

PLANNING AN AGRITOURISM EVENT IN SOUTHERN ILLINOIS: A CASE STUDY OF
THE NEIGHBORHOOD CO-OP GROCERY FALL FARM CRAWL

by

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A Research Paper

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In the fall of 2013, Neighborhood Co-op Grocery of Carbondale, IL hosted a Fall Farm Crawl to showcase the diversity and abundance of small family farms in southern Illinois. The event was the largest organized farm tour to take place in this region. A total of twenty farms spread throughout five counties participated in the self-guided one-day event. Two of the farms were USDA certified organic and the other farms focused on sustainable methods. Also included in the Fall Farm Crawl were two vineyards and wineries and one craft brewery; all of which featured local southern Illinois wines and ingredients.

The Fall Farm Crawl is an example of agritourism. Agritourism is a specific type of tourism that has been growing in the United States over the last decade (Tew and Barbieri 2012). Some studies explain that it is a subset of rural tourism (Phillip et al. 2010; Nilsson 2002). Agritourism attractions include pick-your-own-activities such as pumpkin patches; vineyards and wineries; as well as educational workshops. Some agritourism attractions are seasonal while others are permanent establishments. Several states have begun acknowledging agritourism through the establishment of agritourism trails.

In Illinois, agritourism has been suggested as a means to boost rural economies while satisfying the growing demand of urban and suburban populations to visit the countryside (Wicks and Merrett 2003). Southern Illinois particularly could benefit from agritourism in that it has lower employment rates and a lower median household income compared to the rest of the state (Flint and Gasteyer 2008). The diversity and abundance in food production along with an

impoverished economy makes it opportune for southern Illinois to tap into the benefits of agritourism.

Currently, there are several independent agritourism attractions operating in the southern Illinois region. The Fall Farm Crawl, however, was the first of its kind to collectively showcase these attractions while it also provided an opportunity for farmers to participate in a one-day event without the commitment of establishing a permanent agritourism operation. This paper presents a case study on how the Co-op Fall Farm Crawl was planned and organized.

Purpose of Study

Much of the literature on agritourism that exists today focuses on the phenomenon that happen within individual agritourism establishments rather than regional agritourism events, such as the Fall Farm Crawl. The results found in past agritourism studies can help identify themes that are seen across agritourism activities; however, characteristics vary regionally. At the time of this project, virtually no case studies on the planning of a regional agritourism event have been conducted in southern Illinois. In order to fully understand how a regional agritourism event is organized and brought to fruition, it is necessary that a case study such as this be completed.

Research Objectives

Two research objectives will guide this paper:

- (1) Identify key stakeholders and factors that contributed to the organization of the Fall Farm Crawl
- (2) Identify the key steps in organizing the Fall Farm Crawl and develop a timeline that reflects those key steps

The research objectives of this study will be carried out primarily through a literature review on agritourism and a collection of public data gathered on the Fall Farm Crawl.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Agritourism: An Introduction

The concept and practice of agritourism has been around longer than the term itself. People have participated in farm tours, pick-your-own activities, and other on-farm events throughout history (Wicks and Merrett 2003; Dane 2001). Farmers, state agricultural organizations, and other stakeholders have begun to recognize those activities and give them a title as a specific type of tourism. The growing popularity of agritourism comes at a time when small family farms are struggling with rising farm costs and growing international competition. (Schilling et al. 2012; Veeck et al. 2006). Agritourism is a means for farmers to make extra income while utilizing many of the resources they already have (Schilling et al. 2012); therefore, it has the ability to keep small family farms in business. Agritourism also satisfies the growing interest of urban tourists to visit rural landscapes (Thurston et al. 2002).

A hindrance to better understanding agritourism lies within the terminology itself. Definitions for agritourism vary greatly and similar titles, such as agrotourism or farm tourism, are used interchangeably (Barbieri and Mshenga 2008; Roberts and Hall 2001; Wall 2000). The problem with these inconsistencies is that it can develop confusion among farmers, tourists, academia, state legislators, and other stakeholders that might be interested in studying or supporting the idea (Arroyo et al. 2013). It is important to note, however, that a review of literature indicates that agritourism is indeed the dominating title used whether or not it is consistently the preferred title among stakeholders (Arroyo et al. 2013).

A review of recent literature has revealed efforts to better understand the characteristics of the phenomenon and therefore, establish an appropriate definition that would minimize

confusion amongst stakeholders (Flanigan et al. 2014; Philip et al. 2010). The University of Illinois Extension defines agritourism as “any business activity that brings the public to a farm or rural setting in an effort to market farm raised or produced products or the enjoyment of related outdoor activities.” (University of Illinois Extension 2014). Other definitions often include the words “working farm” (Barbieri and Mshenga 2008, 168). Furthermore, Arroyo et al. (2013) suggests that good definitions of agritourism include key words such as “agricultural setting,” “entertainment,” and “education.”

Agritourism has been studied from both the provider’s perspective (Tew and Barbieri 2012; Ollenburg and Buckley 2007; Sharpley and Vass 2006) and the visitor’s perspective (Nasers and Retallick 2012; Smith et al. 2010). More recently, Flanigan et al. (2014) and Arroyo et al. (2013) have studied agritourism from both the supply and demand sides of the industry. Less studied, however, is the conglomeration of agritourism into farm or agritourism trails. Similarly, most studies focus on agritourism as permanent establishments rather than seasonal or one-day events hosted to facilitate agritourism activity, such as the Co-op Farm Crawl.

