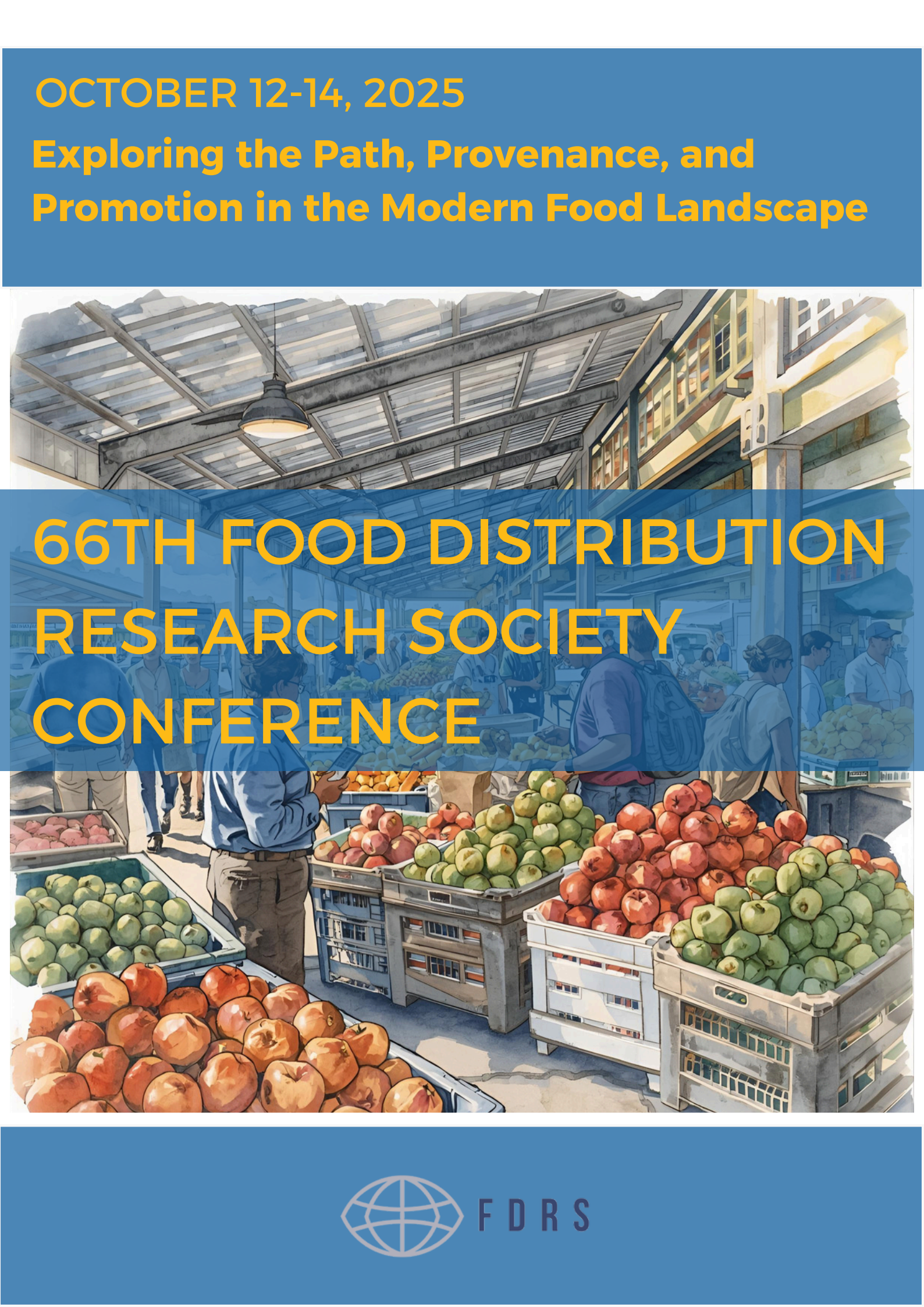


OCTOBER 12-14, 2025

Exploring the Path, Provenance, and
Promotion in the Modern Food Landscape

A detailed watercolor illustration of a bustling indoor food market. The scene is viewed from a low angle, looking down a long aisle. The ceiling is high with a complex network of wooden beams and translucent panels, through which natural light filters. A single black pendant lamp hangs from the ceiling. In the foreground, several large metal crates are filled with fresh produce, including bright red apples and green apples. People are seen from behind and in profile, walking through the aisles and examining the goods. Some are carrying backpacks. The overall atmosphere is one of a vibrant, active food hub.

66TH FOOD DISTRIBUTION RESEARCH SOCIETY CONFERENCE



FROM THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

We are excited you are attending our 66th conference, themed **Exploring the Path, Provenance, and Promotion in the Modern Food Landscape**.

FDRS's overall goal is to facilitate the development of leading-edge information and education about food distribution through applied research by serving as a forum for exchanging ideas and information and acting as a clearing house for food distribution research and education. We strive to help with food industry education and training, as well as the implementation of new ideas and concepts.

This years' program showcases current research in community, food and agricultural systems linkages, innovations in supply chain, and food systems initiatives. Our symposia bring together experts from industry to discuss current developments in the food supply chain and food systems.

We hope you will enjoy the conference, attend the sessions, and take advantage of the opportunity to meet new people. Last, please join us to recognize our award winners.

Wishing you a great conference!

FDRS 2024-2025 Officers

President: Esendugue Greg Fonsah
President Elect: Samuel Zapata
Past President: Alba J. Collart
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Journal of Food Distribution Research
Editors: Brandon McFadden, Jada Thompson

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12

CONFERENCE AGENDA

PRE- SESSIONS

- 9:00 AM-12:30 PM** **S-1088 Meeting**
Room: Mission Bay Room
- 1:00 PM-5:00 PM** **Registration Opens**
Room: Mission Bay Gallery
- 2:00 PM-4:00 PM** **FDRS Student Marketing Challenge**
Room: 713 & 715

GENERAL SESSIONS

- 6:00 PM-7:00 PM** **Welcome Reception**
Location: Pine Hill
Hors d'oeuvres included

MONDAY, OCTOBER 13

- 7:00 AM-8:15 AM** **Registration**
Room: Mission Bay Gallery
- 8:30 AM-10:00 AM** **Symposium I - Opening Session**
Room: Mission Bay Room
- 10:15 AM-11:45 AM** **Research Sessions I**
Mission Bay Room, Breakout Rooms
- 12:00 PM-1:30 PM** **Richardson- Applebaum Awards Luncheon**
Location: Mission Bay Patio
Lunch Included
- 1:45 PM-3:15 PM** **Symposium II**
Room: Mission Bay Room
- 3:30 PM-5:00 PM** **Research Sessions II**
Breakout Rooms
- 6:30 PM-8:30 PM** **Award Ceremony & Banquet**
Location: Mission Bay Room
Dinner Included
- *Breakout Rooms: 711, 701, 703**

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14

- 7:00 AM-8:45 AM** **Registration: Mission Bay Gallery**
FDRS Breakfast & Business Meeting
Location: Mission Bay Room
All FDRS conference attendees invited to breakfast.
Business Meeting starts at 7:45am
- 9:00 AM-10:30 AM** **Symposium III**
Mission Bay Room
Sponsored by SRMEC
- 10:45 AM-12:00 PM** **Research Sessions III**
Mission Bay Room, Breakout Rooms
- *Breakout Rooms: 711, 701, 703**
- This concludes our 2025 FDRS annual conference, thank you for your participation. We look forward to seeing you in 2026.



FDRS SESSIONS

ORGANIZED SYMPOSIUM

These sessions offer the opportunity for presentations and discussions on a single theme or problem related to the food distribution field. Organized symposia proposals are allowed 1 hour and 30 minutes and time for discussion.

RESEARCH REPORTS

These sessions are scholarly papers focusing on the results of research efforts. Presentations of research reports are limited to 15 minutes each, with 5 minutes for Q&A.

RESEARCH UPDATES

These sessions are synopses of research or educational work either (1) recently completed, (2) in progress, or (3) to be undertaken within the next year. Presentations of updates are limited to 10 minutes each, with 3 minutes for Q&A.

