FACTORS INFLUENCING AGRITOURISM PARTICIPATION AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY

FOR LOCALLY PRODUCED FOOD IN GEORGIA: A BEHAVIORAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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(Under the Direction of Angie Yeonsook Im)

ABSTRACT

This study examines factors influencing agritourism participation and willingness to pay for locally produced food in Georgia, based on primary data from a Qualtrics survey of 374 respondents. The findings show that younger, higher-income individuals with strong motivations for scenic and rural experiences are more likely to participate in agritourism. Constraints such as a lack of interest from family and friends negatively impact participation, while a preference for both day and night activities boosts engagement. Structural Equation Modeling identifies attitudes toward local food as a primary driver of WTP, mediated by environmental concern, health awareness, personal image, and product quality. The Multinomial Logit Model reveals that favorable attitudes, younger age, education, higher income, and marital status are key predictors of higher WTP. Recommendations for stakeholders include targeted marketing, improving accessibility, launching educational campaigns to promote agritourism and local food systems, and strengthening participation and economic sustainability in Georgia's agritourism sector.

INDEX WORDS: Agritourism, Willingness to Pay (WTP), Locally Produced Food, Attitude, Consumer Behavior, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the CEO of nature, He who sits on the throne in Heaven and does whatever pleases Him on Earth without being queried by any moral being.

And to my ever-loving parents, Mr. & Mrs. Amusan, for their unwavering support, investment, and constant encouragement. To my siblings, Dolapo Amusan, Taiwo Amusan, and Kehinde Amusan, for their love and inspiration, always. This outstanding achievement is a testament to the investment and support of family and friends. I love and cherish you all.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background

Agritourism has become a key sector in the United States, particularly in Georgia, where agricultural practices and tourism intersect. It is a commercial enterprise that attracts visitors to farms, ranches, or agricultural operations. Agritourism combines agricultural production with tourism to educate or entertain guests while generating supplemental income for farmers (National Agricultural Law Center, 2024). This sector helps diversify revenue streams for farmers while also connecting consumers to agricultural practices in a more hands-on way, promoting a high preference for local food systems and rural lifestyles. The sector's growth aligns with the rising consumer demand for authentic, immersive experiences that traditional tourism often fails to provide. Modern tourists increasingly seek engagement with farming practices, rural landscapes, and food production (Testa et al., 2019; Kline et al., 2015). Tourists are motivated to contribute to the local economy and engage in sustainable consumption practices, which is an integral part of their overall travel experience (Perez et al., 2017; Khatami et al., 2020). It represents a key intersection of agriculture and tourism, providing several benefits to local economies while promoting sustainable practices.

In Georgia, agritourism has substantial potential for economic development, particularly in rural areas where it helps diversify farm incomes and encourages rural revitalization. Georgia's diversified agricultural sector, which includes peaches, pecans, poultry, and cotton products, offers

varied opportunities for agritourism attractions (Georgia Department of Agriculture, 2023)
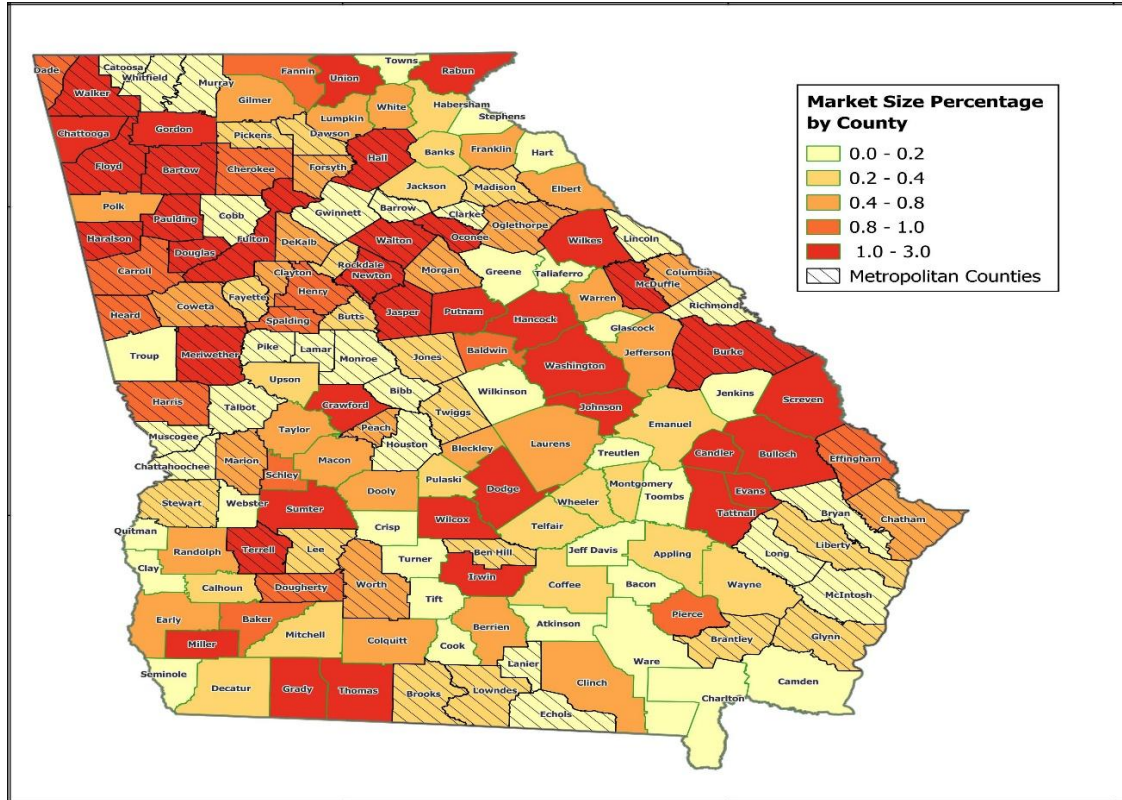
Figure 1. Map of agritourism participation across counties in Georgia.

Source: Created by the author using data from United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2017 Census of Agriculture.

The growing interest in locally grown food among consumers has become a major driver of agritourism's success. Consumers are concerned about food safety, environmental sustainability, and the social impact of their food choices. Locally produced food is often viewed as fresher, healthier, and more supportive of local economies (Georgia Grown, 2025; Smith & Jones, 2022). This preference for local food is reflected in the success of farmers' markets, farm-to-table restaurants, and direct-to-consumer sales channels in Georgia. The willingness to pay more for locally grown goods, often attributed to perceptions of higher quality and sustainability, is a crucial

consideration in the agritourism industry, where direct interactions between consumers and producers enhance this value (UGA Cooperative Extension, 2024).

As agritourism continues to grow in Georgia, understanding the factors that drive participation in these activities is crucial for ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of the sector. Several demographic, economic, and social factors influence consumers' willingness to participate in agritourism, including age, income, educational level, environmental awareness, and attitudes toward local food systems (Garcia, 2020; Brown, 2021). Moreover, the desire to pay for locally produced food is another key area of focus. Studies have shown that consumers' willingness to pay is influenced by the way they perceive product quality, environmental sustainability, and health benefits associated with locally sourced food (Carfora & Catellani, 2023).

The relationship between agritourism and local food systems also extends to preserving agricultural landscapes and the educational benefits it offers the public. Several factors influence participation in agritourism and the willingness to pay for locally produced food, including economic, social, and experiential dimensions. Agritourism improves economic viability, supports small family farms, stimulates rural economies, and preserves agricultural landscapes (Schilling et al., 2012; Dhungana & Khanal, 2023). By attracting visitors, agritourism generates economic and cultural benefits, redevelops rural villages, and provides sustainable livelihoods for farmers. Social factors, such as adopting local customs and the educational value of agritourism, promote consumer involvement and increase consumers' connection to the local culture and environment (Alar, 2024). Agritourism offers excellent opportunities for tourists to experience a rural lifestyle, learn about food production, and participate in hands-on activities, thereby enhancing their overall tour experience.

Agritourism also plays a crucial role in rural development by promoting local economies, preserving agricultural heritage, and encouraging a greater appreciation for the importance of agriculture. In Georgia, agritourism has experienced significant growth, with 5.57% of farms offering agritourism products and services in 2017, generating $28 million in revenue, an 8% increase from 2012. This growth reflects a broader national trend, where farm-based agritourism income tripled between 2002 and 2017, accounting for 5.6% of total farm-related earnings in 2017 (UGA Cooperative Extension, 2024). The increasing adoption of agritourism is also linked to the desire to boost rural economic growth, raise public awareness about farming, and protect the traditions of agricultural heritage (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2019).

