wording of the interview question on the farmer/producer questionnaire regarding transparency may have set it up for negative responses by asking if transparency was an “issue,” thus framing the concept negatively, and that this could have skewed the results slightly.

4.1.3 Factors influencing perceived transparency

Personal interaction was considered by far the most important factor in increasing perceived transparency, although simply seeing farming operations was also viewed as helpful. One



Figure 4-3: Farmers' views of transparency

⁷ Specifically, for direct marketing.

respondent in the organizer group mentioned that the act of opening up the farm to the public was indicative of not having anything to hide, but that face-to-face interaction was even more important.

The ability to see, meet with, and ask questions of farmer/operators emerged as a major theme around appearing transparent: “when you don’t get a chance to talk directly to the farmer, or you don’t see the farmer directly there, that’s when you start to wonder, well, why aren’t they here? Or what are they hiding?”

4.1.4 Effects of increased transparency

Overall, perceived transparency and particularly the personal interaction component of open farm events were thought to increase trust in the agricultural sector.

Respondents believed that local and participating farms were the most likely to be trusted as a result, but that this could extend to the agricultural sector as a whole in some cases.

Most importantly, the trust built at open farm events through personal interaction was seen by many respondents as having a direct impact on purchasing behaviour, as illustrated in Figure 4-4.

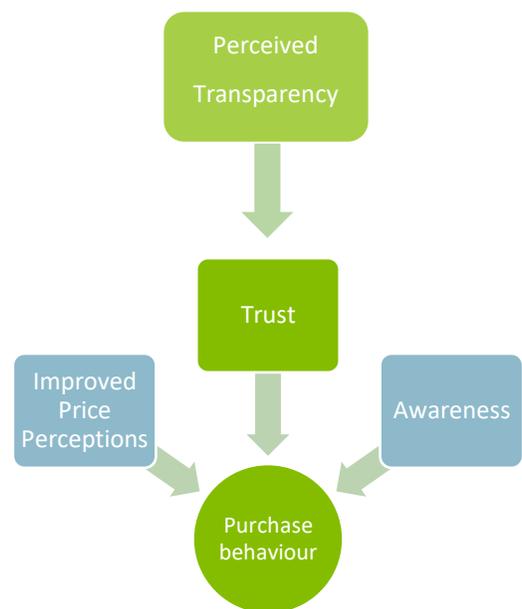


Figure 4-4: Transparency, Trust and Purchase Behaviour

4.2 RO3: Improving perceptions

Two main themes emerged relating to perceptions: education, and a perceived gap between urban and rural residents.⁸ The two main areas where perceptions were seen as being improved due to an open farm event were in farming practices (especially those which could be considered a nuisance) and price. However, how perceptions could be affected was seen by some

⁸ Also referred to as a gap between farmers and consumers by some respondents.

respondents in the farmer/organizer group as dependent on what types of operations participated in the event as well as on attendee pre-conceptions.

4.2.1 Education and learning

Within the organizer respondent group, the concept of education/learning emerged as an important theme for the organizations themselves, as an objective for their event; for participating host sites, as a reason for participation; and for attendees, as a draw to attend the event. Education also emerged as a theme within the farmer/producer group, in relation to potential outcomes of open farm events and a reason to participate in the event.⁹

Education came up in relation to improving perceptions for its potential to correct incorrect perceptions and encourage more understanding of farming practices and cost of inputs.

4.2.2 Knowledge gap

A theme that emerged related to perceptions in both respondent groups, but more strongly in the farmer/producer group, was the concept of a knowledge or understanding gap between urban and rural residents. Within the farmer/producer group the difference between newcomers vs. long-time residents in the Central Okanagan was also mentioned. Open farm events were seen, in some cases, as a way to bridge that gap.