OUTREACH WRITING

These sessions comprise technical communication of food industry issues that are key to Extension/Industry Outreach. These may include 'industry outlook', food supply chain, and marketing articles or content similar to AAEEA's Choices Magazine, for example, geared toward non-academic audiences. Authors will have 15 minutes to present a summary of the article's key points and how it was used in outreach/extension efforts, with 5 minutes for Q&A.

TEACHING CASE STUDIES

These sessions comprise technical communication of food industry issues that are key to Extension/Industry Outreach. These may include 'industry outlook', food supply chain, and marketing articles or content similar to AAEEA's Choices Magazine, for example, geared toward non-academic audiences. Authors will have 15 minutes to present a summary of the article's key points and how it was used in outreach/extension efforts, with 5 minutes for Q&A.

ORGANIZED SYMPOSIUM I: OPENING SESSION

Monday, October 13 | 8:30 AM - 10:00AM

EXPLORING THE PATH, PROVENANCE, AND PROMOTION IN THE MODERN FOOD LANDSCAPE: SHARED EXPERIENCES FROM LEADERS OF CALIFORNIA'S FOOD AND FIBER SUPPLY CHAINS

ROOM: MISSION BAY ROOM

Abstract

Join us for our Opening Session where we connect with leaders discussing the path, provenance, and promotion of California's food and fiber supply chains.

The session includes a Pre-recorded video from the Secretary Karen Ross providing an overview of California's efforts and position as a leader in the food landscape.

We learn from and connect with leaders working at the intersection of policy, production, and research to discuss the path, provenance, and promotion of California's food and fiber supply chains. California plays a critical role in feeding the nation and the world yet faces complex challenges – from water sustainability and labor scarcity to declining farm numbers and the impacts of regulation and technology. Through this moderated “fireside chat,” panelists will share their perspectives on how policymakers, growers, investors, and educators can continue to collaborate to strengthen the food distribution system – from farm to fork – while encouraging innovation and ensuring long-term resilience.

Moderator: Kim Morgan, University of Florida

Panelists:

Dr. Glenda Humiston
Vice-President
Agriculture and Natural
Resources
University of California

Dennis Donohue
Mayor of Salinas
Executive Director of
Western Grower's Center
for Innovation and
Technology

Martha Montoya
CEO of AgTools

Dr. Derrik Robinson
Urban Agriculture, Food
Systems, and
Environmental Issues
Advisor
University of California
Cooperative Extension

Sarah Masterson
Manager
California AgTech Network
Program Director of
The VINE Institute

RESEARCH SESSIONS I

Monday, October 13 | 10:15 AM - 11:45 AM

PRODUCTION, ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND CONSUMER PREFERENCES

ROOM: 711

MODERATOR:
KELLIE RAPIER

RESEARCH REPORT

Qualitative Analysis of Changing Customer Patterns for a Feedlot Transition to Specialty Beef

Presenter: KELLIE RAPER - Oklahoma State University; kellie.raper@okstate.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

Assessing the Economic Feasibility of Edible Cactus and Prickly Pear in South Texas: Opportunities for food distribution and value-added products

Presenter: JORGE C. MARTINEZ-PALOMARES - Texas A&M University; jorge.martinez@ag.tamu.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Moderating Effects of Environmental Concerns on Willingness-to-pay for Food with Sustainable Attributes

Presenter: ARBINDRA RIMAL - Missouri State University; arbindrarimal@missouristate.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Consumers in Quest for a Climate Neutral Meat Protein Alternative: Evidence of goat meat acceptance: Analysis of sensory quality attributes

Presenter: BENJAMIN ONYANGO - Missouri State University; benjaminonyango@missouristate.edu

INNOVATIONS IN PRODUCTION

ROOM: 701

MODERATOR:
JERROD PENN

RESEARCH UPDATE

Quantifying the Market Effects and Welfare Implications for Ultra-Filtered Milk Innovation: The New Product Introduction of Fairlife

Presenter: LINGXIAO WANG - Texas A&M University; lingxiao.wang@ag.tamu.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

Exploring Consumer Preferences for Biofortified Kale: Evidence from Texas

Presenter: MANUEL GARCIA - Texas A&M University; manuel.garcia@ag.tamu.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Preferences for Hemp-blend Fabric Items: Evidence from a real purchase experiment

Presenter: JERROD PENN - Louisiana State University; jpenn@lsu.agcenter.edu

CASE STUDY

Driving Digital Farming Forward: BASF's challenge of scaling innovation in global agriculture

Presenter: CHARITY ALIYAH GREENE - North Carolina A&T State University; cagreene3@aggies.ncat.edu

RESEARCH SESSIONS I

Monday, October 13 | 10:15 AM - 11:45 AM

LESSONS FROM INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS

ROOM: 703

MODERATOR:
CHINONSO ETUMNU

RESEARCH UPDATE

Promoting the Use of Ancient Grains in Midsouth Agriculture

Presenter: RYAN LOY - University of Arkansas; rloy@uark.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

Spatial Price Flows for Orphan Legumes: Evidence from Benin

Presenter: AKEM NINA FABININ - World Bank, University of Kiel, Germany;
fabininakem@yahoo.com

RESEARCH REPORT

Factors Affecting Bread Selection: Strategies for promoting high-quality bread consumption

Presenter: SAYED SAGHAIAN - University of Kentucky; SSaghaian@uky.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Grocery Stockouts and Seller Performance in Amazon's Marketplaces

Presenter: CHINONSO E. ETUMNU - Kentucky State University;
chinonso.etumnu@ksu.edu

FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMING INITIATIVES

ROOM:
MISSION BAY

MODERATOR:
TIM WOODS

RESEARCH REPORT

LFPP Wholesale Capacity Building Strategies in Uncertain Markets

Presenter: TIM WOODS - University of Kentucky; tim.woods@uky.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Food Manufacturers' Decision Making Under Varying State Regulation - An update

Presenter: MARIA KALAITZANDONAKES - University of Illinois Urbana Champaign;
mariahk2@illinois.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

Bad Food, Good Business: The Erasure of African Americans from the revolution of food

Presenter: PATRICIA MORRIS - North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University;
pmorris@aggies.ncat.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

Driving Food Equity: A Non-Profit Model for Supporting Farmers and Communities in the Mississippi Delta

Presenter: VANESSA SHONKWILER - The University of Georgia; V.Shonkwiler@uga.edu

ORGANIZED SYMPOSIUM II

Monday, October 13 | 1:45 PM - 3:15 PM

EXPLORING INNOVATIVE CAREER PATH AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE MODERN FOOD LANDSCAPE

ROOM: MISSION BAY ROOM

Abstract

Navigating the job market for current and recently graduated PhD students is often a cumbersome and confusing process. Given the fast-evolving working environment in food supply chains, it is challenging for students to (1) identify the first job to start a professional career, (2) develop a sense of job security when various positions are added or eliminated, and (3) ensure a balance between personal preferences and market competitiveness in specific subjects. PhD students often either do not know what post-academic jobs are available or do not know what to look for in jobs that may interest them across food supply chains.

Food distribution is a critical component to move products in a timely and safe manner, and the logistics involve complex procedures requiring multiple knowledge in management, information technology, engineering, finance, risk assessment, and market optimization. Panelists in this session will start a dialogue with participants to offer insights and experiences to help participants gain clarity as they consider their post-PhD career. Panelists will present various job opportunities that are currently available in food supply chain and distribution aspects. Followed by an interactive discussion to demonstrate the most common pathways for PhD students who enter the job market, such as working as a postdoctoral researcher, research associate in a public or private lab, entering private industry or the government, or starting as a faculty member (including pro and con analysis). Each pathway offers different experiences that may be enticing to PhD students that have competing priorities and values.

This panel session intends to offer dynamic discussions for both international and domestic students seeking job opportunities after completing their PhD.