Agritourism offers potential as a solution to the challenges faced by Georgia's agricultural sector by providing economic, social, and environmental benefits. It improves farm viability, sustains the local food system, and creates opportunities for consumers and producers to connect, making it a key focus of rural development and sustainable agricultural practices. Understanding the variables that influence participation in agritourism and consumers' desire to pay for locally produced food is crucial for leveraging agritourism opportunities in Georgia. This study aims to analyze the factors that drive participation and determinants of WTP to inform policy better to support the agritourism industry.

1.2   Problem Statement

Agritourism in Georgia serves as a vital link between agriculture and tourism, encouraging rural development and promoting sustainable food systems. While numerous research stresses the importance of demographic, motivational, and attitudinal factors in determining consumer behavior (Govindasamy & Kelley, 2014; Ciolac et al., 2019; Lucha et al., 2016), there is a lack of

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comprehensive studies focused on Georgia-specific drivers of agritourism participation and willingness to pay for locally produced food. These gaps hinder the development of strategies that could improve the effectiveness of agritourism initiatives.

Agritourism has become a crucial niche in the tourism industry, particularly in regions such as Georgia, where tourism and agriculture intersect. Agritourism offers guests outstanding cuisine and agricultural experiences, stimulates local economies, and promotes sustainable practices. The motivations for participating in agritourism are multifaceted, including a desire for authentic experiences, environmental sustainability, and an appreciation for local food heritage. In Georgia, agritourism plays a vital role in economic revitalization and rural development by creating jobs, improving access to locally produced food, and supporting farm income. It also educates visitors about agriculture, sustainable practices, and the origins of their food, thereby creating stronger connections between urban and rural communities (UGA Cooperative Extension, 2024; Tourism Economics, 2024).

Research indicates that social and environmental sustainability influences tourists' behaviors, which include their willingness to pay for locally produced food (Rachao et al., 2019; Kline et al., 2015). Tourists are motivated to support local economies and adopt sustainable consumption practices, which are integral to their overall travel experience (Tao et al., 2019; Anderson, 2018).

Despite the growing interest in agritourism, challenges persist in understanding the specific factors that influence participation and willingness to pay. Research has established that personal motivations influence participation in agritourism, the perceived value of experiences, and socioeconomic conditions (Testa et al., 2019; Musa & Chin, 2022). Tourists often seek experiences that connect them with local culture and food, which can drive their willingness to pay for local

products (Haven-Tang et al., 2022). However, it remains unclear how these factors differ in Georgia, given its unique cultural and agricultural characteristics (Vasadze, 2020).

The willingness to pay for locally produced food in agritourism settings is influenced by perceived authenticity, quality, and satisfaction with the experience (Tao et al., 2019; Sidali et al., 2013). Tourists often seek local food experiences that align with their values regarding sustainability and community support (Dogan et al., 2021). The integration of local food into tourism improves the appeal of destinations and promotes a strong connection between visitors and the local culture (Fuste-Forne & Forne, 2021). Furthermore, developing food tourism clusters can create alternative food supply chains, contributing to the sustainable development of rural areas (Niedbała et al., 2020).

This study aims to address these issues by identifying the drivers of agritourism participation in Georgia, comparing participants and non-participants by demographic factors, and examining the impacts on willingness to pay for local foods using structural equation modeling and multinomial logit analysis.

1.3   Objectives

1. To analyze the key drivers of agritourism participation.

2. To assess the differences between agritourism participants and non-participants.

3. To examine the determinants of willingness to pay for locally produced food by analyzing the mediating role of attitudes toward local food and latent constructs using Structural Equation Modeling.

4. To estimate the direct effects of demographic, socioeconomic factors, and attitude on willingness to pay across distinct categories using Multinomial Logit.

1.4   Hypothesis

H1: Sociodemographic and motivational factors significantly influence agritourism participation.

H2: Agritourism participants and non-participants differ significantly regarding sociodemographic characteristics.

H3: Attitudes toward locally produced foods, as influenced by environmental concerns, health awareness, personal image, and product quality, mediate the relationship between consumer behavior and willingness to pay for locally produced food.

H4: Demographic, socioeconomic factors, and attitude significantly affect willingness to pay for locally produced food across distinct categories.

1.5   Significance of the Study

Agritourism has become a key driver of rural development, offering farmers economic diversification and promoting sustainable agriculture (Tew & Barbieri, 2012). By examining the behavioral factors influencing agritourism participation and willingness to pay for locally produced food, this study contributes to the study on sustainable tourism and local food systems (Brune et al., 2020; Migliore et al., 2015).

The findings of this research will provide policymakers, farmers, and agritourism operators with insights on how to enhance the economic viability of agritourism in Georgia while meeting the increasing consumer demand for authentic and sustainable experiences (Haven-Tang et al., 2022; Fuste-Forne & Forne, 2021). Through understanding consumer motivations and behaviors, the study will inform the design of marketing strategies and policy interventions that encourage sustainable agritourism development and underpin local food systems.

This research contributes to global priorities such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and

Economic Growth) (UN, 2015). By supporting rural economies and strengthening local food systems, agritourism can advance food security and create new economic opportunities. Identifying the behavioral drivers of participation and willingness to pay (WTP) enables policymakers to design effective incentives for farmers. It helps agritourism operators create experiences that appeal to sustainability-conscious consumers.

1.6   Scope of the Study

This study examines the participation in agritourism and the willingness to pay for local food in the state of Georgia. It examines the factors that influence consumer behavior, including attitudes, motivations, and demographics, which impact consumers' purchasing decisions. The research is limited to residents and visitors within Georgia, acknowledging that cultural and agricultural contexts significantly shape consumer behavior (Ciolac et al., 2019; Rachao et al., 2019).

While the study explores a wide range of factors influencing willingness to pay, it does not investigate the influence of external market forces or global trends in local food consumption, as these aspects fall outside the scope of the behavioral analysis (Stanton et al., 2018; Mirosa & Lawson, 2012). The research will focus on local consumer attitudes and socioeconomic factors, with an emphasis on Georgia's sustainable agritourism practices. The findings are applied in Georgia's agritourism industry, taking into account the state's unique agricultural heritage and tourism context. As such, the results may not be fully generalizable to other regions without further studies to assess how diverse cultural and agricultural environments influence similar consumer behaviors (Barbieri et al., 2016; Elshaer et al., 2022). The study's scope is limited to current state agritourism practices and consumer trends, excluding past historical factors or broader international food systems.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Concept of Agritourism and Its Economic Importance

Agritourism combines the activities of agriculture and tourism by allowing individuals to engage in the agricultural production process while expanding the local rural economy. Agritourism creates additional income streams for farmers, advances rural economic development, and preserves the agricultural landscape (Zhou & Chen, 2023; Jin et al., 2021). In regions like Georgia, agritourism strengthens local economies by attracting visitors who purchase local goods and services, benefiting surrounding communities (Bagi & Reeder, 2012). Activities include farm visits, pick-your-own produce, and farm stays, adding educational and recreational value by connecting tourists with agriculture (Chase et al., 2018; Ammirato et al., 2020). Agritourism serves dual roles: enhancing tourist experiences while diversifying farmers' income (Karampela et al., 2019). It also safeguards local culture and heritage, drawing tourists seeking unique, locally sourced experiences (Jin et al., 2021).

Key stakeholders in agritourism include farmers, tourists, local communities, and governments. While farmers provide the experiences and tourists generate revenue, local communities gain through greater economic activity and new employment opportunities (Zhou & Chen, 2023; Broccardo et al., 2017). Government policies also play a critical role in promoting agricultural diversification and supporting rural tourism development (Sandt et al., 2018). Agritourism differs from broader rural tourism, focusing on agricultural activities and driving economic growth through local farming practices (Ohe & Ciani, 2011). It supports farm profitability, local market access, and rural employment, contributing significantly to sustainable development (Zhou & Chen, 2023; Bhandari et al., 2024).

Globally, agritourism has gained popularity, particularly in response to the increasing demand for authentic rural experiences and sustainable practices, as urbanization shifting preferences toward local and eco-friendly products, driving agritourism growth (Mahmoodi et al., 2022; Petrovic et al., 2015). Regions like Europe and Asia have witnessed widespread expansion, often linking agritourism to nature conservation (Alar, 2024; Adamov et al., 2020). In the United States, agritourism combines farm experiences with recreational activities, allowing small farms to diversify their income (Gao et al., 2013; Hollas et al., 2021). Agritourism in Georgia is rooted in the state's agricultural tradition, with products such as peaches and pecans serving as the foundation of this heritage (Lak & Khairabadi, 2022; Sirima, 2023). By 2017, agritourism contributed nearly $950 million to the state's economy, up from $704 million in 2012 (UGA Cooperative Extension, 2024). Today, it generates $124 million annually and supports thousands of jobs (Georgia Department of Economic Development, 2025). Investments in infrastructure, urban marketing, and sustainability initiatives present opportunities for growth (Alar, 2024; Khanal et al., 2020).

