

A PROFILE OF VISITORS TO FRESH FARM PRODUCE OUTLETS IN COCHISE COUNTY, ARIZONA

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This profile was compiled from 904 customer interviews conducted at farm outlets in Cochise County between mid-July and the end of October, 1993. The full results of this study are available in a separate extension bulletin.

The more than 20 farm outlets in Cochise County include pick-your-own farms, and orchards, roadside stands and some retail operations. They offer a variety of products and services including apples and apple bakery products, pistachios, meats, vegetables, honey, live plants, hay rides, fishing ponds and animal displays.

Many of the visitors to the outlets come from the nearest metropolitan area, Tucson, which is located over 80 miles away. The willingness of visitors to drive this far to buy fresh produce is somewhat unique. An important characteristic of these visitors is that nearly half of them indicated that what they liked best about visiting the outlets was the opportunity to have a farm or rural experience. In other words, many of these visitors are more interested in having an experience than in necessarily buying produce.

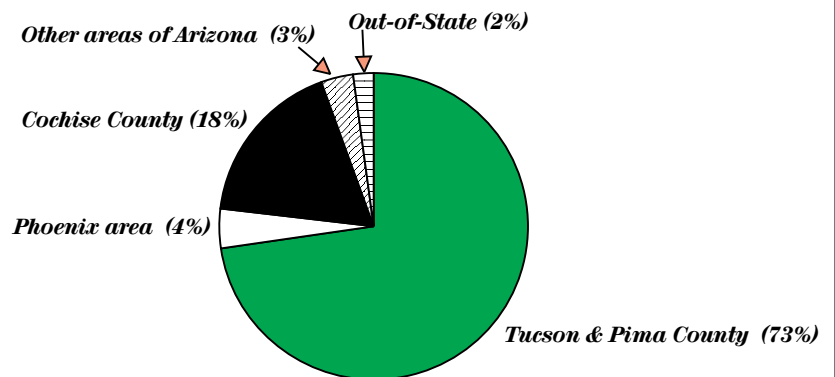
Visitor Characteristics

Almost three-quarters of all visitors to the farm produce outlets in Cochise County were from metropolitan Tucson or else-

where in Pima County, and 18% were local visitors from Cochise County. Only 2.1% were out-of-state visitors (Figure 1). Of the 83% of visitors to the farm outlets that were from outside of Cochise County, 77% came to Cochise County for the primary purpose of buying fresh farm produce. Sixty-four percent of all outlet visitors can be defined as agricultural tourists because they were visitors from outside the county who came to the area primarily to visit the farm outlets (Figure 2). Out-of-county visitors traveled in groups averaging 4.22 people per party. However, their median party size was 3 people. The average or mean is

Figure 1. Origin of Visitors to Farm Outlets

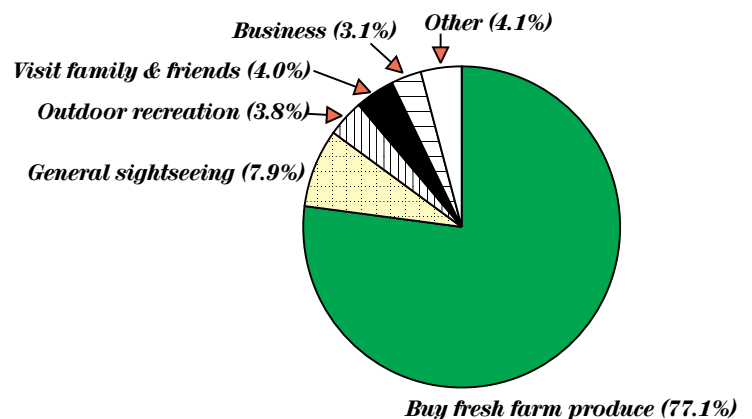
(Number of responses = 890)¹



¹Fourteen of the zip codes provided were nonexistent.

Figure 2. Purpose of Trip by Out-of-County Visitors

(Number of responses = 746)



somewhat larger than the median because of the number of large groups, especially groups of either older people or children, that visited the farm outlets. While 85% of the visitors were Caucasian, Hispanics represented over 8% of all visitor parties (Figure 3). The mean family income was \$42,300, well above the Arizona mean for 1990 of \$35,400 (Figure 4). Respondents had an average of 14.3 years of education (Figure 5) and many were professionals or working in management positions. Twenty percent of all respondents were retired and about one-quarter of all visitors were over the age of 60 (Figure 6).