Panelists:

Kathleen Liang

North Carolina
Agricultural and
Technical State University
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Yanggu Li

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Bryan Collins

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Kim Morgan

University of Florida
kimorgan@ufl.edu

RESEARCH SESSIONS II

Monday, October 13 | 3:30 PM - 5:00 PM

SPECIALITY CROP PRODUCTION

ROOM: 711

MODERATOR:
MARGARITA
VELANDIA

RESEARCH REPORT

Labor Productivity Implications in Small-scale Specialty Crop Production

Presenter: NATHAN JUDD - University of Arkansas; nrjudd@uark.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Factors Correlated with Specialty Crop Farmers' Willingness to Adopt Alley Cropping Systems: The case of Tennessee fruit and vegetable farmers

Presenter: MARGARITA VELANDIA - University of Tennessee; mvelandi@utk.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

Understanding Worker Preferences for Agricultural Credentials: Preliminary results from a discrete choice experiment

Presenter: NATHAN KEMPER - University of Arkansas; nkemper@uark.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

Feasibility Assessment Template for a Pecan Shelling Cooperative

Presenter: EDWIN COLEMAN - Oklahoma State University;
edcolem@okstate.edu

CONSUMER ATTITUDES AND FACTORS AFFECTING PURCHASES

ROOM: 701

MODERATOR:
RAMU
GOVINDASAMY

RESEARCH REPORT

Mapping the Consumer Journey of Hemp-Inclusive Cereal

Presenter: BUDDHIKA PATALEE - University of Kentucky; pataleema@uky.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Rich Media Formats and Consumer Willingness to Pay for Value-added Cheese Attributes: Evidence from a non-hypothetical choice experiment

Presenter: PRALHAD BAJGAIN - University of Tennessee; pbajgain@vols.utk.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

United States Mainstream Meat Market Entry: An analysis of specialty goat meat products

Presenter: BENJAMIN ONYANGO - Missouri State University;
benjaminonyango@missouristate.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

Consumers' Willingness to Pay for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables at Direct Marketing Outlets in the Northeastern United States

Presenter: RAMU GOVINDASAMY - Rutgers University; govind@sebs.rutgers.edu

RESEARCH SESSIONS II

Monday, October 13 | 3:30 PM - 5:00 PM

**COMMUNITY,
FOOD AND
AGRICULTURAL
SYSTEMS
LINKAGES**

ROOM: 703

**MODERATOR:
FAITH AIYA**

RESEARCH REPORT

Community Perspectives on Dairy Industry Impacts and Waste Management Technologies

Presenter: KOLODINSKY, JANE - Arrowleaf Group; jane@arrowleafgroup.com

RESEARCH REPORT

Are Americans Willing to Pay to Improve Food Access for Others? Evidence from a real donation experiment

Presenter: XUESEN FAN - The Ohio State University; fan.953@osu.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

An Exploration of Justice, Trust, Fairness, and Local Identity in Agricultural Marketing: Consumer perceptions of the “Fresh from Florida” program

Presenter: FAITH AIYA - University of Florida; Faith.aiya@ufl.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

Food Trust in Crisis: Emotion, not knowledge, drives consumer choices

Presenter: WUYANG HU - The Ohio State University; hu.1851@osu.edu

ORGANIZED SYMPOSIUM III

Tuesday, October 14 | 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

CREATING VALUE-ADDED CHANNELS AND BUILDING FUTURE MARKETS IN THE SOUTH

ROOM : MISSION BAY ROOM

SPONSORED BY THE SOUTHERN RISK MANAGEMENT EDUCATION CENTER

This symposium highlights strategies for developing value-added markets across the Southern Region. Special emphasis will be given to connecting farm-level production to consumer demand. Speakers will share their experiences in building direct-to-consumer brands, such as beef and sweet potato spirits, as well as other differentiated markets. This session highlights how universities and entrepreneurs can expand marketing opportunities and position farmers for long-term competitiveness.

Lineup:

Welcome and Introductory Remarks

Ronald Rainey, University of Arkansas and SRMEC Director

From Pasture to Plate: Building Direct-to-Consumer Beef Markets

Kimberly Ratcliff, CEO, Ratcliff Premium Meats

From Root to Glass: Value-Added Pathways for Sweet Potato Spirits

Harvey Williams, Co-Founder & CEO, Delta Dirt Distillery

Leveraging Land-Grant Resources for Differentiated Markets

Ryan Loy, University of Arkansas

Roundtable Discussion: Success Stories and Learned Experiences

Moderator: Ronald Rainey, University of Arkansas and SRMEC

Panelists:

Kimberly Ratcliff

CEO, Ratcliff Premium
Meats, Oakwood, Texas

Harvey Williams

Co-Founder & CEO, Delta
Dirt Distillery, Helena,
Arkansas

Ryan Loy

University of Arkansas
rloy@uada.edu

Ron Rainey

University of Arkansas
rrainey@uada.edu

RESEARCH SESSIONS III

TUESDAY, October 14 | 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM

HIGHER EDUCATION INITIATIVES IN FOOD SYSTEMS

ROOM: 711

MODERATOR:
COURTNEY LONG

RESEARCH UPDATE

Extension-Supported Local Food Systems: Takeaways from Cartersville farmers' market, Bartow County, GA

Presenter: VANESSA SHONKWILER - The University of Georgia; V.Shonkwiler@uga.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Strengthening Ag Marketing Strategies: Southern Risk Management Education Center certificate program

Presenter: ALLISON VETTER - University of Arkansas; avetter@uada.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

Understanding potential for National Guard and Military Units to Source Local and Regional: A case study from Minnesota and Illinois Go For Green®

Presenter: COURTNEY LONG - Iowa State University; court7@iastate.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Coaching Arkansas Farm to School Institute

Presenter: CELISE WEEMS - University of Arkansas; cweems@uada.edu

LABELING

ROOM: 701

MODERATOR:
SHUOLI ZHAO

RESEARCH REPORT

Consumer Preferences and Willingness to Pay for Specialty Processed Foods - Do multiple labels make a difference?

Presenter: KYNDA CURTIS - Utah State University; kynda.curtis@usu.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

Transparency or Complexity? Consumer Responses and Associated Search Costs for Multi-Labeling

Presenter: SHUOLI ZHAO - University of Kentucky; szhao@uky.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Substitutability and Complementarity of Ecolabels in the Presence of Conflicting Brand Messaging: A discrete choice experiment

Presenter: ABDELAZIZ LAWANI - Tennessee State University; alawani@tnstate.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Willingness to Pay for Locally Produced Fruits and Vegetables in Alabama: Evidence from a contingent valuation survey

Presenter: PRITAM MITRA - Auburn University; pzm0051@auburn.edu

RESEARCH SESSIONS III

TUESDAY, October 14 | 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM

SUPPLY CHAIN DIMENSIONS OF ANIMAL PRODUCTS

ROOM: 703

MODERATOR:
ALICIA RIHN

RESEARCH REPORT

Willingness to Pay for Farmstead Dairy Products by Southeast US Consumers: A discrete choice experiment

Presenter: NAMA BHUSAL - University of Tennessee; nbhusal@vols.utk.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Consumer Preference and Willingness to Pay for Domestically Produced Goat Meat in the Southern United States

Presenter: NALINI PATTANAIK - Fort Valley State University; pattanaikn@fvsu.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

Beef Packing Resilience during COVID-19: The role of plant size

Presenter: SUNIL DHOUBHADEL - Prairie View A&M University;

spdhoubhadel@pvamu.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

The Impact of Dairy Farm Exits on Local Communities

Presenter: LUIS GARCIA-COVARRUBIAS - University of California Davis;

Lgarciacovarrubias@ucdavis.edu

AGRICULTURAL SUPPLY CHAINS: ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

ROOM:
MISSION BAY

MODERATOR:
JANE KOLODINSKY

RESEARCH REPORT

Local and Regional Food System Resilience: The U.S. Apple Supply Chain

Presenter: ANDREA RAMOS - Michigan State University; ramosan6@msu.edu

RESEARCH UPDATE

Labor Productivity in U.S. Wholesale Trade: Trends, determinants and implications for agriculture

Presenter: OMOWUNMI A. ODEYOMI - North Carolina A&T State University;

oaodeyomi@aggies.ncat.edu

RESEARCH REPORT

The Triple Layered Business Model Canvas Applied to Hemp Foods

Presenter: JANE KOLODINSKY - Colorado State University; jkolodin@uvm.edu

ABSTRACTS

RESEARCH SESSIONS I

Monday, October 13 | 10:15 AM - 11:45 AM

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHANGING CUSTOMER PATTERNS FOR A FEEDLOT TRANSITION TO SPECIALTY BEEF

Beef from Japanese beef breeds such as Wagyu is considered luxury beef by US consumers, thus garnering high prices relative to domestic beef produced from traditional breeds. Some cattle producers have carved out a niche producing purebred Wagyu or American Wagyu beef for this high value market. This research studies a mid-size integrated cow-calf feedlot operation that transitioned from purebred Angus to Wagyu-Angus crossbred cattle with the objective of significantly increasing the percentage of cattle that produce a USDA Prime carcass. The research focus is a qualitative analysis of the evolution of feedlot customer purchase behaviors as the breed transition happened over time. The analysis examines purchase timeline, buyer distance to the feedlot, buyer size and type, cattle breed composition, carcass characteristics, seasonality of purchases, buyer entry and exit, as well as other buyer characteristics.