Agritourism provides farmers with a vital source of supplementary income, improving financial stability and reducing reliance on traditional agricultural revenues, which can be volatile (Cortez et al., 2024; Pitrova et al., 2020). Farmers attract visitors, generate additional income, and create local employment opportunities through agritourism, thereby stimulating rural economies (Barbieri et al., 2016; Togaymurodov et al., 2023). Rural community diversification enhances rural communities' ability to recover from economic shocks and promotes broader development (Khanal & Mishra, 2014). It also protects agriculture's traditions and supports local food systems. Farm visits and workshops connect people with cultural heritage, create community bonds, and foster appreciation for locally sourced products (Meraner et al., 2018). Celebrating local traditions and

encouraging collaboration among farmers enhances social capital and community identity (Ciolac et al., 2020).

Agritourism also contributes to regional economies through job creation and revenue generation. Beyond direct income from farm visits, it stimulates local businesses, including restaurants and shops (Santeramo & Barbieri, 2016; Pavic et al., 2018). Economic assessments indicate that agritourism injects capital into rural areas, thereby supporting sustainable livelihoods and rural development (Arru et al., 2021). Agritourism also bridges local food systems and agricultural practices, promoting sustainability through direct connections between consumers and farms. This integration increases the visibility of locally sourced foods, reduces transportation-related emissions, and strengthens local economies (Cortez et al., 2024; Barbieri, 2013). Farm-to-table experiences and educational tours inform visitors about sustainable farming, promoting sustainable consumption patterns and encouraging the purchase of local food (Arizo & Apritado, 2022; Limocon & Manlapaz, 2024).

Agritourism is an educational platform that teaches visitors about environmental stewardship, organic farming practices, and the socioeconomic benefits of local food systems (Yusuf & Wulandari, 2023). These experiences influence consumer attitudes, increasing their likelihood of supporting local, sustainably produced products and promoting loyalty to local food systems (Alar, 2024).

2.2 Behavioral Foundations of Agritourism and Local Food Consumption

2.2.1 The Theory of Planned Behavior

Ajzen introduced the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in 1991, a widely recognized social psychological framework that explains human behavior through three main elements: attitude

toward the behavior, social norms, and perceived control over the behavior. These factors jointly influence an individual's behavioral intention, the primary predictor of actual behavior.

Key Components of TPB:

1. Attitude toward the behavior describes an individual's favorable or unfavorable assessment of engaging in the behavior. When individuals believe the outcomes of a behavior will be favorable, they are more likely to engage in it (Ajzen, 1991; Conner & Armitage, 1998).

2. Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressures that encourage or discourage the performance of a specific behavior. They indicate how a person perceives the expectations of influential people around them, such as family, friends, or society, expects them to engage in a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

3. Perceived behavioral control evaluates an individual's perception of how easy or hard it is to carry out a behavior. This perception is shaped by factors such as available resources, opportunities, and obstacles (Ajzen, 1991).

Researchers have used the TPB to understand and predict consumer behavior in the agritourism industry, particularly in understanding individuals' intentions to participate. In studies related to agritourism, researchers have found that individuals' attitudes toward agritourism (such as enjoying rural environments and learning about farming) significantly affect their intention to visit agritourism sites (Zhao et al., 2022). Subjective norms, such as peer or social influences towards sustainable practices, can also encourage participation in agritourism (Collins et al., 2024). Researchers have also identified a role for perceived behavioral control. Understanding perceived behavioral control and considering barriers, such as convenience, transportation options, or the cost of agritourism services, is critical for understanding agritourism participation intentions. Some research suggests that using social media may enhance the impact of subjective norms, as visitors

are influenced by social media posts in which agritourism businesses promote their services (Joo et al., 2020).

The TPB benefits both policymakers and agribusiness managers. Understanding what motivates participation in agritourism can inform marketing efforts, enhance accessibility, and promote sustainable practices. The model has proven effective in explaining how attitudes, norms, and perceived control influence consumers' intentions to engage in agritourism, guiding efforts to enhance consumer involvement in the sector (Zhao et al., 2022; Collins et al., 2024). The model emphasizes the key role of attitudes in shaping consumer behavior. For example, Ajzen's earlier work describes that positive attitudes toward local food and agritourism activities enhance consumers' perceived behavioral intention. Recent studies have shown that positive attitudes predict agritourism participation and an increased tendency to invest in local food options during such visits (Brune et al., 2022).

2.2.2 Push and Pull Theory

Originally formulated within migration research (Lee, 1966), the push-and-pull theory of motivation has seen growing use in disciplines like consumer behavior and organizational psychology. It presents a model of the factors affecting human behavior and decision-making. Two primary elements are used in the Push and Pull Theory to explain migration or movement behavior: push factors, which are internal impulses that force people to leave a location, and pull factors, which are external attractions that draw people to a new location. In agritourism, push factors may include urban stress or a desire to reconnect with nature, as urban dwellers often seek escapes from hectic city life (Bruzzone, 2020). On the other hand, pull factors refer to the attractive elements of rural destinations, such as the opportunity to engage in farm activities, access to local food sources, experience rural life, and learn about agricultural practices (Kim et al., 2019; Yousaf et al., 2018).

Research has demonstrated the importance of these motivations in shaping agritourism consumer behavior as push and pull factors influence tourists' decisions to participate in agritourism. Individuals seeking to escape the stress of urban environments are drawn to the tranquility and authenticity of rural agricultural experiences (Rezaei et al., 2021). By understanding these motivating factors, agritourism providers can effectively tailor their offerings to meet the needs and desires of potential visitors (Lee, 1966). Studies indicate that consumers are more likely to engage in agritourism when they seek authentic farm-to-table experiences, emphasizing the critical role of local food offerings (Testa et al., 2019). They found that motivations driving Italian tourists' agritourism experiences were intricately linked to an appreciation for cultural and culinary elements, with local food serving as a major attraction.

2.3   Factors Influencing Agritourism Participation

Understanding the factors that drive agritourism participation helps stakeholders enhance their agritourism initiatives. Key influences include demographic factors, motivational drivers, socioeconomic and regional factors, and participation barriers. Sociodemographic factors, including age, income, education, and residency, have a significant impact on participation in agritourism. Younger individuals may be more likely to seek eco-friendly experiences, while older adults often desire more relaxed and peaceful environments (Cortez et al., 2024). Higher-income participants are likelier to engage in premium agritourism activities, while those with higher education tend to appreciate sustainability and local food. Urban dwellers often prefer agritourism destinations that are easily accessible for short getaways (Sadowski & Wojcieszak, 2019; Zhao et al., 2022).

Motivational factors, such as the search for authentic experiences, a connection to nature, and nostalgia, drive participation. Although farm settings are a site of relaxation and environmental

engagement for some tourists, others are driven by cultural heritage and the desire to reconnect with their agrarian roots (Artuger & Kendir, 2013; Tseng et al., 2019). These motivations stress the appeal of agritourism, as it offers visitors the opportunity to experience a simpler, more authentic lifestyle and connect more deeply with nature. Socioeconomic factors, such as infrastructure, accessibility, and government support, are also crucial. Regions with well-developed infrastructure and easy access from urban centers tend to attract more visitors (Jin et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). Government policies that promote agritourism and provide incentives or support for infrastructure development are essential for encouraging growth (Khanal et al., 2019).

Despite its benefits, several barriers hinder agritourism participation. Lack of awareness, time constraints, perceived high costs, and accessibility issues are common obstacles to effective implementation. Potential visitors may not be aware of nearby agritourism activities or perceive the costs as prohibitive (Radwanska et al., 2019; Dhungana & Khanal, 2023). Inadequate transportation or facilities in rural areas can deter people from participating, as rural locations often lack the same level of connectivity as urban centers. Addressing these barriers is crucial for enhancing agritourism participation and making it more accessible to a broader audience.

2.4   Willingness to Pay for Locally Produced Food in Agritourism

Research on willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced food is a crucial topic in agritourism studies. Consumers are willing to pay more for local products because they value the quality, freshness, and environmental benefits of these products (Lang et al., 2014). WTP is also enhanced when visitors and producers engage directly, creating trust and a sense of community (Kline et al., 2015). Demographic and psychographic factors influence WTP, such as urban residency and health consciousness. Urban consumers are more likely to pay higher premiums than rural consumers, who often prioritize cost over locality (Hempel & Hamm, 2016). Integrating local food systems

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into agritourism enhances cultural value and promotes economic sustainability (Fuste-Forne & Moron-Corujeira, 2022).

