

Introduction:

- Tourism in rural areas has transformed the idealized small town appeal that creates opportunities for land owners to generate additional income.
- Agritourism combines agriculture and tourism to connect farms with communities through recreational-style activities.
- Agritourism provides a way for farms to stay competitive through diversification of activities and employment (Matthews, 2012).
- Education is considered a core tier on-farm activity for agritourism (Chase, 2018).
- Agritourism is growing nationally, but little research exists specific to Montana where the two main industries are agriculture and tourism.

Methods:

- Purpose: To examine Montana agritourism stakeholders' perceptions of industry characteristics, challenges, and opportunities.
- Objectives:
 1. Identify challenges faced by agritourism operators.
 2. Identify common questions of operators.
 3. Describe characteristics of a successful agritourism operation.
- Seven interviews were conducted with four operators and three stakeholders in active counties.
- Interviews were transcribed and content analysis was performed. Emergent codes were organized into themes during researcher analysis sessions.

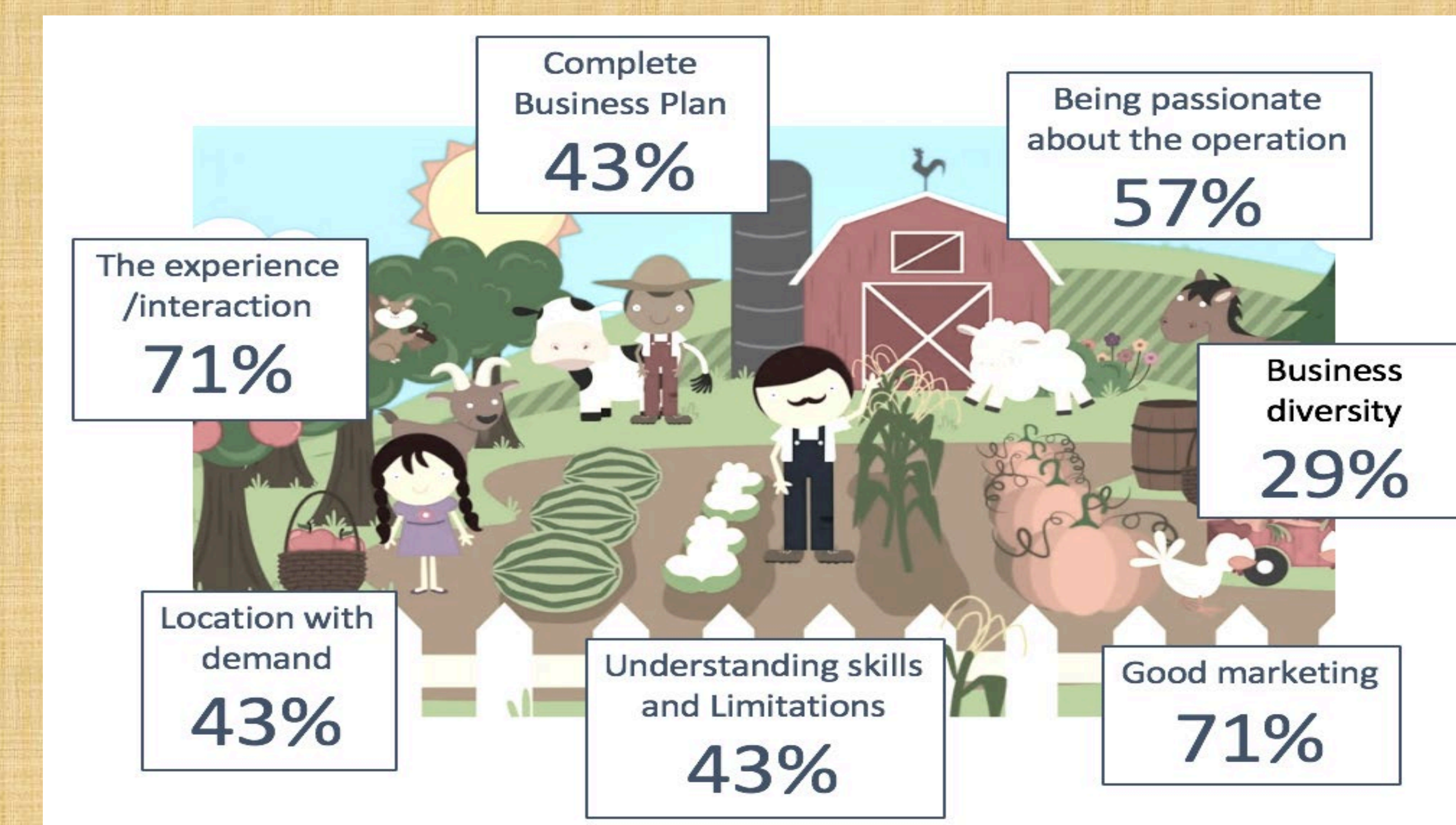
Challenges Faced by Operators:

Monetary Investment
Lack of Labor
Lack of Business Savvy
Liability
Public Interaction
Lack of Time
Regulations/Legislation

Common Questions of Operators:

Liability
Facing legislative obstacles
General advice
Effective marketing
Unexpected joys

Characteristics of Successful Agritourism Operation:



Conclusions and Recommendations:

- The most common themes related to the need for accessible liability information, public interaction regulations, and assistance with business management.
- The top rated characteristics of an effective operation were creating a unique experience for visitors and having an effective marketing plan.
- Mentoring and networking programs should be developed to connect agritourism businesses with economic development organizations, extension education, and agricultural and tourism associations, as well as a designated Montana coordinator.
- Post-secondary agricultural education should consider adding courses and majors in agritourism to meet demand.