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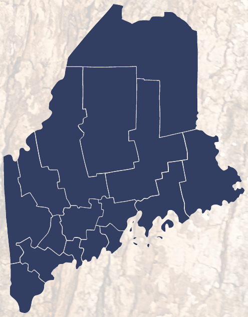

Insights on Agritourism Among Maine Producers: Evidence from the 2024 National Agritourism Producer Survey

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Introduction

Agritourism and direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales have become an essential aspect of the U.S. agricultural landscape, offering economic benefits and opportunities for diversification (Schmidt et al., 2022). While the 2022 Census of Agriculture addresses agritourism and recreational services, and DTC separately, we define agritourism following Chase et al. (2018) and include income from sources that fall under USDA's definition as agritourism and recreational services – a type of "farm-related" income – as well as product sales made directly to consumers on-farm.

Our recent analysis of Census of Agriculture data found that in the U.S. the number of agricultural operations reporting earnings from agritourism or recreational services has remained relatively stable since 2017. In Maine, the 2022 Census of Agriculture estimated approximately 241 agricultural operations with income from agritourism and recreational services (excluding DTC), a slight decline from 2017 (6 fewer estimated farms). Figure 1 presents the USDA-estimated number of agritourism and recreational services operations by county.

USDA estimates for 2022 indicate agritourism and recreation services generated $12.2 million in receipts for Maine farms, accounting for one-quarter (24.8%) of total non-product sales (i.e. "farm-related") revenue. Between 2017 and 2022, receipts on Maine farms from agritourism and recreation services increased 52% after adjusting for inflation. On average, each operation earned $23,062 in gross revenue from these services in 2022. This is 18.5% of the total annual receipts, from all sources, on the average Maine farm, which USDA estimated for 2022 to be $124,991.

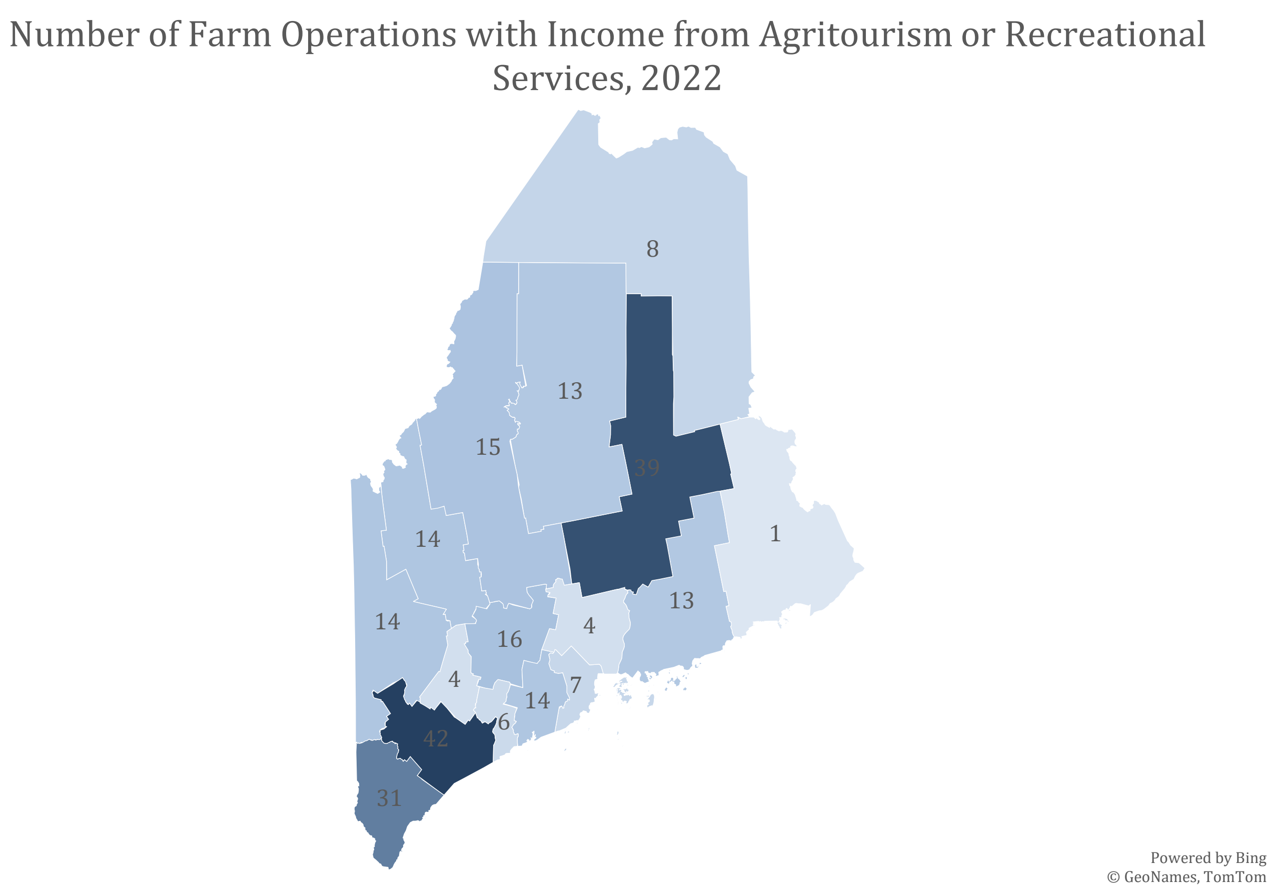

Figure 1 Number of agritourism operations by county in 2022

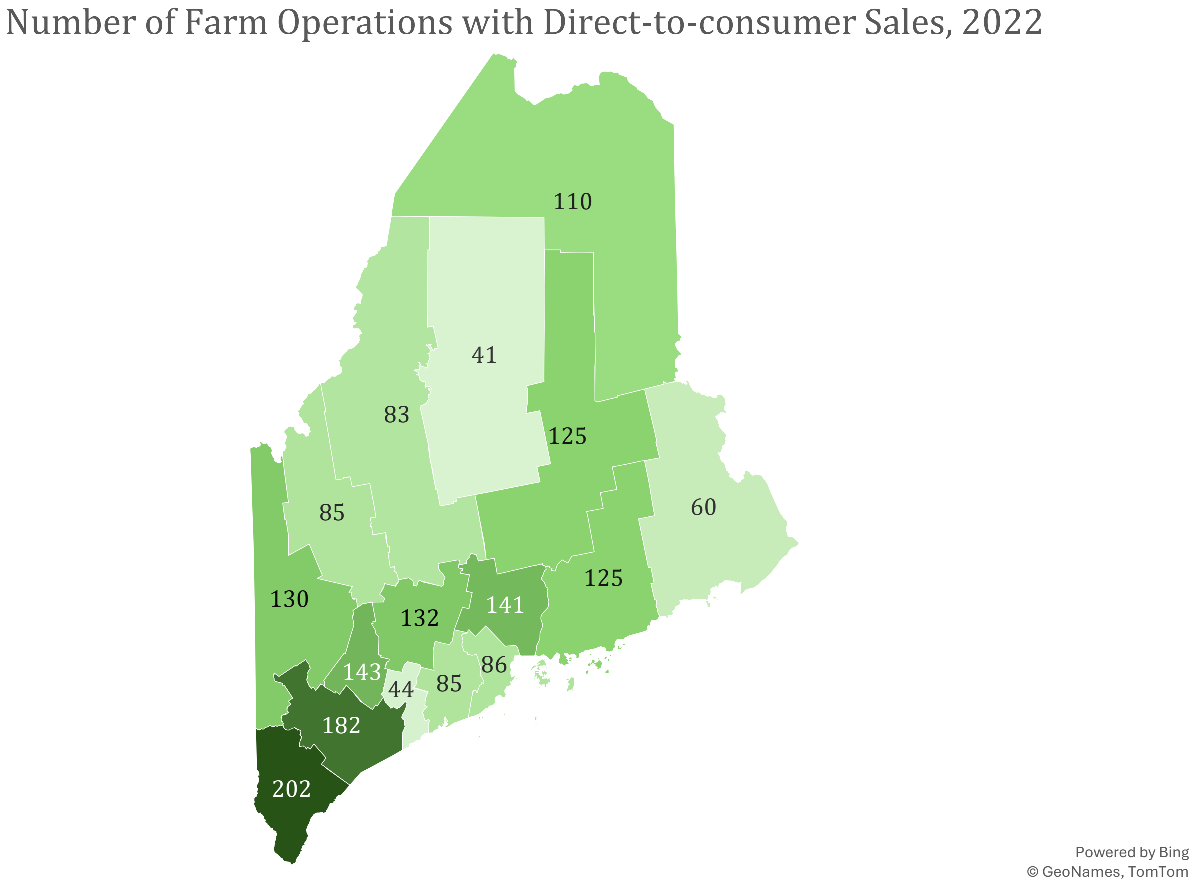

Figure 2 Number of Direct-to-Consumer Sales operations by county in 2022

Nationally, both the total number and proportion of farms engaging in DTC channels has decreased from 2017 to 2022. Across the U.S. these DTC sales are predominantly driven by small-scale farms, with 81.2% of American farms selling directly to consumers in 2022 earning below $50,000 in gross receipts and 67.4% operating on less than 50 acres (Entsminger and Schmidt, 2024a,b). Similar patterns are seen in Maine, where the estimated number of farms with DTC sales receipts declined 13%, from 2,045 farms in 2017 down to 1,774 in 2022. Figure 2 presents the USDA-estimated number of Maine farms with DTC sales revenue in 2022 by county. Maine farms sold $34.9 million worth of products via DTC channels in 2022, a 23% decline over 2017, adjusted for inflation. This means the average Maine farm selling DTC received $19,674 via outlets like farm stores, roadside stands, Community-supported Agriculture subscriptions (CSAs), and farmers' markets in 2022, which is 15.7% of the average Maine farm's total receipts, including government payments.

More than a quarter (25.2%) of Maine farms sell directly to consumers (DTC) but only 3.4% engage in additional agritourism and recreational services, suggesting untapped potential. Unfortunately, Federal census data is unable to provide a more detailed picture of on-farm DTC sales – a critical part of agritourism revenue models – and how this integrates with other agritourism and recreational services activities that hold marketing and revenue generation functions. For Maine, this is clearly of critical importance, given the high proportion of the state's agricultural operations with sales via both on- and off-farm direct-to-consumer marketing channels.

This report presents findings from the *2024 National Agritourism Producer Survey*, conducted in part to address the type of knowledge gaps just identified. The survey questionnaire was developed by researchers from Pennsylvania State University, the University of Maine, the University of Vermont, and Oklahoma State University. This survey is part of a larger project aimed at defining and enhancing the agritourism support system in the United States. The primary objective of conducting this survey was to identify areas where targeted interventions and programs can support agritourism development. Respondents were asked to evaluate several critical factors that impact their agritourism business. This included rating the degree to which they felt different aspects of the environment pose a challenge to developing agritourism in their region, tourism features of the region in which they operate, the socio-cultural environment in which they operate, and their views on how challenging the regulatory landscape is to their agritourism business. The online survey was open from March through August 2024, and 2,139 agritourism operators across the United States responded. A total of 94 survey participants identified themselves as being in Maine by reporting the postal (ZIP) code of their farm.

Where are responding agritourism operations located?

Agricultural producers responding to the survey were in both metropolitan and rural (non-metro) counties across the country (Schmidt et al., 2025). Based on ZIP code information provided by respondents, we identified their county. USDA's Rural-Urban Continuum Codes allow us to classify these counties, where respondent farms are located, into categories that represent population size and urbanicity/remoteness. A majority (86.1%) of responding Maine agritourism operations are located in or adjacent to metropolitan zones. The bulk of these are in metropolitan-designated counties, including 25.5% in Maine's single county with more than 250,000 residents and 17% in metro counties with less than 250,000 residents. It also includes the 43.6% who live in counties that are rural, but which immediately abut a metropolitan neighbor. The remaining 14% of the respondents are in "remote" non-metro counties – the most rural types in the RUCC classification scheme – all with fewer than 20,000 residents in urban spaces (i.e. counties with only small towns or villages).

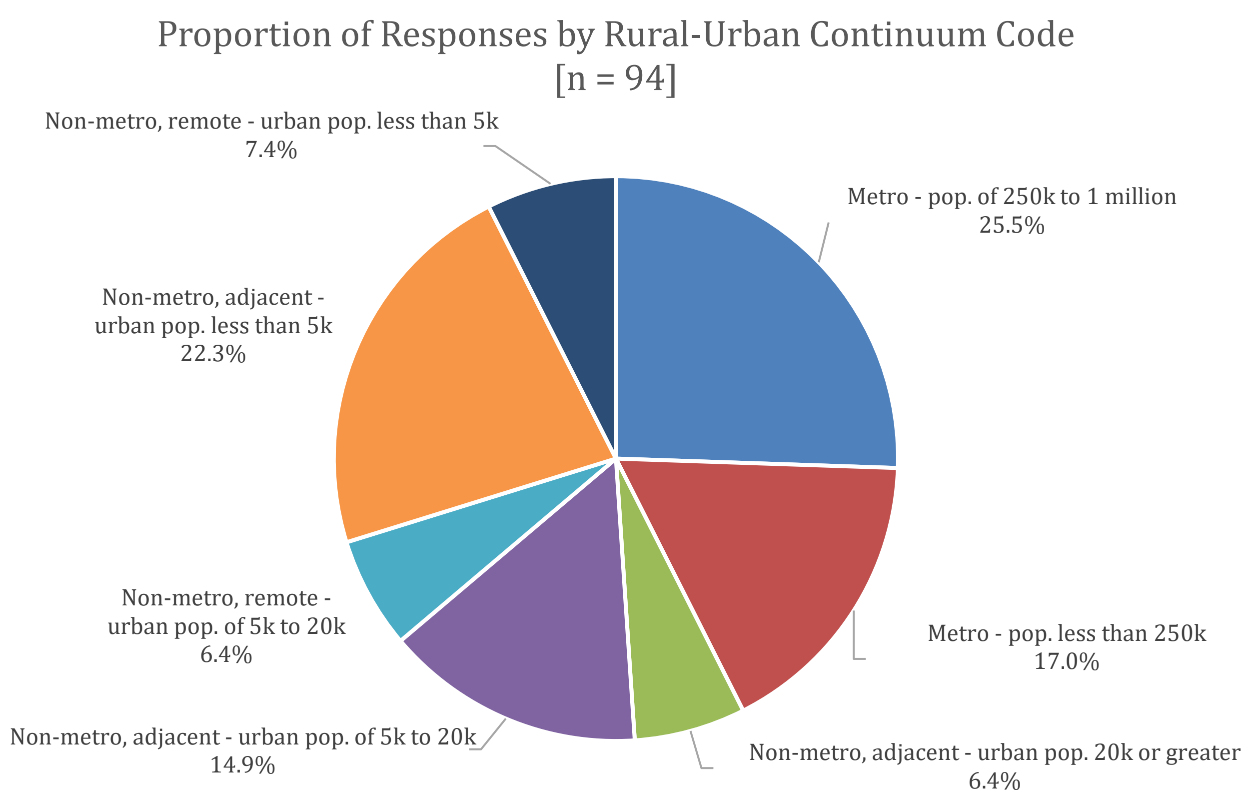

Figure 3 Community type by the Rural-Urban Continuum Code (RUCC) classification of counties

