

I. PROJECT TITLE

*The Agritourism Premium:
Culinary Trails as an Experiential Marketing Strategy for Local Farm Products*

II. FUNDING

Funding for this project is provided by a \$15,000 Graduate Student Research Grant from Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

III. SUMMARY

Agritourism offers a variety of benefits to producers, consumers, tourists, communities, and regions. For producers, agritourism is a form of economic diversification that enables them to increase sales revenue, generate supplemental income, attract new customers, and provide employment for family and friends (Chase, et al, 2021; Paras, et al, 2022; Schilling, et al, 2014; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). Through agritourism, consumers have the opportunity to learn how food is raised, grown, and harvested while enjoying family-friendly activities, outdoor recreation, and other pursuits (Barbieri, et al, 2018; Brune, et al, 2021).

Culinary trails are emerging as a new framework to organize, market, and brand the signature assets of a region. A trail may consist of an inventory of agritourism experiences on working farms and fisheries that invite visitors to curate their own itineraries. Beginning with the Maine Beer Trail in 2009, Maine has been a national leader in the design, development, and promotion of culinary trails, with the establishment of the Maine Cheese Trail, Maine Fiber Trail, and Maine Oyster Trail. Agritourism opportunities packaged at the regional level can help shape the identity of places (Andéhn & L'Espoir Decosta, 2021; Nazariadli, et al, 2018; Palmi & Lezzi, 2020); promote rural economic development (Van Sandt, et al, 2019); brand distinctive local food products (Che, 2006); and increase the contribution of tourism, agriculture and fisheries to GDP (Dhungana & Khanal, 2023; Rossi, et al, 2017).

Through outdoor activities in scenic landscapes, culinary trails engage visitors in co-creating authentic experiences with producers that have the potential to generate the emotional attachment that is the foundation of consumer loyalty (Ghorbanzadeh, & Rahehagh, 2021; Hwang, & Kandampully, 2012; Park & MacInnis, 2006; Yu & Dean, 2001). By generating consumer loyalty, producers can shape the brand of their establishment, industry, and region while facilitating repeat purchase behavior in real time as well as into the future.

While consumer loyalty is comprised of cognitive, affective, conative, and action components, affect is the strongest element of consumer loyalty (Oliver, 1999), as it represents a deep psychological alignment of the brand with the consumer's own values (Keller, 2001). Emotional attachment is comprised of *affection* (love, peace, friendliness), *passion* (delight, captivation), and *connection* (attachment, bonding) (Thomson et al., 2005). The antecedents of emotional loyalty include superior marketing characteristics, traditional customer outcomes, unique user-derived benefits, socialization and intergenerational forces, and sentimentality and emotional memory (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011). Activities like wine tourism engage consumers in the co-creation of experiences that are positively correlated with such consumer loyalty behaviors as word-of-mouth intention, revisit intention and purchase intention (Zhang & Lee, 2022).

While research demonstrates that agritourism increases consumers' intentions to purchase local food (Brune, et al, 2021; Kenebayeva, et al, 2014; Paras & Michaud, 2023), no study has explored whether this intention translates to actual purchase behavior following participation. Indeed, Brune, et al (2021) recommended that "future studies should include follow-up surveys to gauge the participants' actual local food consumption behaviors over time" while "controlling for the impact of past farm visits or levels of locavorism" (p. 1328).

For purposes of this experiment, cheese will serve as a proxy for local farm products. With sales of \$32 billion in 2024, U.S. households spend \$240 per year on cheese, an increase of 33% since 2019. Growth is driven by rising household income, increased consumption by Gen Z and Millennials, increased exploration of artisanal cheese, and a desire for healthy protein-rich snacks (Mills, 2024).

Purpose. The purpose of this research is to determine whether agritourism experiences on culinary trails cultivate consumer loyalty for local farm products. The control group will be comprised of a panel of consumers representative of the U.S. population, while the treatment groups will consist of consumers who receive an information condition about a local producer or participate in an agritourism experience with varying degrees of immersion.

