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Uncovering Success Attributes for the Direct Farmers Markets and Agritourism: Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States

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Despite the many advantages that come with direct farmers' markets/agri-tourism, issues of capacity utilization require strategic thinking on part of the operators. What can the operators do differently to attract more diverse patronage? Factor, cluster, and regression analyses were applied on a 2010 survey of consumers from Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania visiting agri-tourism operations and shopped at direct (farmer-to-consumer) markets. Results from the analyses show that bundling of farmers' markets activities/site attributes is a workable business strategy. Implementing the strategy will spur diverse and steady patronage beyond the traditional fresh produce and value added products. Patronage to farmers' markets/ agritourism sites may be broken down into five distinct dimensions/experiences: learning, naturalist, purchasing, leisurely, and entertainment experiences. Information on the experiences was subjected to cluster analysis yielding four consumer market segments: (1) consumers with a strong affection with the rural scenery, (2) a segment interested in knowing more about agriculture, (3) consumers who visit just to buy the farmers' produce and value added products, and (4) a group of consumers who visit to connect and have fun.

Segmentation/customer profiling stands out as a valuable piece of information that farmers' markets/agritourism business operators could use in positioning themselves better for the future. The business operators now know who their customers are and what it takes to attract them. The regression results show that a number of socio economic variables are related with the patronage experience. The study finds that there is potential for generating activity year round by bundling attributes/activities to tap on a wider market beyond traditional fresh produce buyers.