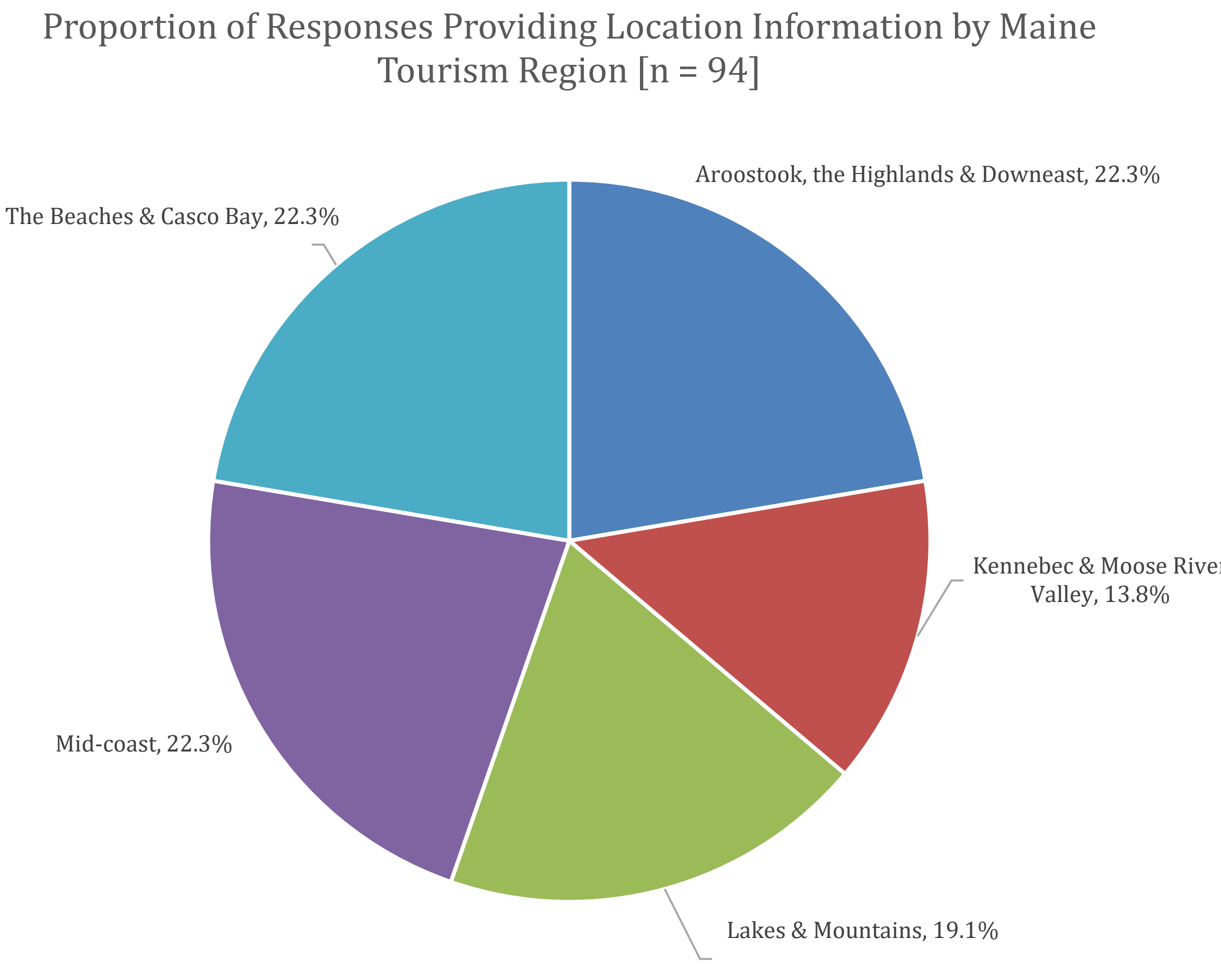

Figure 4 Location of responses by Maine tourism region

These results relatively mirror those for the national sample in the survey, with many agritourism enterprises occurring within relatively easy travel from a town, city, or major metro – in other words, in peri-urban spaces near population centers.

In addition to knowing the types of communities in which Maine agritourism enterprises exist, it is helpful to know where in geographic space they are located. Reporting these results must balance preserving the privacy of survey respondents with offering useful information for policy and decision-making. Therefore, we group Maine counties into contiguous regions structured along the Maine Office of Tourism's official regions, which also represent the jurisdictions of Maine's destination management organizations, called MOT Partners. Figure 4 reports the proportion of the 94 location-identifying respondents within each of five combined tourism regions. No respondents identified themselves as being located in Hancock County, within the Downeast region.

Unintentionally, three of the tourism regions have the same proportion of responses, with The Beaches and Casco Bay region (York and Cumberland counties); Mid-coast region (Sagadahoc, Lincoln, Knox, and Waldo counties); and Aroostook, the Highlands, and Downeast region (Aroostook, Washington, Penobscot, and Piscataquis counties) each representing 22.3% of the Maine sub-sample. These are followed by the Lakes and Mountains region (Oxford and Franklin counties) with 19% and the Kennebec and Moose River region (Somerset and Kennebec counties) with 14%. These proportions roughly match USDA Census of Agriculture estimates for agritourism and DTC farm locations.

How large are responding agritourism operations?

Overwhelmingly, responding farms were small- or medium-scale. There are many ways to evaluate farm scale, such as sales volume or value, acreage, and managerial labor use. The USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) has historically provided a typology or classification of U.S. farms that utilizes the gross value of sales, ownership structure, and operator status (retired or not) to place farming operations into groups. The *2024 National Agritourism Producer Survey* did not collect all the information used by USDA ERS, but it did ask respondents to indicate the category best representing their gross value of sales from all farm-related sources in 2023. It also asked respondents about the number of acres used by the operation and the number of owner/operators providing managerial or decision-making to the farm.

Figure 5 shows the proportional distribution of responses from agritourism operations across categories of gross sales value. Approximately 86% of the 87 respondents who provided this information would likely fall within the USDA ERS classification of "small farms" (USDA, 2024), as they reported less than $350,000 in gross sales for 2023. Notably, this includes 13.8% with less than $1,000 in sales and thus who may not qualify as a farm operation under certain Federal program definitions. An additional 9.2% would likely fall within the mid-sized farm category ($350,000 to $999,999 in sales), with another 4.5% categorized as large or very large operations with sales exceeding $1 million.

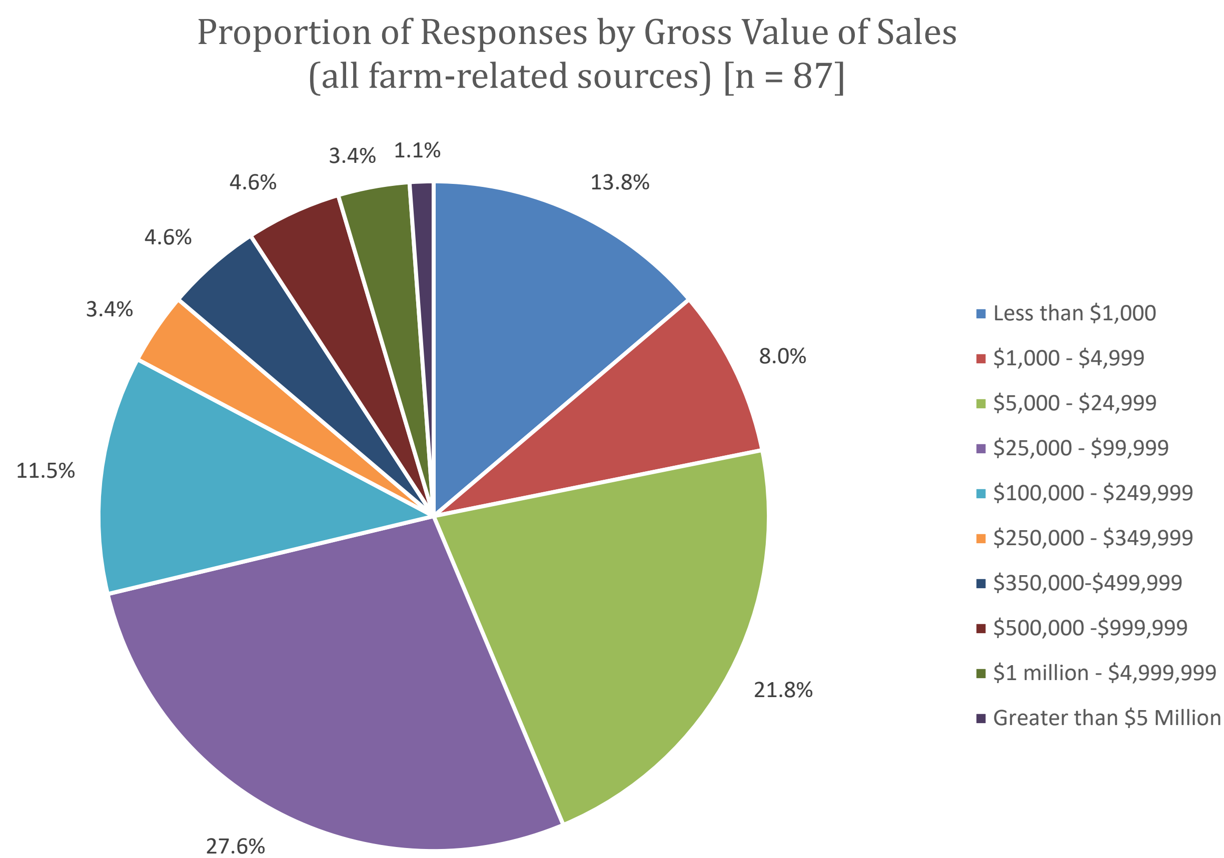

Figure 5 Gross sales from all farm-related sources in 2023

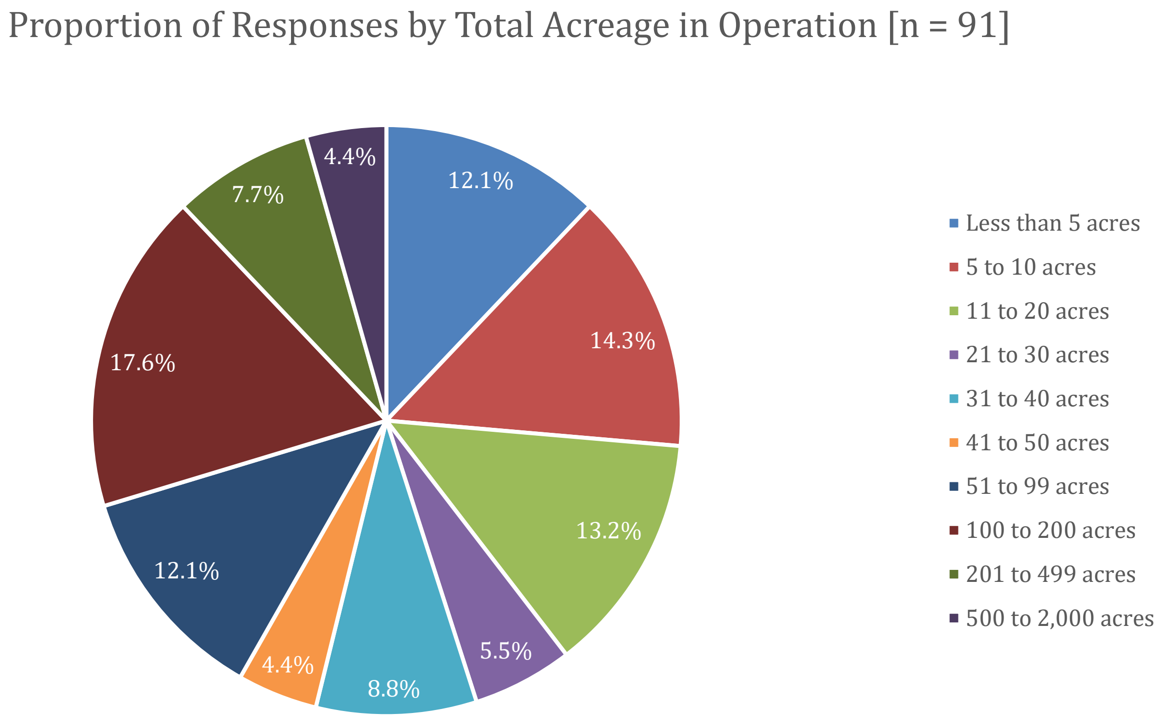

Figure 6 Total acreage reported in the operation for 2023

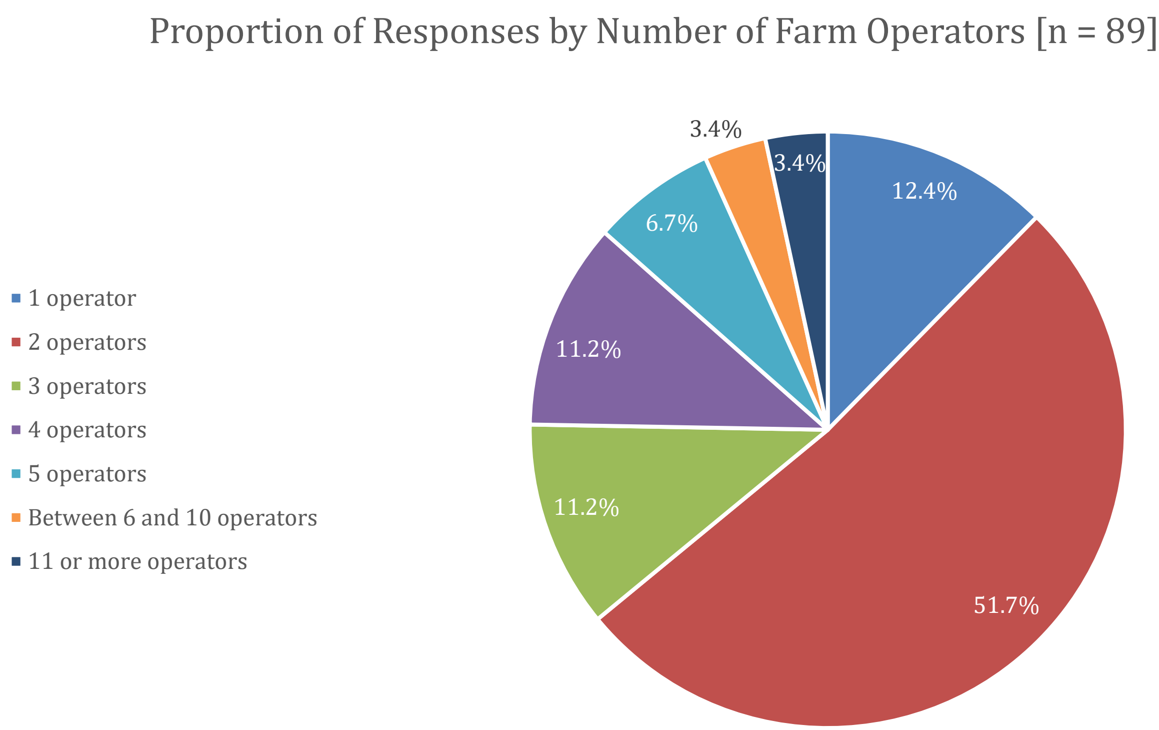

Figure 7 Number of farm operators making decisions for the operation in 2023

Category boundaries for farm size using land area and number of operators are not as well established. Figure 6 reports the proportional distribution of responses across 11 acreage groupings. In the survey, respondents reported the specific number of acres within their operations, and the groupings were created based on the distribution of responses. Most (58.3%) Maine agritourism operations reported 50 acres or fewer available to them in 2023, a common benchmark for "small farms". Some 37.4% reported between 51 and 499 acres, a common range for defining "mid-sized" operations. Only 4.4% of the agritourism operations would likely be considered large farms by acreage, having 500 or more acres.