Benefits

Farmers, tourists, and rural communities can all reap the benefits of agritourism. Several studies suggest that agritourism can be a sustainable practice (Barbieri 2013; McGehee 2009; Choo and Jamal 2009); it offers the potential for economic, social, and environmental benefits while farmers are able to use many of the resources they already have (Schilling et al. 2012) .

Economic

For farmers, agritourism presents the opportunity to gain extra income. Studies reflect varied results, however, when quantifying just how substantial the extra profits are. Tew and Barbieri (2012) found that in Missouri, 62% of agritourism operators do not gain farm income

directly from agritourism; however, it was found to increase their overall profits through cross-marketing. Similarly, Busby and Rendle (2000) found that profits made from farm tourism are minimal but the profits they do provide can create viability for the farm. Finally, a nationwide wide study by Barbieri, showed that 80.6% of agritourism operators in the United States increased their farm profits once they diversified with agritourism (2013). The differences among these studies are most likely due to several complex reasons including the motivations driving farmers. It is necessary to note that although economic goals are generally the most common associated with agritourism (Tew and Barbieri 2012; Ollenburg and Buckley 2007; McGehee and Kim 2004; Nickerson et al. 2001), not all farmers have economic motivations behind agritourism (Tew and Barbieri 2012) and therefore might run their businesses differently.

Agritourism also has the potential to produce economic benefits for the entire surrounding community. For example, Wicks and Merrett (2003) explain that agritourists might make the following expenditures: lodging, transportation, food and hospitality, retail, and recreation.

Social

For some farmers and their families, the social benefits of agritourism outweigh the economic benefits (Nickerson et al 2001). Farm succession, or the transfer of a family farm to the next generation (Mishra et al. 2010), is among these social benefits (Barbieri 2013; Ollenburg and Buckley 2007; Veeck et al. 2006; Fleischer and Tchetchik 2005). Farm succession is often a sustainable goal of not only agritourism, but in the larger context of rural tourism as well (Lane 1994). Brown et al. (1997) suggested that agritourism can encourage young family members to become more involved with the family business; while at the same time, farmers that engage in agritourism are 73.3% more likely to pass the business on to their offspring (Barbieri 2013).

Barbieri's study on the sustainability of agritourism compared with other farm entrepreneurial activities, determined that agritourism entrepreneurs were much more likely to preserve historic buildings and equipment on their farms compared to other entrepreneurial farms (2013). Keeping family farms in business can help preserve the rural landscape.

There are also social benefits that result from the farmer/tourist dynamic of agritourism. Many farmers take pride in sharing their knowledge and lifestyle with tourists and these may serve as the primary goals behind their agritourism operations (Burton 2004; Getz and Carlsen 2000). Schroeder (2004) found that relationships built between farmers and tourists were viewed as life enriching. The educational component of agritourism can play a significant role in the spreading of new ideas and farming methods (Jolly and Reynolds 2005).

Environmental

Extensive research has not yet been done on the connection between agritourism and its environmental benefits; however, Barbieri (2013) found that most agritourism operators practice some form of agricultural conservation whether it be in the form of integrated pest management or water conservation.

While agritourism can negatively impact the environment by increasing travel and pollution, it can also provide benefits such as increasing awareness about sustainable farming. Choo and Jamal (2009) suggested that agritourism can act as a facilitator for sustainable agriculture in their study that focused on organic farm tourism.

Challenges and Obstacles

Sharpley and Vass (2006) identified four common challenges facing farmers who wish to diversify with agritourism. These factors include: location, investment, marketing, and quality. Location can determine the success of agritourism because not all locations are easily accessible

to tourists. Also, the physical characteristics of the farm or surrounding areas may make some farms more appealing than others (Sharpley and Vass 2006). The physical site of the tourist attraction is the core of the tourism product; its appeal can be “enhanced through service and hospitality” (Forbord et al. 2012 896; Smith 1994). Similarly, tourists often wish for a complete tourism package when visiting a rural tourism establishment (Wilson et al. 2001). Appropriate accommodations, places to eat, and other recreational opportunities outside of the agritourism attraction itself, are all important components within a location.

Although agritourism often incorporates the use of resources that already exist on the farm (Schilling et al. 2012), it can still be seen as a financial investment depending on the goals of the individual farmer. For example, a farmer may require building new facilities, restoring old buildings, or purchasing better insurance. Without the support of local government through legislation, subsidies, or grants, agritourism can be a real challenge for some farmers who are struggling economically to begin with (Sharpley and Vass 2006; Fleischer and Felsenstein 2000).

Insurance can particularly be a challenge for farmers and liability is a concern if their visitors injure themselves (Centner 2010). In fact, a study on agritourism in Pennsylvania indicated that high insurance and liability risks were the biggest difficulties for agritourism operators (Centner 2010; Ryan et al. 2006). Several states and counties across the United States are adopting statutes which limit the liability for farmers who wish to practice agritourism (Centner 2010). Along with easing liability, local governments are also responsible for the permitting process and establishing zoning codes; these are major obstacles for agritourism operators because they are often found to be confusing and expensive (Keith et al. 2003).