The null hypotheses include the following:

- 1) H_1 : There is no statistically significant difference between the control and treatment groups on their preference for local cheese.
- 2) H_2 : There is no statistically significant difference between the control and treatment groups on their values, beliefs, and attitudes toward local food (locavorism).
 H_{2a} : Educational attainment has no effect on locavorism.
 H_{2b} : Household income has no effect on locavorism.
- 3) H_3 : There is no statistically significant difference between the control and treatment groups on consumer loyalty toward local cheese.
- 4) H_4 : Within subjects, participation in agritourism has no influence on consumer loyalty for local cheese.

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V. METHODS

The research team will administer a survey to 1,000 consumers on the following topics (Appendix A and Appendix B):

1. **Discrete choice experiment** on cheese involving a local, national, global, and international brand with attributes on brand, perceived quality, place of origin, and price.
2. **Values, beliefs, and attitudes toward local food** using a validated scale to measure locavorism (Reich et al, 2018).
3. **Previous participation in agritourism**, such as a visit to a cheesemaker or dairy farm.
4. **Demographics**, including age, gender, race, ethnicity, household income, educational attainment, work status, and zip code.
5. **Consumer loyalty behavior toward local food** using a validated scale (Bagozzi et al, 2017).

Deception will not be used as part of the experiment.

Control group: Panel of 200 consumers on Prolific representative of the U.S. population.

Treatment groups:

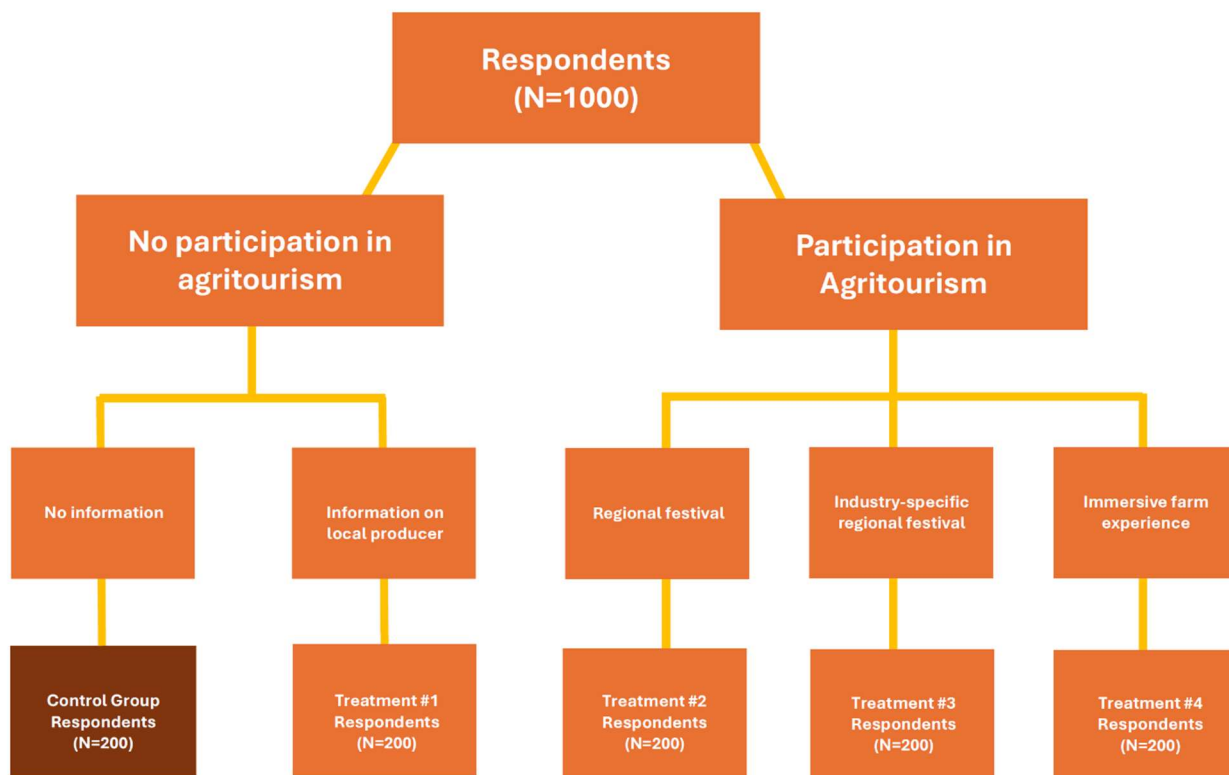
1. Panel of 200 consumers on Prolific representative of the U.S. population. Unlike the control group, they will receive an **information condition** that includes a story about the local food producer within the discrete choice experiment.