Managerial and decision-making labor available on the farm can be an indicator of operational complexity and organizational size. USDA estimated that in 2022 roughly 40.4% of all U.S. farms had a sole operator and 47.3% had two operators. Our Maine sub-sample of agritourism operators shows a similar proportion indicating the farm had two operators making decisions in 2023, at 51.7% of the 89 responses (Fig. 7). However, in Maine – compared to the survey's nation-wide figures – a greater proportion of farms had three, four, or five operators (totaled, 29.1%) and a much smaller proportion had only one operator (12.4%). Thus, compared to national estimates for the whole farm population, it appears agritourism operators in Maine rely on greater numbers of owner/operators making decisions, and thus have increased managerial scale and complexity.

What types of activities and products are offered by operations with agritourism enterprises?

The survey posed questions to learn more about the types of products grown or made on the farm and the types of agritourism activities offered to welcome visitors. For both questions, respondents could select from a number of pre-populated answers and could also share other answers via free response. In total, 94 and 93 survey participants engaged in these questionnaire sections, respectively.

Figure 8 presents the proportion of respondents that indicated different product types were present on the farm. More than one item could be selected. Not included in Figure 8 is data for hops, hemp/ cannabis, bakery, mushrooms, and tree nuts – items which were indicated by fewer than 1% of Maine respondents. Responses indicate the most common products available from operations with agritourism enterprises: 57% grew fruits and vegetables in 2023; 50% had animals and animal-related products; 37% offered value-added products (such as jams, pickles, sauces, cheese, or wine); 29% had nursery products, flowers, or Christmas trees; 16% were producing row or field crops (such as wheat, soy, or hay), 8.5% reported maple operations, and 3.2% reported fiber and fiber products.

Most respondent farms have diversified production systems; 59.6% indicated more than one type of product is grown or made by the farm. Further, 30.9% of respondent operations have both specialty crop and livestock enterprises within their production activities, meaning that many mix both horticultural and animal husbandry practices on their farm. Of the 35 farms that reported value-added production, 71% also indicated fruits and vegetables and 60% also indicated animal products (including aquaculture and mariculture) present within the operation.

While most of the values for Maine are similar to those of the whole national sample results, the state did see notably higher proportions of agritourism farms with maple and fiber product types.

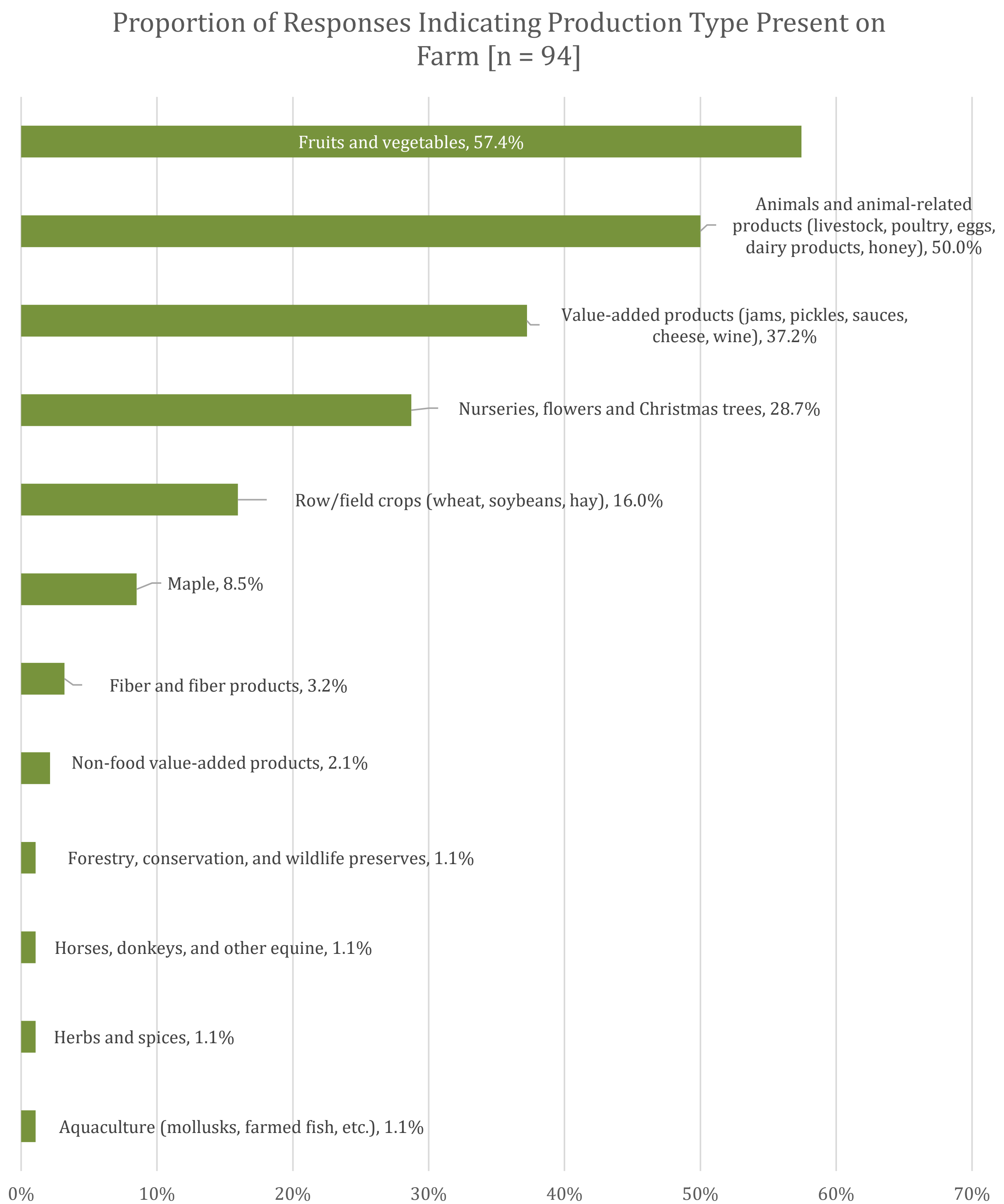

Figure 8 Type of production activity present on farm in 2023

Agritourism operations have many different activities and strategies for welcoming visitors to the farm and providing experiences for them. Figure 9 reports the proportion of the 93 responses indicating which experiences were offered in 2023. Notably, one of the activities – off-farm direct sales – was included in the survey as an option because this is a highly contested issue within Federal data collection (Hollas et al., 2024). Off-farm direct sales were offered by 38.7% of respondents.

This is critical as results in our Maine sub-sample indicate that the most common agritourism activity – indicated by 77.4% of respondents in the state – during 2023 was sales made directly to consumers on-farm via on-site stores or stands, Community Supported Agriculture subscription pick-up points, etc. Following that, the next most common activity was educational activities, such as tours or workshops, with 66.7% of Maine agritourism operations reporting it for 2023. This was followed by pick-your-own (36.6%), and events (33.3%) such as farm-to-table dinners and weddings. Versus the national whole-sample data, a larger proportion of Maine agritourism enterprises reported both outdoor recreation (31.2% in Maine, compared to just 19.1% nationally) and hunting (18.3% in Maine, compared to just 9.9% nationally).

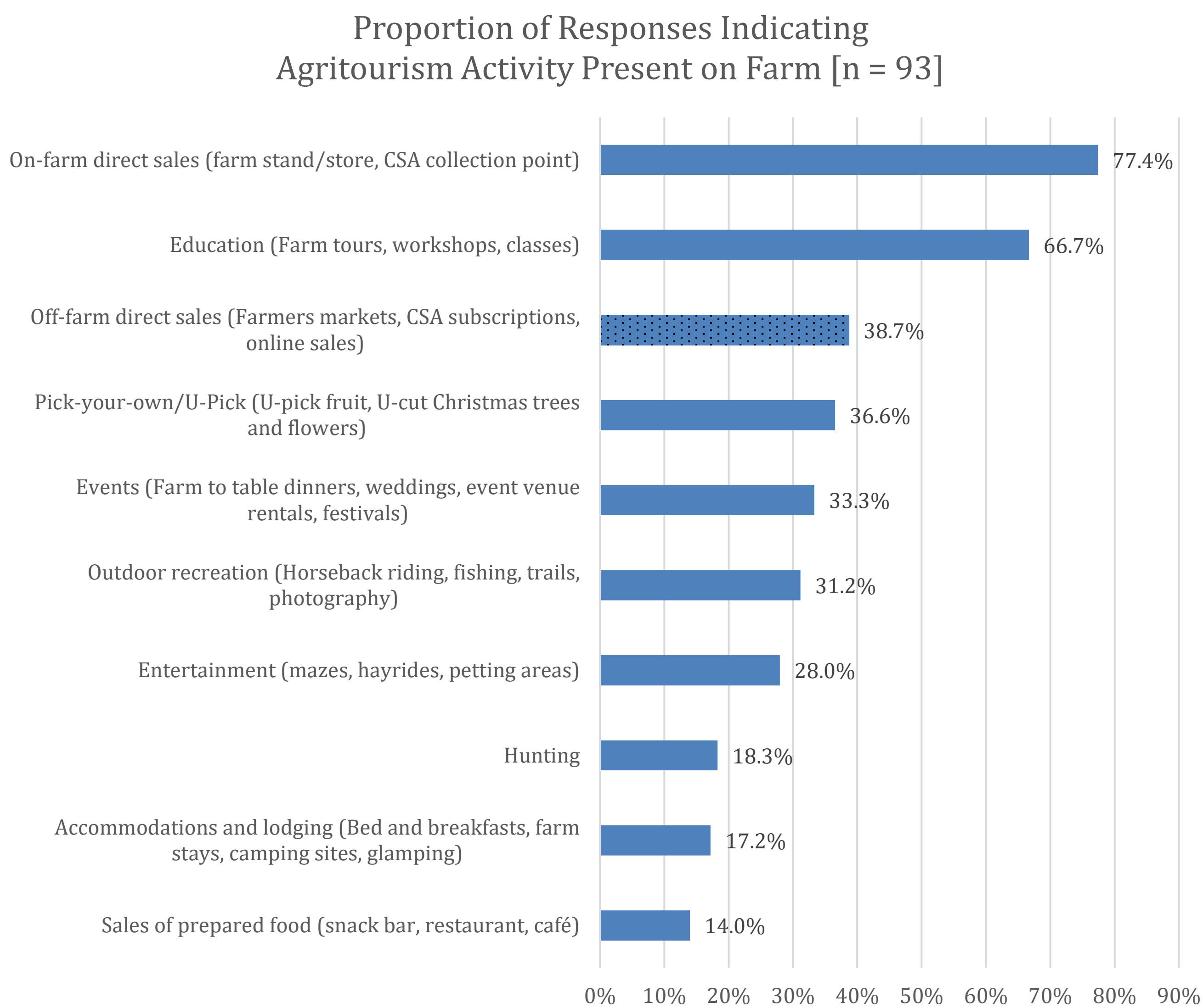

Figure 9 Type of agritourism activity present on farm in 2023

What are the economic impacts of agritourism activities to farms?

Often, agritourism activities are identified as a means of income diversification for individual farms and within rural economies. Thus, it is important to monitor the potential effects agritourism has in terms of increasing farm gross sales value and to determine if agritourism activities themselves are profit contributors to the whole-farm bottom line. Farms were asked to provide information about their operations on these.

Figure 10 reports the distribution of respondents across categories of gross sales value obtained in 2023 from agritourism. For 19.8% of respondents, agritourism accounted for less than $1,000 in sales. Most farms (62.8%) had between $1,000 and $99,999 in agritourism sales. Approximately 16.3% of responding firms saw 2023 sales from tourism and recreation activities ranging from $100,000 to $1 million, and only 1.2% had more than $1 million. Compared to national results, more Maine farms were in the lower sales categories. While sales information provides an indicator of volume, profitability provides an indicator of the effects on farm incomes.

Figure 11 reports the distribution of respondents across agritourism profit categories. Many enterprises operated at a loss or break-even (34.1%) or contributed less than $1,000 (11.8%) in net income to the farm. Another 47.1% reported between $1,000 and $99,999 in 2023 agritourism profit. Just 7% reported higher net earnings, in excess of $100,000 from agritourism.