Marketing an agritourism business is also a challenge for many farmers as they might not have access to necessary skills or resources (Sharpley and Vass 2006; Embacher 1994). DMOs,

or destination marketing organizations, may include “local, regional and state convention and visitor bureaus; tourism development authorities; offices of travel and tourism, and chambers and commerce.” (McGehee 2009 112). DMOs can play an important role in connecting farmers with the necessary marketing resources they need. McGehee suggests that a collaborative relationship between farmers and DMOs and one in which the characteristics of agritourists are well understood, is an indicator for a successful marketing strategy (2009).

Another factor that might be a challenge for some farmers is the desire and ability to work well with tourists. The interactions between farmers and tourists often determine the satisfaction level of the tourist and their desire to revisit the establishment (Choo and Petrick 2014). Wicks and Merrett (2003) suggest that this is a critical step when planning for agritourism and that hiring an employee that is well-suited for particular tasks can help overcome this obstacle. The hiring of outside employees can also benefit the local community.

The fourth common challenge that Sharpley and Vass (2006) identified was the quality of the products and services offered through the agritourism operation. The location of the attraction, the products offered, and the level of service can all determine the quality of the agritourism experience.

Factors for Success

A study conducted on rural tourism in Illinois, summarizes 10 factors of success which can also be associated with agritourism since agritourism has been considered a subset of rural tourism (Phillip et al. 2010; Nilsson 2002). Wilson et al. (2001) identified the 10 factors as follows:

- (1) A complete tourism package
- (2) Good community leadership

- (3) Support and participation of local government
- (4) Sufficient funds for tourism development
- (5) Strategic planning
- (6) Coordination and cooperation between businesspersons and local leadership
- (7) Coordination and cooperation between rural tourism entrepreneurs
- (8) Information and technical assistance for tourism development and promotion
- (9) Good convention and visitors bureaus
- (10) Wide spread community support for tourism

This study was conducted by holding focus groups throughout Illinois with stakeholders involved with rural tourism. The study revealed the importance of community when organizing rural tourism. The study suggests that a single agritourism operation can be successful by itself for only so long before further support and organization is required. In order to fully succeed, community involvement is necessary. Individual businesses, visitor centers, and local governments all play important roles in assisting agritourism operators with overcoming some of the challenges discussed thus far.

Particularly relevant to the case study of the Co-op Farm Crawl is a publication that was designed to assist agritourism stakeholders develop a regional agritourism program. Kuehn et al. (2000) presented a series of factors to consider when planning and organizing such an event. Similar to the Illinois rural tourism success factors, this publication stresses the importance of involving individuals or organizations outside of the agritourism operation itself. These individuals or organizations might include Cooperative Extension or tourism bureaus and they can create somewhat of a planning committee for the event. A summary of the factors suggested to be considered by Kuehn et al. (2000), includes the following:

- (1) Identify the region
- (2) Identify the factors and organizations that are to be involved and assign relevant tasks to each
- (3) Hold a planning session
- (4) Identify and acknowledge the concerns of stakeholders
- (5) Identify the type of tourist that is to be attracted
- (6) Develop goals for the event
- (7) Develop objectives for the event (how to reach those goals)
- (8) Conduct an inventory of resources in the region both agricultural related (i.e. the agritourism attractions, farmers' markets, and farm stands) and non-agricultural. (i.e. rest stops, parking areas, historical sites)
- (9) Create a theme for the event
- (10) Develop an action plan consisting of dates for tasks to be completed by
- (11) Promote the event
- (12) Evaluate the event

To summarize, both studies on regional tourism events have showed the importance of strategic planning through good leadership and the utilization and understanding of local resources. Furthermore, Kuehn et al. (200) also stresses the importance of understanding the tourist and conducting an evaluation after the event occurs.

Common Stakeholders

Farmers and Farm Families

Several stakeholders concerned with agritourism are identified throughout the literature. Perhaps the most obvious stakeholders are farmers and their families. Farmers are concerned

with agritourism due to any number of the benefits discussed thus far, including: increasing profits or farm viability; and social benefits such as sharing their knowledge and lifestyle with tourists. Even if farmers are not involved with agritourism directly, they are still likely to have a concern with agritourism because it can indirectly affect them by having an impact on local markets.

Tourists

The agritourist is not as well understood as the farmer in agritourism (Flanigan et al. 2014). To begin understanding the agritourist, it first might be helpful to understand the basic motivations of tourists in general. Tourists are typically seeking to celebrate a special occasion; explore or learn; improve health and well-being; rest and relax; or enhance relationships (Wicks and Merrett 2003; Shaw and Williams 1994). Several of these desires can be met with agritourism.

A study by Nasers and Retallick (2012) on agritourists in Iowa, revealed that tourists are often unfamiliar with the terminology of agritourism and therefore, they might unknowingly participate in agritourism. For example, 66.34% of the Iowa study participants acknowledged that they had participated at a pick-your-own fruit or vegetable establishment but not all of those participants acknowledged that it was agritourism.