AUTHORS:

Kellie Curry Raper
Oklahoma State University

Lixia H. Lambert
Oklahoma State University

ASSESSING THE ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY OF EDIBLE CATUS AND PRICKLY PEAR IN SOUTH TEXAS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOOD DISTRIBUTION AND VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS

The edible cactus ("nopal," *Opuntia streptacantha*) and prickly pear (*Opuntia ficus-indica*) are drought-tolerant crops with high nutritional value and potential for expansion in arid regions. "Nopales", composed of over 90% water, provide essential nutrients, fiber, and compounds shown to reduce blood glucose. Prickly pear fruits also offer unique nutritional and organoleptic qualities. Mexico is the world's main producer and exporter, yet the short shelf life of these products demands proper refrigeration during the transportation. In the U.S., demand is growing, with imports reaching \$30.36M in 2024—a 28% increase from 2023. South Texas, with its semi-arid climate, marginal lands, and strategic location, is well-positioned to cultivate these crops, but their economic viability remains untested. This study will assess the economic feasibility of establishing and expanding the cultivation of the edible cactus and prickly pear in South Texas. Findings will guide producers toward adopting a water-efficient crop and strengthening local food systems.

AUTHORS:

Jorge C. Martinez-Palomares
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Samuel Zapata
Texas A&M University

MODERATING EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS ON WILLINGNESS-TO-PAY (WTP) FOR FOOD WITH SUSTAINABLE ATTRIBUTES

This study investigates consumer preferences and willingness to pay (WTP) for various food labeling attributes, including “Climate Smart,” “USDA Certified Organic,” “Locally Grown,” and “Sustainably Grown (not certified organic).” A moderation model was developed to test research hypotheses using data collected in a 2024 household survey conducted across six Midwestern states. Preliminary findings indicate that a higher percentage of consumers were willing to pay a premium for labels such as “USDA Certified Organic” (57%) and “Locally Grown” (66%) compared to more ambiguous labels like “Grown Using Climate Smart Practices” (30%) and “Eco-Friendly” (51%). Willingness to pay varied significantly based on consumers’ environmental concerns, generational cohort, and socio-demographic characteristics. Findings suggest that younger consumers, particularly those with stronger environmental values, represent a key demographic for marketing climate-conscious and sustainability-labeled food products.

AUTHORS:

Arbindra Rimal

Missouri State University

CONSUMERS IN QUEST FOR A CLIMATE NEUTRAL MEAT PROTEIN ALTERNATIVE: EVIDENCE OF GOAT MEAT ACCEPTANCE: ANALYSIS OF SENSORY QUALITY ATTRIBUTES

USA meat market is dominated by beef, poultry, and with growing interest in alternative proteins due to health and environmental concerns. Goat meat, with lower greenhouse gas emissions compared to cattle, offers potential as a more climate-friendly option. This study, using data from Sunbelt Ag Expo attendees, analyzed consumer preferences for barbecued goat meat based on attributes of appearance, juiciness, texture, flavor, and aftertaste. From this analysis insights were drawn on what may drive goat meat acceptance and potential meat purchases. Empirical analysis applied principal components factor analysis to reduce five barbecued goat meat physical attributes into smaller and more focused set of dimensions. Three dimensions explaining 89 percent of variability were identified; juiciness and texture; after-taste and flavor were placed in the second tier with the appearance attribute coming last. Regression analysis on the dimensions shows that consumers’ demographics and goat meat attributes such as freshness impact people’s evaluations.

AUTHORS:

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QUANTIFYING THE MARKET EFFECTS AND WELFARE IMPLICATIONS FOR ULTRA-FILTERED MILK INNOVATION: THE NEW PRODUCT INTRODUCTION OF FAIRLIFE

Ultra-filtered milk has emerged as a rare growth driver in the U.S. milk and plant-based milk alternatives (PBMA) market, offering higher protein, reduced sugar, and lactose-free benefits that align with evolving health preferences. Fairlife's 2014 launch marked the first successful entry, reaching a 6% market share by 2023 and prompting broader industry adoption. We quantify the market and welfare effects of ultra-filtered milk using NielsenIQ retail scanner data from 2014–2023 and the staggered county-level roll-out of Fairlife as a quasi-experiment. Employing a Callaway–Sant'Anna difference-in-differences framework, we estimate causal impacts on prices and sales of conventional, lactose-free, organic, and PBMA products. A structural demand system further recovers substitution patterns, diversion ratios, and welfare gains. Our findings reveal that ultra-filtered milk significantly reshaped competitive dynamics and delivered consumer welfare gains through both variety and competition effects, demonstrating the potential of functional innovation to revitalize milk and PBMA markets.

AUTHORS:

Lingxiao Wang
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Oral Capps, Jr.
Texas A&M University

EXPLORING CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR BIOFORTIFIED KALE: EVIDENCE FROM TEXAS

Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension have developed kale cultivars agronomically biofortified with Iron and Zinc, specifically adapted to South Texas' soils and growing conditions. To ensure the success of these innovations, a better understanding of consumer preferences and market acceptance is needed. This study aims to evaluate Texas consumers' perceptions and willingness to pay (WTP) for biofortified green leafy products, using kale as a case study. Data will be collected until August via an online survey in Qualtrics, recruiting 500 participants in Texas following the IRB protocols. The survey includes sections on consumer perceptions of biofortification methods, sociodemographic characteristics, food consumption behavior, and a discrete choice experiment with ten hypothetical scenarios that combine different attributes and levels (e.g., kale varieties, biofortification method, nutrient levels, certifications, and price).

AUTHORS:

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PREFERENCES FOR HEMP-BLEND FABRIC ITEMS: EVIDENCE FROM A REAL PURCHASE EXPERIMENT

This study argues that the U.S. sugar policy provides valuable business information to this industry, facilitating financial analysts' forecasts of publicly traded sugar-using firms (SUFs). To test our hypothesis, we evaluate relevant forecast properties (bias, accuracy, and dispersion) for SUFs and their agribusinesses (AGBs) peers. The analysis covers the 1976-2023 period, comparing results before and after 1994 when the USDA started implementing the World Agriculture Supply and Demand Estimates forecasts for volumes of sugar produced and consumed in the U.S. Consistent with our hypotheses, the results show that financial analysts' earnings forecasts for SUFs (particularly after 1994) are systematically (1) less biased, (2) more accurate, and (3) less dispersed than those for AGBs. Our results add to a series of studies showing that SUFs are companies with a solid and stable economic performance, which can partly be explained by the benefits SUFs indirectly receive from the US sugar policy.

AUTHORS:

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Jerrod Penn
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Casey Stannard
Louisiana State University

Maria Bampasidou
Texas A&M University

Matthew Fannin
Louisiana State University

DRIVING DIGITAL FARMING FORWARD: BASF'S CHALLENGE OF SCALING INNOVATION IN GLOBAL AGRICULTURE

This teaching case centers on BASF, a global leader in agricultural inputs and innovation, and its strategic approach to advancing digital farming. With agriculture facing increasing pressure to produce more with less amid climate uncertainty, rising costs, and environmental scrutiny, BASF has positioned itself at the forefront of agri-digital transformation. Through tools that integrate real-time field data, satellite imagery, and AI-powered recommendations, BASF aims to enable farmers to make more precise, sustainable, and profitable decisions.