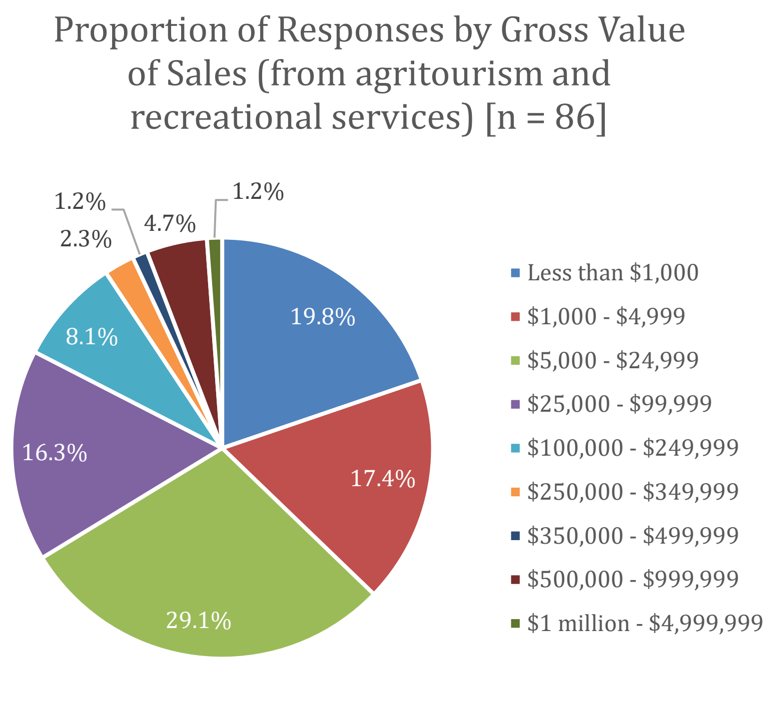

Figure 10 Gross sales value from agritourism or recreational services in 2023

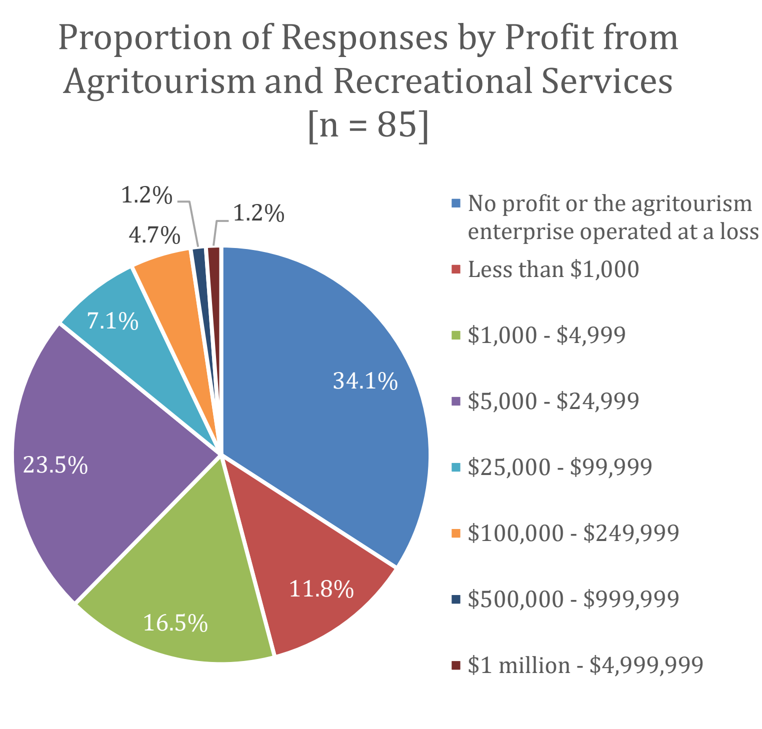

Figure 11 Profit (net income) from agritourism or recreational services in 2023

What is the timing, volume, and operator experience level with agritourism activities on farms?

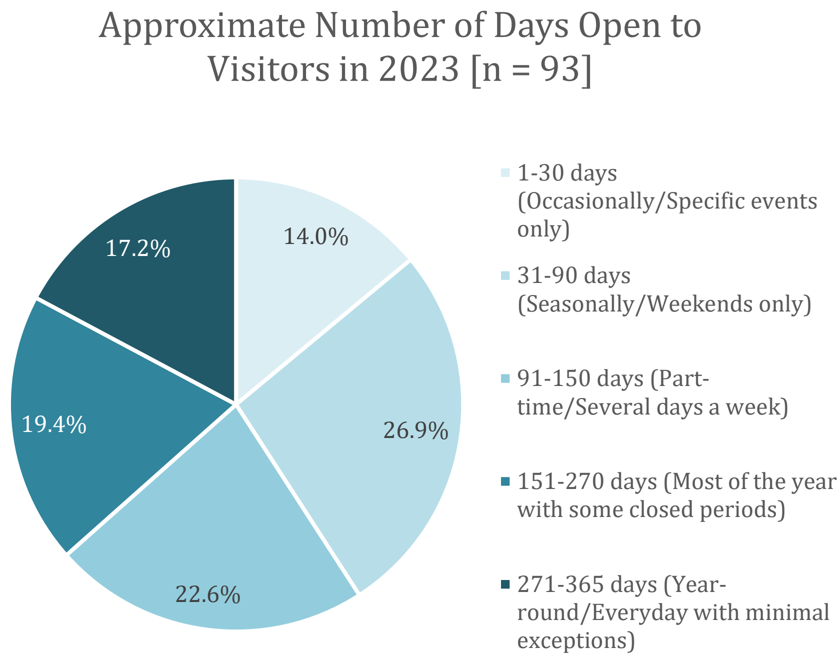

Figure 12 Number of days open to visitors in 2023 (approx.)

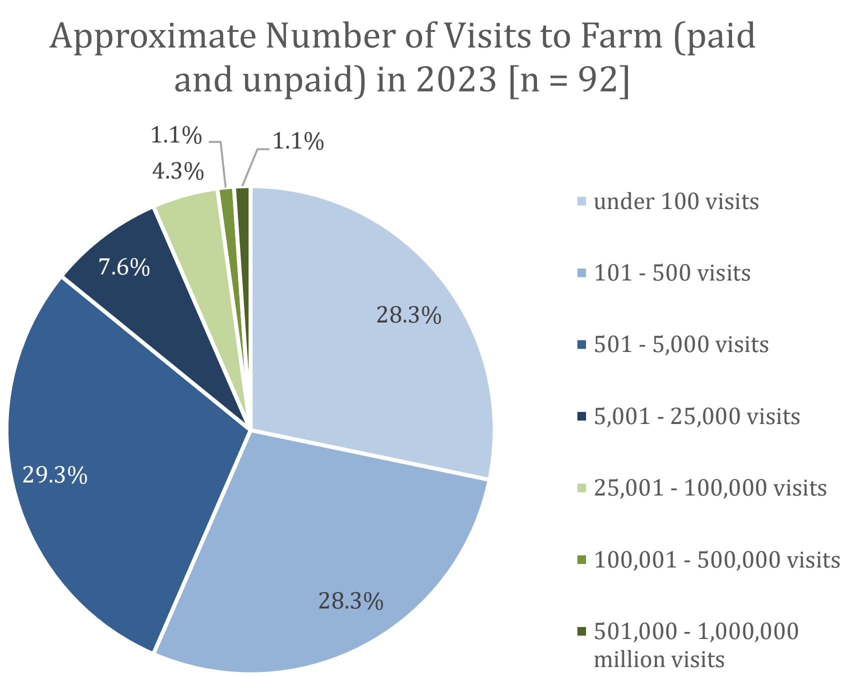

Figure 13 Number of visits to the farm (paid and unpaid) in 2023 (approx.)

Most agritourism farms (63.5%) were open to visitors part-time (150 days or less) in 2023. Figure 12 reports the distribution of responses across five different timing windows presented in the survey to understand the approximate number of days the farm was open for visitors. Maine also has a greater proportion of farms welcoming visitors 31 to 150 days versus national data. These results indicate agritourism is a supplemental activity engaged in only part of the year.

This is further supported by data in Figure 13, which reports the proportion of responses across categories of annual visits to the farm in 2023. Approximately 86% of respondents reported fewer than 5,000 total visits that year. This included 28.3% who had fewer than 100 visits.

Notably, Maine had a lower proportion of farms with fewer than 5 years of experience with agritourism activities (27.8%) and a greater proportion with 25 or more years' experience (28.9%) compared to national data (Fig. 14). This indicates that Maine farms engaged in agritourism may have more experience versus the national average. These farms may soon need to transition ownership via succession planning.

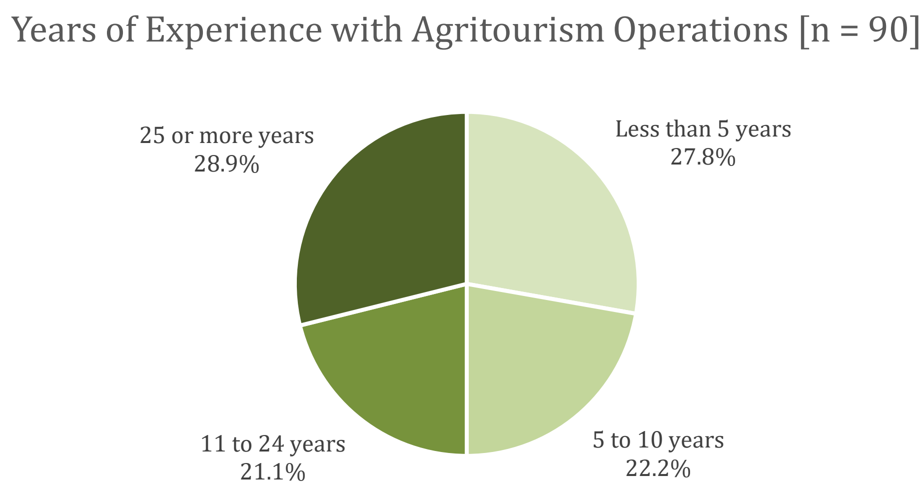

Figure 14 Years of experience with agritourism at this operation

Who is operating agritourism enterprises and responding to the survey about their enterprises?

In line with accepted social scientific practice, the survey also collected demographic information about respondents and about managers or owners operating the farm. Responses were provided voluntarily and survey participants had the opportunity to provide no response, if desired. In total, 92 respondents provided information about the highest level of education they personally have received (Fig. 15). The greatest proportion of respondents (34%) hold a four-year college degree. This is followed by 32% with postgraduate degrees like an MBA or PhD. Smaller segments include those with some college experience (14%) and high school graduates or those with less education (11%). At 9%, the smallest group comprises those with technical degrees from 2-year colleges.

A similar number (93) also provided information about their primary occupation (Fig. 16). The majority (73%) listed working for their farm or ranch as primary. Off-farm work accounted for 23% of respondents, representing a significant portion engaging in external employment. A smaller group, totaling 2%, identified as retired, homemaking, or not working due to disability. Only 2% chose not to disclose their primary occupation.

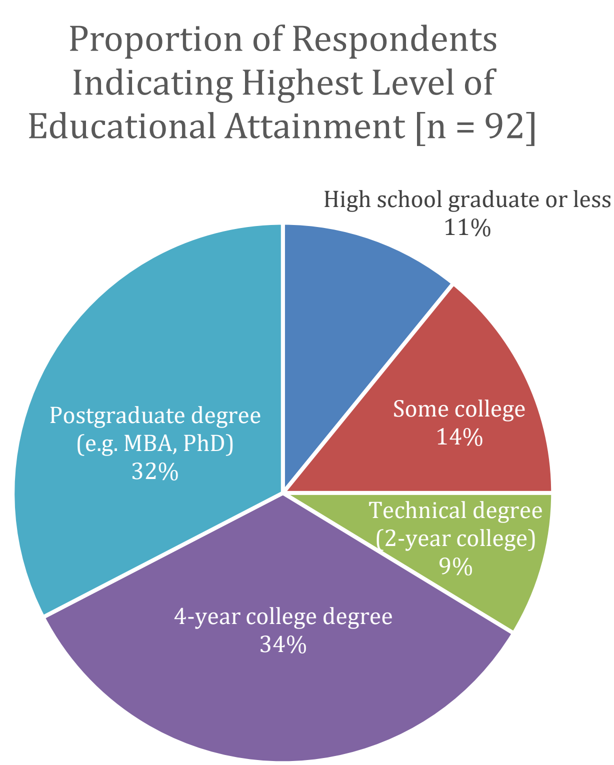

Figure 15 Highest level of educational attainment for respondent

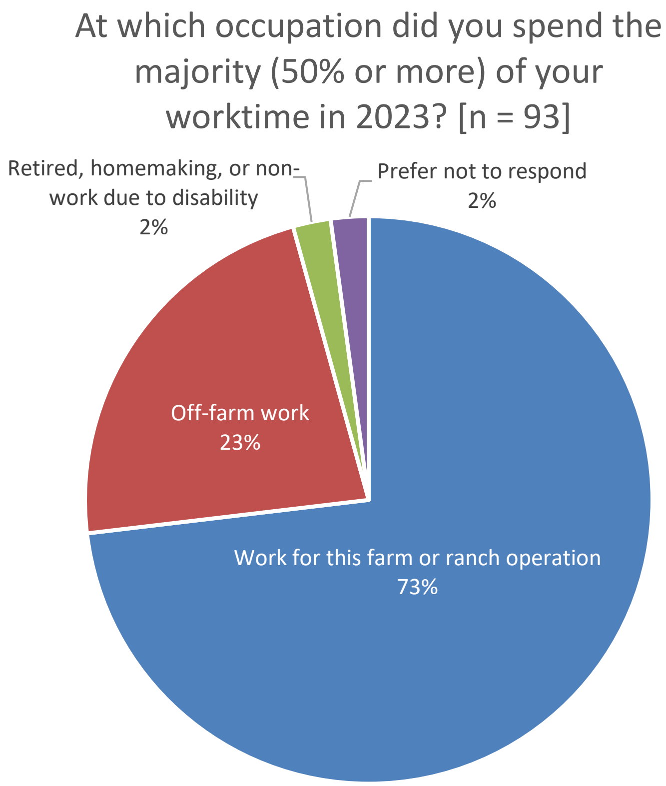

Figure 16 Primary occupation of respondent in 2023

Results also provided information about the background of respondents. The majority (57.6%) were female [n=92]. In terms of veteran status [n=93], 83% reported that they had never served in the military. Additionally, 9.7% indicated that they had previously been on active duty, while 3.2% were involved in training for the reserves or the National Guard. Most respondents (61.3%) were 55 years or older, including 29% who were over 65 years of age [n=93].

Of the respondents, 64 offered information about the number of operators – those managing or owning the firm – from various groups; 94% of agritourism operations had at least one woman leading the farm, 23.4% had at least one military veteran operator, 3.1% had at least one operator from a non-White background, 10.9% had at least one operator who identified as LGBT, and 4.7% had at least one operator who is a new American.

How do agritourism operators view their entrepreneurial environments?

One goal of the 2024 National Agritourism Producer Survey is to identify areas where directed programming and interventions can support the development of agritourism enterprises. Respondents were presented with a series of rating questions where they were asked to evaluate several critical factors about the entrepreneurial ecosystem in which they are pursuing their ventures. This included rating the degree to which they felt different aspects of the environment pose a challenge to developing agritourism in their region (Fig. 17), an evaluation of key complementary tourism features of the destinations in which they operate (Fig. 18), their agreement with a set of statements describing the socio-cultural environment in which they operate (Fig. 19), and their views on how challenging different facets of the regulatory landscape are to their agritourism business (Fig. 20).

The Community Capitals Framework (Flora, Flora, & Gasteyer, 2016) was employed as a conceptual model for evaluating factors of the agritourism entrepreneurial environment. Financial capital – such as funding to promote agritourism in a region or directly funding producers with agritourism operations – was the most challenging aspect for responding agritourism operators, with 68.5% indicating it is at least moderately challenging or greater for developing agritourism. This was followed by natural environment (55.9% rating moderately challenging or greater) and built or physical capital (54.3% selecting moderately challenging or greater). Maine agritourism operators generally rated social and cultural capital as unchallenging, with more than 70% of respondents selecting slightly challenging or posing no challenge at all. Compared to national data, Maine's political and governance capital was rated much less of a challenge for agritourism enterprises, while natural environment was much more challenging versus the whole sample results.