Furthermore, there is an issue of identifying local from non-local tourists. Smith et al. (2010) conducted a study on wine trail tourism in southern Illinois. The study found that the motivations behind local wine visitors differed from wine tourists. Results of the study found that outside of visiting the wineries themselves, wine tourists placed higher levels of importance on visiting national parks and fine dining, whereas local wine visitors placed higher levels of importance on local dining, sightseeing, and photography. Regional case studies such as this can

be beneficial in better understanding the tourist demographic in certain areas. As the authors suggest, the study can also help determine what businesses and/or attractions might best be clustered together to offer a complete tourist package (Smith et al. 2010).

Community Members and Businesses

As discussed earlier, the benefits of agritourism can spread outside of the agritourism operation itself. Hotel owners, business owners, and the surrounding environment are also agritourism stakeholders. Community residents might be affected by agritourism in negative ways such as noise pollution or higher traffic volumes; however, they might also be affected positively by having easy access to enjoyable agritourism activities, access to more jobs, and the overall economic gain within communities which has been seen with many studies in the past (Barbieri 2013; Barbieri 2009; Che et al. 2005; Reeder and Brown 2005; Saxena et al. 2007; Veeck et al. 2006; Wicks and Merrett 2003).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Addressing Research Objectives

The first research objective states:

1. Identify key stakeholders and factors that contributed to the organization of the Co-op Fall Farm Crawl.

This objective was met by gathering information about the Co-op Fall Farm Crawl from the event's program guide, the Co-op's Outreach and Owner Services Coordinator, and public data from tourism offices. Based on the findings from the literature review, the information was then analyzed accordingly. Lastly, the information was organized and presented in tables and discussed.

The second research objective states:

2. Identify the key steps in organizing the Co-op Fall Farm Crawl and develop a timeline that reflects those key steps.

This research objective was met by utilizing the information gathered from the first research objective and then referencing the literature review to identify the key steps through which the Fall Farm Crawl was developed. Key dates were confirmed with the Neighborhood Co-op Grocery's Outreach and Owner Services Coordinator when necessary. Lastly, a timeline reflecting those key dates was developed and discussed.

Study Area

The Fall Farm Crawl was held across five counties in southern Illinois; the five counties include: Jackson, Williamson, Union, Johnson, and Pulaski. Carbondale, IL, located in Jackson County, is the largest city in the study area with a population of approximately 26,000 people (United States Census 2012). The host for the Fall Farm Crawl, Neighborhood Co-op Grocery, is located in Carbondale.