Non-local visitors were different in important respects than local visitors. They were more likely to bring children, they were looking for a different mix of products, they made fewer trips to the farms over a single season. Non-local visitors were also more likely to indicate that what they liked best about visiting the outlets was the opportunity to have a farm or rural experience.

Roughly 44% of the out-of-county visitor parties, but only 39% of the locals, brought children. Children under the age of 18 represented 29% of all visitors. Unlike similar studies in other parts of the country, women did not constitute the overwhelming majority of visitors. Approximately 55% of all visitors, whether from Cochise County or from outside, were female. The difference may be because the trip to Cochise County is viewed more as a family or group experience rather than exclusively as a trip to secure fresh fruits and vegetables for preserving.

Trip Characteristics

Out-of-county people who came primarily to visit farms spent an average of half a day in the area. Visitors who came to the area for reasons other than purchasing farm produce (e.g., for general sightseeing, to visit family or friends, or for outdoor recreation or camping) aver-

aged 1 3/4 days in the area. Agricultural tourists generally visited 2 or 3 fresh farm produce outlets during their stay. For almost one-third of the out-of-county visitors, this was their first trip to the farm outlets (Figure 7). A surprisingly high percentage, 21% of local visitors, were making their first trip to the farm outlets. These percentages indicate potentially large annual increases in the number of visitors at the farm outlets. Less than 20% of non-locals visited outlets six times or more versus almost 40% of locals. Repeat visitation during the season was common. Thirty-seven percent of out-of-county and 70% of local respondents had visited the fresh farm outlets at least twice during the previous season (Figure 8). Nearly half of the local respondents visited the outlets four times or more.

Only 5% of the visitor parties that come mainly to visit farms, stayed overnight, while 31% of visitor parties coming to Cochise County for other reasons who also visited farm outlets stayed overnight. Almost two-thirds of all visitor parties that stayed overnight chose to stay in Willcox.

Eighty-two percent of all out-of-county travelers visited local farms only and did not visit any other local attractions on this trip. The most popular other attractions visited were the Chirachuas and the Rex Allen Museum which were visited by 4% and 3% of the out-of-county visitors respectively (Figure 9).

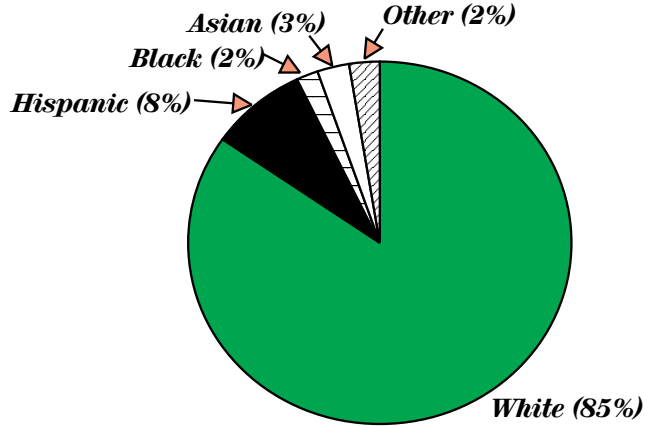
What Visitors Want

An overwhelming 97% of all visitors interviewed planned to return to the farm outlets. Forty-four percent of all visitors indicated that what they liked most about visiting the farm outlets was the experience of being on a farm or in a rural place (Figure 10). The next most commonly cited reasons for liking the outlets were the freshness of the produce (28%) and the quality of the produce (19%).