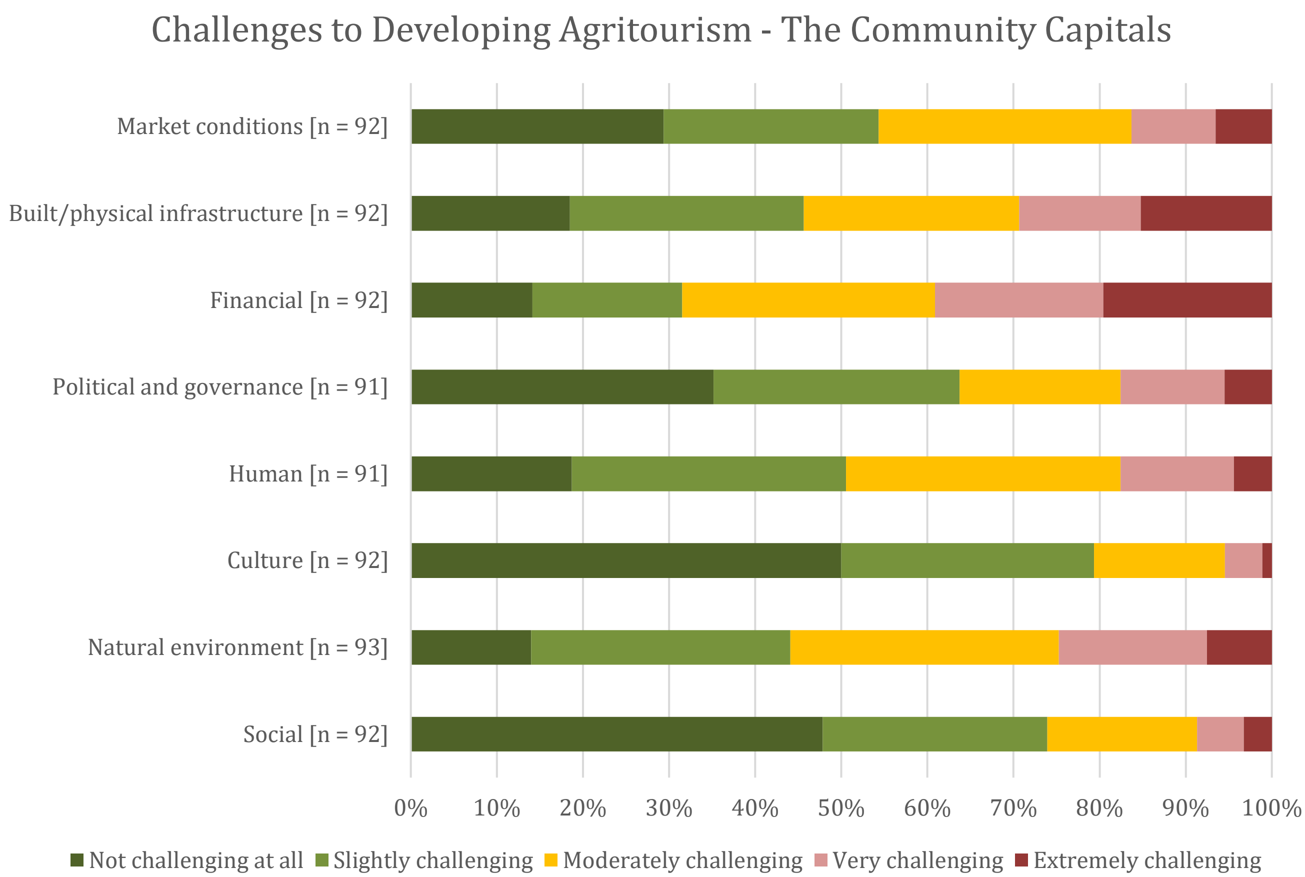

Figure 17 Distribution of respondent ratings of the challenge posed by various entrepreneurial ecosystem features using an augmented Community Capitals Framework

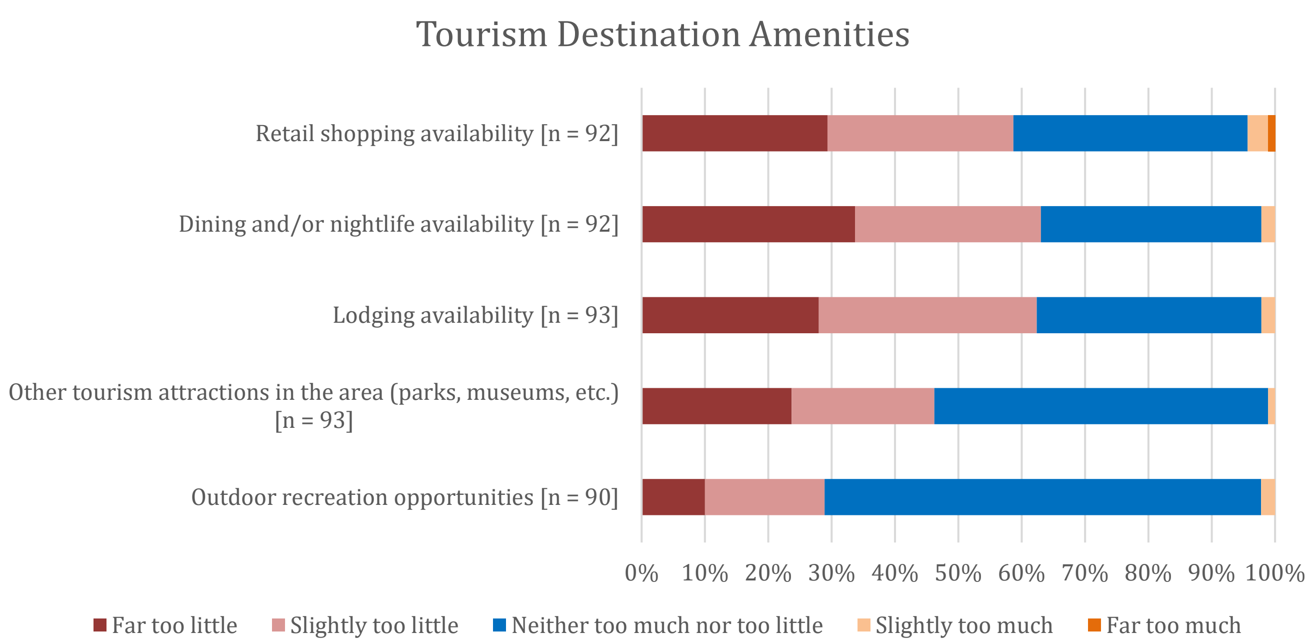

Figure 18 Distribution of respondent ratings of tourism destination amenities in their region

When evaluating a set of five tourism destination amenities within their region (Fig. 18), a plurality of respondents indicated there was neither too much nor too little of every given amenity type. Moreover, very few (less than 5%) indicated their destinations had "too much" of a given amenity. However, three key amenities – dining/nightlife (63%), lodging (62.4%), and retail shopping (58.6%) are most likely under-developed, with the noted proportions being those of respondents indicating these as slightly or far too little in their destinations. This opens potential strategies for agritourism enterprises to fill these gaps (e.g. establishing an on-farm restaurant, creating barn cocktail hours, etc.) and highlights the importance of developing economic vibrancy in small towns and villages near farming communities. Notably, the amenity least identified as having too little in an agritourism operation's destination was outdoor recreation activities; while this was also the case among the entire national sample, in Maine it is notable given results in Figure 9 indicating a greater proportion of Maine farms connect their agritourism activities to these recreational amenities.

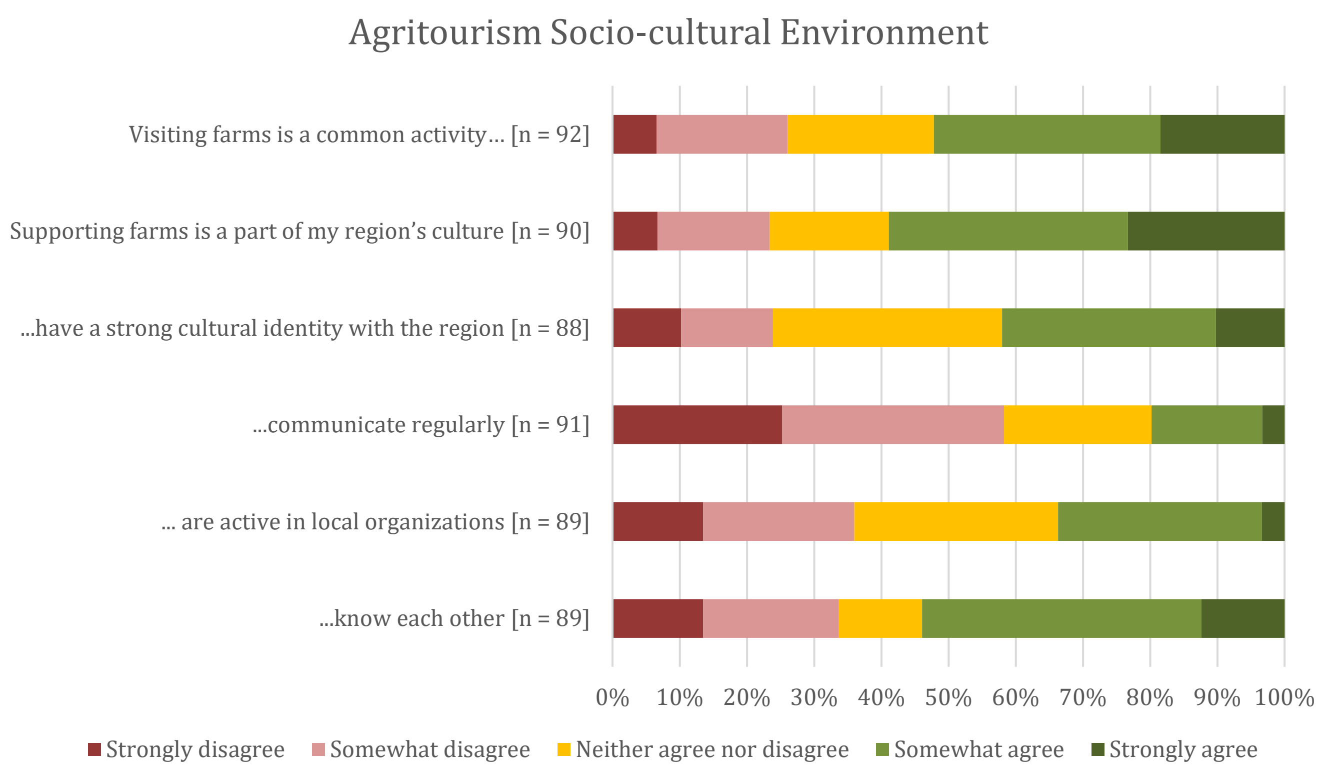

Figure 19 Distribution of respondent ratings of agritourism socio-cultural environment

Support ecosystems for entrepreneurial activities are also driven by the social and cultural aspects of the business environment (Fig.19), which influence market demand, consumer behaviors, and access to entrepreneurial resources. Most respondents agreed with statements positively evaluating the consumer-focused elements of the socio-cultural environment; 58.9% somewhat or strongly agreed that supporting farms is part of their regional culture, and 52.2% agreed that visiting farms is a common activity for regional residents. Indicators of entrepreneurial networks within their region's agritourism industry were also measured. Here, Maine is lacking in some aspects. Just 20% of agritourism operators indicated agreement that they communicate regularly with one another. Some 33.7% agreed that agritourism operators are active in local organizations, and 42% agreed that agritourism operators near them have a strong regional cultural identity. These three facets are indicators of tie strength; strong ties are often associated with developing regional brands and collective strategies that help drive destination development. However, results indicate that among the respondents, these agritourism operator networks may be largely composed of weak ties (54% agree that agritourism operators know each other).

The regulatory landscape for agritourism is rapidly evolving and often fragmented, with different approaches to crafting and implementing regulations, such as zoning. Regulatory compliance can be a challenge for many small businesses and for those firms transitioning from predominantly product-oriented strategies to mixed product-service strategies. To evaluate this complexity, respondents were asked to rate eight regulatory issues on how challenging they were for their business, and were also provided the option to indicate if they were uncertain or the item was not applicable to their business (e.g. farms with no animals are not likely to be subject to the provisions of the Animal Welfare Act).

Maine results indicate that for the state's respondents the regulatory landscape may be perceived as less challenging than in other parts of the U.S. as indicated by national-level results from the survey (Schmidt et al., 2025); more than 60% of Maine responses indicated every regulatory attribute included in the questionnaire as uncertain/not applicable or not at all or only slightly challenging (Fig. 20). Designating agritourism operations as retail sites – which often imposes certain infrastructure and facilities requirements on businesses – was the most challenging, with 34.8% rating it as moderately so or greater. Civil liability was the second most challenging regulatory item for Maine agritourism operations with 33% rating it as a moderate or greater challenge, followed by accessibility compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (32.6% as moderate or greater).

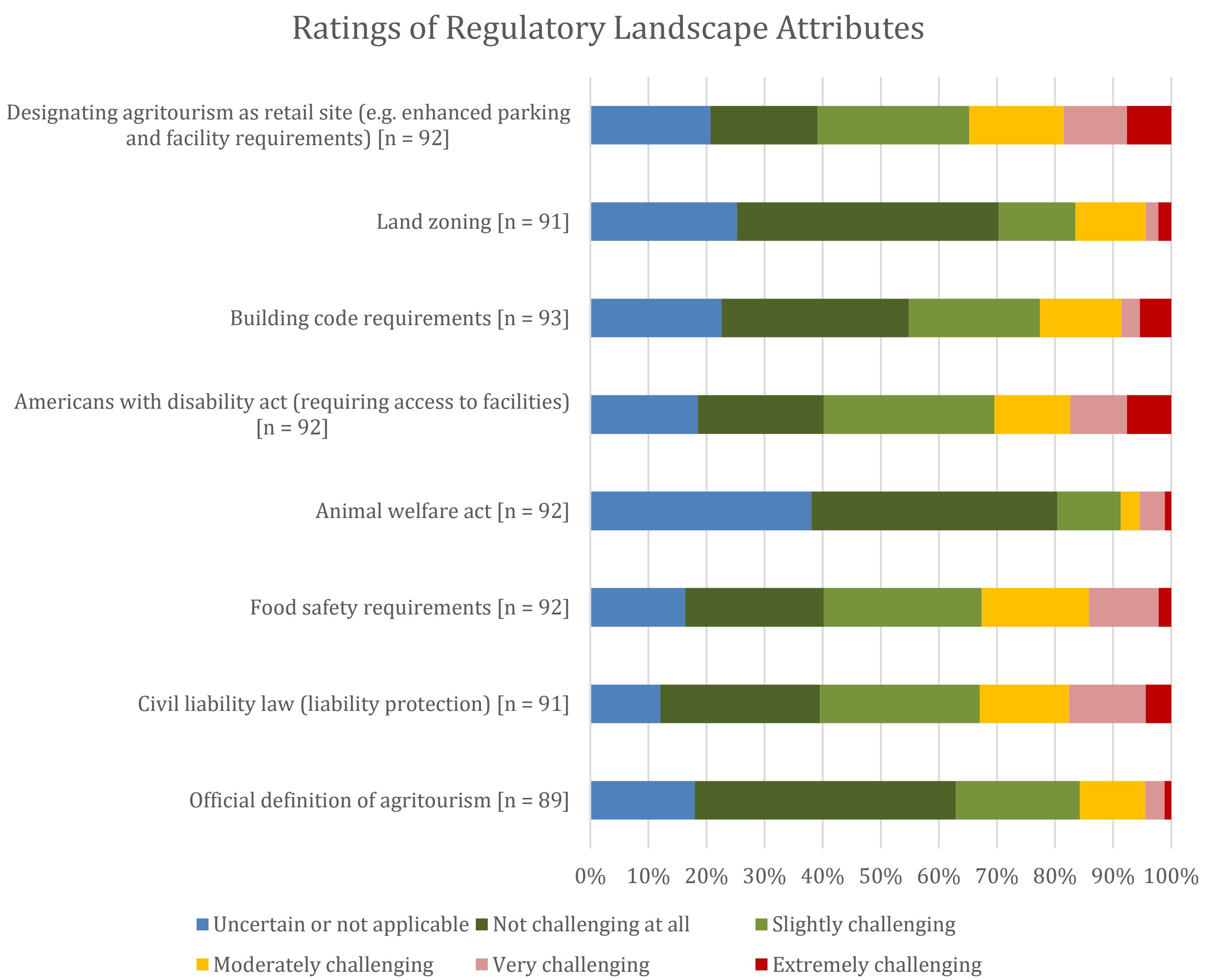

Figure 20 Distribution of respondent ratings of regulatory landscape attributes

What are agritourism operators' experiences and practices concerning regulations?