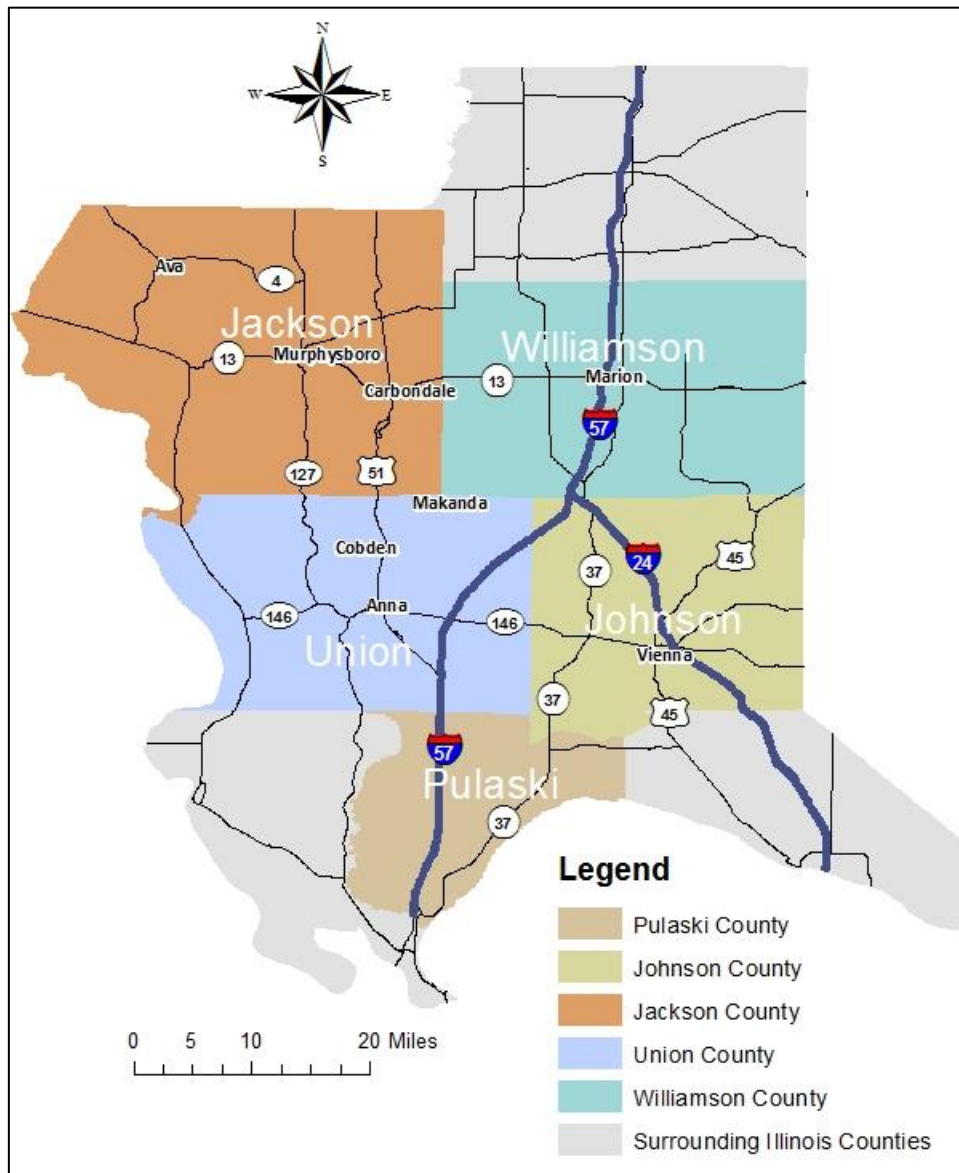


Figure 1. Map of Study Area

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the two research objectives that guided this project. The first research objective reveals a collection of key stakeholders and factors that contributed to the organization of the Co-op Fall Farm Crawl. The key stakeholders and factors include: Neighborhood Co-op Grocery; farms and businesses; and tourists. **Table 2** summarizes the key stakeholders and factors that make up the findings of the first research objective.

The second research objective was to “identify the key steps in organizing the Co-op Fall Farm Crawl and develop a timeline that reflects those key steps.” The findings of this research objective reveal that the planning of the Co-op Fall Farm Crawl was found to be organized in four phases (**Figure 3**); the four phases include: the initial idea; planning and design; promotion; and the event. Finally, a timeline was developed to reflect the order in which key steps were carried out during the organizing of the event (**Table 3**).

Research Objective One Findings

Key Stakeholders and Factors

Neighborhood Co-op Grocery

Neighborhood Co-op Grocery in Carbondale, IL was the host for the Fall Farm Crawl. Specifically, the Outreach and Owner Services Coordinator for the Co-op, was the primary event creator and organizer. The Co-op has organized several tours in the past including the Foodie Farm Tour of 2012, which featured three farms and a winery in southern Illinois. During the planning of the Fall Farm Crawl, the Outreach and Owner Services Coordinator worked closely with farmers; the Co-op’s Brand Development Manager; local businesses and regional and local tourism offices.

The Co-op played several significant roles within the planning of the Fall Farm Crawl. These roles included providing insurance for all participating farms and business; acting as the liaison between farmers and tourists prior to the event; designing and funding the event program guide; designing and funding event t-shirts; designing and funding directional markers on the tour route; promotion of the event through flyers, radio, letters to state representatives, local newspapers, and local tourism offices. Most importantly, the Co-op's Outreach and Owner services Coordinator had the desire and knowledge necessary to create the event.

Farmers and Businesses

Seventeen farms, two wineries, and one craft brewery participated in the Fall Farm Crawl (**Table 1**). As Table 1 shows, a variety of goods and services were included in the tour. The farms featured sustainably grown produce including two USDA Certified Organic Farms; one farm also serves as a Bed and Breakfast. All of the farms and business featured local southern Illinois crops and ingredients.

Table 1. Fall Farm Crawl Farms and Businesses

Name	Type of Operation
1. Alto Vineyards and Winery	Vineyard and winery featuring southern Illinois wines
2. All Seasons Farm	USDA Certified Organic fruits, vegetables, and herbs; small scale biointensive practices
3. Country Sprout Organics	USDA Certified Organic fruits and vegetables
4. Lick Creek Beef	Pasture-fed and finished cattle
5. Greenridge Farm	Sustainably grown vegetables and flowers
6. Dayempur Herb Farm	Sustainably grown fruits, herbs, and vegetables; permaculture
7. Farm to Fork Farm	Southern Illinois University Department of Agriculture student-run vegetable farm
8. LOGIC Farm	Southern Illinois University student-run sustainable vegetable farm
9. Frontwards Farm	Sustainable fruits and vegetables; pastured eggs and poultry
10. Flyway Family Farm	Sustainable fruits and vegetables

11. Hollow Pumpkin Farm	Sustainable fruits and vegetables
12. Mulberry Hill Farm	Sustainable fruits and vegetable farm
13. Mustard Seed Sowers	Sustainable vegetable and educational farm
14. Owl Creek Vineyard	Vineyard and winery; locally grown hard cider
15. La Colina Linda	Sustainable fruits and vegetables; Bed and Breakfast
16. River to River Farm	Sustainable fruits and vegetables
17. Roundabout Farm	Sustainable fruits and vegetables
18. Scratch Brewery	Farm and microbrewery with locally sourced ingredients
19. Spring Valley Farm	Compound of family farms and a restaurant
20. Windy Hill Hops	Sustainable hops farm

The operations were spread across five counties in southern Illinois, including Jackson, Williamson, Union, Johnson, and Pulaski (**Figure 2**). The majority of farms and operations are located in the counties of Jackson and Union near the towns of Carbondale, Cobden, and Makanda.