Over three-quarters of the visitors made the trip in search of specific products (i.e.,

Figure 3. Racial or Ethnic Background of Visitors

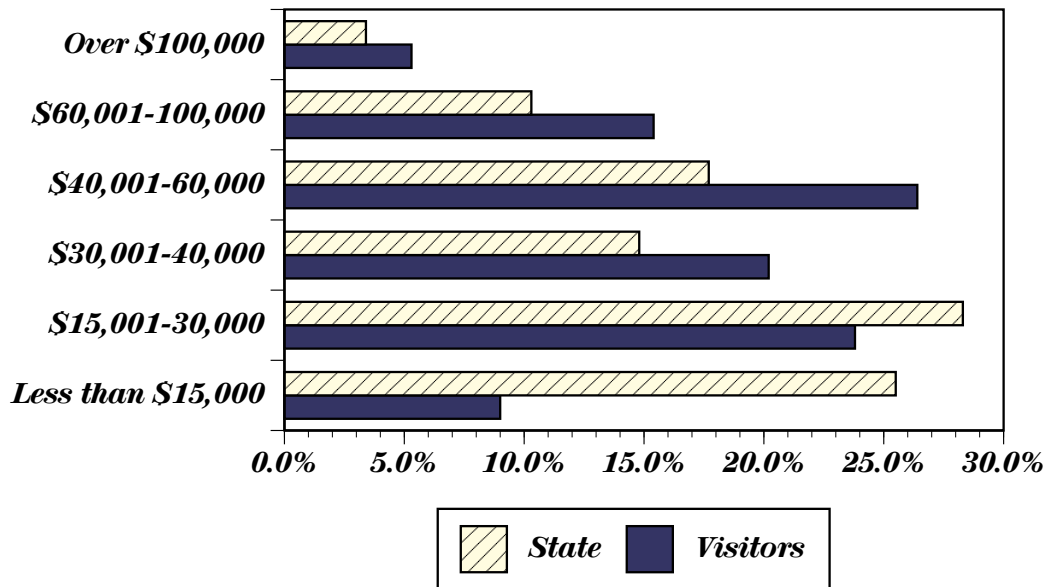
(Number of responses = 816)¹



¹ Eighty-eight respondents did not answer this question.

Figure 4. Income Level of Visitors Compared to State Average

(Number of responses = 857)¹

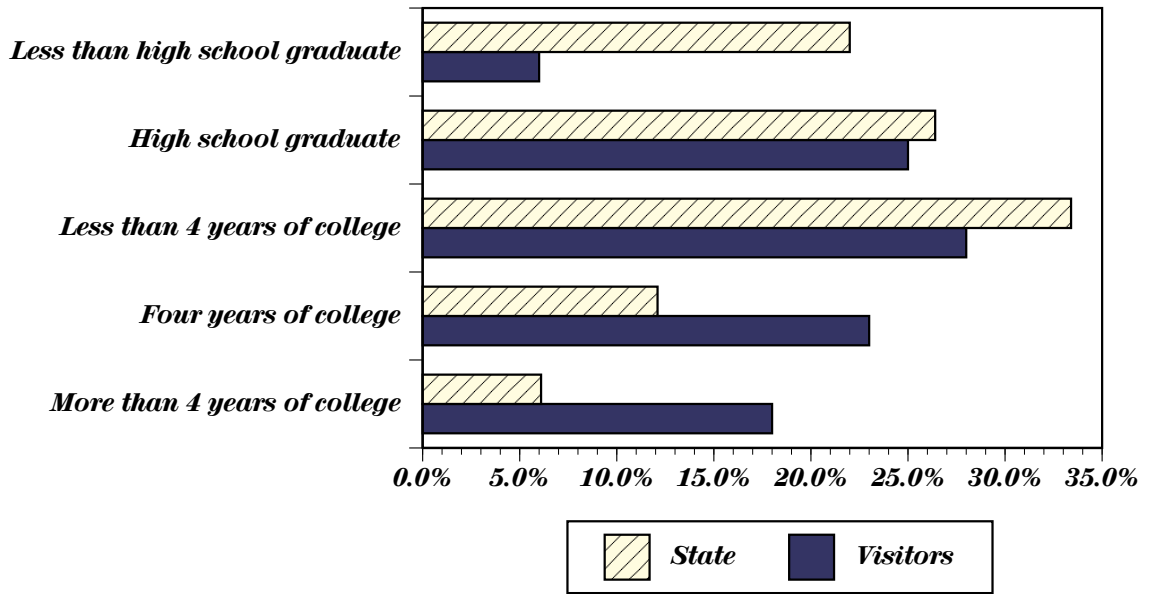


¹ Forty-seven respondents did not answer this question.

