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Carolyn Hricko
University of Vermont

Katie Robertson
University of Vermont

Nick Rose
University of Vermont

Meredith T. Niles
University of Vermont

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Room to Grow: Agritourism Opportunities in Vermont Agriculture and Food System Plan: 2020 (Part One)

Carolyn Hricko¹, Katie Robertson¹, Nick Rose¹, Meredith T. Niles²

1. *The University of Vermont, Food Systems Graduate Program*

2. *The University of Vermont, Department of Nutrition & Food Sciences, Food Systems Program*

Key Findings

This analysis demonstrates that there is significant unrealized potential to advance agritourism within the *Vermont Agriculture and Food System Plan: 2020 (Part One)*¹ strategic plan and that applying an agritourism lens allows for the identification of a wide range of additional opportunities that can support Vermont farmers and agritourism goals. While agritourism is recognized in the report with a dedicated issue brief, this subsector of Vermont agriculture is otherwise largely overlooked in the other opportunities identified in Vermont's strategic plan, particularly for the agritourism activities of hospitality, recreation, and entertainment. While direct-to-consumer sales, agricultural education, and farm diversification were referenced within the strategic plan's opportunities, there is substantial room for increased attention to these activities as well.

- 3/22 (14%) of the briefs explicitly mention agritourism activities within their respective opportunities sections (Apples, Dairy, and Direct Markets)
- 18/22 (82%) of the briefs have the potential to incorporate agritourism, or could do so to a greater extent, according to our analysis
- 6/157 (4%) of all opportunities across all briefs are explicitly related to agritourism, while 27/157 (17%) are implicitly related to agritourism (Table 1)
- We identify 57 potential but overlooked agritourism opportunities across the report briefs and agritourism categories (Table 1)
- Hospitality, recreation, and entertainment activities are absent from the opportunities (Table 1)
- Farm diversification, recreation and agricultural education hold the greatest potential for future agritourism growth and investment (Table 1)

Background

Agritourism is an important and growing part of Vermont's agricultural economy and community, accounting for an estimated \$51.7 million in Vermont farm income in 2017.² This analysis considers how agritourism is represented and highlighted within the strategic plan report, specifically across the many briefs and beyond the specific agritourism brief. The aim of this analysis is to identify shared agritourism opportunities across the product, market and issue briefs and highlight areas where the greatest impact for agritourism can be achieved. We use six categories of agritourism activities (direct-to-consumer sales, agricultural education, hospitality, recreation, entertainment, and farm diversification)

¹ Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, and Farm to Plate Network. (2020). *Vermont Agriculture and Food System Plan: 2020 (Part One)*. agriculture.vermont.gov/administration/annual-report

² 2017 Census of Agriculture, Volume 1, Geographic Area Series Part 45, Vermont, State and County Data, United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, (Table 7) 17 (Apr2019)
https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Vermont/vtv1.pdf.

as a framework to assess references to agritourism in the 22 briefs and 157 opportunities in the report (Table 1). References are considered explicit if the agritourism category, or key activity in the category, are mentioned in the opportunity, and implicit if the reference is related to or supportive of an agritourism category or key activity, but not explicitly mentioned. The potential for additional agritourism opportunities are also considered for each brief.

Methods

Opportunities within the 22 product, market and issue briefs³ in the *Vermont Agriculture and Food System Plan: 2020 (Part One)* strategic plan report were reviewed for references, both explicit and implicit, to agritourism. These references were categorized according to the framing of agritourism activities on page 85 of the report: direct-to-consumer sales of local food, agricultural education, hospitality, recreation, and entertainment. Farm diversification was also included as a category as it is described as a core component of agritourism in the report. Explicit references to agritourism were determined to be statements that included the agritourism category name (i.e., direct-to-consumer, agricultural education) and/or key activities (i.e., pick your own, on-farm workshop), or synonyms for these names or activities. Implicit references to agritourism were identified as references that could be interpreted as being related to or supportive of the agritourism categories and/or key activities. The number of opportunities with explicit and implicit references to agritourism, and the brief in which they were listed, were tracked within a spreadsheet. Opportunities deemed to reference agritourism were identified as either explicit or implicit (not both), and were assigned to a single category of agritourism.

The 22 product, market, and issue briefs were also reviewed for potential but currently unrecognized opportunities to support agritourism for each of the six agritourism categories described above. These potential opportunities were also tracked and tabulated within the spreadsheet referenced above. Potential opportunities were determined by reviewers based on their experience with agritourism and Vermont farming. Each brief topic could have up to one potential opportunity identified for each category of agritourism, except for categories that were explicitly or implicitly referenced by an opportunity in the brief. To further inform this analysis and support future analyses, all opportunities from the report were tabulated and organized in an additional spreadsheet.