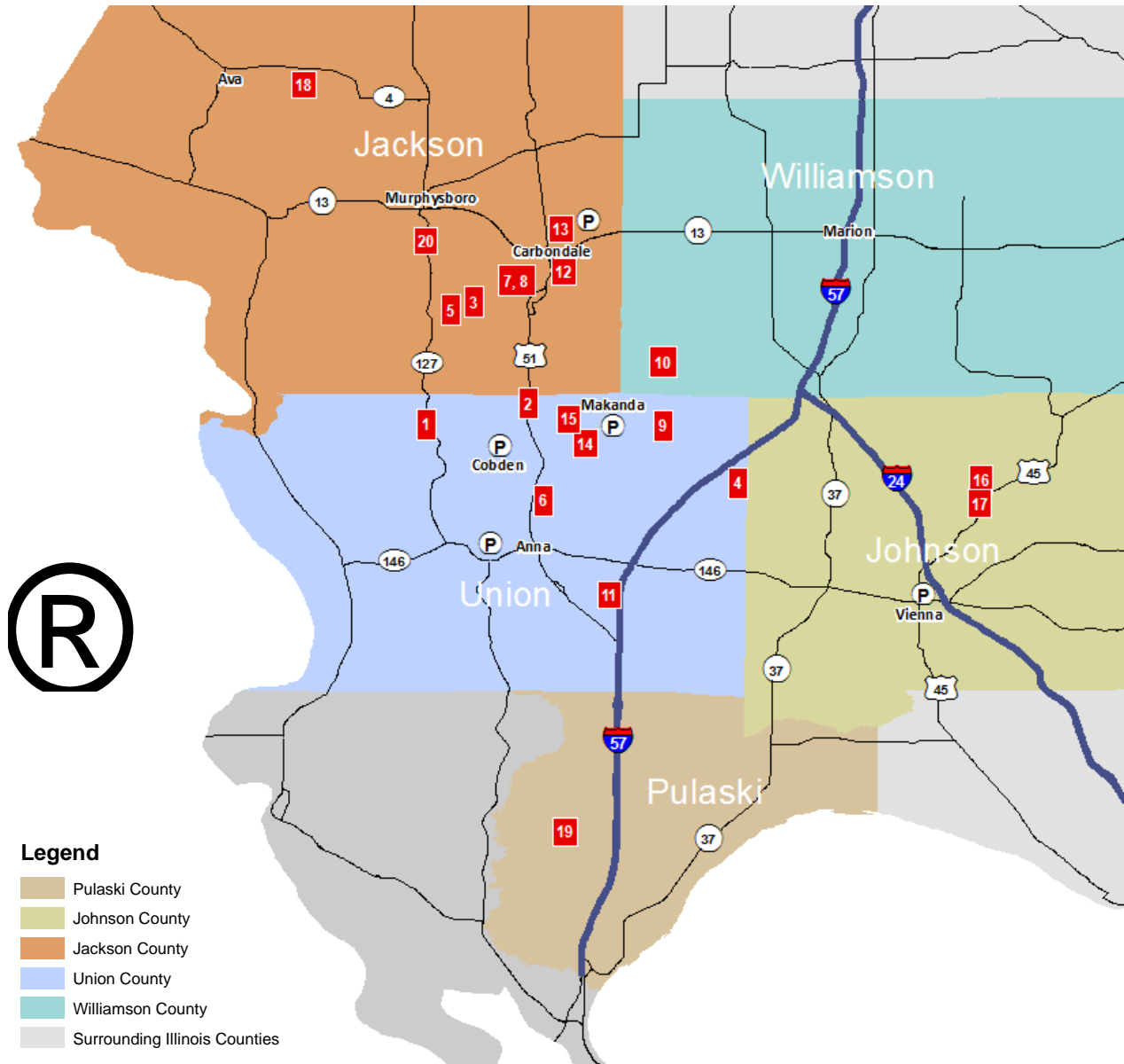


Figure 2. Map of Farms and Businesses

The farmers and businesses were key stakeholders in the Farm Crawl and the Fall Farm Crawl would not have been possible without them. The farmers and business owners influenced the planning of the Farm Crawl primarily during the application process; they were encouraged to voice their concerns and provide details as to how their farm or business would be represented in the Farm Crawl guide. The wineries and brewery had normal business hours during the

duration of the Farm Crawl, 1-6pm, while the other farmers and their families adjusted their schedules to be available during tour hours. Whenever possible, accommodations for tourists to use bathrooms and/or hand washing facilities were made.

Tourists

A total of 142 tourists registered for the Farm Crawl prior to the day of the event. It is estimated that more tourists actually participated in the tour, however, due to carpooling and un-registered attendees. Registration was completed through the Co-op's website. Co-op owners received a discounted price of \$12 and non-owners paid \$15. Farm Crawl t-shirts were provided to those who registered for the event early. The addresses of the tourists were not collected during the registration process so it is not possible to determine where tourists were travelling from, however the Co-op estimated that the majority of tourists were local tourists.

On the day of the event, tourists referred to the program guide to determine which farms and businesses they wanted to visit. Tourists were encouraged to visit as many farms as they wanted between the hours of 1 and 6pm. It is estimated that the majority of tourists travelled in small groups and visited two to three farms. Farms and businesses provided group tours as their visitors arrived.

Summary of Key Stakeholders and Factors

Table 2 reflects the key stakeholders and factors which were responsible for the development of the Farm Crawl.