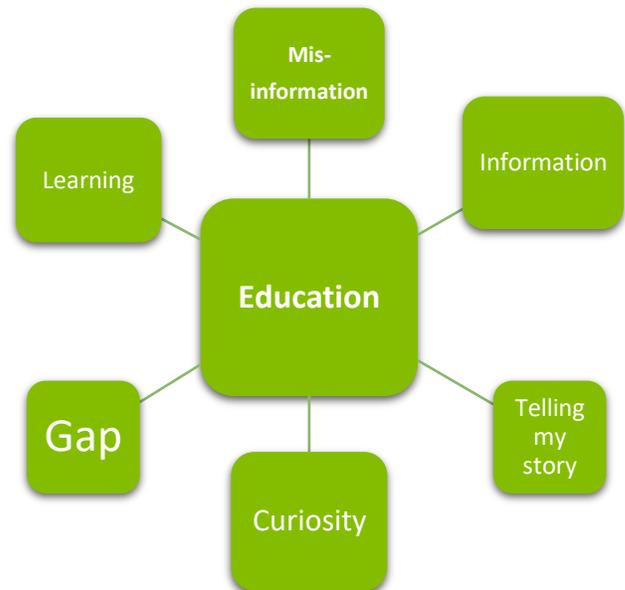


Figure 4-5: Themes related to education

⁹ Among those who said they were interested in participating.

Some respondents in the farmer/producer group felt that while people in the Okanagan may be aware of the agricultural operations around them simply due to the relative visibility of agriculture in the area, this awareness might be shallow (“I don’t think they’re very aware of what actually goes on”) or restricted to one type of agriculture (e.g. there may be good awareness of wineries, or agritourism operations, but less awareness of some other types of operations). Misunderstanding of common farm practices was also mentioned, especially those that could be considered a “nuisance,” such as the use of helicopters or bird cannons and making noise early in the day. Respondents mentioned that urban residents or newcomers do not understand the necessity of these practices, or why they have to happen at certain times of the day. One said: “There’s a lot of things that can’t be done in the full heat of the day. Like you can’t pick fruit in the full heat of the day, so you have to start super early, and I think a lot of people don’t understand why we make noise and dirt and stuff at all hours.”

Respondents in the farmer/producer group often felt that the chance to explain these practices would be beneficial. It was commented that “normally when someone is upset it’s because they don’t have all the information about why we do things.”

“Normally when someone is upset it’s because they don’t have all the information about why we do things.”

Figure 4-6: Quote about understanding

Open farm events were seen by respondents in both groups as a platform to educate consumers as to why certain practices are necessary, and to potentially correct incorrect perceptions gathered from the media. Perceptions based on negative stories about farming and agriculture in the media were mentioned, as well as false information circulating on social media.

4.2.3 Effect of improved perceptions

It was suggested that improving perceptions of farming practices, specifically around those considered nuisances, could increase understanding between rural and urban residents and reduce complaints.

Open farm events were also seen as having a positive impact on perceptions of price and therefore willingness to pay. Again, this was attributed to education – to farmers explaining the inputs and reasons behind the prices of local products. One respondent stated that participating in an open farm event gives farmers the opportunity to “better educate [attendees] as to why prices are the way they are, and that it’s worth it to spend that money.” Another mentioned that people would be willing to pay more if they knew what went into producing food.

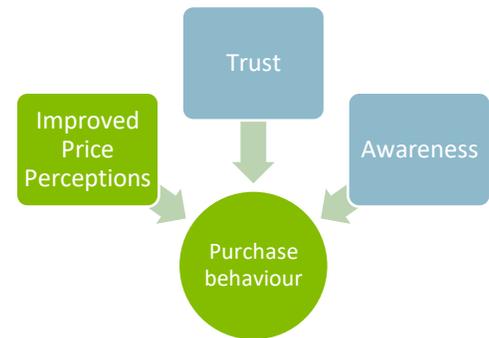


Figure 4-7: Improved price perceptions and purchase behaviour

4.3 RO4: Awareness of business, job, and career opportunities

While open farm events were seen as successful in increasing awareness of business opportunities in the agricultural sector, with sometimes tangible results, respondents generally agreed that these events have the potential to increase awareness of job and career opportunities in agriculture only if explicitly designed to achieve this. This RO consists of three related but differing components, which resulted in slightly differing results for each. The first component, business opportunities, warrants discussion in isolation. The other two components, job and career opportunities, are addressed jointly.

4.3.1 Business opportunities

Connection was a theme that came up relating to business opportunities. Two categories of business opportunities were identified: a) business opportunities between host sites and outsiders and b) business opportunities within the farming community.



Figure 4-8: Business opportunities

Connections with restaurants was mentioned by respondents in the organizer group as one business opportunity arising from open farm events. One commented that “there are definitely some restaurant owners who go and check out open farm day, because it’s a chance to build a connection and they could get a local supplier.” Another respondent said that host sites had signed up new distributors and had their products in new stores as a result of participating in the event. Personal connection was cited as a factor in these business opportunities, although heightened brand awareness due to promotion associated with participation was also mentioned.