Visitors who participate in one of the following agritourism experiences:

2. 200 visitors who participate in an **immersive agritourism experience** on the Maine Cheese Trail.
3. 200 visitors who participate in an **industry festival** sponsored by the Maine Cheese Guild.
4. 200 visitors who participate in The Big E, a **regional festival that is not industry specific**.

The study incorporates both an online experiment (control group and treatment group #1) as well as a natural field experiment (treatment groups #2, #3, and #4). The initial survey with topics 1-5 constitutes a between-subjects design where the treatment is compared across four groups. The

follow-up survey for treatment groups #2, #3, and #4 constitutes a within-subjects design where the responses of subjects will be compared with their prior responses.



Power analysis. For the between-subjects design, the experiment involves one product x 4 treatments, resulting in 5 groups. The minimum sample size to achieve 90% power is 124 observations per sample. With a proposed sample size of 200 and an alpha of 0.01, the power of the experiment is 0.997.

For the within-subjects design administered to treatment groups #2, #3, and #4, the power of the experiment for a sample size of 50 is 0.875 at the .05 significance level. Thus, the within-subjects design requires that 25% of subjects in treatment groups #2, #3, and #4 respond to the follow-up survey.

VI. PERSONNEL

Caroline Paras is an Interdisciplinary PhD student pursuing a self-designed major in agritourism at the University of Maine to explore the role of experiences on culinary trails in promoting consumer loyalty and brand promotion for local food. In addition, she runs her own consultancy, ParasScope, focused on market research and grant writing to support local food economies. Caroline has led three IRB-approved projects. She earned an MA in American and New England Studies from the University of Southern Maine in 2015, a BA in Tourism & Hospitality from the University of Southern Maine and a BA in both Political Science and Communication from the University of California, San Diego.

Norman O'Reilly, MBA, Ph.D., CPA, is Dean of the College of Business at the University of New England. He has expertise in a range of business topics, including analytics, marketing, sponsorship, social media, sport finance, social marketing, physical activity and management education. Dr. O'Reilly has authored or co-authored 16 books, 14 case studies in the Harvard/Stanford series, and more than 145 peer-reviewed journal articles. One of the world's leading scholars in the business of sports, Norm has taught at the University of Maine, University of Ottawa, Syracuse University, Stanford University, Laurentian University, Ryerson University, Athabasca University, Bayreuth University, and the Russian International Olympic University. Dr. O'Reilly earned his Ph.D. in Management & Marketing at the Sprott School of Business at Carleton University in 2007 and an MBA in Marketing from the Telfer School of Management at the University of Ottawa.

VII. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

All subjects must be at least 18 years old to participants. Subjects will be recruited through three methods:

- 1) Subjects for the control group and treatment group #1 will be recruited online through the www.prolific.com platform. Such platforms make online participant recruitment reliable and efficient, giving researchers immediate access to millions of diverse, high-quality respondents (Buhrmester, et al., 2011). To register for Prolific, respondents must be at least 18 years of age.
- 2) Treatment groups #2 and #3 will be recruited as part of a natural field experiment conducted at two events: Maine Cheese Festival in Pittsfield, Maine on September 8, 2025, and The Big E, a regional festival in Springfield, Massachusetts scheduled for September 12-28, 2025. At both events, the team will host a table with a pop-up tent that will be labeled as a research station. Subjects will be intercepted, with survey input via iPad.
- 3) Treatment group #4 will be recruited as part of a natural field experiment conducted during Open Creamery Day on the Maine Cheese Trail. Scheduled for Sunday, October 12, 2025, Open Creamery Day is an open house of 10-20 farms throughout Maine that host tours, classes, direct sales, and other activities. To encourage participation, participating farmers will first be recruited through an email jointly sent by the research team and the Maine Cheese Guild (Appendix C). Farmers who agree to participate will be sent a stack of postcards with a QR code (Appendix D) for distribution to visitors via a brief pitch (Appendix E), which will lead them to the landing page of the online survey.