Table 2. Key Stakeholders and Factors

Key Stakeholders	Key Factors
Neighborhood Co-op Grocery	Leadership role for event; Event promotion; Program guide design and funding
Neighborhood Co-op Outreach and Owner Services Coordinator	Primary event creator and organizer; Agritourism knowledge and experience; Local food and resources knowledge
Statewide and regional tourism offices	Event promotion
Local design and printing company	T-shirt production
Tourists	Successful turn-out and generally positive feedback (word-of-mouth); Funds gained from registration fees assisted with insurance coverage
Farmers and Businesses	Diverse list of farms and attractions for tourists to choose from; accommodations for tourists

Research Objective Two Findings

The second research objective entailed developing a timeline that reflects the organizational components of the Fall Farm Crawl. This objective was met by identifying the key steps through which the event was organized. It took approximately six months to plan and carry out the Farm Crawl. The timeframe through which the planning occurred can be organized into four main phases (**Figure 3**). **Table 3** includes a timeline of the key steps included in the development of the Farm Crawl.

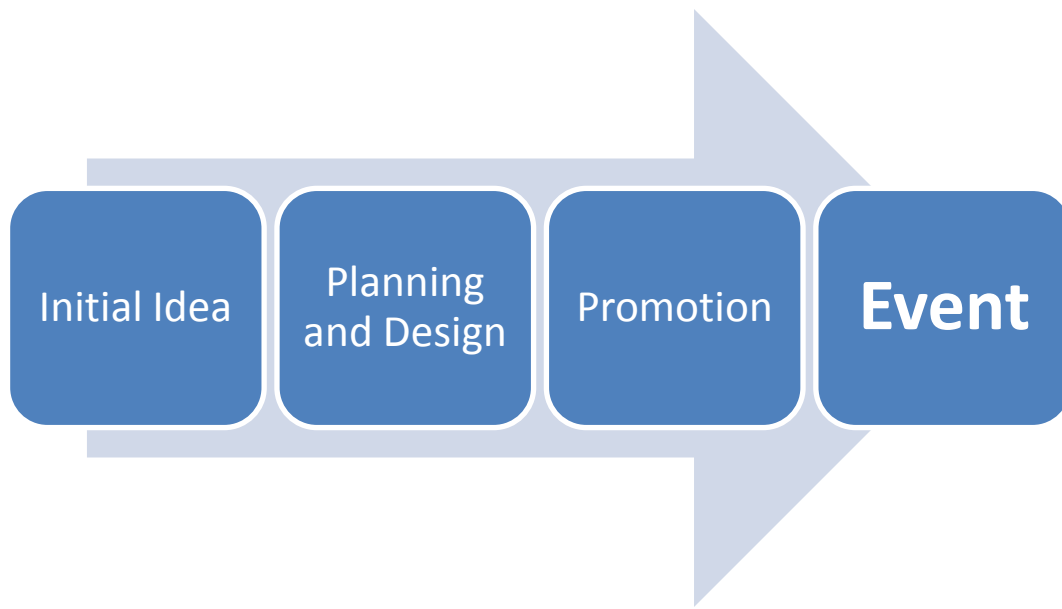


Figure 3. Phases in the Development of the Fall Farm Crawl

Phase 1: Initial Idea

- Brainstorming the title of the event
- Considering goals
- Contacting farmers and businesses
- Holding initial meetings with stakeholders

Phase 2: Planning and Design

- Selecting the date for event
- Designing and distributing applications for farms and businesses
- Designing program guide
- T-shirt design
- Securing insurance
- Programing on-line registration for tourists

Phase 3: Promotion

- Contacting tourism offices
- Composing letters to state representatives
- Distributing program guide

Phase 4: Event

- Providing directions and accommodating tourists when needed

Table 3. Timeline of Key Steps in the Development of the Farm Crawl

Component	When Completed
Farmers and business were contacted via phone to establish initial interest in event	Spring and Summer 2013
Applications for farmers and businesses were designed	May 2013 (4 months prior)
Applications were distributed via e-mail or in-person at farmers' market	Week of June 17 th 2013 (3 months prior)
Follow-up phone calls for applications not yet received	Completed week of July 15 th (2 months prior)
Letters to state representatives were written and distributed	Completed week of July 15 th (2 months prior)
T-shirts were produced by local printing and design company	August 5 th 2013 (7 weeks prior)
Program guide design completed	August 7 th , 2013 (6 weeks prior)
Tourism offices were contacted about event promotion	August 2013 (1 month prior)
Program guides are printed by on-line printing company and distributed	September 3 rd , 2013 (2 weeks prior)
Farm Crawl	September 22, 2013, 1-6pm

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

This paper presented findings from a case study on the Co-op Fall Farm Crawl. The focus of this study was based on the planning process of this event. Two research objectives guided this paper as key components within the planning phase for the event were presented in the findings section of this paper. The key components of planning a regional agritourism event can be organized into three main categories: Leadership (i.e. Neighborhood Co-op Grocery), supply (i.e. farms and businesses), and demand (tourists). The following discussion summarizes those key components with recommendations for future events also included within the discussion. Lastly, the timeline in which the event was developed is discussed and final recommendations are presented in a table.