In some cases, participating host sites gained the opportunity to network with one another, resulting in collaboration or cross-marketing opportunities. Respondents in the farmer/producer group mentioned that networking with other farmers or learning about their neighbours would be a draw for participating, as well.

4.3.2 Job & career opportunities

Respondents in the organizer group were generally uncertain whether open farm events raised awareness of the availability of job or career opportunities in agricultural fields, primarily because this was not something that was either measured or included in event objectives.

Respondents in the farmer/producer group thought that open farm events have the potential to increase interest in jobs and careers in the agricultural sector if designed to do so. One respondent mentioned that ensuring elementary or high school kids were visiting – e.g. by inviting schools for a tour – would increase the effectiveness of an open farm event in raising awareness of job and career opportunities in a meaningful way, suggesting that there is little point in trying to raise awareness if the message only reaches those who are not likely or able to

move into a job or career in agriculture. Another was of the opinion that this is an area that the agricultural sector needed to improve upon.

4.4 RO5: Key success factors

Three primary and interrelated themes in Key Success Factors (KSFs) applicable to any event emerged. These are

1. Funding
2. Promotion
3. Public interest

Funding was mentioned most often, and often in relation to promotion, linking the first two KSFs. Promotion/marketing was one of the major themes that emerged in the study, and a theme often mentioned by organizers in relation to KSFs. Public interest was seen by one organizer as necessary to meet any objectives an event might have, and a respondent in the farmer/producer group also mentioned that without enough attendees there would be no point in participating as a host site. This is directly related to promotion of the event as well, as effective promotion is a way to increase public interest. For a complete list of all factors identified by respondents as KSFs, see Appendix C.

Other success factors relate to specific objectives of the event and will therefore differ depending on the objectives of the event. These are listed in Table 4-2 below.

Table 4-2: Objective-specific success factors

Objective	Associated Success Factor(s)
Educating those not familiar with agriculture	Host sites that are working farms Personal interaction with farmers/operators
Increasing perceived transparency and trust	Personal interaction with farmers/operators
Increasing business networks	Facilitating interaction between farmers and retailers/restaurants/distributors Providing networking opportunities for participating farmers

4.5 RO6: Other impacts

There were a few impacts on participating farmers not strictly relating to other ROs that are worth noting. First of all, closer connection and community support were mentioned as outcomes of participating in an open farm event. In one case, this took the form of a community fundraiser for a participant after a barn burnt down. Respect of others in the agricultural community was mentioned as well. Thirdly, participating in an open farm event was described as a learning opportunity for host sites as well as attendees. It was suggested that interacting with consumers at the event provided an opportunity to gain an understanding of consumer needs and level of knowledge. Finally, respondents mentioned that participating farmers simply enjoyed telling their story more than they expected, and therefore gained a sort of intrinsic value from participating.

4.6 Conclusion

There were nine participants in this research project: four organizers of open farm events and five farmer/producers in the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region.

Key findings from this study include that open farm events are seen as an effective way to raise awareness of open farm events, respondents in the organizer group saw open farm events as a good way to increase perceived transparency in the agricultural sector while some in the farmer/producer group expressed mixed view on the merits of transparency, and that open farm events have the potential to improve perceptions of agriculture (particularly when it comes to agricultural practices and pricing of local products). The factors of improved price perceptions, increased trust and increased awareness were seen as having an impact on consumer purchasing behaviour, aligning with results expected from the literature review.



Figure 4-9: Factors perceived as influencing consumer behaviour

While open farm events appear reasonably successful in raising awareness of business opportunities in agriculture, the same cannot be said about job and career opportunities. The four main KSFs identified in the study were funding, promotion, public interest, and political support. Other impacts on participating farmers included community support and the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the public and consumers.

The findings outlined here will be used to draw conclusions and make recommendations in the next chapter, Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines conclusions drawn from the findings in Chapter Four. Conclusions for each RO are discussed, followed by conclusions about the decision statement. Next, limitations of this study are discussed. The final section of this chapter is recommendations based on the findings and conclusions.

5.2 Conclusions about research objectives

5.2.1 RO1: Awareness of agricultural businesses

Results from this RO indicate that open farm events are very successful in raising awareness of local agricultural operations. While this particularly applies to those that take part in the event itself, an open farm event has the potential to raise awareness of non-participating operations as well simply because it draws more people into rural areas/farming communities.