By engaging with this case, students will be able to:

- Evaluate barriers to digital innovation in agriculture across different global regions
- Analyze how agri-input firms position themselves in the digital farming landscape
- Understand the role of data, sustainability, and trust in food distribution systems
- Propose strategic approaches to increasing technology adoption in traditional agricultural markets

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PROMOTING THE USE OF ANCIENT GRAINS IN MIDSOUTH AGRICULTURE

This project aims to expand a new international partnership focused on developing a value-added ancient grain market in the Mid-South region of the United States. The University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture and Kore University of Enna in Sicily have initiated an agreement focused on ancient grain research, knowledge exchange, and the development of market infrastructure for ancient and heirloom grain varieties in the U.S. The collaboration aims to replicate this approach in the Midsouth, where traditional commodity crops prevail and growers face persistent challenges related to global and domestic competition.

Developing value-added markets for ancient grains provides an opportunity for producers to differentiate their product and stabilize on-farm income streams. This research presents the scope of the U.S.-Italy collaboration, steps taken toward implementation, and highlights the outreach and policy needs required to support future scaling. It contributes to current discourse on agricultural diversification, food value chains, and international knowledge transfer in the context of economic development.

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SPATIAL PRICE FLOWS FOR ORPHAN LEGUMES: EVIDENCE FROM BENIN

Understanding the market dynamics of orphan legume crops is increasingly critical as calls grow louder for more sustainable and inclusive food systems. These indigenous crops, often overlooked in mainstream ag hold significant promise for nutrition, biodiversity, and climate resilience. This study explores monthly producer price data for selected orphan crops using a widely consumed staple crop as a benchmark for comparison. By examining intra and inter-regional price patterns, the study seeks to uncover whether the observed trends stem from market-specific issues or broader systemic factors. Notably, despite being cultivated in similar agroecological zones, orphan legumes show irregular price behaviors, hinting at underlying structural barriers. These include inconsistent transport networks, uneven policy attention and gaps in institutional support rather than simple market inefficiencies.

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FACTORS AFFECTING BREAD SELECTION: STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING HIGH-QUALITY BREAD CONSUMPTION

Bread is a staple food in many countries, with diverse types reflecting variations in consumer preferences and consumption levels. This study investigates the factors influencing bread type selection among Iranian consumers. Data was collected from 401 households in 2024 across three regions of Tehran using random cluster sampling. The impact of individual characteristics on bread choice was analyzed using a multinomial logit model, while product characteristics were examined with a conditional logit model. Findings from the multinomial logit model indicate that age, gender, household size, education, and income significantly influence bread type selection. Distance to the bakery, shelf life, taste, quality, and price emerged as key determinants. Sangak bread was the most consumed type, with Sangak and bulky breads perceived as having superior nutritional properties, longer shelf life, and lower waste compared to other types. Subsidized Barbari and Lavash breads exhibited the highest waste levels. Taste, quality, and availability were identified as critical factors for increasing consumption.

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GROCERY STOCKOUTS AND SELLER PERFORMANCE IN AMAZON'S MARKETPLACES

This study examines the relationship between grocery stockouts and sales performance on Amazon's marketplaces in five countries—Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Using a dataset that comprises more than 290,000 distinct grocery products, we find that Amazon has higher sales and lower stockout rates than its third-party sellers. Our analysis also reveals strong negative correlations between stockout rates and sales performance across all countries. Specifically, when products are unavailable for a 90-day period, average sales rankings across all seller types are 14%–67% higher, indicating lower sales performance. The correlation between stockouts and sales rankings appears stronger for Amazon's own products compared to those sold by third-party sellers. These results highlight how grocery inventory availability relates to sales performance across different seller types in Amazon's e-commerce ecosystem, with implications for both platform operators and third-party sellers.

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LFPP WHOLESALE CAPACITY BUILDING STRATEGIES IN UNCERTAIN MARKETS

Local food marketing through wholesale distribution channels has encountered challenging times through adjustments to Covid, political swings, and consumer preferences for food attributes. A national survey of Local Food Promotion Program grant projects was conducted in collaboration with USDA-AMS to explore wholesale capacity building strategies. Project manager interviews and site visits with over 30 projects were conducted to explore issues and opportunities common to different types of projects. Many innovative strategies have been employed across the country in support of projects involving food hubs, meat processing, produce, certified kitchens and incubators, in addition to rural and urban market settings. The strategies have been diverse and projects of different types have been confronted with unique sorts of challenges. This presentation will highlight some of the more successful strategies, explore issues around outcome/impact measurement, discuss the issue of sustainability, and unique considerations for successful wholesale market development strategies within certain types of project and market contexts.

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FOOD MANUFACTURERS' DECISION MAKING UNDER VARYING STATE REGULATION - AN UPDATE

States are increasingly regulating the production practices, ingredients, and labeling of food products sold within their borders. This patchwork approach to food policy is likely to have significant ramifications for the U.S. food sector and interstate agri-food trade. In the Journal of Food Distribution Research, we developed a conceptual framework to assess how differences in states' regulations influence food manufacturers' costs and production decisions. Using the model, we examined differences in producer behavior across three policy examples, illustrating how firms respond to regulatory costs and highlighting the implications of interstate heterogeneity in food policy. As policies continue to unfold at lightning speed, we'll discuss the current state of food regulation, expected changes, and the implications for the food system.

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BAD FOOD, GOOD BUSINESS: THE ERASURE OF AFRICAN AMERICANS FROM THE REVOLUTION OF FOOD

This research update explores how cultural food systems, specifically African American soul food are judged within the context of alternative food systems (AFS), and how these sentiments capture much more complex issues such as food security, food sovereignty, and market participation. Although no official definition for alternative food system exists the primary focus of these systems is to promote environmental sustainability, economic viability to farmers, equitable access to nutritional foods, and community engagement. This study currently in progress uses a mixed methods approach to explore how soul food is perceived in both the mainstream food systems and AFS. The quantitative section utilizes sentiment analysis from structured survey responses in an attempt to assess public opinion on soul food and its connection with food security and market participation. The qualitative section will have a phenomenological framework utilizing one on one interviews to capture those lived experiences. The results will work to inform policy, and market strategies in the agri-food sector.

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DRIVING FOOD EQUITY: A NON-PROFIT MODEL FOR SUPPORTING FARMERS AND COMMUNITIES IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA

The Mississippi Delta faces persistent challenges in food access, agricultural viability, and rural economic development. This presentation shares the innovative approach of the Mississippi-based non-profit In Her Shoes, Inc. (IHS) that is transforming the regional food system. Through a multi-channel model that includes a mobile food truck initiative, and brick-and-mortar grocery stores, IHS partners directly with local farmers. Operating one food truck in four different locations and two grocery stores, IHS addresses food insecurity in low-income neighborhoods while providing market access for small and underserved farmers. This presentation will explore how the initiative was designed, the operational and funding models used, key partnerships, and measurable outcomes in terms of farmer participation and community impact. It will also share lessons learned, including regulatory challenges, scaling strategies, and the role of trust-building in historically underserved communities. This dual-purpose mission highlights how non-profits can bridge the gap between supply and demand in food deserts, leveraging local agriculture to build community resilience.

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RESEARCH SESSIONS II

Monday, October 13 | 3:30 PM - 5:00 PM

LABOR PRODUCTIVITY IMPLICATIONS IN SMALL-SCALE SPECIALTY CROP PRODUCTION

Small-scale specialty crop farms face labor challenges due to limited capital resources and the physically demanding, skill-intensive nature of tasks like planting, setting up irrigation, weeding, and post-harvest washing and packing. This paper explores how worker skill level directly affects productivity, economic efficiency, and overall farm operations. Data collected from task-based observations show that experienced workers perform these jobs faster and with fewer errors than novice laborers. While the difference may seem small, economic implications compound when accumulated from seedbed preparation to post-harvest handling. Especially for small-scale farms that typically operate on tight schedules and budgets, worker efficiency and morale play an important role. As such, hiring more experienced workers, while more expensive per hour, allows delegation of task as they tend to work more independently and make fewer mistakes, ultimately saving both time and money. On the other hand, newly hired, unskilled workers often need more supervision and training, which can slow down the farm's workflow, especially when experienced workers are pulled from their own tasks to train new employees.