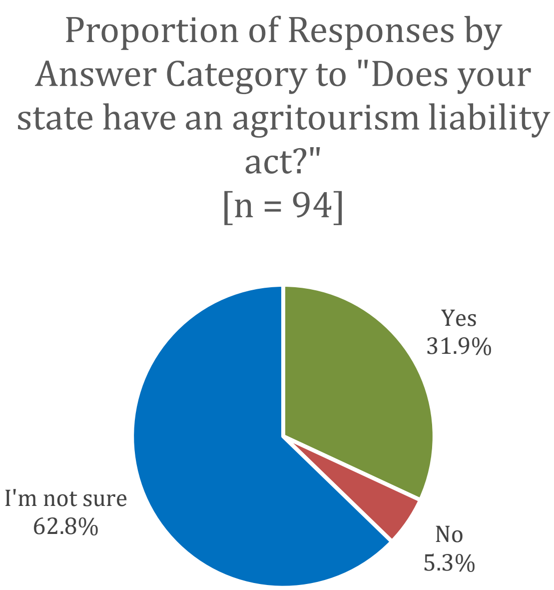

Figure 21 Does your state have an agritourism liability act?

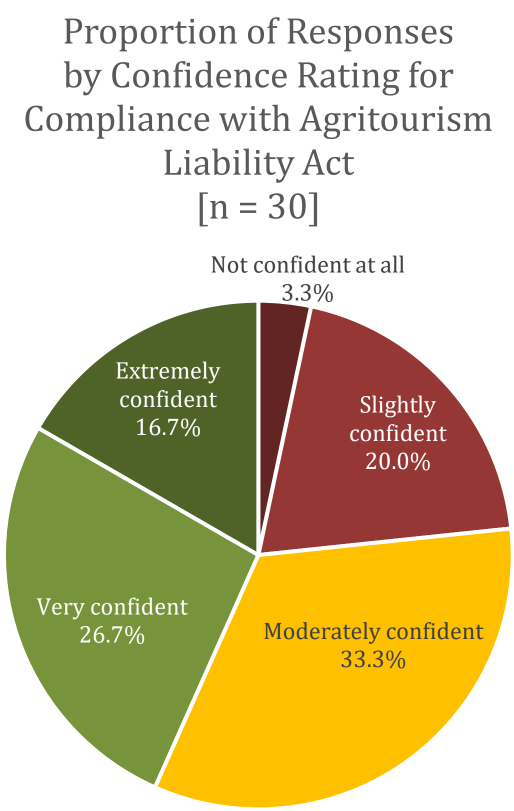

Figure 22 Confidence that farm has complied with requirements of local agritourism liability laws

After rating regulatory landscape attributes (recall Fig. 20), survey respondents were presented with questions designed to better understand their practices and business readiness on several of the key issues. This included civil liability (Figs. 21 to 24), compliance with zoning (Fig. 25) and other regulations relevant to their agritourism enterprise (Fig. 26), and experience with disputes (Figs. 27 to 29).

Most (62.8%) respondents indicated they are unaware ("I'm unsure") whether Maine has an agritourism liability act in place (Fig. 21). Awareness of state liability laws is a topline indicator of agritourism operators' knowledge of critical legal protections and requirements in their risk environment. Welcoming the public into any public space poses a risk of liability, but legal mechanisms are available to reduce those risks. In 2012, Maine enacted statutory language limiting the liability of agritourism professionals, defined as "a person who is engaged in the business of farming or ranching and provides one or more agritourism activities, whether or not for compensation." To receive liability protection under Maine's agritourism statute, the business must take certain actions, such as posting a sign with designated language at specific points or having participants sign statements informing them of the inherent risks. (MRS Title 7, Chapter 8-E)

Respondents who believe their state has an agritourism liability act (n = 30), were then asked to rate their confidence that they are following it (Fig. 22). Of these, 43.4% are very or extremely confident they comply with the requirements. One-third (33.3%) are moderately confident of their compliance, and 23.3% are slightly or not at all confident of compliance.

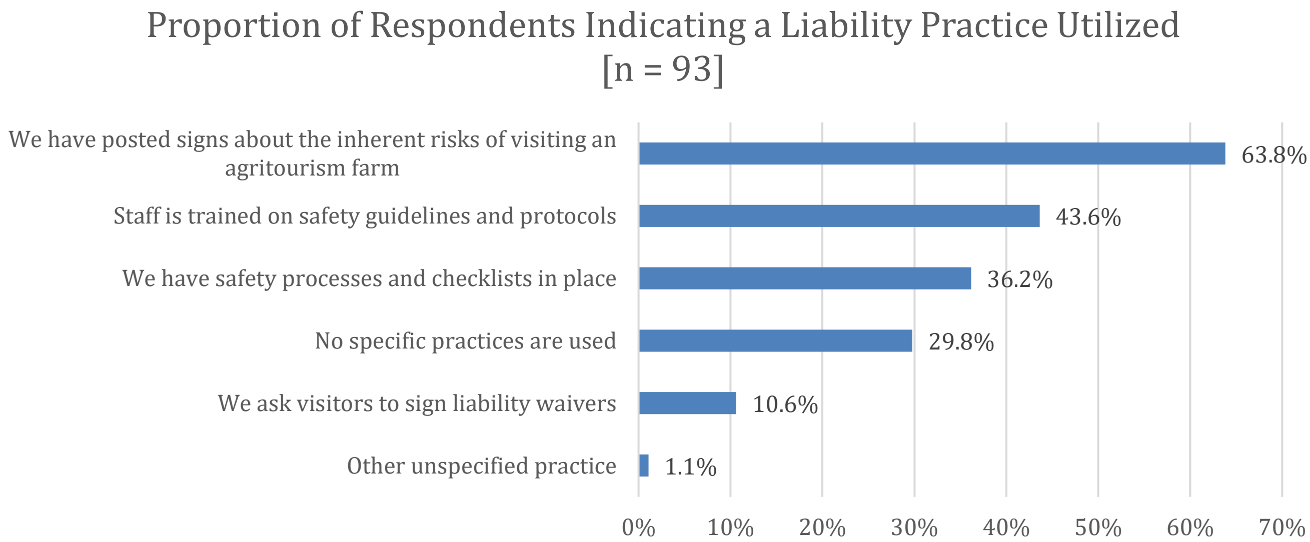

Figure 23 Liability practices utilized

Apart from direct legal protection to civil liability, farms can adopt practices to reduce or mitigate risks and liability. Figure 23 presents data on the proportion of Maine operators who indicated that they engage in each practice. Four practices were pre-populated in the survey questionnaire, along with an option to indicate that no specific practice is used on the farm and an option to write in free responses. While 29.8% responded they do not use any specific practices, the most common practice used is the posting of warning signs (63.8%). Visitors being asked to sign liability waivers was the least common practice, with 10.6% of sub-sample valid responses selecting this option. Some 44% have trained staff on safety guidelines and protocols and more than a third (36.2%) reported their farms have implemented safety processes and checklists. No Maine respondents wrote-in answers identifying other practices.

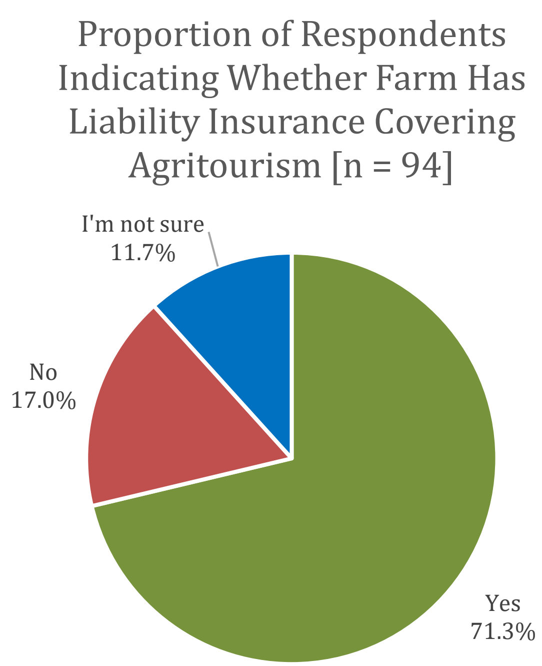

Figure 24 Farm has liability insurance covering agritourism?

In a separate question, respondents were asked about another risk management practice: carrying an insurance policy with liability coverage for the agritourism operation (Fig. 24). This may be a special rider insurance policy with an additional premium to cover the specific types of activities offered by the farm. Of the 94 valid responses to this question, 71.3% indicated that yes, they have liability insurance that specifically covers the agritourism operation. A smaller proportion (17%) said they do not have such insurance coverage, and 11.7% were uncertain. This is notable given the implications for farm risk management, especially of sole proprietorships. In Maine, two organizational types are available that may limit liability while providing tax and financial benefits: the Limited Liability Company (LLC) and the Limited Profit Company (L3C, see MRS §1611).

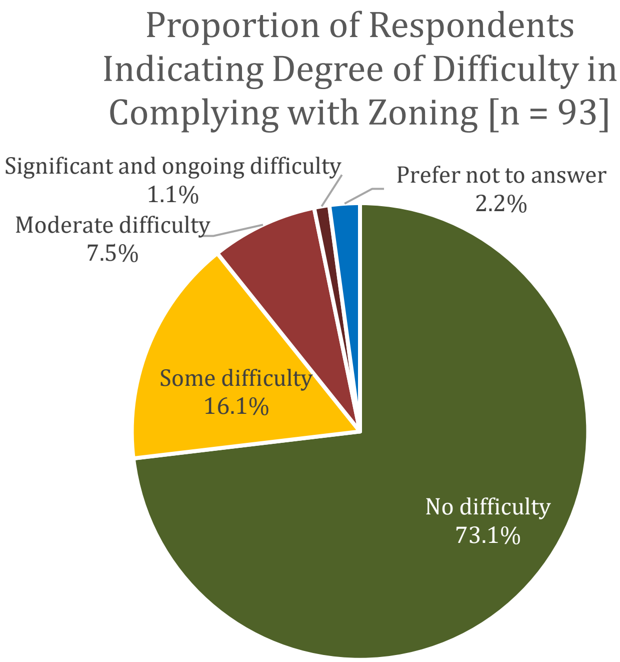

Figure 25 Degree of difficulty in complying with zoning

Compliance with zoning regulations may also be challenging for agritourism operations in some jurisdictions, particularly if farms are in areas of increasing urban sprawl or when zoning laws create specific conditions that must be met to host certain activities. Survey participants were asked to rate their experience with zoning compliance (Fig. 25). Of the 93 valid responses, 73.1% indicated they have had no difficulty; this is substantially higher than the national sample's 57.7%. Additionally, 16% reported having had "some difficulty". Only 8.6% indicated they have had significant difficulty. Some 2% preferred not to answer this question.

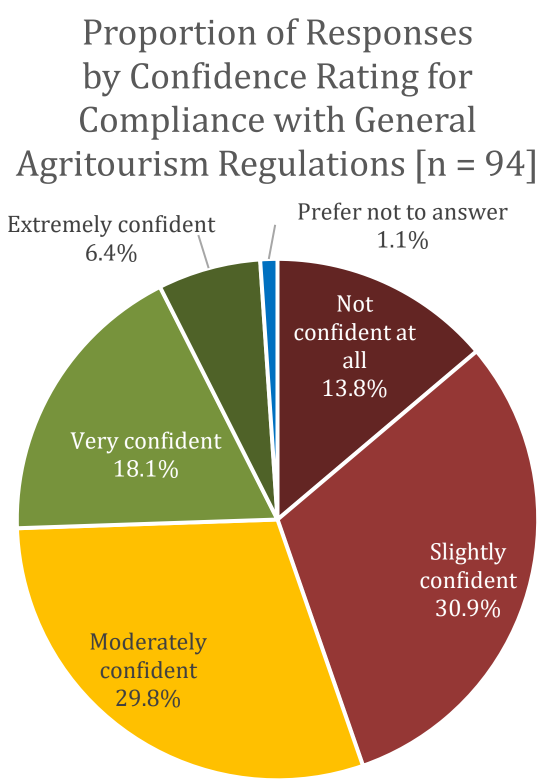

Figure 26 How confident are you that you are in compliance with agritourism regulations?

Given the variation in regulatory issues across jurisdictions, the survey also posed a catch-all question to understand agritourism operators' confidence in their general knowledge and compliance with agritourism regulations applicable to their business. Figure 26 reports the distribution of ratings among the 94 valid observations. In the generalized context, findings indicate a plurality of producers lack confidence that they know about and have complied with applicable regulations; 44.7% were not at all or only slightly confident. Additionally, 29.8% indicated they were moderately confident. The implication is that more work can be done with Maine agritourism operators to improve their knowledge of regulatory issues and connect them with resources to invest in building compliance strategies. Given Maine's Home Rule[1] structure, this will require the inclusion of local municipal governments.

[1] For more on Home Rule in Maine, see: Constitution of Maine, Article VIII, Part Second; MRS §2101-2109 and §4351-4364-C; and Bower (1985).

Disputes with various parties – regulators, zoning boards, neighbors, employees, customers, etc. – may arise amid any business activity. Agritourism operations may experience such disputes over impacts on communities, disgruntled customers, differences in understanding of legal and regulatory issues, the boundaries of property, and more. Survey respondents were asked, "relating to your agritourism operation, have you experienced significant disputes where you or the other party has suggested legal action or litigation?" (Fig. 27). Among the 93 valid responses, 90% indicated they had not experienced such significant disputes. Approximately 3% were either unsure or preferred not to answer, while 7% indicated yes, their agritourism operation has experienced at least one significant dispute.

