

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

UI Extension in Teton County spearheads agritourism in the Tetons project

AT A GLANCE

To help strengthen the viability of agriculture, UI Extension conducted local food and agritourism community surveys and created an agritourism and local food online directory.

The Situation

The Greater Yellowstone-Teton region is known for its rugged public lands, wildlife, recreation and agricultural roots. With tourism and the service industry serving as large economic drivers in the region, development pressure has converted substantial agricultural land. However, a new crop of agriculture is thriving — small and diversified farms and ranches. The western side of the Tetons in Teton Valley, Idaho hosts much of the farming community due to limited availability of land and less favorable climatic and soil conditions in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Increasing interest in locally produced food makes Teton Valley's agricultural heritage an important economic force. Despite an abundance of recreational tourism, little information about agritourism has been aggregated or promoted by regional travel and business development organizations. The shift to an amenity-based and tourism economy continues to create pressure on landowners to sell and convert agricultural lands to commercial and residential uses. Agritourism can help farmers diversify their enterprises and help sustain the profitability of working farms.



View the Teton Food and Farm Coalition's agritourism directory online at: www.tetonfoodfarmcoalition.org/agritourism.html.

Our Response

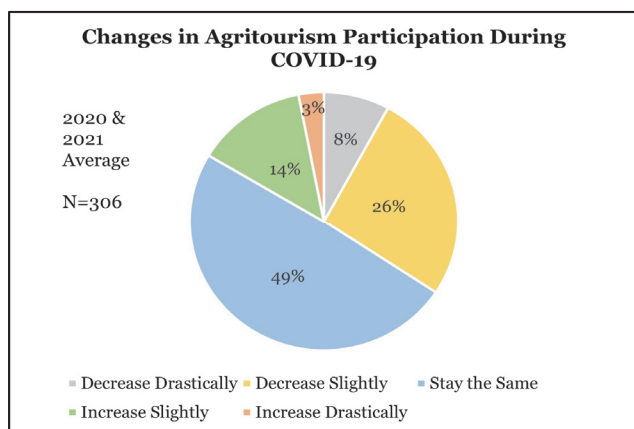
UI Extension, Teton County identified a need and spearheaded this project to help the Teton Food and Farm Coalition highlight agritourism activities in the "Teton foodshed" region, primarily in Teton Valley, Idaho/Wyoming. The project included two main components: 1) online surveys conducted in 2020 and 2021 that gauged local food purchasing behaviors of consumers before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as consumer interest in leveraging agritourism activities; and 2) the development of an online agritourism directory for the Teton Food and Farm Coalition (TFFC).

Program Outcomes

An online Qualtrics™ survey was designed to determine important sectors of agritourism, areas of growth based on consumer interest, and identify how consumer habits and agritourism participation may have shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data was collected from two different voluntary survey samples (N=215 in 2020 and N=197 in 2021). Surveys were distributed online in Teton County, Idaho and Wyoming. In addition to collecting demographic information, several questions asked about agritourism participation and local food purchases before and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Additional data collected over the phone, email and online were used to assess the presence of local sectors of agritourism. Information was compiled to develop an online agritourism and local food directory. Farmers market sales data were also collected to assess the economic growth of local food sales during the pandemic. The goal was to determine levels of agritourism activity across farms, by assessing levels of participation within three main sectors of agritourism including: 1) food and sales; 2) experiences; and 3) education.



Percentage of responses to the question, “Do you expect your participation in agritourism activities to increase or decrease in light of COVID-19?” (Based on a Likert scale of one-five, with five as “increase drastically” and one as “decrease drastically.”)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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17-22-jwerlin-agritourism • 9/22

Approximately half of the survey respondents reported that their overall agritourism participation and local food purchasing habits stayed the same during the pandemic, with 46% of respondents reporting that they occasionally participate in agritourism activities (8% extremely often, 23% often, 20% rarely and 3% never). Yet, in 2021, there was a slight reduction in the likelihood of participating in specific agritourism activities compared to 2020. The top agritourism activities ranked as: 1) visiting/shopping at farmers market; 2) buying local agriculture products at grocery/retail stores; 3) eating locally produced/grown food at restaurants; and 4) farm stands.

It is noteworthy that survey respondents indicated that they purchased 41% of their food locally prior to the pandemic. Additional research could include surveying visitors to the region since most survey participants were residents. Further, sales at the Teton Valley Farmers Market increased substantially over the two years, with 2021 market sales increasing by an astounding 27% from 2020. These data indicate a strong consumer market for local food and farmers market items.

Moving forward, tourism boards, organizations and governments could help promote local agriculture by highlighting the diverse agritourism opportunities in the Teton region. These include promoting and assisting growth of farmers markets, food festivals and events, school garden and agriculture programs, developing agritourism-friendly land use policies and buy local campaigns.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Thanks to Teton Science School AmeriCorps service members Eve Cinquino, Jennifer Hudson and Giovanna Wallis for project assistance. Work was supported by cooperators of the Teton Food and Farm Coalition whose mission is to build a strong local food system.