The inclusion of different treatment groups is necessary to determine the most efficient and effective forms of consumer education that influence both values and consumer behaviors. Furthermore, treatment groups #2, #3, and #4 will receive the entire survey again two months later to determine whether the treatment had a latent impact on consumer behavior. To administer the follow-up survey, treatment groups #2, #3, and #4 will be encouraged to provide their email address (Appendix B).

VIII. INFORMED CONSENT

All participants will access the same survey, which will be hosted on the Qualtrics platform. A written consent form will be included on the landing page of the survey (Appendix F). By pressing the “start” button on the landing page, individuals will consent to participate in the survey. Subjects will be asked to complete a 40-question, 5-part survey on the following topics:

1. **Discrete choice experiment** with 5 questions on cheese involving a local, national, global, and/or international brand.
2. **Values, beliefs, and attitudes toward local food** with 11-items on a 7-point Likert scale.
3. **Previous participation in agritourism**, such as a visit to a creamery, cheesemaker, or dairy farm, with 4 multiple choice items.
4. **Demographics** with 8 items on age, gender, race, ethnicity, household income, educational attainment, work status, and zip code.
5. **Consumer loyalty survey** with 12 items.

IX. CONFIDENTIALITY

This study will treat information generated by participants with confidence. As part of informed consent, participants will be notified that their individual responses will be known only to the research team. Data will be recorded on Qualtrics. Individual responses will never be associated with a corresponding name. All responses will be represented only in aggregate form to report research findings.

Individual responses will be disassociated from their participant identities using an encrypted electronic key. The electronic key linking participant data to their identity will be destroyed by [month, year]. Access to identifiable data will be restricted to members of the research team named in this proposal. Collected survey data will be stored on [survey platform] indefinitely and de-identified data will be stored indefinitely on a password-protected computer.

X. RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS

Except for time and inconvenience, this experiment poses minimal risk to participants. A 40-question survey will take 15-20 minutes to complete.

XI. BENEFITS

This study will have no direct benefit to participants.

XII. COMPENSATION

All subjects in the control and treatment groups will be offered a chance to win a [Maine Cheese Gift Box](#), valued at \$129. Participants in treatment groups #2, #3, and #4 who elect to complete the follow-up survey will be offered two chances to win.

In order to conduct research on Prolific, all participants in the control group and treatment group #1 will receive ~ \$2.50 for completing the survey.

XIII. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Appendix B: Follow-Up Survey Instrument

Appendix C: Joint invitation letter

Appendix D: Visitor postcard

Appendix E: Producer pitch to visitors

Appendix F: Informed Consent Form

DRAFT




Appendix A Discrete Choice Experiment [two examples are provided for illustrative purposes]

1. How often do you consume cheese?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once per day
- ☐ Several times per week
- ☐ Several times per month
- ☐ Several times per year

2. If you were offered the following feta cheese choices in your local market, what brand would you prefer to purchase? Please rank the following choices, with #1 being your first choice, and #4, your last choice.

- ☐ 365
- ☐ Athenos
- ☐ Three Charm Farm
- ☐ Real Greek Feta

	[private label]	[national brand]	[local brand]	[international]
Product [Photos will be large enough to read labels]				
Brand	Whole Foods	Athenos	Three Charm Farm	Real Greek Feta
Description	<i>Our 365 brand feta cheese, which offers excellent value and flavor, is made from cow's milk and packed in brine for a tangy, salty bite. It's even more delicious when mixed into salads and crumbled over stuffed bell peppers.</i>	<i>Our most popular traditional feta is made simply and with respect for the ingredients. We take extra time and care to create the perfect creamy, tangy taste you know and love.</i>	<i>Dense yet creamy with a mild tang in a light salt brine.</i>	<i>Made as the Greek artisans intended using 100% sheep's milk sourced strictly from shepherds in the regions of Thessaly & Macedonia and employing traditional techniques that date back thousands of years. A short period of barrel aging imparts a unique tangy, citrusy flavor and a creamy texture that are</i>