Willingness to pay describes the highest price an individual is willing to pay for a good or service, reflecting its perceived value. In agritourism, it is crucial as it supports farmers in sustaining their operations and promotes direct relationships with consumers (Brune et al., 2020; Arumugam, 2018). Higher WTP enables farmers to maintain sustainable practices, promoting local food systems and strengthening rural economic stability (Yusuf & Wulandari, 2023). Key factors influencing WTP include product attributes (e.g., freshness, quality, authenticity), consumer perceptions of sustainability, and trust in local producers. Consumers often associate local foods with superior quality and sustainability, which increases their willingness to pay (Arumugam, 2018; Mastronardi et al., 2015). Trust, built through direct interactions in agritourism, enhances consumer loyalty and perceived value (Arizo & Apritado, 2022; Torquati et al., 2017).

Standard methods for measuring WTP include contingent valuation and choice experiments. Contingent valuation involves direct questioning to estimate WTP but may suffer from hypothetical bias (Wu et al., 2020). Choice experiments investigate consumers' tastes by presenting alternatives with varying attributes and prices, giving more detailed information but requiring complex analysis (Jeczmyk et al., 2021; Gajic et al., 2024). Immersive agritourism experiences, such as pick-your-own activities and farm tours, help increase consumer engagement and understanding of local food value, thereby enhancing willingness to pay (Brune et al., 2020). Storytelling and education about sustainable practices and cultural significance encourage appreciation and willingness to pay (Kline et al., 2015; Liangco et al., 2023).

2.5 Empirical Studies on Agritourism Participation and Willingness to Pay for Locally Produced Food

The growing interest in agritourism has led to research on its impact on consumer behavior, particularly in terms of willingness to pay for local food. Agritourism enables consumers to engage with local food systems and provides some exposure to agricultural practices. As such, it provides opportunities to promote local food products while contributing to the sustainability of rural economies. Previous studies have explored the factors that drive agritourism participation and how these factors relate to WTP for locally produced goods (Kim et al., 2018; Qu et al., 2017; Carfora & Catellani, 2023).

Brune et al. (2020) examine how participating in agritourism influences consumers' intentions to buy local food. Conducted across six farms in North Carolina, the study used pre- and post-visit surveys to measure changes in attitudes, perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, and intended purchasing behavior. Findings indicate that agritourism enhances attitudes toward local food, improves perceptions of accessibility, and promotes social support for local food systems, thereby increasing consumers' willingness to allocate a higher budget for local food.

Huller, Heiny, and Leonhauser (2017) conducted a study examining the potential link between small-scale agricultural production and the growing tourism sector in the Kazbegi region of Georgia. The study identifies bottlenecks in the agri-food supply chain, such as a lack of processing facilities, low productivity, and inadequate infrastructure, that constrain local farmers' ability to meet the demands of the tourism sector. It also highlights possibilities for marketing local agri-food products to tourists, such as honey, herbal teas, and trout, which are already in high demand. The study suggests that investing in processing facilities, improving production efficiency, and implementing more successful marketing strategies could enable local farmers to

benefit from the tourist boom. Novel direct marketing options, such as cooperative shops, roadside stalls, and food souvenirs, were proposed to enable farmers to increase their incomes and improve their livelihoods.

Carpio and Isengildina-Massa (2008) investigate how much South Carolina consumers are willing to pay for locally produced agricultural products, such as fruits, vegetables, and animal-based products. Using a contingent valuation framework, the study finds that consumers are willing to pay an average premium of 27% for locally grown produce and 23% for locally grown animal products. The results indicate that age, income, and motivation to support local farmers significantly impact willingness to pay for local products. Furthermore, the study indicates that willingness to pay decreases as the premium for local products increases, with preferences declining sharply at higher premium levels (e.g., 50%). The findings suggest that state branding and promotional campaigns could be effective, especially if they emphasize the quality of the products and the local support aspects.

Kim et al. (2018) examine the long-term effects of agritourism on consumers' future food purchasing behaviors. Using household-level consumer panel data from South Korea, the study employs the Almost Ideal Demand System (AIDS) model to assess changes in food consumption patterns after agritourism experiences. The findings reveal that agritourism significantly alters spending in categories such as grains, vegetables, fruit, meat, and fish, while expenditures on processed food remain unaffected. Repeated exposure to agriproducts during agritourism experiences can lead to sustained changes in consumer behavior, positioning agritourism as an effective marketing tool to promote local agricultural products. The study also includes observations on the economic impact of agritourism, demonstrating that it can increase farm

income and influence consumers' future purchasing decisions, thereby supporting the local agricultural economy.

The research conducted by Flanigan et al. (2015) investigated the supply and demand of agritourism in Scotland. This study uses typology to categorize agritourism based on visitor interaction with agriculture, farm status, and authenticity. On the supply side, the study finds that farmers are motivated by income diversification and employment. Demand-side drivers, such as location, value, and scenery, are key factors in tourism. Niche markets, such as "Working Farm Direct Authentic Interaction" (WFDAI), attract visitors who seek authentic farm experiences and education. This study emphasizes agritourism's potential to generate both private benefits (income) and public benefits (such as agricultural awareness and local food promotion).

The study by Dsouza et al. (2023) in India uses the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and employs a pre- and post-experience survey analyzed through repeated-measures MANOVA. The study reveals a noticeable increase in tourists' intention to purchase local food following their agritourism experience. It supports the notion that tourists' direct experiences with agritourism influence attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and personal norms toward local food consumption. Subjective norms were not significantly influenced. It concludes that agritourism is vital in promoting sustainable local food systems and recommends strengthening agritourism strategies to support local economic development.

Zhao et al. (2022) investigate how environmental values, particularly environmental benefits, and the concept of human-nature coordination influence consumer intentions to participate in agritourism. The study extends the Theory of Planned Behavior by incorporating these environmental values and utilizes structural equation modeling to analyze survey data from 640 respondents. The results demonstrate that environmental values promote consumer intentions,

attitudes, and subjective norms, serving as important mediators, but perceived behavioral control does not significantly influence the relationship. Communicating environmental benefits and promoting the concept of human-nature coordination can enhance consumer participation in agritourism. The research provides valuable information to agritourism operators and policymakers interested in targeting environmentally conscious consumers. However, the lack of perceived behavioral control means that other determinants may be more strongly influential on consumer intentions.

A study by Batte et al. (2006) examines consumer willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced foods, with a focus on fresh strawberries. Using a customer-intercept survey and choice experiments conducted at Ohio's direct markets and grocery stores, the study employs conjoint analysis to estimate the willingness-to-pay (WTP) for attributes such as production location, farm size, and freshness guarantees. Results indicate that consumers are willing to pay a premium for locally grown strawberries, with grocery store shoppers willing to pay an average of 0.64 more per quart and direct market shoppers willing to pay 1.17 more. Freshness guarantees garnered the highest premiums, suggesting that freshness is more influential than local origin.

Balogh et al. (2016) examine consumer willingness to pay for traditional food products, using Hungarian Mangalica salami as a case study. Utilizing a discrete choice experiment (DCE) and the generalized multinomial logit model (GMNL), the study analyzes consumer preferences and willingness to pay for key attributes, including quality certification, retail channels, and the proportion of mangalica meat in the salami. The findings reveal that consumers are willing to pay a premium for traditional food products, particularly those certified for quality, sold in farmers' markets or small butchers, and contain a higher percentage of mangalica meat. The study shows the importance of robust certification systems and the impact of prior consumer experience on

willingness to pay, suggesting that past consumption plays a significant role in shaping future purchasing decisions.

Li et al. (2022) analyze the willingness to pay (WTP) and preferences for rural tourism attributes in China using a discrete choice experiment (DCE). The attributes used in the study include friendly service, traditional culture, local-style accommodation, and contact with nature. The findings indicate that urban respondents are willing to pay premiums for these attributes, and higher-income respondents demonstrate a higher WTP. The study also identifies the preference heterogeneity of respondents and categorizes them into two groups: "rural comfort seekers" and "rural culture and amusement lovers." The findings suggest that rural areas can be developed into diversified consumption spaces that retain their rurality.

Zhang et al. (2020) explore how local food is consumed in both China and Denmark through a values-beliefs-attitudes model. Structural equation modeling is used in the study to analyze how individual values (both collectivist and individualist), consumer beliefs (such as locavorism and a fresh-start mindset), and attitudes are related to buying local food. The findings show that collectivistic values have a positive influence on locavorism in both countries, while individualistic values are significantly related to locavorism only in Denmark. Moreover, long-term orientation positively predicts locavorism and a fresh-start mindset, influencing consumer attitudes and intentions to purchase local food. These results highlight apparent cross-cultural differences, suggesting that local food marketers must tailor their communication strategies to varying consumer values across cultural contexts.

