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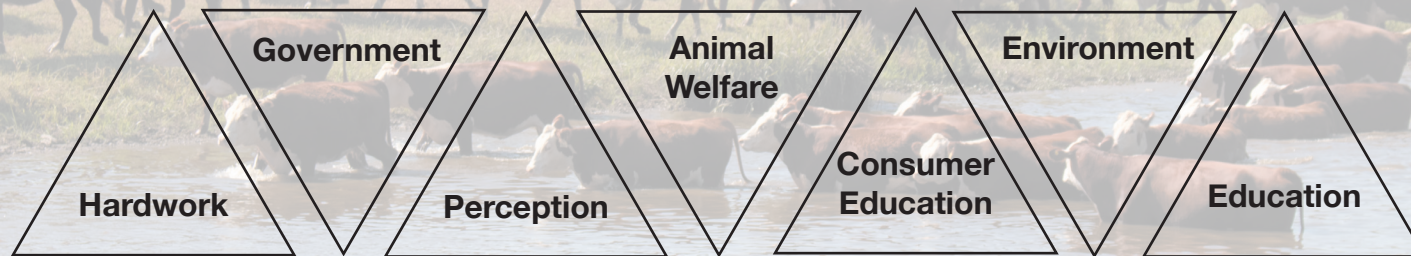
A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS AFTER EXTENSION-LED FARM TOURS



With most consumers being four generations removed from the family farm (USDA, 2012), there is a knowledge gap between agricultural producers and consumers (Smart, 2009). Using the Knowledge Gap theory, this study examined the perceptions of consumers following a beef cattle farm tour in order to determine the effectiveness of farm tours of increasing agricultural knowledge and shifting consumer perceptions.

This study sought to explore participants' perceptions after an extension-led "Moms on the Farm Tour". A focus group was held post-tour with nine participants and tour leaders. Questions focused on whether or not participant perceptions changed, and if they had, what caused the change.

SEVEN THEMES EMERGED FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION



CONCLUSIONS

The findings suggest the program had a positive and powerful impact on participants' perceptions of agriculture, especially the beef industry. The positive perception shift can be attributed to decreasing the knowledge gap according to Specht et al. (2014). The seven themes that emerged demonstrate subjects that participants found interesting, relevant, or memorable which can influence and guide future studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that data about farm tour effectiveness be collected when farm tours are conducted. Utilizing the seven themes that emerged from this study, Agricultural organizations should share the success stories of farmers caring for their animals and the environment as both of these have been shown to resonate with consumers. These themes can help shape future farm tour programs on topics that should be discussed and studied.