One noteworthy perceived outcome of this increased awareness was its effect on purchasing behaviour. As suggested by the literature review, it would appear that consumer awareness does impact consumer demand, and awareness both of where to purchase and what can be produced locally was seen as positively impacting consumer purchasing behaviour in this study. This suggests that participation in an open farm event results in an economic benefit for farmers/operators. While this is likely to primarily apply to those who participate in the event and are engaged in direct marketing, awareness of what can be grown in the Okanagan area and in BC could result in more support for agriculture at the regional and provincial level as well. This indicates that the impact of open farm events could extend past participating farms/host sites, and even the specific region they take place in.

There was, however, no indication that open farm events increase awareness of agriculture's contribution to the economy.

5.2.2 RO2: Perceived transparency and trust

The results of this RO are generally aligned with results expected from the literature review and indicate that open farm events do have the potential to a) increase perceived transparency and b)

foster trust in ways similar to consumer-producer interaction at other venues.¹⁰ The most important finding from this RO is that repeat interaction is not necessarily requisite for increasing trust.

Open farm events were generally perceived as well-positioned to increase perceived transparency and trust, particularly by organizers of open farm events. That trust was generally thought to be a result of personal connection (face-to-face interaction) over other factors¹¹ indicates that the ability of open farm events to provide opportunities for interaction between attendees and host site operators is very important to this outcome.

The perceived impact of trust on purchase behaviour underscores the importance of this aspect of open farm events.

5.2.3 RO3: Awareness of business, job, and career opportunities

While open farm events seem to result in a higher awareness of business opportunities within the agriculture sector, primarily relating to connections between restaurants and retailers and farmers, events' ability to raise awareness of job and career opportunities simply through visiting farming operations is limited. This runs contrary to one previous study on farm tours but does imply that, in order to address the issue of the aging-out farm of operators, something specifically aimed at educating attendees about job and career opportunities is needed.

The result of increased connections between farming operations and restaurants and retailers is encouraging, however, as healthy relationships between suppliers, producers, and retailers was identified in the literature review as a factor in the viability of regional agricultural communities.

5.2.4 RO4: Improving perceptions

The results of this research indicate that open farm events are perceived as successful at improving perceptions of agriculture, particularly concerning farm practices and price perceptions. Education was a dominant theme relating to this RO, as respondents in both groups saw open farm events as an opportunity to educate attendees about agriculture.

¹⁰ Such as at farmers' markets etc.

¹¹ This aligns with the literature review.

While animal welfare and food safety were identified in the literature review as two areas in which perceptions could be improved, the main areas that emerged as important to respondents in this study were a) perceptions of practices that could be considered nuisances and b) perceptions surrounding price. If the suggested reduction in complaints about “nuisance” farm practices were to materialize, an open farm event would clearly contribute to the social viability of regional agriculture. Improved perceptions about the prices of local food has relatively direct economic implications for regional producers as well.

Although some respondents in the farmer/producer group thought that whether consumer perceptions were affected positively or negatively would strongly depend on what type of operations were involved in an event, evidence from the organizer group¹² suggests that the impact is likely to be primarily positive and not necessarily tied to certain types of operations. This does, however, suggest that presentation may be an important factor in changing attendee perceptions.

5.2.5 RO5: Key success factors

The main themes in key success factors indicate that for any open farm event, promotion, funding, public interest, and political support are likely to be important. Any other key success factors depend largely on the objectives of the event, suggesting that event objectives should be aligned with key success factors at the planning stages to ensure objectives are reached.

5.2.6 RO6: Other impacts

The results from this RO suggest that farmers/operators participating in an open farm event may benefit from increased integration in their community, a better understanding of their consumers and how the general public views/understands agriculture, and enjoyment from participating. While not as tangible as some other outcomes (such as the effects of increased awareness on purchase behaviour), the potential to narrow the perceived gap between urban and rural residents could have important implications for the social sustainability of the agricultural sector.

¹² Based on feedback from events – in one case, survey data.

Better understanding of consumer needs and wants has clear implications for marketing as well as, potentially, production.

While the literature review suggested that shifts in long-term consumer purchasing behaviour or capturing new markets would fall under this RO, respondents viewed these as outcomes of increased awareness and/or trust, falling under RO1 and RO2, respectively.

5.3 Conclusions about decision statement

Open farm events are perceived primarily as supporting the economic sustainability of the agriculture sector, although some factors that can be classified as social were also identified.