Source: Survey data and 1990 Census of Arizona Population and Housing. Summary Tape File 3A (Corrected). U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

Figure 5. Education of Visitors Compared to State Average

(Number of responses = 904)



Source: Survey data and 1990 Census of Arizona Population and Housing. Summary Tape File 3A (Corrected). U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

Figure 6. Age Distribution of Visitors

(Number of visitors in interviewed parties = 3600)

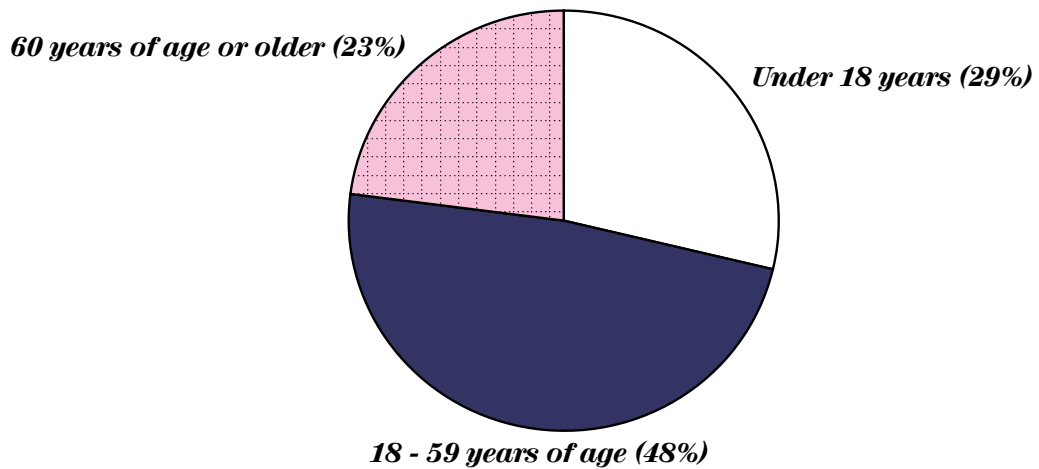


Figure 7. Times Respondents Had Visited Farm Outlets in This or Prior Years

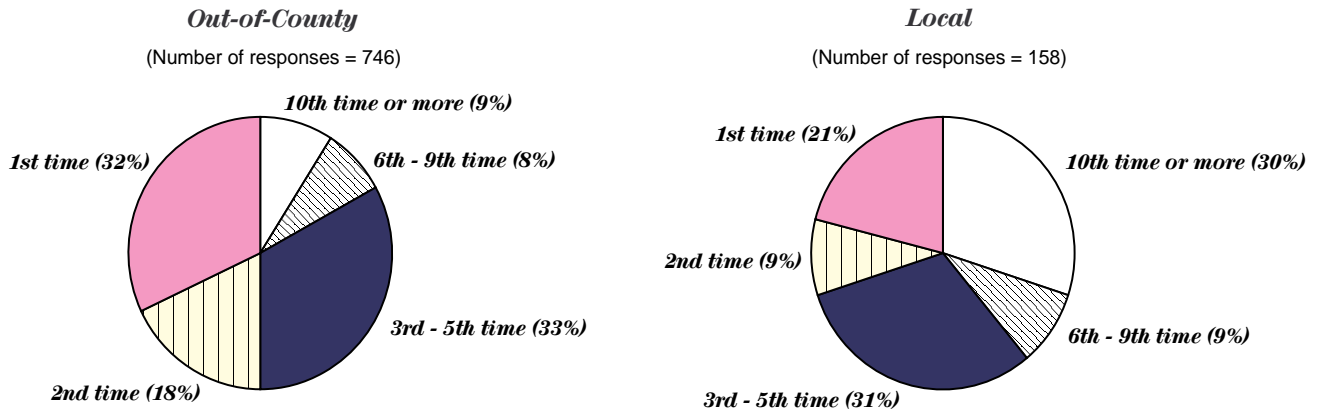


Figure 8. Times Visited Last Year

(Number of responses = 904)