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FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE FOR A PECAN SHELLING COOPERATIVE

The pecan industry in the United States is seeing a significantly increased demand for products, due primarily to growing international demand and the recognized health benefits of pecans. Smaller pecan growers have historically been at the mercy of larger shellers, taking whatever in-shell price these shellers reported on a given day. However, the recent development of USDA price reporting mechanisms and local market growth potential for shelled pecans have increased requests for producer-owned shelling facilities. This research will address a feasibility assessment tool being developed for small pecan growers wishing to construct a shelling facility that would meet FDA's food safety inspection guidelines. The assessment tool, which can be used by a single pecan grower or a growers' cooperative, allows users to evaluate the financial feasibility of starting and operating a shelling facility. The template includes enough flexibility to incorporate multiple inputs (e.g., improved pecans and native pecans, member and non-member pecans) and outputs (e.g., mammoth halves, pieces, shells for mulching, etc.) to mimic the expected operating conditions of a proposed facility. The template can also be modified to include further value-added marketing opportunities such as roasted/flavored pecans and pecan butter.

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FACTORS CORRELATED WITH SPECIALTY CROP FARMERS' WILLINGNESS TO ADOPT ALLEY CROPPING SYSTEMS: THE CASE OF TENNESSEE FRUIT AND VEGETABLE FARMERS

Alley cropping is an agroforestry practice that involves planting trees or shrubs alongside herbaceous crops within the same production system. Benefits of alley cropping include crop diversification, enhanced productivity of annual crops, reduced soil erosion, improved pollinators and wildlife habitat, decreased incidence of pests and diseases, carbon sequestration, and reduced nitrogen leaching. All these benefits could contribute to the long-term environmental and economic sustainability of fruit and vegetable production, supporting regional food systems. Despite the potential benefits of alley cropping systems, their global adoption remains low. This study evaluated farmers' willingness to adopt alley cropping using data from a survey of Tennessee fruit and vegetable farmers and Firth's logistic regression. Regression results suggest that age, education, risk preferences, access to off-farm income, familiarity with alley cropping, and farmers' perceptions of heat stress as a major challenge in their farm operation are significantly correlated with farmers' willingness to adopt alley cropping.

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UNDERSTANDING WORKER PREFERENCES FOR AGRICULTURAL CREDENTIALS: PRELIMINARY RESULTS FROM A DISCRETE CHOICE EXPERIMENT

To support workforce development in Arkansas's food and agricultural sectors, our research team is conducting a survey and discrete choice experiment (DCE) during the summer of 2025 to assess worker preferences for short-term credential programs. The study targets adult learners, particularly those in rural and underserved communities, to better understand which features of training programs are the most appealing and accessible. This Research Update will preview the study design and share preliminary findings on stakeholder engagement, survey implementation, and expected applications of the findings. By prioritizing worker voices and preferences, this project aims to bridge the gap between workforce demand and training supply, thereby supporting a more resilient and responsive agricultural economy in Arkansas.

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MAPPING THE CONSUMER JOURNEY OF HEMP-INCLUSIVE CEREAL

As hemp re-enters the U.S. food system, understanding its integration into diets is vital. This study examines consumer adoption of hemp-inclusive cereals using NielsenIQ household scanner data (2017–2019) from over 2,500 households, focusing on spending patterns, demographics, and post-purchase behavior. We develop a Spending Strength Index to classify households into non-spenders, once-only, and low, medium, or high spenders, and apply linear probability models to assess demographic and socioeconomic influences. Results indicate that younger, smaller, and higher-income households are more likely to purchase hemp cereals, but repeat purchases remain limited. Event-study analysis shows sustained spending only months after initial purchase, suggesting trial behavior or delayed value recognition. Many products lack prominent “hemp” labeling, reducing awareness and creating a provenance barrier. These findings underscore the need for clearer marketing and improved visibility of hemp’s nutritional benefits to expand adoption in mainstream markets.

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RICH MEDIA FORMATS AND CONSUMER WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR VALUE-ADDED CHEESE ATTRIBUTES: EVIDENCE FROM A NON-HYPOTHETICAL CHOICE EXPERIMENT

This study investigates the impact of a media-rich (video) treatment on WTP for value-added cheese attributes (price, retail location, origin, color, cattle breed, and farmstead). Using an incentivized discrete choice experiment with 110 participants randomly assigned to a rich media (video) or infographic treatment, we assess the differential impact of information treatment and show that our estimates are robust. Across both treatment groups, consumers experienced higher utility for cheese purchased from farm-direct retailers, produced in-state, and made from Holstein milk when compared to grocery store retailers, out of state origins, and breed unspecified respectively. Media format influenced attribute-specific WTP in distinct ways. As a richer media, video significantly increased WTP for the farm-direct retail (\$1.42) over grocery stores, compared to the infographic treatment (\$0.86). Conversely, the infographic treatment heightened the utility derived from specific attributes, like the Holstein breed, increasing WTP to \$1.39 when compared to the video (\$0.83) over breed unspecified. These findings suggest that media richness has a heterogeneous effect on WTP for value-added cheese attributes highlighting the need for attribute tailored marketing strategies.

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UNITED STATES MAINSTREAM MEAT MARKET ENTRY: AN ANALYSIS OF SPECIALTY GOAT MEAT PRODUCTS

This study utilizes data from a national consumer survey conducted in February 2024, the research seeks to understand consumers perspectives and motivations making goat meat more acceptable in the mainstream meat market. Currently, demand for goat meat in the United States comes from the immigrant population and ethnic communities. (Ibrahim et al., 2017). Given that consumers care more about the quality of the food they purchase, goat meat, which has lower cholesterol and is leaner than other red meat, may make it easier to position successfully in the general meat market. Market entry may require availing a product that is familiar and comparable to the meat's consumers purchase, a subject of this study. Familiar meat products, such as burgers, are items that are sold at grocery stores and convenience stores. Findings from this research will contribute towards understanding what drives consumers to purchase such goat meat products when made available.

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CONSUMERS' WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES AT DIRECT MARKETING OUTLETS IN THE NORTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

As health consciousness and the demand for fresh, locally sourced produce grow, insights into consumer WTP can guide policies and initiatives aimed at promoting healthy eating habits. An internet survey of 1,167 respondents residing in New York, Delaware, New Jersey, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania was conducted from March 7 to 15, 2021, to capture consumer purchasing behavior and other characteristics related to visiting direct marketing operations and shopping at direct market outlets in the Northeast. The logistic regression analysis reveals that several factors significantly influence the willingness to pay for fresh fruits and vegetables at direct marketing outlets. Key positive predictors include the number of children in the household, belief in better variety at direct marketing outlets, willingness to give tips, awareness of nature tourism, having a garden, higher income levels, younger age, and willingness to buy from sustainable market outlets. Conversely, larger household sizes and urban residences negatively affect WTP. Higher educational attainment is associated with decreased WTP, and race/ethnicity plays a role, with White and Asian Americans less likely to pay.

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COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES ON DAIRY INDUSTRY IMPACTS AND WASTE MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGIES

Both dairy industry consolidation and use of technological innovations to manage dairy waste are accelerating. This study is a component of the “Idaho Sustainable Agriculture Initiative for Dairy” project funded by a USDA NIFA Sustainable Agricultural Systems grant. The larger project includes the development of value-added technologies that build on anaerobic digestion to manage dairy waste. Increasing amounts of dairy waste is a major issue facing the industry and impacts communities. Using a community capitals framework, this study answers two related research questions that have previously been under explored: 1) how much of a positive or a negative impact do residents believe the local dairy industry has on multiple aspects of their community and 2) how much of a positive or a negative impact do residents believe it has on their community when local dairies adopt new waste management technologies? Data are from a mail survey of adults residing in Idaho’s eight largest dairy counties collected between January and March 2025 (n=398). Bivariate probit analysis revealed perceptions of community and waste management technology impacts are related. Findings from multivariate estimates indicate that distance from a dairy, perceptions of economic contribution, perceptions of environmental impacts, and concern about the Avian flu are significant predictors. Implications for extension programming, industry communication, and community engagement are discussed.

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ARE AMERICANS WILLING TO PAY TO IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS FOR OTHERS? EVIDENCE FROM A REAL DONATION EXPERIMENT

Public health crises disrupt both food supply and consumer trust. During the pandemic, “virus-tested” labels emerged to signal safety, yet it remains unclear whether demand for these labels reflects factual knowledge or emotional concern. We conducted a discrete choice experiment with over 900 consumers, focusing on beef and shrimp. Each choice set varied by country of origin, virus-tested labeling, and certifying authority. We also measured concern (information-seeking frequency) and knowledge (accuracy in food safety questions). We estimated willingness to pay (WTP) with psychological interactions. Results reveal that emotional concern, rather than knowledge, drove demand. High-concern consumers displayed significantly higher WTP, particularly for government and retailer-certified labels, while knowledge effects were weak or even negative. These findings suggest that visible, credible safety signals may be more effective than factual information in restoring consumer confidence during crises.

