Minnesota Agri-tourism: Status and Interest
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Introduction & Purpose
Agri-tourism is defined as a set of activities that occurs when people link travel with the products, services, & experiences of agriculture. Examples of agri-tourism include, but are not limited to, farm stays, hay rides, wine trails, farm tours, & farm festivals. Agri-tourism can increase farm revenue, lead to a more diversified business, & stimulate local economies.

In 2009, the University of MN Tourism Center, in partnership with Renewing the Countryside, the MN Institute for Sustainable Agriculture & the MN Grown program of the MN Department of Agriculture conducted a survey of MN farms to learn about agri-tourism businesses, activities, & opportunities. The information gained from the survey is designed to help the University of MN Tourism Center & its partner organizations provide better educational & marketing opportunities for agri-tourism in MN.

Methods
Sample & Instrument
Members & individuals belonging to partner or cooperating organizations’ mail lists.

610 respondents of 2247 surveyed (27.2% response rate)
Respondents relationship with farm, agri-tourism activities, agri-tourism operation, customers, marketing, & demographics were queried.

Data Collection
Respondents with email addresses were sent an electronic survey while respondents without email addresses were sent a paper copy of the survey.

Results
Current Agri-tourism Activities
28.9% Currently have agri-tourism activities
31.5% Do not have agri-tourism, but are considering adding it in the next 5 yrs
39.6% Do not have agri-tourism & are not interested in adding it in next 5 yrs

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Discussion
The most frequently offered types of agri-tourism activities include farm tours, fruits/vegetables, & animals. While these activities are frequently offered as ways to supplement or diversify income, a variety of ‘other’ motivations abound such as education, for the fun of it, & community involvement. These motivations may be just as important to agri-tourism businesses as the economic incentives. They also indicate a greater emphasis on social sustainability rather than purely economic profitability.

Not surprisingly, the most difficult issue related to agri-tourism is time. While joint marketing associations & educational information may help decrease this time commitment, interested parties should understand the time requirements necessary for agri-tourism. Advertising & liability concerns are other major constraints. Again, a joint marketing program may help defray advertising costs. Potential businesses will have to weight their benefits with potential liability costs & look for affordable insurance programs. Educational material on their liability responsibilities will help them adequately insure their facility.

The majority of customers travel less than 50 miles & spend less than 4 hours at a destination. Considering common tourism definitions (i.e. travel greater than 50 miles), most of these destinations are currently more agri-tainment than agri-tourism.

Future research
Market research related to consumers’ interest in agri-tourism & willingness to pay are essential. This research will better inform businesses on proper pricing of their product & types of activities to offer. Distance traveled is an important component of tourism and correlates well to consumer spending, so advertising to potential customers outside of a destination’s 50-mile radius may increase agri-tourism potential (Weaver, 2006). However, this must be done in connection with a study measuring willingness to travel for specific activities to ensure customers will respond to the advertising.