These two categories are discussed below.

5.3.1 *Economic sustainability*

Results from RO1, RO2 and RO3 suggest that the combination of increased awareness of local farming operations, transparency, trust, and improved price perceptions due to an open farm event could impact consumer purchasing behaviour and thus increase economic support for participating farms. Evidence from RO4 indicates that opportunities to gain contracts with local restaurants and retailers is another potential outcome of an open farm event. Finally, respondents also thought that increased awareness of what can be grown in the region would change peoples' choices at the grocery store, leading to more purchases of regional and BC products over imported. These factors together suggest that an open farm event could very well help support the economic sustainability of the regional agricultural sector, and perhaps have some impact on the industry at the provincial level as well.

Open farm events were seen as not only affecting attendee willingness-to-pay for local products but, possibly more importantly, a willingness to seek out products from local producers both directly and in the grocery store. As the literature review suggested that people are willing to pay for local produce but not to go out of their way to look for it, this is an encouraging finding. It suggests that open farm events have the potential to change the importance people place on local products as well as the monetary value. Whether this is due to personal connection and trust or simply to increased awareness of where to purchase may be an avenue for further research.

5.3.2 *Social sustainability*

Results from RO4 and RO6 suggest that there are social benefits resulting from participation in an open farm event. Open farm events could potentially help integrate urban and rural communities by increasing understanding between the two groups, supporting the social sustainability of the community as whole. Further, participating farms may specifically benefit from increased social support due to connections made both with consumers and other farmer/operators as a direct result of participation.

5.4 Limitations

This research project was exploratory and involved a small sample population, limiting its generalizability. The study also did not include any farmers who had already participated in an open farm event, nor consumers who had visited one, instead relying on organizer's perceptions of host site and attendee experiences. While these perceptions were often backed up by formal feedback and in one case, survey data, it remains that further research involving host site operators and attendees would be beneficial.

5.5 Recommendations

This project provides a stepping-off point for further research into the impact open farm events can have on attendees, participating farms, and the agricultural sector. If an event takes place in the Central Okanagan Economic Development Region, it would be beneficial to gather feedback from attendees and participating farms to assess how effective the event is in achieving its objectives and what factors influence consumer awareness, trust, and perceptions.

While awareness seems to be a result of open farm events due to their nature (as well as effective promotion), other outcomes were tied to specific factors. Therefore, if increased transparency and trust is a desired outcome of the event, it is recommended that an event in the Okanagan be designed to encourage interaction between farmers/producers and attendees. If business connections are important, it may be useful to extend invitations to the event to local restaurants and retailers, and/or to facilitate networking between participating farmers/producers – especially since networking was mentioned as a draw of participating within the farmer/producer group. Further, key success factors that relate to particular outcomes should be integrated at the

planning stages in order to meet desired objectives. Finally, if an objective of the event is to raise awareness of job and career opportunities in agriculture, a specific educational component addressing this may be needed.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview guide - organizers

Questions are in bold with numbered sub-questions. Probes are indicated by bullet points.

1. How long has your event been running?

1.1. How did it start?

- Volunteer group
- Farmer driven
- Other

2. How many farms usually participate?

2.1. How much has this changed over the years?

3. How many visitors does the event receive?

3.1. Has this changed greatly from the first years?

4. Do you feel your event is growing in success? ← (only ask if more than one event and not covered in previous questions)

5. Do you charge either farmers or attendees for participation?

6. What form does this event take?

- e.g. farm crawl, open farm day, breakfast on the farm etc.

6.2. Is the event guided, or is it a self-guided event?

6.3. Why did you choose this format?

7. What sort of activities does the event include?

- Presentations (educational)
- Games
- Wagon rides
- Food or a meal?

8. Did you have objectives for your event?

8.1 What were they?

- Raise awareness?
- Increase transparency?
- Change consumer attitudes?

8.2 Were they met?

8.3 **If yes** → How did you determine whether the event's objectives were being met?

- Survey/observation/other feedback from attendees/farmers

8.4 **If no** → Why?

- Objectives not achieved or
- Difficult to tell whether objectives met

9. In your opinion, why do people come to your event?

- Curiosity/learning?

9.1 What's the biggest draw?

- Activities?

9.2 What have you done to increase attendees?

- Marketing?
- Has it worked well?
- Do you see return attendees from year to year?