The information compiled in these spreadsheets was used to determine the number and percent of briefs that did and did not reference agritourism, or could do so to a greater extent. The number and percent of opportunities (excluding the agritourism brief opportunities) that explicitly and implicitly reference agritourism were also calculated based on the data in the spreadsheets. Potential opportunities were also tabulated and summarized. Trends in the type of agritourism activities referenced or missing in the reports were also assessed.

We developed an infographic to communicate the results of our analysis in a visual manner using the web-based graphic design platform Canva (Appendix 1). The infographic highlights the specific categories of agritourism with the most potential to support the Vermont agriculture and food systems strategic plan.

Summary

Our analysis reveals that applying an agritourism lens across the strategic plan can help identify shared opportunities across product, market and issues briefs and highlight areas where the greatest impacts could be achieved. While the *Vermont Agriculture and Food System Plan: 2020 (Part One)* strategic plan addresses agritourism through a dedicated brief, this analysis demonstrates that there is

³ The Agritourism Brief and the opportunities contained within were not reviewed or included in the analysis given that this topic was selected as the lens through which to view the other briefs contained in the report. With the agritourism brief, there are a total of 23 briefs, and 162 opportunities.

significant, currently unrealized potential for simultaneously advancing agritourism as well as multiple other sectors of Vermont agriculture by focusing on the opportunities with existing and potential overlaps with agritourism.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Vermont House Agriculture Committee chair, Carolyn Patridge, and her fellow representatives, Ellen Kahler from Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund (VSJF), Abbey Willard from Agricultural Development Division, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAF), and our Food Systems Science and Food Policy colleagues for their inputs and advice.

Supplementary Materials

Table 1. Opportunity Overlaps with Agritourism

Appendix 1. Room to Grow Infographic

Table 1. Opportunity Overlaps with Agritourism

Agritourism Category	Explicit Overlaps	Implicit Overlap	Potential Overlap
Direct-to-Consumer Sales	5	21	4
Agricultural Education	0	6	10
Hospitality	0	0	8
Recreation	0	0	9
Entertainment	0	0	12
Farm Diversification	1	0	14
Total	6	27	57

Opportunities in the strategic plan report deemed to make an explicit or implicit reference to agritourism (see methods below) were categorized by type of agritourism activity. Potential but currently unrecognized overlaps with each agritourism category were identified for each product, market, and issue brief.

Room to Grow:

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Agritourism – providing education, hospitality, entertainment, recreation, and direct sales opportunities on farms – has the potential to support farmers, cultivate community, and invigorate the Vermont economy.



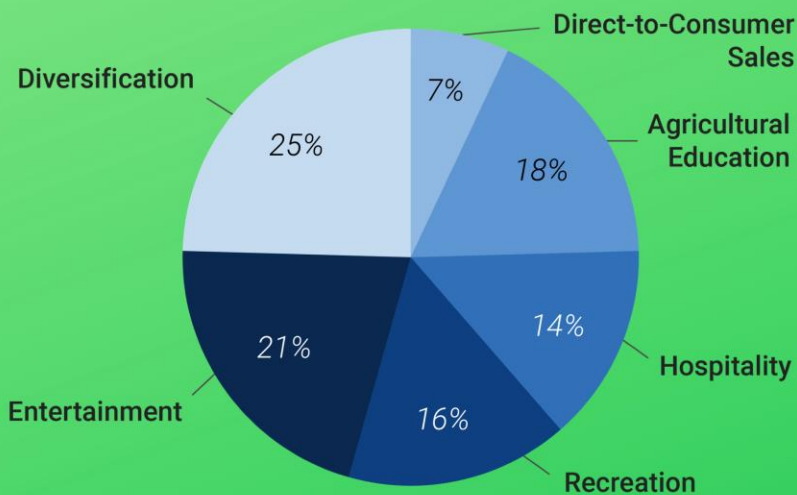
82%

18 out of 22 of the briefs have potential to incorporate agritourism

14%

3 out of the 22 briefs explicitly mention agritourism (apples, dairy and direct markets)

Potential but currently overlooked agritourism opportunities:



FARM STANDS, FARMERS MARKETS



WORKSHOPS, SCHOOL VISITS



OVERNIGHT FARM STAYS



HIKING TRAILS, HORSE RIDES



FESTIVALS