Araujo et al. (2022) empirically examine the factors influencing tourists' willingness to pay (WTP) for sustainable tourism destinations, focusing on environmental beliefs, ecotourism attitudes, and sustainable consumption behavior. Using structural equation modeling on data from

567 Portuguese tourists, the study finds that environmental beliefs significantly influence ecotourism attitudes and sustainable consumption behavior but do not directly affect willingness to pay. Instead, ecotour attitudes and sustainable consumption behavior mediate the relationship between environmental beliefs and WTP, indicating that tourists with positive sustainability attitudes and behaviors are more likely to pay a premium for sustainable destinations.

2.6   Barriers to Agritourism Participation

Agritourism has emerged as a strategy for diversifying rural economies and enhancing agricultural sustainability, but various barriers persist that inhibit effective participation in this sector. These barriers can be categorized into structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions, as outlined by leisure barrier theory. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective strategies to promote involvement in agritourism. Structural barriers refer to external factors that constrain individuals' ability to participate in agritourism. These include financial constraints, which remain a primary issue, as many farmers lack the capital needed to initiate or sustain agritourism ventures (Tan & Abdullah, 2022). The absence of standard frameworks that guide agritourism development further complicates the financial landscape for stakeholders (Yusuf & Wulandari, 2023). Infrastructural deficiencies, such as poor road access, limited accommodation, and inadequate communication networks, present additional challenges for small and marginalized farmers (Yamagishi et al., 2021). Regulatory challenges, including excessive business regulations and complex legal requirements, can overwhelm new entrants and discourage participation (Pratt et al., 2022; Centner, 2009).

Interpersonal barriers involve the social relationships and community dynamics that shape agritourism participation. A lack of supportive networks and collective action among farmers can hinder collaboration and knowledge sharing, which are crucial for the success of agritourism

operations (Ferreira et al., 2022; Peroff et al., 2022). Gender dynamics and traditional roles may further limit participation, especially for women who may face societal or family expectations that restrict their leadership in agritourism enterprises (Tuyen et al., 2023; Arroyo et al., 2019). Intrapersonal barriers refer to individual attitudes, beliefs, and skills that affect one's willingness to engage in agritourism. Perceived self-efficacy is crucial, as many farmers are uncertain about their ability to manage tourism activities, which are often perceived as being outside their traditional areas of expertise (Ferreira et al., 2022). Individual motivations and fears, concerns about public engagement, doubts about profitability, or unwillingness to move beyond traditional agriculture can further hinder participation (Peroff et al., 2022).

2.7 Summary of Literature Gaps and Contributions

2.7.1 Key Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing interest in agritourism and its impacts on economic, social, and environmental factors, several critical areas remain underexplored. Much of the existing research focuses on the economic and operational dimensions of agritourism, yet there remains a lack of attention to consumer behavior. The psychological drivers behind consumer decisions to participate in agritourism, such as motivations and preferences, have not been fully understood (Ammirato et al., 2020; Mastronardi et al., 2015). A more in-depth exploration into these behavioral aspects could offer significant value for improving the effectiveness of agritourism marketing and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Although there is substantial research on the willingness to pay for local food and the general dynamics of agritourism participation, few studies have explored how participation in agritourism influences the willingness to pay for locally produced food. This gap is crucial, as understanding this relationship could help stakeholders improve local food systems and promote

sustainable practices within the agritourism sector (Ammirato et al., 2020). Moreover, there is a lack of research on the regional and cultural specifics of Georgia's agritourism context. Most studies examine broader trends, but they do not focus on the local specifics that influence agritourism participation and WTP. Given Georgia's unique agricultural landscape, understanding these local dynamics is essential for making the findings more applicable and actionable (Kharaishvili & Suknishvili, 2021).

2.7.2 Contributions of This Thesis

This thesis aims to address the identified gaps and limitations by making several key contributions to agritourism literature. One significant contribution will be the integration of behavioral theories, specifically the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Push-Pull Theory, to better understand how consumers engage with agritourism and how their willingness to pay for local food is influenced. By applying these frameworks, this research will comprehensively analyze the psychological, social, and cultural factors influencing agritourism participation and WTP (Genhua, 2023).

It will also provide a Georgia-specific perspective on agritourism participation and willingness to pay, focusing on the state's local agricultural practices, consumer interests, and cultural factors influencing these behaviors. This localized focus will enhance the relevance of the findings for agritourism stakeholders in Georgia and provide practical, actionable insights for improving the effectiveness of agritourism in this region (Kharaishvili & Suknishvili, 2021; Jámbor et al., 2020). Ultimately, based on empirical data, the research will offer policymakers and agritourism operators practical recommendations. These recommendations will focus on increasing consumer engagement, boosting WTP for local food, and developing more sustainable

agritourism practices and local food systems in Georgia (Mastronardi et al., 2015; King et al., 2010).

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

3.1   Theoretical Framework

This section provides the conceptual foundation for understanding the determinants of agritourism participation and willingness to pay for locally produced food. The study is primarily guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Push-Pull Theory, which explain how individual attitudes, external motivations, and constraints influence behavioral intentions.

3.1.1   Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior, developed by Ajzen (1991), posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape behavioral intentions. TPB serves as the foundation for analyzing WTP for locally produced food, particularly in emphasizing the role of attitudes in shaping behavioral intentions. While TPB traditionally includes three components, this study focuses on attitudes as the strongest predictor of WTP, supported by prior research (Ajzen, 1991; Lim & Dubinsky, 2005). Attitude represents a person's favorable or unfavorable assessment of buying locally produced food, which has a direct impact on their behavioral intentions.

Attitude in this study mediates the relationship between key latent constructs, such as environmental concern, health awareness, personal image, product quality, and willingness to pay. This mediating effect is examined using Structural Equation Modeling, allowing for a better understanding of how consumer perceptions shape purchasing behavior. Previous studies show that consumers with favorable attitudes toward sustainability and local food products are more likely to participate in agritourism and pay a premium for locally produced food (Testa et al., 2019). These attitudes are influenced by perceptions of environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability, aligning with global trends toward eco-friendly tourism practices (Li et

al., 2023; Olya et al., 2023). Tourists with positive attitudes are more likely to perceive agritourism experiences as sustainable, which in turn strengthens their intention to purchase local food (Tussyadiah et al., 2018; Yin et al., 2023).

3.1.2 Push-Pull Theory

The Push-Pull Theory differentiates internal motivations (push factors) from external attractions (pull factors) that influence travel choices. Push factors refer to the inner motivations that prompt individuals to pursue new experiences, such as escape, novelty, or education. In contrast, pull factors are the external attributes of a destination that draw tourists (e.g., scenery, activities, local food). This theory has been widely accepted in tourism research (Dann, 1981; Crompton, 1979), and the interaction of these factors shapes travel decisions.

The push-pull framework helps explain why tourists seek farm-based rural experiences in agritourism. Push factors, such as a desire for authenticity or connection with nature, drive tourists to seek agritourism experiences. At the same time, pull factors such as scenic farm landscapes and the opportunity to purchase fresh local food further enhance the appeal of agritourism destinations. Local food is a significant pull factor, with studies linking farm-to-table experiences to greater satisfaction and a higher willingness to pay (Choe & Kim, 2018; Lee et al., 2021). As a result, push factors (e.g., novelty) and pull factors (e.g., local food) work together to influence tourists' travel choices and spending behaviors, particularly in agritourism contexts.

Agritourism's integration of local food attracts visitors and influences their purchasing behavior and willingness to pay. Immersive farm experiences provide visitors with the opportunity to purchase food directly from the source, often enhancing their appreciation for locally grown products and increasing their willingness to pay a premium for these authentic goods. Empirical studies show that participating in agritourism strengthens tourists' positive attitudes toward buying

local food, supporting their intention to spend on farm products. Related research likewise finds that travelers drawn to farm-to-table experiences tend to exhibit a higher willingness to pay for local produce (Lee et al., 2021; Tchetchik et al., 2020), underlining the economic value of these pull factors for destinations. This pattern aligns with the push-pull theory: the push for authenticity, learning, or novelty makes visitors more receptive to the pull of Indigenous food offerings, increasing the value they attach to those products and their likelihood of paying for them.

The push-pull framework offers a logical approach to understanding tourist motivations. Tourists' internal desires (push factors) increase the appeal of external attractions (pull factors), such as local food, which shapes their decision to participate in agritourism and their willingness to pay for locally produced food. This theory grounds the discussion in established motivation theory while directly addressing the role of agritourism pull factors in shaping willingness to pay.

3.2   Survey Design

The survey for this study was designed to collect data on agritourism participation, willingness to pay for locally produced food, and the factors influencing these behaviors. Administered using Qualtrics Survey Software, a widely recognized platform for online data collection, the survey was structured into several sections to capture sociodemographic information, travel behaviors, agritourism participation, and attitudes toward locally produced food.