				<i>unparalleled by fetas made elsewhere.</i>
Price	\$7.39	\$4.94	\$11.00	\$34.99
Cost per pound	\$7.39	\$9.88	\$35.20	\$80.00
Place of origin	United States	United States	Alfred, Maine	Greece
Ingredients	Cultured Pasteurized Milk, Salt, Microbial Enzymes.	Culture, pasteurized part-skim milk, salt, enzymes, natamycin	TBD	Pasteurized sheep's milk

2. With regard to your #1 choice, please rank the importance of the following factors.

Brand

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

Quality

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

Price

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

Place of origin

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

3. With regard to your #2 choice, please rank the importance of the following factors.

Brand

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Quality

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Price

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree


Place of origin

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree



4. What is the highest price you would be willing to pay for the Maine cheese?

- ☐ The listed price (100%)
- ☐ 75% of the listed price [actual price to be listed]
- ☐ 50% of the listed price [actual price to be listed]
- ☐ 25% of the listed price [actual price to be listed]
- ☐ Would not purchase at any price


Information Condition




Three Charm Farm

WHEY BETTER CHEESE  

WHOLESALE



The Farm ▾ Our Animals ▾ Our Products ▾ 



About Three Charm Farm

Ingrid Claesson and Edward Sabatini (along with Ingrid's son Nicklas, then 12 years old) founded Three Charm Farm in 2012. As a small family farm, we raise Mini-Nubian, Nubian, and Nigerian Dwarf Dairy goats and a variety of dairy sheep. (We also have pigs, cats, dogs, chickens, and turkeys!) We take pride in providing a peaceful, loving structure and daily affection to our animals while also living in peaceful coexistence with the surrounding wildlife. Several of our abutting neighbors also provide access to their land at no charge so that our animals can naturally maintain the land—we are so grateful for their support!

Our animals enjoy various pasture units and small wooded areas (for rotational grazing/browse) and are given a diet of garden herbs and vegetables, grains, kelp, minerals, and the highest quality hay to ensure their health and happiness. We raise our animals with a holistic approach to their health, the micro-environment, and as an integral part of the preservation of the farm.






From mid-May through the first of November, we create **small-batch artisanal cheeses and farmstead yogurt** with the help of our lovingly raised goats and sheep. Our products are available through our **cheese CSA**, by special order, **at select farms and markets**, and on the menus of a few fine restaurants in the area!

We are members of the Miniature Dairy Goat Association and the Maine Cheese Guild. We also collaborate with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to ensure that all of our practices at the farm are environmentally responsible.

about the farmhouse

Our farmhouse was built in the late 1700s by Levi Hutchins, a Revolutionary War soldier who fought and survived the Battle of Valley Forge. Following the Hutchins family, the Fernald family was next to occupy the home for about five generations. It was then purchased by the Jacobsen family in the 1950s and remained in their family until they sold it to us in 2012! We feel fortunate and honored to be able to continue the tradition of farming in this historic home, to be a part of the preservation of this historic place, and to be able to share our mission with the community, both with our products and through outreach.

The painting of the farmhouse above (and the inspiration for Three Charm Farm's logo) was created by Edward Sabatini for his and Ingrid's wedding invitation.



Locavorism Scale

1. Locally produced foods just taste better

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

2. All else equal, there is no taste difference between a locally produced food and one that was shipped from somewhere else.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

3. Locally produced foods are more nutritious than foods that have been shipped from somewhere else.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

4. I don't trust foods that have been produced by large, multinational corporations.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

5. Large, global food systems are destined to fail.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

6. I would go out of my way to avoid buying food from a large retail grocery chain.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

7. I feel uneasy eating something unless I know exactly where it was produced.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

8. Buying locally produced foods supports sustainable farming practices.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

9. Buying local foods helps build a more prosperous community.

10. I like to support local farmers whenever possible.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

11. Supporting the local food economy is important to me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

Previous Participation in Agritourism

Definition of agritourism

Agritourism is a form of commercial enterprise that attracts visitors onto a working farm or ranch for the purpose of recreation, entertainment, and/or education while generating income for the owner (National Agricultural Law Center).