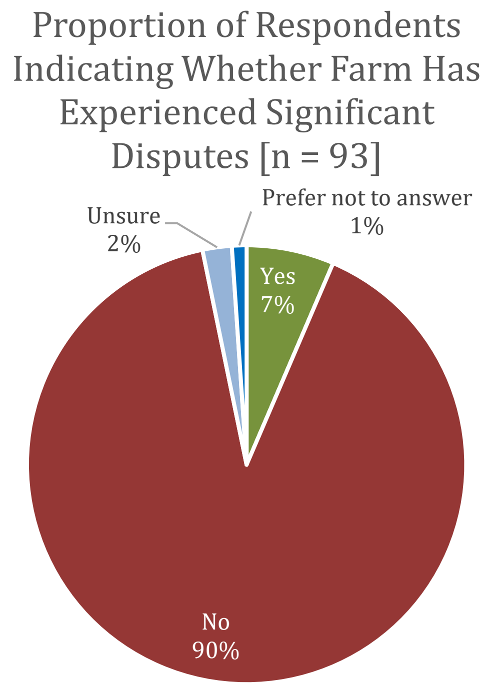

Figure 27 Experienced significant disputes related to their agritourism enterprise?

Respondents were also asked which types of disputes they had experienced (Fig. 28). Five pre-populated options were provided for selection, along with the choice to indicate no disputes were encountered, that they preferred not to answer, and to provide a free response. Most respondents (76.8%) reported they had not experienced any disputes. Figure 25 reports the dispute types most encountered. Conflicts with neighbors were reported with the greatest frequency among the respondents, including those over issues such as noise, smells, or traffic (9.8%), property lines (4.9%) and of unspecified type (1.2%). Disputes with participants (i.e., customers or visitors) were the next most common (6.1%). No Maine respondents provided open-ended write-in answers, and none selected several pre-populated items such as disputes related to livestock or land-use, those with government entities, or contract disputes with vendors.

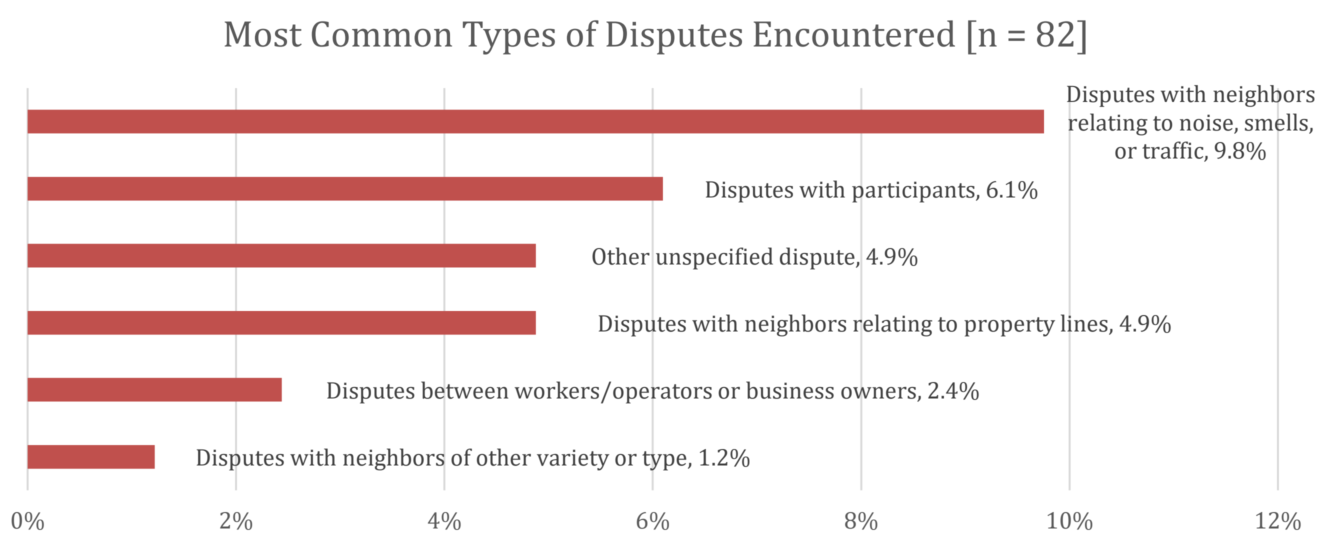

Figure 28 Type of dispute(s) experienced

The six respondents who indicated that their farm had experienced a significant dispute where they or the other party suggested legal action were also asked if they had participated in Maine's Agricultural Mediation Program (AMP). Agricultural mediation is a voluntary process that can help resolve disputes related to agritourism and agricultural issues. The process is guided by a trained mediator, who creates a collaborative and confidential environment where parties can openly communicate and work together toward mutually agreeable solutions. The goal is to avoid litigation, and mediation is often quicker and more cost-effective, making it a practical choice for preserving relationships and addressing conflicts. In the U.S., 43 states offer mediation services[2]. Maine's AMP is led by the University of Maine Cooperative Extension; the contact information can be found on the UMaine Extension website.

We asked eligible respondents about their knowledge and use of mediation services following a dispute (Fig. 29). Of these most were unaware of mediation services. None participated in such services. Not all disputes are conducive to mediation.

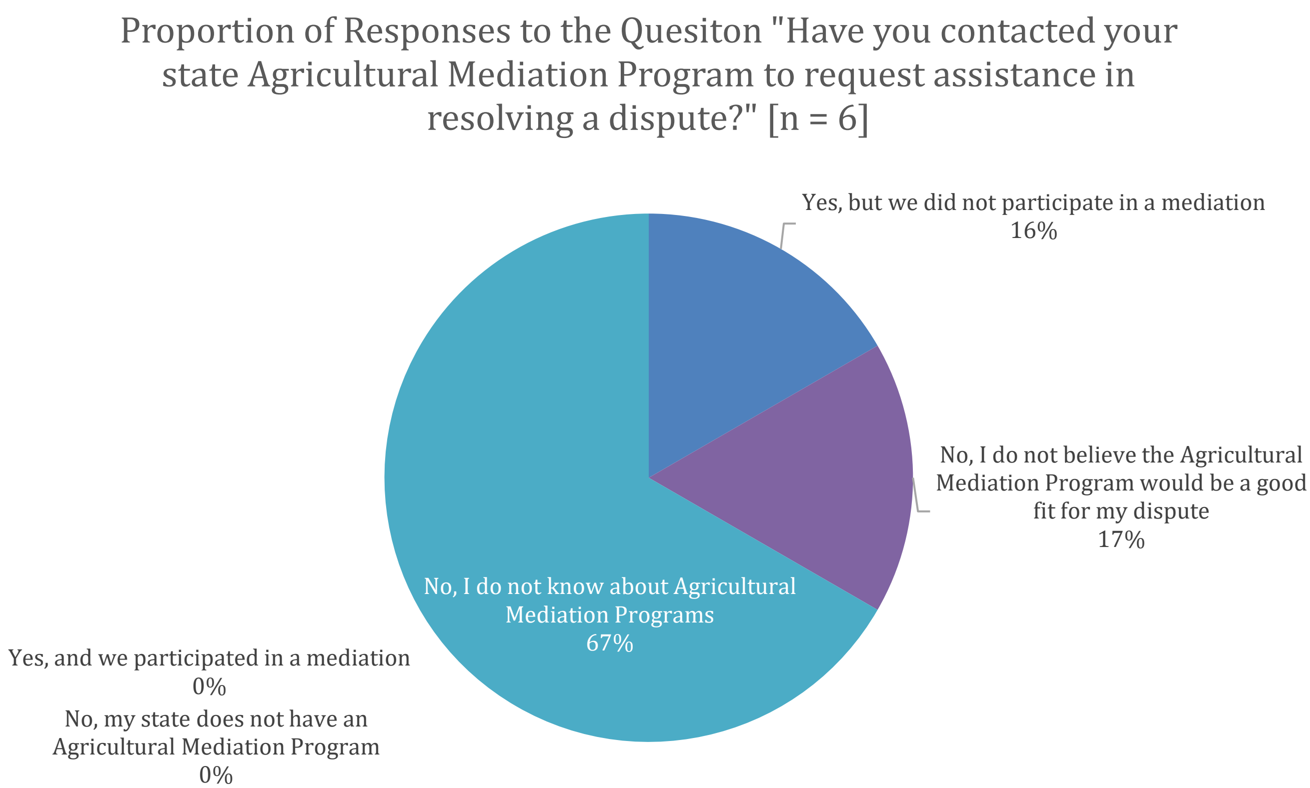

Figure 29 Have you contacted your state Agricultural Mediation Program to request assistance in resolving a dispute?

The structure of the survey limited the pool of respondents who were presented this question. However, among those who did engage, and based on results from the wider national sample, data indicate that better integration of the Agriculture Mediation Program with agritourism audiences is warranted, including efforts that increase awareness among agritourism operators. Increased use of the program by agritourism operations may reduce costs associated with litigation or continued losses to businesses stemming from dispute actions.

[2] Delaware, Kentucky, Nevada, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia do not have AMP programs.

What support organizations and programming interest agritourism operators?

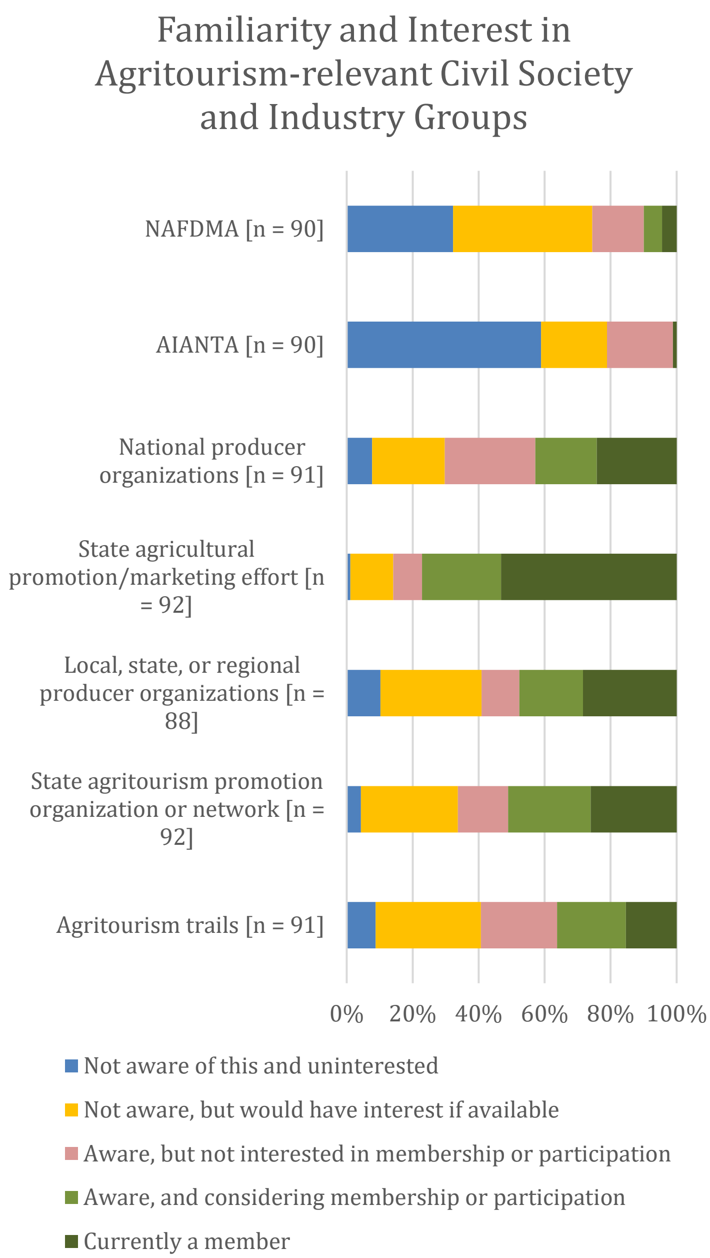

Figure 30 Distribution of respondent ratings of familiarity and interest in agritourism-relevant civil society and industry groups

Various organizations and agencies exist within the agritourism support ecosystem that provide aid in developing agritourism enterprises and destinations. The support these organizations provide may include educational training and technical assistance, collective marketing and branding activities, policy advocacy, event and destination coordination, and more. To help understand how agritourism operations might access support networks, the survey asked respondents to rate their familiarity and interest in these civil society and industry groups on a combined scale. Figure 30 presents the distribution of responses across these rating categories for two specific organizations and five generic organization types. The specific organizations are NAFDMA (an international agritourism membership organization) and the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA). These national organizations were included separately as they supported survey distribution to their members. A total of 92 Maine respondents provided at least one rating for the organizations included in the question.

Agritourism operations in *Vacationland* are most frequently (53.3%) current members of the state's agricultural promotion or marketing effort (e.g. *Real Maine).* Smaller proportions have current membership in local/regional (28.4%) or national producer organizations (24.2%). Further, notable proportions indicated they are not aware of but would have interest in participating in NAFDMA (42.2%) or state agritourism promotion organization or network (29.3%). Sizeable proportions also indicated awareness and active consideration of membership in state-level promotional efforts. Assistance – in terms of technical support, financing, etc. – that helps producers in connecting with or founding these kinds of organizations in Maine or its tourism regions may have promise for building collective strategies. Of note are those approaches which might coordinate agritourism enterprises and the wider tourism industry in Maine to draw visitors from the tourist-heavy coasts to the interior as a part of their sojourn.

Figure 30 also provides data on operators' perspectives on a growing tool for agritourism-focused destination management and promotion – the local agritourism "trail". Most known among the winemaking and vineyard industry ("wine trails"), both sector-specific and diversified sector trails have emerged across the U.S. and abroad. Among the sub-sample, only 15% of respondents indicated they are current members of a trail. However, a majority of respondents (53%) indicated interest in agritourism trail membership, either that they are currently unaware of a trail in their region but would have interest if available (32%) or that they are aware of a regional trail and actively considering membership (21%). This interest is noticeably higher than seen among results for the national sample. Intriguingly, 32% indicated they have no interest in agritourism trails, including nearly one-quarter (23.1%) who are aware of one in their region but not interested in joining.