The first section of the survey focused on respondents' travel behaviors and their agritourism engagement. Participants were asked about their leisure travel habits, including the number of day trips and overnight trips taken in the past year and their plans for future trips. This section also explored respondents' experiences with agritourism activities, such as visits to U-pick farms, farmers' markets, wineries, and other attractions. Respondents were asked to rate factors such as scenic views, local food options, and experiential activities using a 5-point Likert scale (1

= "not at all important," 5 = "significant") to assess the importance of various agritourism attributes. This approach provided an understanding of the key drivers of agritourism participation and the preferences of potential visitors.

The second and third sections of the survey assessed respondents' willingness to pay for locally produced food. These sections included questions on respondents' attitudes toward locally produced food, environmental concerns, health awareness, personal image, and product quality measured using Likert-scale questions. A choice experiment was incorporated to measure WTP more precisely. Respondents were presented with hypothetical scenarios and asked to indicate their willingness to pay a premium for local food products. The WTP categories were defined as Low, Medium, and High, based on the percentage premium respondents were willing to pay (e.g., up to 5%, 10%, or 15% more). This method enabled a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing consumers' valuation of locally produced food.

The concluding section of the survey captured sociodemographic information about the respondents. Questions were included to gather data on age, gender, education level, race, household income, marital status, employment status, and other relevant characteristics. These variables were essential for analyzing the demographic profiles of agritourism participants and non-participants and for understanding how sociodemographic factors influence travel behaviors and willingness to pay for local food.

3.3   Data Collection and Sample Description

The data for this study was collected through a structured online survey distributed to residents and visitors in Georgia. The survey aimed to capture demographic, motivational, attitudinal, and behavioral data on agritourism participation and willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced food. A large sample size is crucial for ensuring the integrity of descriptive statistics and the

generalizability of the findings, particularly when employing advanced statistical techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling. Following the recommendation of Hair Jr. et al. (2017), the 10-times rule was applied to determine the minimum sample size required for SEM analysis. This rule suggests that the sample size should be at least 10 times the number of indicators in the most complex construct of the model or 10 times the largest number of structural paths in the model. Since the model includes 5 structural paths, the minimum sample size is 50. After data cleaning, 374 responses were collected from respondents across Georgia, exceeding the minimum requirement and ensuring robust statistical analysis.

The survey was administered online using Qualtrics Survey Software, a widely used data collection platform. The questionnaire was designed to take 15–20 minutes to complete, striking a balance between comprehensiveness and respondent engagement. This method was chosen to efficiently reach a diverse audience while ensuring representation across key demographic variables, such as age, gender, household income, and geographic location within Georgia.

Ethical considerations were thoroughly considered during data collection. At the beginning of the survey, participants received a consent statement outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and that their responses would be kept confidential. No personal identifying information was obtained, maintaining the respondent's anonymity.

3.4   Description of Variables and Measurement

The study examines variables associated with agritourism participation and willingness to pay for locally produced food. The variables are categorized based on research objectives and measured using appropriate scales.

Objective 1: Key Drivers of Agritourism Participation

The variables for this objective are designed to analyze the factors influencing agritourism participation. The dependent and independent variables are as follows:

Dependent Variable:

- **Agritourism Participation:** A binary variable where 1 indicates participation in at least one agritourism activity (e.g., U-pick farms, ranch visits, farmers' markets, farm stays, etc.), and 0 indicates no participation.

Independent Variables:

- **Demographics:** These variables capture the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents, including age, gender, education, household income, and employment status.

- **Motivational Factors:** These variables measure respondents' reasons for participating in agritourism and are assessed using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

- **Barriers to Participation:** These variables capture obstacles to agritourism participation and are measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

- **Social Constraints:** These variables capture social limitations to agritourism participation and are measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

- **Trip Type:** These variables capture the trip preference of participants, including those involved in day trips, night trips, both day and night trips, or neither.

Objective 2: Differences Between Agritourism Participants and Non-Participants

Descriptive statistics were used to profile the demographics of both groups, and t-tests were used to compare the means of continuous variables (age and household income) between participants and non-participants. Chi-square tests were used to profile the associations between participation and categorical variables (gender, employment, and employment status).

Objective 3: Determinants of Willingness to Pay (WTP) for Locally Produced Food by Analyzing the Mediating Role of Attitudes toward Local Food using Structural Equation Modeling

The variables for this objective are designed to analyze the factors influencing willingness to pay for locally produced food. These variables include willingness to pay, attitude, and latent variables (environmental concern, health awareness, personal image, and product quality), as well as demographics such as gender, age, household income, education, marital status, and race. Structural Equation Modeling is used to analyze the relationships.

Dependent Variable:

- **Willingness to Pay:** This variable measures respondents' willingness to pay a premium for locally produced food and is recorded on an ordinal scale (0 = not willing to pay; 6 = willing to pay 25% or more).

Mediating Variable:

- **Attitude Toward Locally Produced Foods:** This latent construct is measured using a composite score derived from multiple Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Predictors of Attitude:

- **Environmental Concern:** Perceptions of local food's role in environmental sustainability.
- **Health Awareness:** Awareness of the health benefits of consuming locally produced food.
- **Personal Image:** Influence of local food consumption on social perception and self-identity.
- **Product Quality:** Perceived freshness and quality of locally produced food.

Other independent variables include demographics such as gender, age, household income, education, marital status, and race.

Objective 4: Direct Effects of Demographic, Socioeconomic Factors, and Attitude on Willingness to Pay across Distinct Categories Using Multinomial Logit

The focus is on estimating the direct effects of attitude and various sociodemographic factors on willingness to pay for locally produced food using a Multinomial Logit model. This helps to understand how individual characteristics, such as attitude, age, gender, household income, education level, employment status, and marital status, impact the likelihood of being categorized into the Low, Medium, and High WTP groups.

Dependent Variable:

- **Willingness to Pay:** This is measured by the amount a consumer is willing to pay for locally sourced food compared to non-local alternatives. It is categorized into three levels: Low, Medium, and High, based on the consumers' premium percentages, which they are willing to pay above the base price for locally produced food.

Independent Variable:

- It includes factors such as attitude, gender, age, household income, education, marital status, and race.

Table 3.1: Description of Variables Used in the Analysis

Variable	Description
Agritourism Participation	Binary variable: 1 = Participated in agritourism, 0 = Did not participate
Gender	Binary variable: 1 = Male, 0 = Female
Age	Respondents age in years: 1 =18-24, 2 = 25-29, 3 = 30-34, 4 = 35-39, 5 = 40-44, 6 = 45-49, 7 = 50-54, 8 = 55-59, 9 = 60-64, 10 = 65-69, 11 = 70 and above

Household Income	Categorical variable: 1 = Under $24,999, 2 = $25,000-$34,999, 3 = $35,000-$49,999, 4 = $50,000-$74,999, 5 = $75,000-$99,999, 6 = $100,000-$149,999, 7 = $150,000-$199,999, 8 = $200,000-$249,999, 9 = $250,000 or more
Education	Categorical variable: 1 = Some College and Higher, 0 = High School and below
Employment Status	Binary variable: 1 = Employed, 0 = Unemployed
Race	Categorical variable: 1 = White or Caucasian, 0 = Otherwise
Marital Status	Binary variable: 1 = Married, 0 = Not Married
Willingness to Pay	Ordinal variable: WTP categories (0 = Not willing to pay, 1 = Up to 5% more, 2 = Up to 10 % more, 3 = Up to 15% more, 4 = Up to 20% more, 5 = Up to 25% more, 6 = Willing to pay 25% or more)
Attitude Toward Locally Produced Food	Mediating variable: Composite score from attitude-related items (Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 = neither, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)
Trip Type	Categorical variable: 0 = Neither day or night trip, 1 = Day trip, 2 = Night trip, 3 = Both day and night trip
Motivational Score	Continuous variable: Average of motivation-related survey items (Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 = neither, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)
Participation Barriers Score	Continuous variable: Average of barrier-related survey items (Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 = neither, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)
Social Constraints Score	Continuous variable: Average of social constraints-related survey items (Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 = neither, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)
Environmental Concern	Latent construct: Perception of the environmental impact of locally produced food (Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 = neither, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)
Health Awareness	Latent construct: Perception of health benefits of local food (Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 = neither, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)
Personal Image	Latent construct: Influence of social perception on local food purchases (Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 = neither, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)
Product Quality	Latent construct: Evaluation of local food based on freshness and quality (Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 = neither, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025

3.5 Model Specification

This study employs logistic regression for agritourism participation, chi-square tests for group comparisons, t-tests for group comparisons, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine attitudes as a mediator of willingness to pay (WTP), and Multinomial Logit (MNL) to analyze WTP categories. Each model aligns with the study's objectives, capturing key behavioral and demographic influences.