1. Given this definition, have you ever participated in an agritourism experience?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

2. What types of activities have you participated in?

- ☐ Direct sales (U-Pick, farm stand)
- ☐ Education (tours, classes)
- ☐ Entertainment and events (festivals, corn maze)
- ☐ Outdoor recreation (hiking, hunting, fishing)
- ☐ Hospitality (lodging, restaurant)
- ☐ Not applicable

3. How often do you participate in agritourism?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once in my lifetime
- ☐ Once in the last 5 years
- ☐ Once a year
- ☐ Multiple times per year
- ☐ Multiple times in the last 5 years

4. Have you ever participated in an agritourism experience related to dairy?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ I have visited a dairy farm
- ☐ I have visited a cheesemaker

Demographics

1. **What is your age?**
 - ☐ 18-24
 - ☐ 25-34
 - ☐ 35-44
 - ☐ 45-54
 - ☐ 55 and over
2. **What is your gender?**
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Non-binary
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
3. **What is your race?**
 - ☐ White
 - ☐ African American
 - ☐ Asian
 - ☐ Asian Pacific Islander
 - ☐ Native American
 - ☐ Two or more races
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
 - ☐ Other
4. **Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin?**
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
5. **What is your annual household income?**
 - ☐ Less than \$25,000
 - ☐ \$25,001-\$49,999
 - ☐ \$50,000-\$74,999
 - ☐ \$75,000-\$99,999
 - ☐ \$100,000-\$199,999
 - ☐ Over \$200,000
6. **What is your work status?**
 - ☐ Unemployed
 - ☐ Employed part-time
 - ☐ Employed full-time
 - ☐ Self-employed
 - ☐ Student
 - ☐ Retired
7. **What is your highest level of educational attainment?**
 - ☐ Less than high school diploma or GED
 - ☐ High school diploma or GED
 - ☐ Some college
 - ☐ Associate degree
 - ☐ Baccalaureate degree
 - ☐ Graduate or professional degree
8. **What is your zip code**

Appendix B: Survey on consumer loyalty

For the purposes of this survey, “local” is defined as food grown, raised, and harvested by a farm or artisanal producer in the same state or region where it is sold [The control group and treatment group #1 will only receive questions 6-12, which will be answered based on their own choice #1 from the discrete choice experiment].

1. What event did you attend in the last year?

- ☐ Maine Open Creamery Day
- ☐ Maine Cheese Festival
- ☐ The Big E
- ☐ Other
- ☐ N/A

2. Did you purchase cheese at this event?

- ☐ Yes, at Maine Open Creamery Day
- ☐ Yes, at the Maine Cheese Festival
- ☐ No

3. Since this event, have you purchased any cheese? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ N/A
- ☐ Purchased a Maine cheese
- ☐ Made a first-time purchase of a local cheese brand
- ☐ Made a repeat purchase of a local cheese brand
- ☐ Purchased a national brand
- ☐ Purchased a private label brand
- ☐ Purchased an international brand

4. Think about your purchase of one of these cheeses and answer the following questions in relation to this brand. What is the origin of the cheese you chose?

- ☐ A Maine cheese
- ☐ A local cheese brand from my home state
- ☐ Another cheese brand from a small farm
- ☐ National brand
- ☐ Private label brand
- ☐ International brand

5. What factors influenced your purchase of this product?

Brand

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Quality

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Price

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Place of origin

6. To what extent does this brand say something “true” and “deep” about whom you are as a person?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

7. To what extent do you feel yourself desiring to purchase this brand?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

8. Please express the extent to which you feel emotionally connected to this brand.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

9. Please express the extent to which this brand will be part of your life for yours to come.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

10. Suppose your brand were to go out of production. To what extent would you feel anxiety?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

11. In thinking about this brand, please express your overall feelings and evaluation.

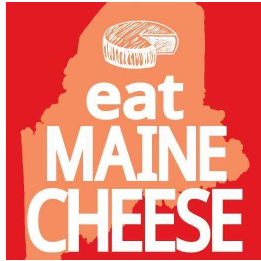
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly negative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly positive

12. **Have you engaged in any of the following activities in relation to this brand?** (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Visited the cheesemaker's website
- ☐ Reviewed the product online
- ☐ Promoted the brand on social media
- ☐ Visited the farm or factory where the cheese is produced
- ☐ Connected personally with the cheesemaker
- ☐ Visited the place of origin where the cheese is produced
- ☐ Recommended the product to family and friends
- ☐ Made a repeat purchase of the product
- ☐ Purchased other products from the same brand