10. In your opinion, why do farmers participate in this event?

10.1 What sorts of things do farmers expect to gain?

10.2 How do you think participating benefits farmers?

- New customers
- Community support (in what form?)
- Marketing opportunities
- Opportunity to widen business networks (e.g. make connections with local retailers/restaurants)

- Recruiting opportunities (gain employees)

11. Were there any impacts on the farming community that you weren't expecting?

12. Do you think that open farm events increase awareness of local agricultural operations?

- 12.1 Are attendees surprised by the number of farms/diversity of farms in their region?
- 12.2 Are attendees surprised at what is produced in their area?
- 12.3 Are attendees surprised by what they can purchase locally?
- 12.4 Is there anything else attendees mention they learned about that they didn't know?

13. In your opinion, do attendees leave with a better understanding of farming as a business?

- 13.1 A better understanding of farming's contribution to local economy?
- 13.2 Awareness of job or career opportunities?

14. Do you think events like yours are a good way of demonstrating transparency to consumers?

- 14.1 Do attendees feel farmers are being transparent?
- 14.2 What do you think this is due to?
 - Interaction with farmers
 - Exposure to working farms/farm processes
 - Primarily?
- 14.3 Do you feel that this is an important aspect of the event?
- 14.4 Do farmers feel this is an important aspect of the event?
- 14.5 Do you think this leads to greater trust in the agricultural sector?
 - Local? Overall?
 - What do you think contributes to this?

15. What do you think attendees take away from your event?

- 15.1 Are peoples' perceptions of agriculture improved?
 - Of local farming operations?
 - Of farming practices (e.g. animal husbandry, pest control)?

- Of agriculture overall?

15.2 Does it change negative perceptions of farming?

- Perception that farms are noisy/smelly?
- Perceptions around food safety?
- Perceptions about the use of technology?
- Perceptions about the pricing of local products?

15.3 In your opinion, what's the most important thing attendees take away from the event?

- Why?
- Based on what (e.g. feedback, surveys, other data)?

16. Do you think your event increases local support for the farming sector? (Only ask if not answered through previous questions).

- In what way?
- Why not?
- Indirectly?

17. What have some of the challenges of organizing your event been?

17.1 Farmers concerned with safety of having visitors on working farms?

- Disease transmission? (Livestock/crops)
- Safety around machinery?

17.2 Logistical challenges?

- Parking?
- Crowding?

17.3 Funding?

17.4 Marketing?

- Getting people to come out?
- Convincing farms to take part?

17.5 How did you deal with these challenges?

18. Have you completed an economic impact assessment for your event at all?

- Can you share any of the results? What did it show?

19. What were the key success factors for your event?

20. Is there anything else you would like to share? Do you feel like I've missed something important during this interview?

Interview guide – farmers/producers

Questions are in bold with numbered sub-questions. Probes are indicated by bullet points.

1. How long have you been farming?

1.1. Operating current business?

1.2. In the local area?

2. What size is your current farm (acres)?

3. What do you produce?

3.1. Primarily?

4. Do you produce for export or local sale?

4.1. Local as in Kelowna area? BC? Other Canadian provinces?

5. Do you supply restaurants, grocery stores etc.? no

6. Do you do any kind of direct marketing? no

- Farm-gate sales?
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs?
- Selling at farmer's markets?

7. Is agritourism part of your current operation? no

- In what way?

8. Have you heard of an Open Farm Day before?

PROVIDE DESCRIPTION OF OPEN FARM EVENT:

Open Farm Events are events wherein farmers open their doors to the public for a day – not necessarily the entire farm, but the idea is to let people see a working farm and working farm processes and have some interaction with the farmers themselves. Usually multiple farms take part so that people can go from one farm to another, visiting a variety of different farms.

Sometimes there are extra activities for visitors such as games, wagon rides, or petting zoos, or educational presentations, but this varies from event to event.

9. How aware do you think consumers are of farming operations in this region?

10. Do you think an event like this would increase awareness of farming operations in the region?

10.1. In what way?

10.2. Do you think attendees would be surprised by the diversity of the local agricultural sector?

10.3. Would they be surprised by what is available for purchase locally?

11. Do you think an event like this would increase people's understanding of farming as a business?

11.1. Would it increase understanding of farming's contribution to the local economy?

11.2. Would it increase awareness of job or career opportunities in agriculture?

12. Do you think that consumer perceptions of transparency in agriculture is an issue for farmers? *Are you concerned about being misunderstood by the public if you are fully transparent?*

12.1. Is it important for you that you appear transparent with customers?

12.2. Do you think an open farm event would be a good way to demonstrate transparency?

12.3. In your opinion, would this increase trust in local agriculture?

- Agriculture overall?