3.5.1 Logistic Regression for Agritourism Participation

Govindasamy and Kelley (2014) and Bagi and Reeder (2012) specify a binary logistic regression model to estimate the probability of agritourism participation. The dependent variable, participation, is coded as 1 if the respondent has participated in an agritourism activity and 0 otherwise.

The logistic model expresses the log odds of participation as a function of predictor variables. For respondent i, the model is specified as follows:

$$In\left(\frac{P_I}{1-P_i}\right) = \beta_o + \beta_1 Age_i + \beta_2 Gender_i + \beta_3 Education_i + \beta_4 Household\ Income_i$$

$$+ \beta_5 Motivational\ Factor_i + \beta_6 Participation\ Barrier_i$$

$$+ \beta_7 Social\ Constraints_i + \beta_8 Employed_i + \beta_9 Trip\ Type_i + \epsilon_i \dots (3.1)$$

Where P_i represents the probability that respondent i participates in agritourism. The independent variables include key demographics (age, gender, education, household income, and employment status) and other drivers of agritourism participation (motivations, participation barriers, social constraints, and trip type). A positive coefficient indicates that as the predictor variable increases, the odds of agritourism participation also rise, while a negative coefficient indicates a decrease in those odds.

Binary logistic regression is employed because the dependent variable is dichotomous (participation vs. non-participation), and the logistic function guarantees that predicted probabilities are confined to the [0,1] range. This method is widely used in tourism research to model participation decisions. The model is estimated using maximum likelihood estimation (MLE), a method that yields efficient and unbiased parameter estimates. Furthermore, it allows for the interpretation of odds ratios, offering intuition into the relative impact of each predictor on agritourism participation.

3.5.2 Chi-Square Test

A chi-square test of independence is used to examine differences between agritourism participants and non-participants, employing categorical variables. This test assesses whether the distributions of variables such as gender, education level, and employment status differ significantly between the two groups. The chi-square test statistics are computed as follows:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2}{E_{ij}} \dots (3.2)$$

Where O_{ij} is the observed frequency in each category, and E_{ij} is the expected frequency under the assumption of no association between agritourism participation and the categorical variables.

A significant chi-square result indicates that the proportions of a given characteristic (e.g., male vs. female, employed vs. unemployed) differ between agritourism participants and non-participants, suggesting that the variable may be a potential determinant of participation. A 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$) determines statistical significance.

3.5.3 T-Test for Key Differences

An independent sample t-test is conducted to assess mean differences between agritourism participants and non-participants for continuous variables such as age and household income. The t-test is formulated as follows:

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 = \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{s_p^2(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2})}} \ldots (3.3)$$

Where $\bar{X}_1$ and $\bar{X}_2$ are the sample means for participants and non-participants, respectively, and s_p^2 is the pooled variance.

A significant t-test result suggests that the mean of a continuous variable (age and household income) differs significantly between the two groups. The analysis provides insight into whether participants tend to have different socioeconomic characteristics than non-participants.

3.5.4 Structural Equation Modeling for Willingness to Pay

Araujo et al. (2022) and Zhao et al. (2022) employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze the latent psychological and demographic factors influencing willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced food, with a specific focus on the mediating role of attitudes. SEM is chosen for its ability to simultaneously estimate a measurement model (defining latent constructs from observed indicators) and a structural model (specifying causal relationships between constructs). This approach integrates latent psychological determinants such as environmental concern, health awareness, personal image, and perceived product quality while accounting for direct demographic influences, including age, gender, household income, education, and marital status.

Measurement Model

The measurement model defines the relationships between latent constructs and their corresponding observed indicators, thereby ensuring construct validity and reliability. Environmental Concern, Health Awareness, Personal Image, and Product Quality, which are the four latent constructs, are modeled as exogenous variables influencing WTP. Each construct is measured using multiple Likert-scale survey items, such as concerns about environmental

sustainability, preferences for healthier food options, or perceptions of product quality. Attitude Toward Local Food is also modeled as a mediating latent construct that links these factors to WTP.

The measurement model is evaluated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), with validity assessed through:

- Factor loadings ($\geq$0.5) to confirm that each indicator adequately measures its latent variable.

- Composite reliability ($\geq$0.7) to ensure internal consistency of constructs.

The measurement model is specified as:

$$y_{ij} = \lambda_j \xi_i + \zeta_{ij} \dots (3.4)$$

Where y_{ij} is the observed indicator score of respondent i on indicator j, ξ_i is the latent construct (e.g., environmental concern), λ_j represents the factor loadings, and ζ_{ij} accounts for measurement error.

Structural Model

The structural model specifies the causal relationships among latent constructs, demographic variables, and willingness to pay. The four latent factors influence WTP indirectly through attitude, reflecting how underlying values and perceptions shape behavioral intentions.

The structural relationships are specified as follows:

$$Attitide = \gamma_1 Environmental\ Concern + \gamma_2 Health\ Awareness + \gamma_3 Personal\ Image$$
$$+ \gamma_4 Product\ Quality + \vartheta \dots (3.5)$$

$$WTP = \beta_1 Attitude + \beta_2 Age + \beta_3 Gender + \beta_4 Income + \beta_5 Education + \beta_6 Marital\ Status$$
$$+ \beta_7 Race + \varepsilon \dots (3.6)$$

Where γ_i represent structural coefficients showing the effect of each latent construct on attitude, while β_1 captures the impact of attitude on WTP, $\beta_2 - \beta_7$ represent direct effects of demographic variables on WTP, ϑ_i, and ε_i denote disturbance terms accounting for unexplained variance.

This formulation ensures that latent psychological constructs and observed demographic characteristics contribute to WTP, aligning with previous SEM applications in consumer behavior and sustainable tourism studies (Zhao et al., 2022).

The SEM model is estimated using Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE) based on the covariance matrix of observed variables. Model fit is assessed using multiple fit indices to ensure the specified model adequately represents the data structure. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) are reported, following standard practice. An RMSEA value below 0.08 indicates a reasonable fit (with <0.05 suggesting a close fit). CFI and TLI values above 0.90 indicate an acceptable fit (with ≥0.95 indicating a good model fit) (Hooper et al., 2008). Model Chi-square statistic (with a non-significant χ^2 indicating good fit, though χ^2 is sensitive to sample size) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) as additional diagnostics were also considered.

3.5.5 Multinomial Logit Model for WTP Segmentation

To estimate the factors influencing willingness to pay for locally produced food, a Multinomial Logit (MNL) model is used. This model allows the classification of respondents into three WTP categories (Low, Medium, and High) based on sociodemographic and attitudinal factors. The Low category serves as the reference group, and the model estimates the likelihood of respondents falling into Medium or High WTP categories. Respondents are classified based on their survey responses, with those willing to pay up to 5% more categorized as Low WTP, those willing to pay

10% to 20% more as Medium WTP, and those willing to pay 25% or more as High WTP. These categories are treated as unordered, as their intervals may not be equal.

The MNL model is specified as follows, based on the formulation by Greene (1997) and Long (1997):

$$P(WTP_i = j) = \frac{\exp(\beta_{j0} + \sum_{k=1}^{p} \beta_{jk} X_{ik}}{\sum_{k \epsilon \{Low, Medium, High\}} \exp(\beta_{k0} + \sum_{l=1}^{p} \beta_{kj} X_{il}} \dots (3.7)$$

For each $P(WTP_i = j)$ is the probability that respondent i selects category j for WTP (Low, Medium, or High), X_{ik} represents the independent variables, such as demographics and attitudes for respondent i, β_{jk} are the coefficients for the independent variables for category j.

This model enables the estimation of how each variable affects the probability of being in the Medium or High WTP categories relative to the Low category while accounting for both sociodemographic factors and attitudes. It is estimated using Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE), and model fit is assessed using indices such as the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), and likelihood ratio chi-square (LR Chi-Square). These metrics evaluate the model's adequacy and the significance of predictors.

This approach aligns with studies such as Varghese et al. (2024) and Nazzaro et al. (2024), which used MNL to segment respondents based on psychological factors and preferences, thereby validating its application to the analysis of WTP in this research.

3.5.6 AIC/BIC Test for Model Selection

The Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) were employed to identify the best-fitting model for the dataset. These measures strike a balance between goodness of fit and model simplicity by penalizing models that include more parameters, thereby reducing the risk of overfitting. The AIC and BIC statistics are calculated as follows:

$$AIC = -\frac{2}{N} * LL + 2 * \frac{k}{N} \dots (3.8)$$

$$BIC = -2 * LL + \log(N) * k \dots (3.9)$$

Where LL is the model's log-likelihood, N represents the total number of observations, k denotes the number of parameters in the model, and log() is the natural logarithm. The model that yields the lowest AIC or BIC is considered the optimal fit. These tests were applied to both SEM and MNL models to ensure the selection of the most suitable model for WTP analysis.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion of the analyzed data. Results were presented on respondents' socio-demographics, factors influencing agritourism participation, differences between participants and non-participants, willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced food, and the structural relationships between attitudes, participation, and WTP. The results from statistical models, including Chi-Square analysis, T-Test, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), and the Multinomial Logit Model (MNL), are discussed in relation to the study objectives.