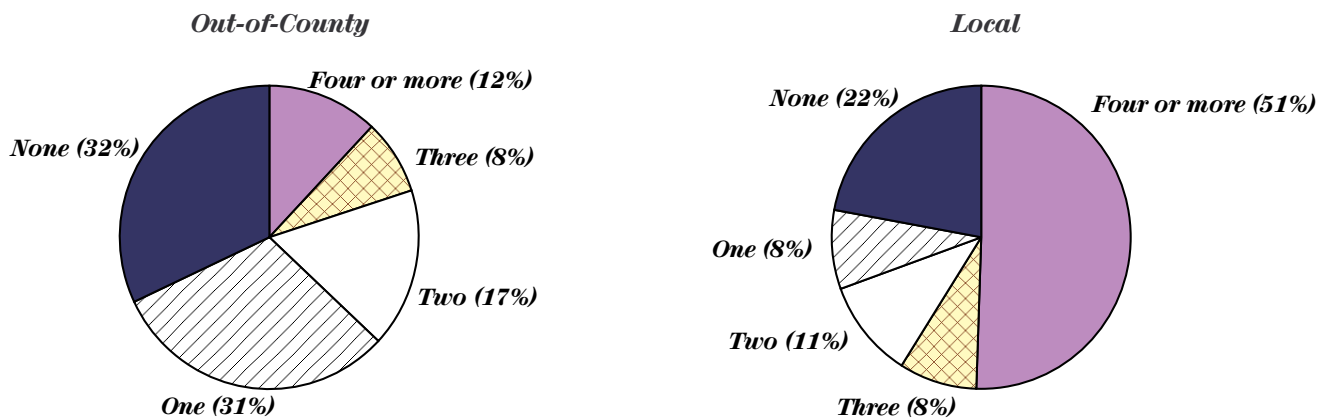


Figure 9. Other Attractions Visited by Out-of-County Visitors