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Appendix C: Joint invitation write-up for email blast



On behalf of the Maine Cheese Guild, we are looking for producers to participate in a research study at the University of Maine. Caroline Paras, an Interdisciplinary PhD student at the Graduate School of Business, seeks to understand whether visitor participation in agritourism helps to cultivate consumer loyalty for local farm products. This research project includes 1) face-to-face interviews with Maine cheese producers; and 2) a natural field experiment on Open Creamery Day in 2025. Details of your voluntary participation are described below.

- 1) **Face-to-face interviews with Maine cheese producers** [This qualitative research study is not part of the ECO 503 experiment but will be included in the same letter]

This project seeks to understand how the Maine cheese industry works together to promote agritourism. Participation consists of a 45-60 minute interview on your farm at your convenience. Questions may include a description of your agritourism activities as well as the benefits and challenges of working together to promote agritourism.

2) **Natural field experiment on Open Creamery Day**

To facilitate data collection from consumers, we are recruiting farms to distribute postcards in a convenient location such as a check-in counter, registration book, and/or cash register. The postcard will contain a QR code that will lead visitors to an online survey with the following components:

- Preference for local cheese versus national and international brands
- Values, beliefs, and attitudes about local food
- Previous participation in agritourism
- Consumer loyalty toward cheese brands
- Demographics

All participants who submit their email as part of the survey process will have a chance to win a Maine cheese gift basket of food valued at \$130.

To participate in either project, please answer a brief poll (check all that apply):

- ☐ Yes, I am interested in being interviewed
- ☐ Yes, I am interested in having my visitors surveyed
- ☐ I am interested but I need more information
- ☐ No, I am not interested in participating

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Caroline Paras, Interdisciplinary PhD Student at the University of Maine, at caroline.paras@maine.edu or (207) 318-7900.

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Appendix D: Visitor Postcard

Consumer Survey



Consumer Survey

Did you participate in the Maine Cheese Festival or Open Creamery Day? The University of Maine wants to hear from visitors about:

- Your creamery experience
- Your cheese preferences
- Your local food preferences
- Previous agritourism experience
- Demographics of cheese consumers

1. Scan the QR code
2. Answer the survey by October 30, 2025
3. Enter to win a Maine cheese box



Appendix E: Producer pitch to visitors

“Thanks for joining us for Open Creamery Day. The University of Maine would love to hear from visitors about their cheese preferences, attitudes toward local food, and more. Here’s a postcard with a link to the survey. You can also enter to win a Maine Cheese Box!”

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Appendix F: Informed Consent Form

Introduction. The University of Maine is exploring the link between agritourism and local food. On behalf of the Principal Investigators, Caroline Paras, Dr. Erin Percival Carter, and Dr. Norman O'Reilly, we invite you to participate in our research study. You must be at least age 18 to participate.

What will I be asked to do? If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take a 40-question online survey involving preference for cheese brands; values, beliefs, and attitudes about local food; previous participation in agritourism; and demographics. If you are willing to provide your email, we will invite you to participate in a follow-up survey covering the same topics.

Risks. Except for your time and inconvenience, there are no major risks to you from participating in this study. The experiment will take 15-20 minutes to complete.

Benefits. This research will not provide you with any direct benefits. Through your participation, the research is intended to inform the field of experimental economics by investigating how agritourism influences food preferences.

Compensation. To incentivize your participation, you will be invited to submit your email for a chance to win a gift basket of cheese valued at \$130.

Confidentiality. Your participation is anonymous. The information you provide in response to questions will be treated with professional confidence and used only for research purposes. Data will only be published in aggregate form such that individual responses will never be revealed or shared with anyone outside the research team. An electronic key linking your name to the data will be kept separate from the data and destroyed by [date]. The electronic key will be stored on a password-protected computer, and the data will be stored in a secure electronic database at the University of Maine for an indefinite period of time.

Voluntary. Your participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time. You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.

Whom may I contact with questions? If you have any questions about the study, please contact the research team below. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of Maine at (207) 581-2657.

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