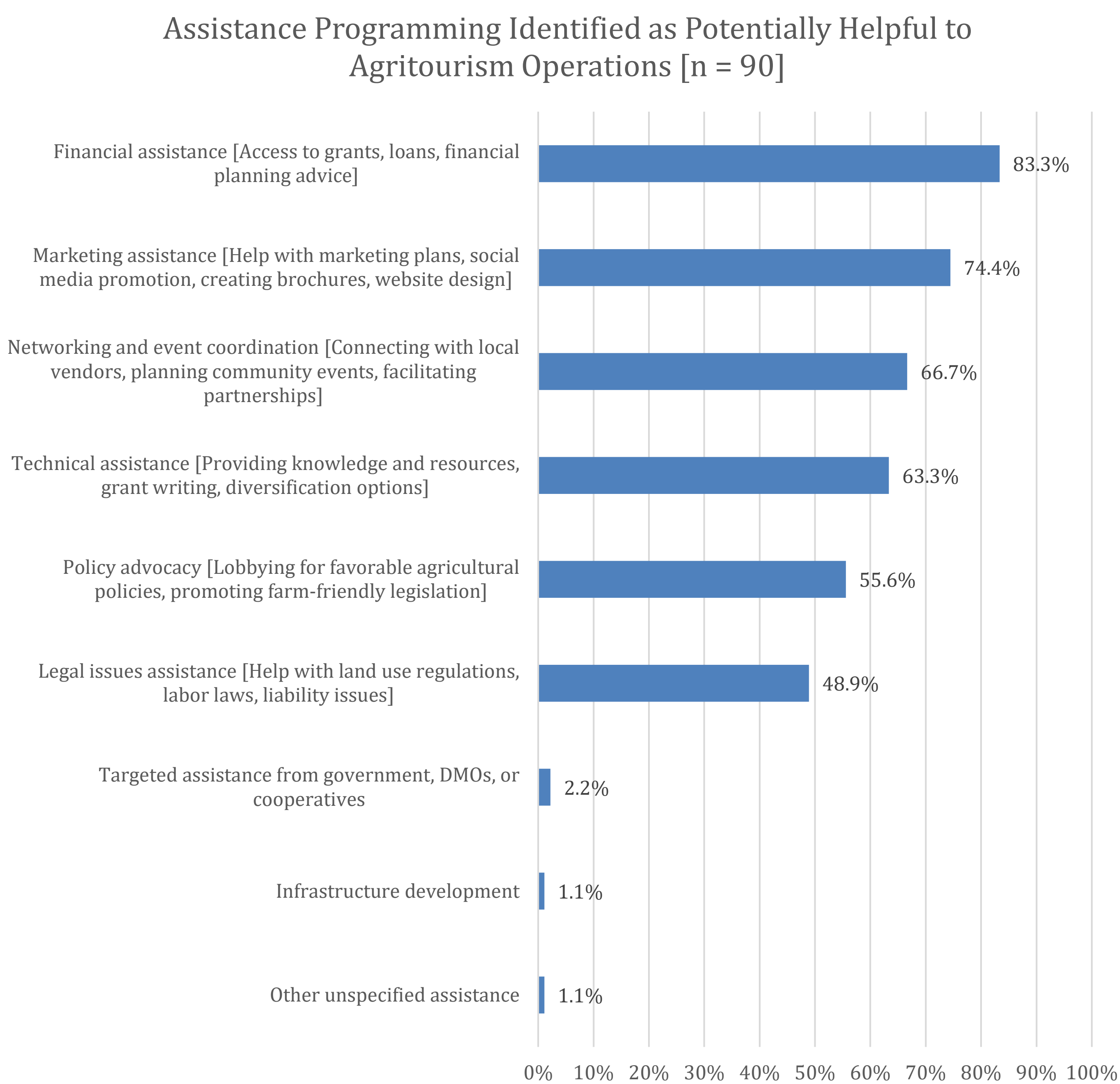

Figure 31 Type(s) of assistance that would be helpful in developing agritourism enterprise

What types of support can organizations – such as the Cooperative Extension service at the University of Maine – provide that many agritourism operators would find helpful? Results of the survey provide insight into this question, shown in Figure 31. Unsurprisingly, given findings previously presented in Figure 17, financial assistance is the most frequently indicated with 83.3% of the 90 valid responses selecting this option. This is followed by marketing assistance (74.4%), networking and event coordination (66.7%), and technical assistance (63.3%). Here, Maine departs from national data in its agritourism enterprises' clear desire for network facilitation and common event hosting; among the national sample this was the least selected type (although still indicated by a majority of respondents).

Similarly, respondents were asked what types of financial programs they utilized during 2023 to support the development of their agritourism enterprises. Figure 32 depicts the proportion of the 89 responses selecting different options. Overwhelmingly, operators indicated they did not receive any grants or loans in 2023 (68.5%) and some 42.7% also indicated they were not aware of any grants or loans being available to support their agritourism business. Those who did engage in financial support programs were much less frequent, with 5.6% indicating they received grants, obtained loans, received donations via fundraising, or had in-kind technical assistance or marketing dollars. As alterations in Federal farm programs and policy are anticipated, mobilizing state resources to improve access to and use of financial capital services may be beneficial in building Maine's agritourism enterprises.

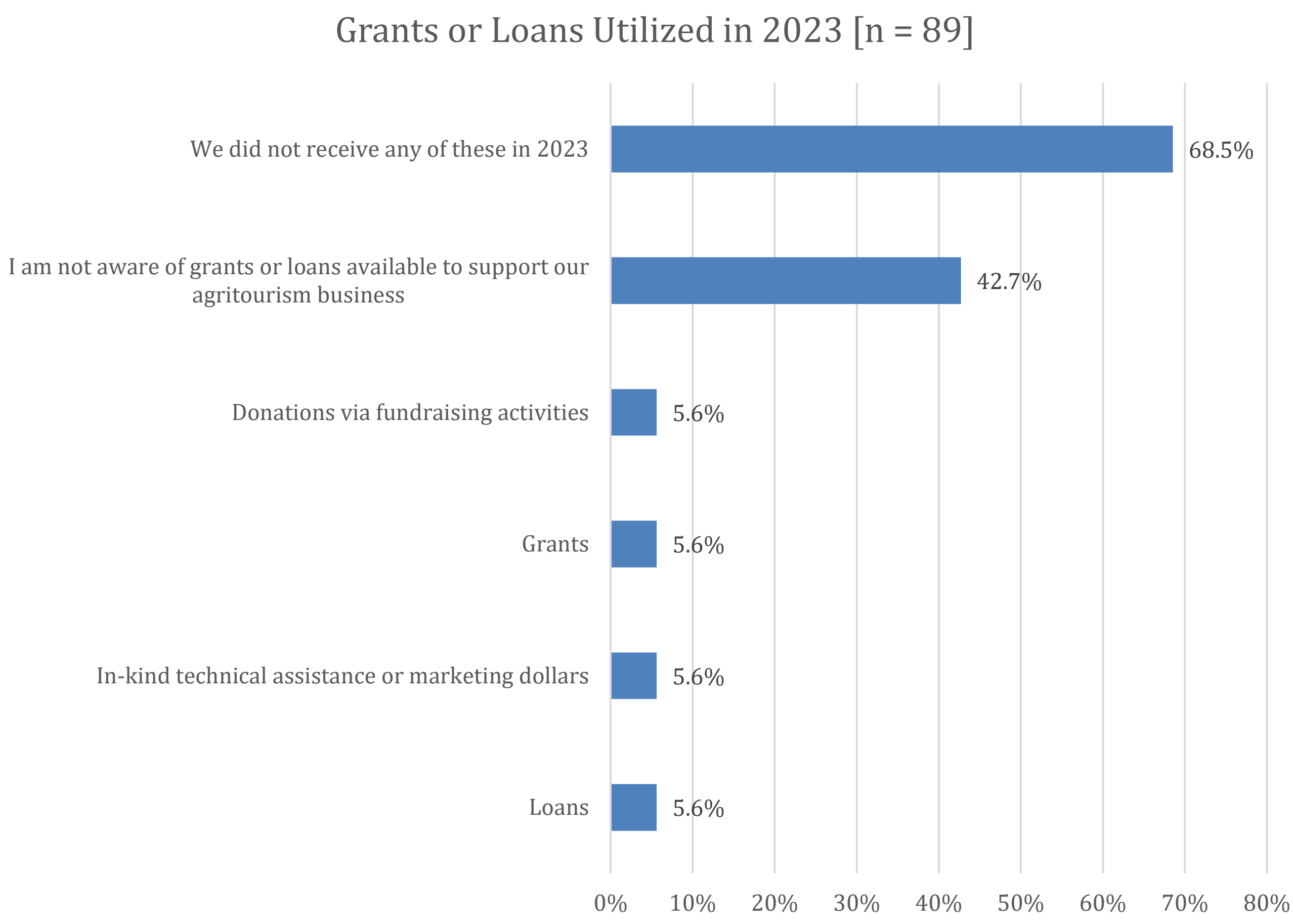

Figure 32 Type of financial supports utilized in 2023

How do operators view the future of agritourism?

Despite challenges and barriers, Maine's agritourism operators have a generally positive view of agritourism's future (Fig. 33). When asked to rate three aspects of the future (in five years), 65.2% of operators felt their operation's profitability would increase moderately or significantly, 59.8% felt that way about their operation's number of visitors, and 54.4% felt they would expand the number of agritourism activities or initiatives on their farm moderately or significantly. However, while Maine respondents were overall positive about agritourism's future, these proportions were lower than the national whole-sample results. A larger proportion of Mainers (vis à vis the national sample) felt the number of visitors (29.3% vs. 18.8%) and the number of activities or initiatives on the farm (30.4% vs. 25.9%) would stay the same. So too did a greater proportion of Maine respondents expect decreases in profitability (14.2% vs. 8.2%), visitors (10.9% vs 6%), and activities offered (15.2% vs 5.7%) over the next five years.

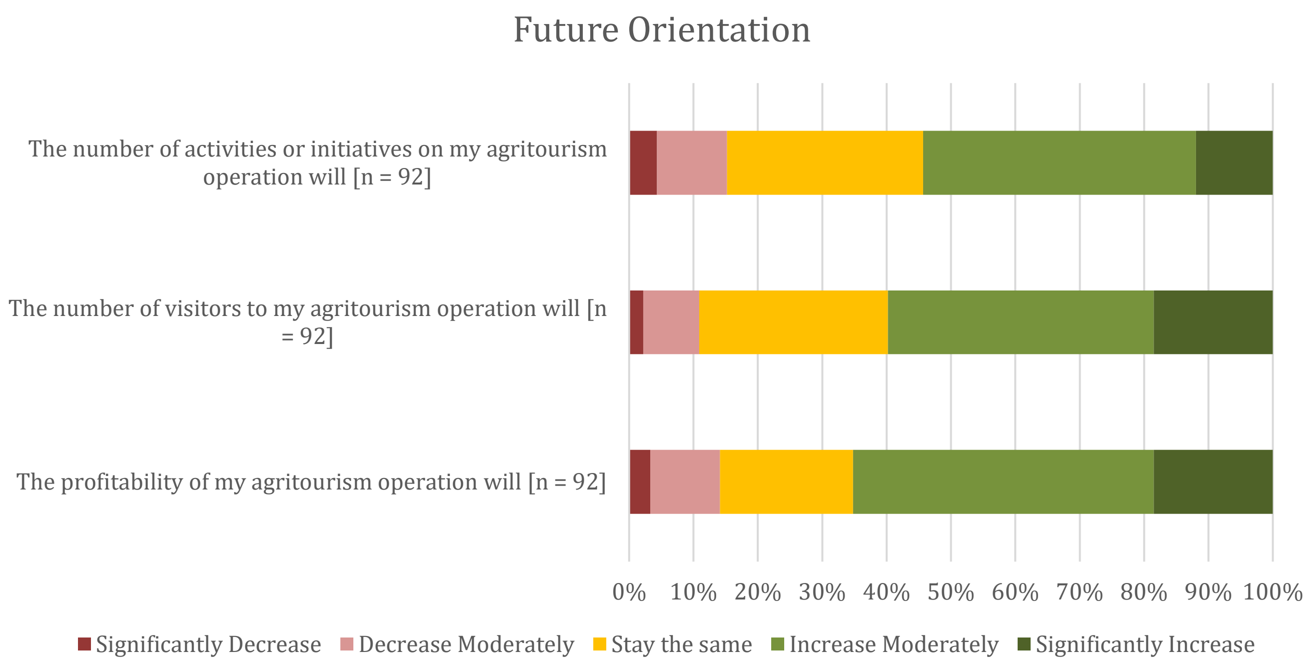

Figure 33 Distribution of respondent ratings of the future orientation of their agritourism enterprises

Conclusion and Recommendations

Agritourism presents a promising yet underutilized opportunity for farmers to diversify income streams and strengthen rural economies. This is particularly the case in Maine, where historically strong tourism and outdoor recreation economies have existed, particularly along the coast. The results of the *2024 National Agritourism Producer Survey* reveal that while many farms actively engage in agritourism, significant barriers prevent its full potential from being realized. Key challenges include issues with limited access to financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and gaps in social capital among agritourism operators – notably a need to develop regional agritourism trails and farm organizations.

The survey highlights that a substantial proportion of agritourism operators struggle with profitability, and many lack the necessary financial, regulatory, marketing, and technical support to succeed. Additionally, weak communication networks among producers and minimal engagement in regional agritourism collaborations hinder the development of robust agritourism ecosystems.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

To address these challenges and support the growth of agritourism, we recommend the following actions for local and regional policymakers, researchers, service providers, and industry leaders:

- **Enhance Regulatory Guidance**: Offer educational workshops and legal consultations for local policy and decision makers and agritourism support providers to improve support for agritourism entrepreneurship. Educate agritourism operators to strengthen compliance with agritourism-related regulations, such as liability laws, food safety requirements, and building codes.
- **Increase Financial and Marketing Support**: Provide targeted financial aid programs, grants, and low-interest loans to help agritourism entrepreneurs to scale their agritourism businesses. Develop accessible marketing resources to assist farms in promoting their offerings to broader audiences.
- **Strengthen Social Capital**: Facilitate the development of networks to improve communication, encourage collaboration, and promote regional branding efforts. Extension programs can facilitate these connections by hosting workshops and networking events. Monitor and improve connections between agritourism operations and MOT Partners. And where feasible, have regional partnerships focus on bridging coastal and inland spaces for tourism promotion.
- **Focus on Policy Advocacy**: Engage stakeholders in lobbying for continued state and federal support for agritourism development, rural tourism destination enhancement, and building connections between Maine's abundant outdoor recreation amenities and its farms through infrastructure development such as trails and byways.

Next Steps for Research

Research should explore strategies to build stronger communication networks and foster cooperative efforts among producers. Monitoring local and regional agritourism's long-term economic and community impacts would also support funding and resource requests. Given forecast impacts on Maine's tourism economy, this monitoring work may prove vital to tailoring responses and coordinating local and regional support organizations.

Further Reading and Resources

Agritourism in the United States - State & National Factsheets Using Data from the 2022 U.S. Census of Agriculture: https://aese.psu.edu/outreach/agritourism/projects/nifa-agritourism/state-factsheets

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Maine Revised Statues Title 7 Chapter 8-E, §251 – 252. *Agritourism Activities.* Available at: https://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/7/title7ch8-Esec0.html

Maine Revised Statues Title 31 Chapter 21, §1611. *Low-profit limited liability company.* Available at: https://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/30-a/title30-Ach111sec0.html

Maine Revised Statues Title 30-A Chapter 111, §2101 – 2109. *Home Rule.* Available at: https://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/7/title7ch8-Esec0.html

Maine Revised Statues Title 30-A Chapter 187 Sub-chapter 3, §4351 – 4364-C. *Land Use Regulation.* Available at: https://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/30-a/title30-Ach187sec0.html

Maine Office of Tourism, *Partner Organizations and Tourism Regions.* Available at: https://motpartners.com/partner-organizations/ (for a list of contacts and websites for Maine's destination management and marketing organizations)

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