(Number of responses = 746)

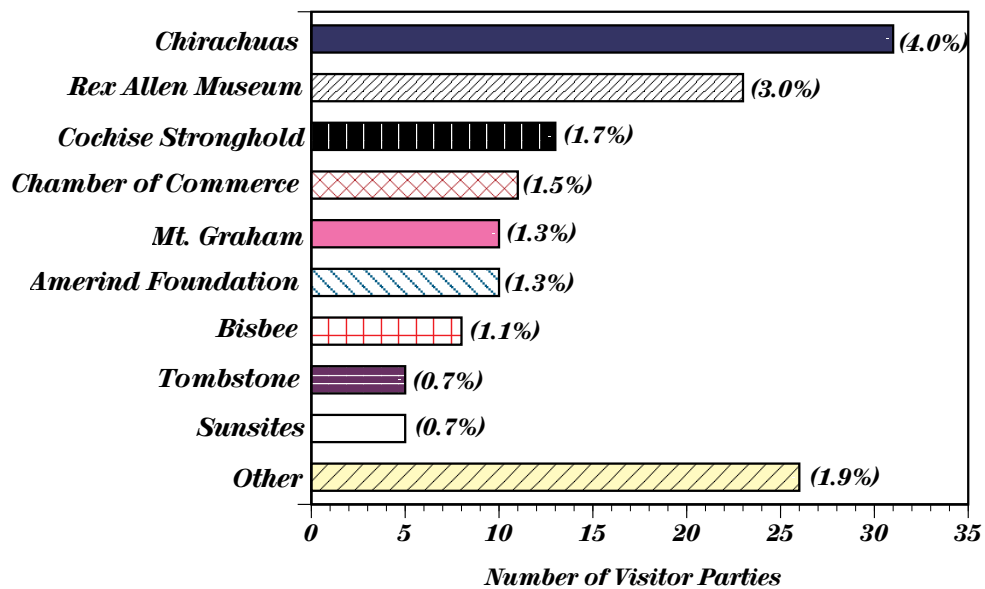
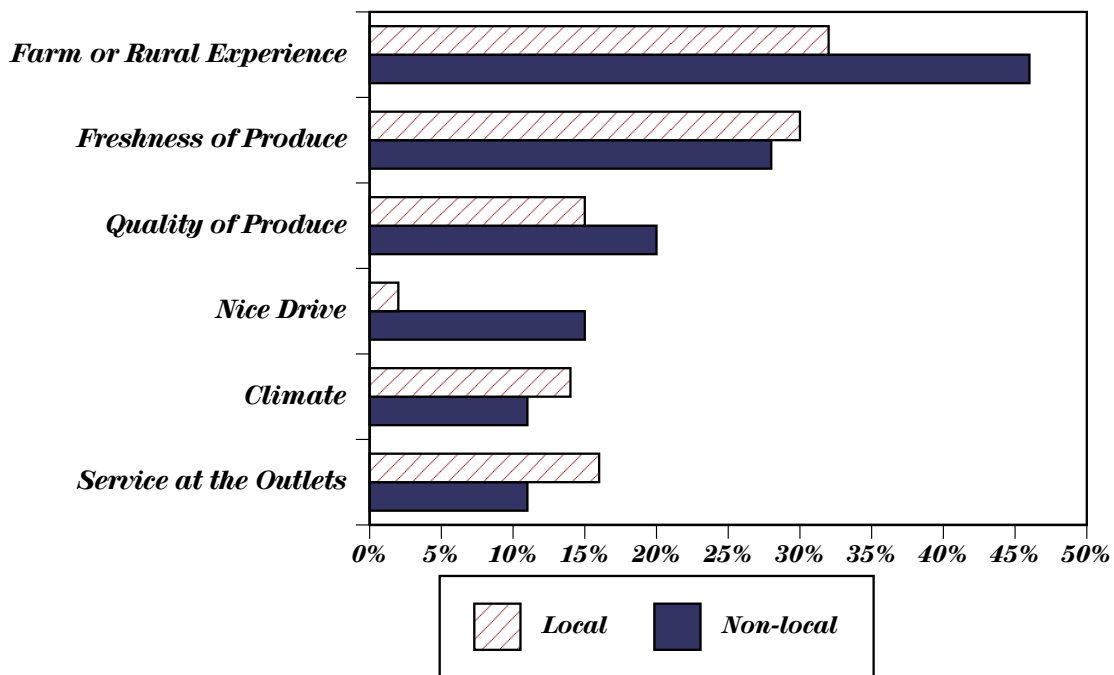