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AN EXPLORATION OF JUSTICE, TRUST, FAIRNESS, AND LOCAL IDENTITY IN AGRICULTURAL MARKETING: CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF THE “FRESH FROM FLORIDA” PROGRAM.

In an era of expanding global food networks, efforts to revitalize local food systems have gained renewed attention, particularly through state-sponsored agricultural marketing initiatives that seek to strengthen regional or local identity and connect consumers to nearby producers. Florida has invested in the “Fresh from Florida” (FFF) program to elevate the visibility of locally grown fruits and vegetables. Yet, despite the program’s prominence, little is known about how consumers view such a program and how these perceptions shape broader views of justice, trust, fairness, and local identity in state branding efforts. This study addresses that gap by examining the perceptions of primary grocery shoppers across Florida, New York, Ontario, and Quebec. Through focus groups, we explore the cognitive and emotional associations consumers make with Florida agriculture and the FFF label, aiming to uncover the underlying narratives of justice, trust, and fairness embedded in these judgments.

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FOOD TRUST IN CRISIS: EMOTION, NOT KNOWLEDGE, DRIVES CONSUMER CHOICES

This study examines the resilience of alcoholic beverage manufacturers and drinking places during the Great Recession (2007-2008) and the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 onwards) using Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages data from 2005-2023. We analyze how beer, wine, and distilled product establishments fared compared to drinking places, which were severely impacted early in the pandemic. Despite economic shocks, alcoholic beverage manufacturers continued to expand nationally during the pandemic. We explore county-level variations in resilience, considering factors like federal stimulus funding. Preliminary regression analyses investigate county-level factors associated with establishment decline and rebound. Notably, drinking places experienced sharp declines during pandemic shutdowns but rebounded quickly, though unevenly across regions. By understanding these spatial processes, our work aims to help industry and community leaders better prepare for future economic shocks, recognizing the sector's importance in local recreational economies and tourism.

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RESEARCH SESSIONS III

TUESDAY, October 14 | 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM

EXTENSION-SUPPORTED LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS: TAKEAWAYS FROM CARTERSVILLE FARMERS' MARKET, BARTOW COUNTY, GA

Farmers markets are increasingly recognized as catalysts for community-based economic development and local food access. However, their success often hinges on strong support structures. This presentation will share key takeaways from the Cartersville Farmers Market in Bartow County, Georgia, where collaborative efforts between UGA Extension agents, local government, and community partners led to a ninefold increase in vendor sales between 2019 and 2024. Highlights include Extension's leadership in securing EBT access under its umbrella, creating and enforcing equitable vendor rules, guiding the hiring of a market manager (in partnership with the City of Cartersville), and leading an impact evaluation that informed strategic improvements. The session will also introduce a forthcoming guideline for Extension agents, offering pragmatic tools and leverage points, from market setup to impact evaluation, for fostering thriving, resilient markets. These lessons aim to equip local food systems advocates with actionable collaborative models for strengthening local food systems.

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ABSTRACT: STRENGTHENING AG MARKETING STRATEGIES: SOUTHERN RISK MANAGEMENT EDUCATION CENTER CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

Marketing is the activity that transforms production in a farm or ranch operation into financial success. As we experience the market volatility of 2025 which squeezes profit margins, the ability of producers to capture price premiums and manage their marketing risks have never been higher. The Southern Risk Management Education Center (SRMEC) educates farmers and ranchers to manage risks across a range of risk management areas beyond federal crop insurance. SRMEC's online certificate course, Introduction to Risk Management, highlights tools and strategies to help farmers and ranchers manage the marketing risks they face daily. The course addresses marketing plans, the components of marketing decisions, contingency planning, and marketing tools, to help producers enhance marketing effectiveness, reduce risk exposure, and improve financial outcomes. The course is offered via the Agricultural Finance, Tax, and Asset Protection (AgFTAP) national education program. While AgFTAP focuses on financial and legal risks, the aligned program offers a variety of marketing resources, supporting the long-term viability and profitability of agricultural enterprises.

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UNDERSTANDING POTENTIAL FOR NATIONAL GUARD AND MILITARY UNITS TO SOURCE LOCAL AND REGIONAL- A CASE STUDY FROM MINNESOTA AND ILLINOIS GO FOR GREEN®

Local and regional food procurement continues to be a difficult strategy for institutions due to quantity and price. However, institutions continue to be interested in bridging the supply and demand and meeting organizational and client values of locally and regionally sourced foods to provide increased economic impact to the regional community. In a recent study, collaborating with Illinois and Minnesota National Guard units, the research team addressed the potential of utilizing a current shift in dining menus at Guard Units to Go for Green and local procurement. Go For Green is an Army dining nutrition and education program that combines Department of Defense strategies with Special Operations Command nutrition standards. The goal of the program is to improve health, fitness, and readiness of soldiers. Through this initiative, the research team is identifying menu items that can be sourced local and regionally to support the soldier health initiative. While this is just getting underway, there are distinct potentials for assessing improved soldier health and energy levels, improved economic benefit to local and regional farmers and suppliers, as well as improved protocols for transitioning procurement practices. This presentation will review the methodology of working with military units, analyzing contracts, and confirming a process for implementing a new procurement practice.

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COACHING: ARKANSAS FARM TO SCHOOL INSTITUTE

This study explores the integration of a Farm to School program into a high school curriculum to illustrate its effectiveness as a teaching tool for the food and agriculture industry. The study focuses on England High School, where students engaged in experiential learning through partnerships with local farms, school gardens, and a greenhouse. The program enhanced students' understanding of modern agriculture by aligning educational activities with core concepts in agricultural science, food systems, and sustainability. The case highlights how interdisciplinary learning prepares students for career pathways in agribusiness, food science, and sustainable agriculture. The findings demonstrate that Farm to School not only reinforces academic standards but also builds industry-relevant skills, fosters community connections, and inspires the next generation of agricultural leaders.

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CONSUMER PREFERENCES AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR SPECIALTY PROCESSED FOODS – DO MULTIPLE LABELS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

This study explores consumer preferences and willingness to pay (WTP) for specialty-labeled processed foods, with a focus on the impacts of multiple product labels on purchasing behavior. Using data from a 2024 online survey of consumers across the US West, respondents participated in choice experiments for packaged beef jerky, bottled mild salsa, and bottled tart cherry juice. Results indicate low overall familiarity with specialty production and labeling standards, although local and organic labels were most recognized and frequently purchased. Respondent WTP was highest when products carried dual labels, such as local and organic or grass-fed and organic, compared to single-label products. For example, consumers were willing to pay up to \$2 more for dual-labeled salsa and cherry juice, and \$3 more for dual-labeled beef jerky, relative to the unlabeled product. These findings suggest that combination labeling strategies enhance consumer willingness to pay and offer food industry stakeholders a pathway to increase product differentiation and competitiveness.

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TRANSPARENCY OR COMPLEXITY? CONSUMER RESPONSES AND ASSOCIATED SEARCH COSTS FOR MULTI-LABELING

This study examines consumer valuation of food labeling information, with a specific focus on Organic, Non-GMO, and Bioengineered (BE) certifications. We employ an experimental approach to measure consumers' willingness-to-pay for this information and to understand the cognitive processes underlying their purchasing decisions. The research aims to determine the perceived value of these labels, whether consumers recognize the informational overlap between them (e.g., that an "Organic" label implies "Non-GMO"), and how the sequence of information disclosure influences valuation and subsequent price perceptions. Following the experiment, participants complete a comprehensive survey to gather data on sociodemographic, consumption habits, attention to food labels, and both subjective and objective knowledge of the labeling systems. By analyzing the choices made, this research will provide crucial insights into how consumers value and process complex food label information, offering implications for regulatory policy, marketing strategy, and consumer education.