13. What would you hope that attendees would take away from an event like this?

13.1. Improved perceptions of agriculture?

- Of local farms?
- Farming practices (e.g. animal husbandry, pest control)?
- Agriculture overall?

13.2. If people have negative perceptions of farming, do you think an event like this could change this?

- Perception around noises/smells from agriculture?
- Perceptions around food safety?
- Perceptions about use of technology in agriculture?
- Perceptions about prices of local products?

13.3. In your opinion, what's the most important thing that attendees could take away from an open farm event?

14. Overall, do you think an open farm event in this area would increase support for local farms? (only ask if not already answered through previous questions)

- How?

15. Would you be interested in taking part in an event like this?

- If no, is there anything that could convince you to take part?

15.2. Would you be interested in attending the event as a visitor?

16. How do you think participating in an open farm event would benefit you?

16.1. Do you think this will benefit your farm directly? How?

- Opportunity to sell to attendees?
- Opportunity to gaining long-term or repeat customers?
- Opportunity to widen business networks (e.g. make connections with local retailers/restaurants)?
- Opportunity to attract employees?
- **If not**, why?

16.2. What would be the most important reason for you to take part?

16.3. Do you think an event like this would benefit the local agricultural sector as a whole?

- How?
- Community support?
- If not, why?

17. What might prevent you from taking part in an open farm event?

- Concern about visitors on farm – safety? Disease transmission?
- People coming away with negative impressions?
- Time commitment?
- Limited staff/employees available to help on the day? Prior to day?
- Logistics – parking, crowding?

18. What would you need to make your participation in an open farm event easier?

- More information on what would be involved?
- Safety measures to avoid cross-contamination from other farms?

- Educational materials – e.g. posters, games, brochures?
- Volunteers?

18.2. What time of year would be best for you?

- Time of day?

19. In general, what sort of challenges do you think organizing an event like this would face?

- Getting farmers to participate?
- Getting enough attendees to come out?
- Weather?

20. To be most successful, what do you think an open farm event in your region should look like?

- Number of farms/variety of farms
- Farm-gate sales
- Activities (wagon rides, food samples, games?)

21. Do you have anything else you'd like to share? Have I missed something important during this interview?

APPENDIX B: THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

Major themes and sub-themes

In the table below are the major themes and sub-themes that emerged during analysis.

As the themes below are often interrelated, certain ideas, issues and sub-themes may be repeated in the open coding under more than one theme.

Theme	Open Coding
Education	Issues and ideas related to education were misinformation about agriculture in the media, the gap between rural/urban residents, learning as a draw and an outcome of an open farm event, the ability of open farm events to facilitate education of farming practices, and as a platform for farmers to “tell their story.” Understanding was mentioned multiple times by both participant groups as either an outcome or goal of an open farm event.
Awareness	Issues and ideas related to awareness were the perceived effectiveness of open farm events in raising awareness of local agricultural businesses and products, differences in level of current awareness between newcomers and long-time Okanagan residents, and the effect of better awareness of what can be produced in the Okanagan region.
Perceptions	Issues and ideas related to perceptions included misinformation or negative stories about agriculture in the media, the ability of open farm events to address this, perceptions about “nuisance” practices, and perceptions about price.
Connections	Ideas related to connections made at open farm events included the opportunity to connect with fellow farmers/producers, the opportunity to forge business relationships, the opportunity to connect with consumers and the effect of face-to-face interaction and connection on trust and purchasing behaviour.
Transparency	Issues and ideas related to transparency included personal interaction, trust, and the possibility of being too transparent and misunderstood by consumers/the public.
Key Success Factors	Ideas related to key success factors were funding, promotion, public interest, political support, industry willingness, and other KSFs specific to event objectives (see Appendix C for complete list of KSFs).

APPENDIX C: KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Listed below are all the factors identified by respondents as key success factors during the study.

- Funding
- Promotion
- Public interest
- Industry willingness
 - The willingness of host sites to participate
- Strategic partnerships at the planning level
 - Between the government and external stakeholders
- Political support
- Pilot event with host sites already experienced with having people on their farm
 - E.g. those in agritourism or who already run farm tours
- Weather