Figure 10. What Respondents Liked Most About Their Visit to the Farm Outlets

(Number of responses = 904)



Note: Visitors could give multiple responses.

76% of non-local and 86% of local visitors). Almost one-third of all visitors were looking specifically for apples (37% of non-locals but only 9% of local visitors). The other most popular products in descending order were: sweet corn, pumpkins, tomatoes, peaches, string beans and squash (Figure 11).

Although visitors appear to really enjoy their current experience, they had suggestions for improvements. The most common suggestions were to improve signage, provide better rest rooms, improve the roads and do more advertising, each of which were mentioned by 5% of all respondents. Sixty-two percent of all respondents had no suggestions for improvement.

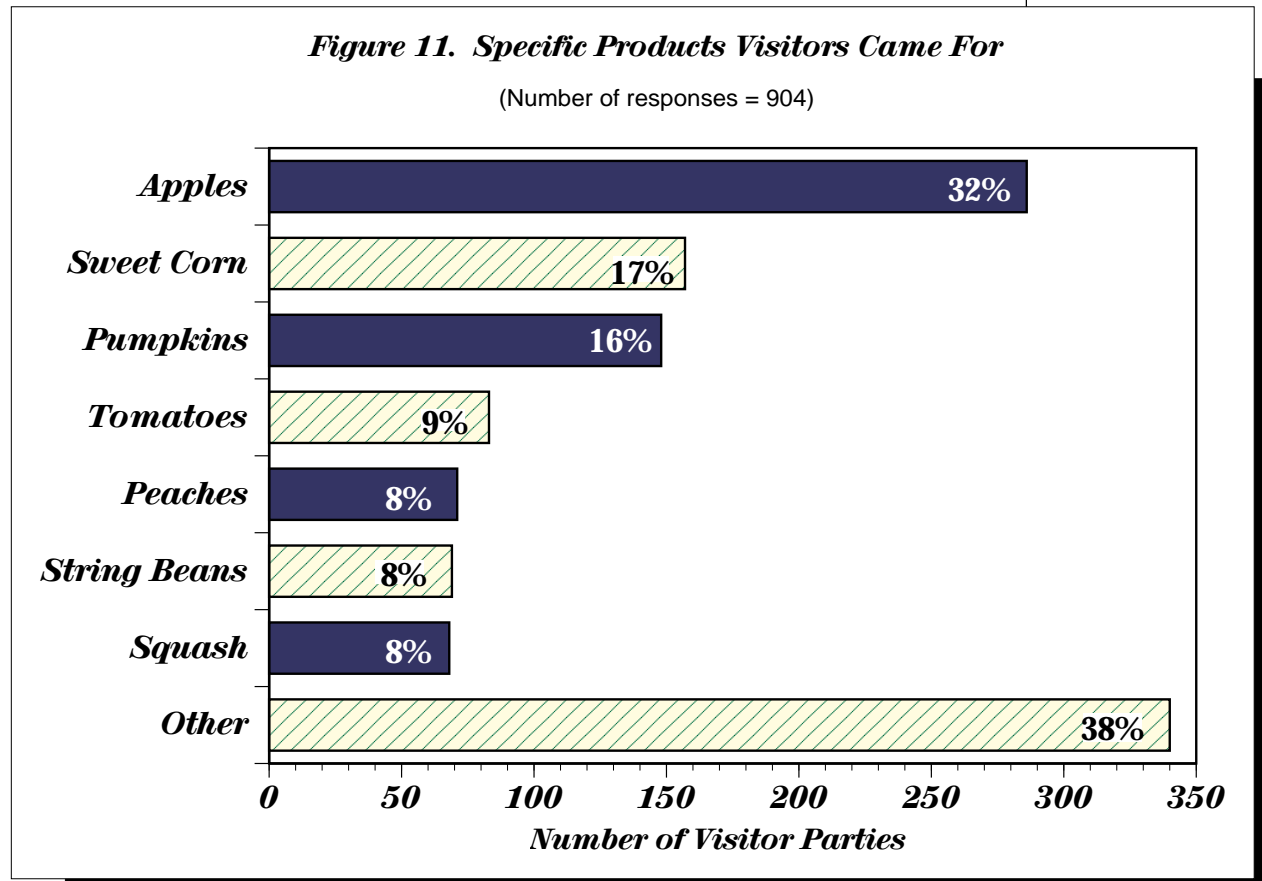
When asked if there were other types of food products or produce they would like to buy, the most commonly mentioned products were berries, especially straw-

berries, peaches, cherries, peas, lettuce, and various types of corn (sweet, pop, white and yellow). A number of products that people mentioned are already available in the area. However, they may not have been available at the particular farm outlets that the respondent visited. This is one indication of the need for the farm outlets to promote each other and make referrals directing customers to other operations that have these products. It is also an indication of the need to inform customers about when certain products are available during the season.

Visitors indicated that they would be interested in doing other activities while they were in the area. The most commonly mentioned of these activities were riding horses, swimming, fishing, farm tours, seeing crafts, and hiking or camping. Suggestions for various types of fairs and festivals also were common.

Figure 11. Specific Products Visitors Came For

(Number of responses = 904)



Visitor Expenditures

An estimated 19,032 non-local visitor parties went to one or more of the Cochise County farm outlets during the 1993 late summer season. This represents approximately 81,450 visitors. These visitors spent an average of \$58.00 per party, of which \$42.00 was spent at the farm outlets. Over one-half of the visitors spent money in local restaurants and almost one-fourth bought gasoline locally.

The total expenditures by out-of-county visitors are estimated at \$1 million during the 1993 season, of which \$768,000 was spent at farm outlets.

Conclusions

Visitors to Arizona fresh farm produce outlets differ from visitors to U-pick op-

erations in other states in the distance they are willing to travel to visit the outlets and by the fact that the farm experience is such an important reason for their trip. Typical visitors are Caucasian with above average income and education. Visitors are generally coming out only as part of a day trip and are traveling in small groups. They do not tend to visit attractions in the area other than the farm outlets. Over three-quarters of the visitors come to the outlets looking for a specific product.

References

Leones, Julie, Douglas Dunn, Marshall Worden, Robert Call. Agricultural Tourism in Cochise County, Arizona. Visitor Characteristics and Economic Impacts. The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Bulletin, 1994.

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