Leadership

Leadership is a key component of planning a regional agritourism event. Leaders can kick start an idea, contribute knowledge and enthusiasm, and provide the necessary resources for marketing and promotion. Neighborhood Co-op Grocery provided the leadership that was required for organizing the Fall Farm Crawl. Employees with the Co-op contributed their knowledge and expertise on agritourism and the southern Illinois farming community while planning this event. Other examples of possible leaders include: tourism offices, local government, and community groups (Wilson et al. 2001). Leaders might work collaboratively, with each individual or group contributing something towards the planning of the event. It is also important for the farmers and businesses participating in the event to have a voice within the planning process.

Supply

The supply component to be considered when planning a regional agritourism event, is comprised of the farms and businesses featured and/or involved with the event. The Fall Farm Crawl offered a variety of farms and businesses through which tourists could experience a unique self-guided tour. A common theme throughout agritourism literature suggests that a tourism package is found to be appealing for tourists (Smith et al. 2010; Wilson et al. 2001). Accommodations for out-of-area guests, restaurants, or any other tourist activities supplies tourists with reasons to stay longer in the area, and therefore, potentially spend more money. In the case of southern Illinois, the Shawnee National Forest and state parks offer visitors additional opportunities when visiting this unique region.

Also included in the supply component are the region's local businesses that contribute to the organization of the event. For instance, the Fall Farm Crawl utilized local businesses to produce the event t-shirt and insurance was purchased through a local company in southern Illinois. Also, picnic areas at local parks were indicated on the event map where tourists could relax and eat food directly purchased from the farms they visited.

Demand

Tourists are a key component to consider when organizing a regional agritourism event. Literature suggests that there is an increasing demand for agritourism; however, the agritourist is not well understood (Flanigan et al. 2014). This is partially due to the fact that tourists often might not be aware that what they are participating in is considered agritourism (Nasers and Retallick 2012). Because of this, acknowledging an event as agritourism during promotion, might help clear some confusion.

In order to provide relevant marketing and promotion, agritourists need to be better understood. For future events, it would be beneficial to record where tourists are coming from and their general demographic. Requesting feedback from the tourists would also be helpful for future event planners. Kuehn et al. (2000) explain that the evaluation of a regional agritourism event is crucial so that planners can understand if their goals for the event were met.

Timeline

The total length of time in which it took to organize and carry out the Fall Farm Crawl was approximately six months. The four phases in the development of the event included: (1) Initial idea, (2) Planning and Design, (3) Promotion, and (4) the Event. The first phase of planning consisted of brainstorming important ideas for the event such as an event title and the main goals for the event. Considering the findings of this project, it is also recommended that within this phase, an inventory of resources within the region be made so that local resources can be utilized appropriately and local attractions can be clustered together. Planning sessions with stakeholders would also take place during this phase and it is also important to start considering what type of tourists the event will attract.

The second phase consists of planning and design; it was the most time consuming phase during the planning of the Fall Farm Crawl. When planning similar events, it would be beneficial to allow this phase a considerable length of time. Included in the second phase, is the design of promotional materials; design and distribution of applications; and securing insurance for the event. Establishing the list of farms and businesses that participate in the event can be a long process as some do not submit applications by deadlines. Furthermore, some farms and businesses change their minds about participating in the event and the promotional materials must then be updated accordingly.

The third phase of event development consists of promoting the event. There are several outlets to promote regional agritourism events. In the case of the Fall Farm Crawl, state representatives were contacted; the Owner and Outreach Services Coordinator spoke on a local radio station about the event; program guides were distributed at Neighborhood Co-op Grocery; and statewide and regional tourism offices advertised the event.

Finally, the fourth phase of event development consists of the event itself. During the time that the event is taking place, it is important that event planners or volunteers are available to answer questions and/or provide directions when needed.

The findings of this project suggest that a fifth phase consisting of event evaluation also be included in the development of a regional agritourism event. Kuehn et al (2000) explain that the evaluation of an event is crucial in understanding if goals have been reached.

Table 4. Summary of Recommendations

Key General Recommendations	Recommendations for Fall Farm Crawl
Leadership Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighborhood Co-op Grocery to work with governmental agencies or tourism bureaus during initial idea and planning phases • Organize tasks to be done and coordinate who will complete them • Identify goals of each leader
Clustering of Attractions and Tourism Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create inventory of additional attractions that might compliment event (i.e. restaurants offering local cuisine) • Include overnight accommodations on map • Include Shawnee National Forest and other tourist attractions on map • Suggest unique routes for tourists to take
Understand Tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep record of where tourists are originating from and their general demographic information • Request feedback on level of satisfaction during event • Quantify spending • Market and promote accordingly
Event Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate whether goals of event have been achieved • Document recommendations for future events

Conclusion

Although agritourism has been practiced in southern Illinois for quite some time, the Fall Farm Crawl hosted by Neighborhood Co-op Grocery was the first event in the region to collectively showcase small family farms, wineries and one brewery; all of which featured crops and ingredients unique to the region. Some of the participants in the tour practice agritourism year-round or seasonally; while for others, the Fall Farm Crawl was an opportunity for those farms and businesses to partake in a one-day agritourism event.

After reviewing the findings of this research project, it is evident that the Fall Farm Crawl was made possible through the collaboration of several important components. These components are unique to the southern Illinois region in many ways; however, the findings of this study highlighted several ideas and recommendations that can be applied to the planning of similar events in other regions.

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