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SUBSTITUTABILITY AND COMPLEMENTARITY OF ECOLABELS IN THE PRESENCE OF CONFLICTING BRAND MESSAGING: A DISCRETE CHOICE EXPERIMENT

Evidence from consumer behavior research suggests that ecolabels, while intended to signal environmental benefits and attract eco-conscious consumers, may lose their effectiveness when brand imagery conflicts with their eco-friendly message. This study advances and experimentally tests a new explanation for the diminished impact of ecolabels: a theory based on the interplay between conflicting brand messaging and ecolabels attributes. Using a Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE), we explore the substitutability and complementarity of two common ecolabels, organic and cage-free, in the eggs market and how their effectiveness is moderated by brand messaging conveyed through packaging (biodegradable vs. non-biodegradable). The DCE is employed to investigate how ecolabel presence and brand imagery consistency interact to influence consumer perceptions and willingness to pay. This paper provides the theoretical framework and experimental design necessary for producers, policymakers, and marketers to promote sustainable consumption.

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WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR LOCALLY PRODUCED FRUITS AND VEGETABLES IN ALABAMA: EVIDENCE FROM A CONTINGENT VALUATION SURVEY

This study examines consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced fruits and vegetables in Alabama, using a contingent valuation framework that distinguishes between items labeled "Alabama-grown" and state branding in Alabama under the "Sweet Grown Alabama" (SGA) program. The experimental design allows clear separation of the effects of geographic origin and state branding, while controlling for potential hypothetical bias. Results indicate significant premiums for locally produced items, with significant branding effects when compared to baseline willingness to pay for generic U.S. produce. Behavioral factors, particularly frequent purchasing of local products, emerge as stronger predictors of WTP than demographic characteristics, underscoring the importance of habitual engagement with local food systems. Findings suggest that while branding can enhance consumer valuation, its effectiveness is context-dependent and may be most impactful when baseline attachment to local goods is moderate. The study offers insights for policymakers and marketers seeking to strengthen regional food markets and optimize branding strategies.

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WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR FARMSTEAD DAIRY PRODUCTS BY SOUTHEAST US CONSUMERS: A DISCRETE CHOICE EXPERIMENT

This study assesses Southeast U.S. consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) for farmstead dairy products (e.g., milk, cheese, and ice cream) to learn about the opportunities for enhancing economic sustainability for farmstead dairies. An online survey was conducted in 2024 with 5290 respondents equally sampled across nine southeastern states (AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MS, SC, VA, and WV). The study employed a discrete choice experiment (DCE) and used a mixed logit model to estimate the WTP for various product attributes such as origin, packaging, retailer, production methods, quality/flavor, and price. Consumers across all states showed positive WTP for in-state logos, grass-fed, and all-natural labels for fluid milk versus out-of-state and conventional production. Conversely, glass packaging and low-fat content need a discount for consumers relative to plastic and reduced fat. For cheese, sharp flavor and state branding were preferred, while mild flavor and plastic wrapping needed a discount. For ice cream, consumers WTP a premium for in-state branding and premium quality, whereas ice cream from reduced-fat milk needed a discount.

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CONSUMER PREFERENCE AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR DOMESTICALLY PRODUCED GOAT MEAT IN THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

The American meat consumption basket reflects a growing share of goat meat as Americans become more health conscious and ethnically diverse, offering opportunities for domestic goat meat producers and marketers. Hence, a consumer survey was conducted in 14 Southern states to examine the market for domestically produced goat meat, involving 1203 participants. The survey found that 63% of the participants (763) had tasted goat meat before and 68% of them (523) were willing to pay more for domestically produced goat meat than imported goat meat. Moreover, 49% of the participants (372) who had tasted goat meat before moderately or strongly agreed that domestically produced goat meat was safer than imported goat meat. Results from a logistic regression analysis explained that various socio demographic factors such as consumers' age, education, and income affected their willingness to buy domestically produced goat meat.

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BEEF PACKING RESILIENCE DURING COVID-19: THE ROLE OF PLANT SIZE

The COVID-19 disruption of the U.S. beef supply chain led to government efforts to enhance its resilience. A key policy response was to reduce dependence on large slaughter plants by expanding capacity in smaller, geographically dispersed facilities. This approach sparked research into plant size, market structure, and resilience – each using different definitions of resilience. However, most plant size studies focus solely on changes in processing volume compared to normal times, overlooking recovery speed and the duration of downturns, two critical aspects of resilience. Our study addresses these gaps by developing resilience metrics across 35 U.S. states and analyzing their relationship with plant size, labor conditions, and COVID-19 policies. We find that medium-sized plants played a crucial role in enhancing resilience during the pandemic, challenging the USDA's emphasis on smaller packing plants. These findings suggest that more nuanced, evidence-based strategies are needed to strengthen the beef processing sector's resilience.

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THE IMPACT OF DAIRY FARM EXITS ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The U.S. dairy industry is undergoing rapid consolidation. Smaller farms are exiting the dairy industry, while larger operations are expanding. This shift has significant economic and social consequences for rural communities that rely on dairy farming as a primary source of employment and income. This study addresses that gap by assessing the broader economic impacts of dairy farm exits in Wisconsin, a central dairy-producing state. We utilize county-level data from 2001 to 2022 to investigate the relationship between dairy farm closures and local economic indicators, including employment, labor income, GDP, and the number of businesses in supporting industries. To address potential endogeneity, we apply an instrumental variable (IV) approach using Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) payments, which influence farm exit decisions by stabilizing farm revenue. Preliminary results indicate that dairy farm exits are associated with job losses and a decline in related industries, primarily due to reduced local demand. However, efficiency gains from larger farms that absorb production can partially offset these losses through improvements in overall GDP. This research contributes to academic understanding of structural change in agriculture and provides empirical evidence on the localized economic consequences of farm consolidation, informing future research and rural development policy.

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LOCAL AND REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCE: THE U.S. APPLE SUPPLY CHAIN

Local and Regional Food Systems (LRFS) have gained attention in the United States for their role in promoting food security, sustainability, and local economic development. However, LRFS are increasingly exposed to multiple, overlapping shocks such as climate variability, labor shortages, and market disruptions. This study explores how LRFS actors in the U.S. Midwest experience and respond to these challenges, with a focus on the apple supply chain. Using a qualitative research design, we conducted in-depth interviews with supply chain actors to understand structural characteristics, types of disruptions, and adaptive strategies. Preliminary results for the apple supply chain show that actors have faced multiple shocks—ranging from labor shortages and food safety incidents to weather variability and market disruptions—and have responded by adopting the H-2A labor program, investing in orchard modernization, diversifying markets and varieties, and exploring value-added strategies like certifications and agritourism. These efforts reflect a broader trend toward flexibility and innovation to strengthen resilience. Ongoing research will compare additional supply chains to identify common and sector-specific resilience strategies that can inform policy and practice.

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LABOR PRODUCTIVITY IN U.S. WHOLESALE TRADE: TRENDS, DETERMINANTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR AGRICULTURE

The wholesale trade industry occupies a strategic position in the U.S. economy, serving as an intermediary between producers and retailers and ensuring the distribution of goods, including food products. Over the past three decades, the sector has been reshaped by digital infrastructure, evolving labor dynamics, and global integration, with important consequences for labor productivity. This study examines the determinants of labor productivity in U.S. wholesale trade from 1987 to 2024 using time series econometrics. The Johansen cointegration test and Vector Error Correction Model (VECM) are applied to explore long- and short-run dynamics among employment, hours worked, and labor compensation, within the framework of the Cobb–Douglas production function and Solow Growth Model. By situating wholesale productivity in the context of food distribution, the study highlights its role in improving efficiency, stabilizing prices, and enhancing food security. Findings contribute to sectoral productivity research and underscore workforce efficiency as vital to national supply chains.

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THE TRIPLE LAYERED BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS APPLIED TO HEMP FOODS

This research update describes building hemp supply chains using the triple layered business model canvas tool to explore sustainability-oriented business model innovation. Based on evidence from our own research and the existing literature, we will present information on the following elements of the business model canvas to include sustainability. This high-level overview will include examples of current strengths and weaknesses of the hemp supply chain. Given that hemp is purported to have thousands of uses, we will focus on hemp foods. While much attention has been paid to hemp CBD, there is less information about hemp foods produced from grain (seed). And while business models have been developed for hemp fiber bags, hemp farms specifically, and CBD businesses, there has been no development of businesses

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