4.1   Socioeconomic Characteristics

Table 4.1 presents the descriptive statistics of the respondents. This section provides an overview of their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, including gender, age, education level, race, household income, employment status, and marital status.

The sample was made up of 374 respondents, with a higher proportion of females (59.36%) compared to males (40.64%), indicating that the majority of respondents were female. The age distribution spanned various groups, with the largest share of respondents aged 35-49 years (28.61%), followed by those aged 65 years and older (24.60%) and those aged 18-29 years (16.04%). Education levels varied, with 72.99% of respondents having at least some college education, while 27.01% had a high school education or lower. This suggests that most respondents have at least a college-level education. In terms of racial distribution, 62.83% of respondents are White or Caucasian, while 37.17% are from other racial groups, including Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian or Asian American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and other races.

The income distribution among respondents showed that 38.50% earned between $50,000 and $99,999, 16.58% earned under $24,999, and 4.28% reported an income of at least $200,000. This indicates that a considerable proportion of respondents fall within the middle-income brackets. Regarding employment status, 57.49% of respondents were employed, while 42.51% were unemployed, which included retirees, individuals with disabilities, furloughed workers, and those actively seeking employment. Marital status data revealed that 44.92% of respondents were married, while 55.08% were unmarried, encompassing individuals who were single, divorced, widowed, separated, or living in a married or partnered relationship.

Beyond socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, respondents' motivations, barriers, and social constraints related to agritourism participation were also measured and categorized for analysis. The Motivational Score was computed from six factors that drive engagement in agritourism, including scenic appeal, touring opportunities, interest in rural towns, agritourism attractions, ecotourism, and wineries/breweries. Respondents were classified into three motivation levels: Low (6.15%), Medium (34.49%), and High (59.36%). The participation barriers score was derived from five factors limiting agritourism participation: distance to farms, transportation difficulties, lack of restrooms, limited internet and cell coverage, and cost concerns. Respondents were categorized into Low (14.17%), Medium (61.76%), and High (24.06%) barriers. Social Constraints Score measured social limitations, such as lack of interest from family or friends, absence of a travel companion, and concerns about rural community acceptance. Respondents were grouped into Low (42.25%), Medium (42.25%), and High (15.51%) Constraints.

Among trip types, the dominant preference was for both day and night agritourism trips (74.60%). Smaller shares of respondents preferred no trips (17.91%), only day trips (3.48%), or

only night trips (4.01%). These preferences provide insight into the types of agritourism experiences in which respondents are most likely to engage. Overall, these socio-demographic characteristics and motivational factors offer a comprehensive understanding of the drivers that shape agritourism participation and willingness to pay for locally produced food in Georgia.

Table 4.1: Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographics Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	152	40.64
	Female	222	59.36
Age	18-24	27	7.22
	25-29	33	8.82
	30-34	36	9.63
	35-39	40	10.70
	40-44	39	10.43
	45-49	28	7.49
	50-54	24	6.42
	55-59	25	6.68
	60-64	30	8.02
	65-69	37	9.89
	70 and over	55	14.71
Educational Level	High school and below	101	27.01
	Some college and higher	273	72.99
Race	White or Caucasian	235	62.83
	Non-white	139	37.17
Household Income	Under $24,999	62	16.58
	$25,000-$34,999	43	11.50
	$35,000-$49,999	37	9.89
	$50,000-$74,999	99	26.47
	$75,000-$99,999	45	12.03
	$100,000-$149,999	55	14.71
	$150,000-$199,999	17	4.55
	$200,000-$249,999	4	1.07
	$250,000 or more	12	3.21
Employment	Employed	159	42.51
	Unemployed	215	57.49
Marital Status	Married	168	44.92
	Unmarried	206	55.08

Other Drivers

Motivational Score	Low Motivation (1.0 - 2.49)	23	6.15
	Medium Motivation (2.5 - 3.49)	129	34.49
	High Motivation (3.5 - 5.0)	122	59.36
Participation Barriers Score	Low Barriers (1.0 - 2.49)	53	14.17
	Medium Barriers (2.5 - 3.49)	231	61.76
	High Barriers (3.5 - 5.0)	90	24.06
Social Constraints Score	Low Constraints (1.0 – 2.49)	158	42.25
	Medium Constraints (2.5 - 3.49)	158	42.25
	High Constraints (3.5 - 5.0)	58	15.51
Trip Type			
	Neither Day nor Night	67	17.91
	Day trip	13	3.48
	Night Trip	15	4.01
	Both Day and Night	279	74.60
Total		**374**	**100**

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025

4.2   Agritourism Participation Analysis

This section examines the factors influencing agritourism participation, including participants' socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, and the logit model results assessing key determinants.

4.2.1   Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics of Agritourism Participants and Non-Participants

The analysis of agritourism participation revealed that specific demographic and socioeconomic factors significantly influenced engagement in agritourism activities. Table 4.2 presents the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of agritourism participants.

Among the respondents, a significant majority participated in agritourism, with similar engagement rates across genders, indicating that gender does not influence participation. However, age was a key determinant, with younger individuals exhibiting the highest participation rates, suggesting a strong interest in agritourism within this group. Despite this, middle-aged and older

individuals accounted for the largest absolute number of participants, primarily due to their substantial representation in the overall sample. This suggests that while younger individuals are more likely to engage in agritourism, middle-aged and older respondents contribute the largest share of total agritourism participants due to financial stability and availability of leisure time.

Education was positively associated with agritourism participation. Individuals with some college education or higher were more likely to participate than those with a high school education or lower, suggesting that higher levels of education may be linked to greater awareness or interest in agritourism-related activities. Similarly, race played a role in agritourism participation. Non-White respondents had slightly higher participation rates than White respondents, indicating that agritourism appeals to a racially diverse audience. However, since Whites or Caucasians comprised a larger portion of the overall sample, they accounted for the majority of agritourism participants. This pattern may reflect differences in awareness, accessibility, or cultural preferences regarding agritourism experiences.

Income was a significant determinant of agritourism participation, with participation rates increasing as income levels rose. Higher-income individuals were more likely to engage in agritourism due to their greater financial flexibility for discretionary spending on travel and leisure. However, while the highest-income groups exhibited the greatest likelihood of participation, the middle-income group ($50,000–$99,999) contributed the largest share of total agritourism participants, emphasizing that agritourism remains accessible across different income levels, with middle-income earners being the most engaged demographic.

Employment status also influenced agritourism participation, with employed individuals exhibiting a higher participation rate than unemployed individuals, suggesting that financial stability may facilitate greater engagement in agritourism activities. However, despite their lower

participation rate, unemployed individuals, including retirees and those outside the workforce, still constituted a substantial share of total agritourism participants, indicating that agritourism remains accessible across different employment statuses. Marital status also played a role in agritourism participation. The data revealed that married individuals were more likely to participate than unmarried individuals, suggesting that agritourism may appeal more to married individuals due to its suitability for family-oriented activities. However, unmarried individuals, including those who are single, divorced, widowed, or separated, still showed substantial engagement, showing that agritourism is not exclusively family-driven and remains accessible to individuals across different household structures.

Respondents highly motivated to participate in agritourism tended to engage more in these activities. Motivation was linked to factors such as the appeal of rural areas, the desire for scenic beauty, and interest in ecotourism. Those with higher motivation were more likely to engage in agritourism activities, indicating that an individual's desire for nature-based experiences significantly influences participation. Barriers to participation, such as transportation difficulties, distance to farms, and lack of necessary amenities (e.g., restrooms or connectivity), were key considerations for many respondents. While many participants faced these barriers, they were still motivated to engage in agritourism activities. Social constraints also played a role. These included a lack of interest from family and friends, difficulties in finding a travel companion, and concerns about acceptance in the rural community. While many respondents had low or medium social constraints, some participants reported high social constraints, which could limit their willingness to engage.

The analysis also revealed insights into participants' preferences for different agritourism experiences. The majority (81.42%) of participants preferred both day and night agritourism trips,

indicating strong interest in a comprehensive experience that spans the entire day. In contrast, only 3.72% and 3.10% of participants preferred day-only or night-only trips, respectively. Meanwhile, 11.76% of respondents did not participate in either day or night trips, representing non-participants in agritourism activities.

Table 4.2: Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics of Agritourism Participants and Non-Participants

Demographics Variables	Categories	Participants (%)	Non-Participants (%)	Total (%)
Gender	Male	131 (40.56%)	21 (41.18)	152 (40.64%)
	Female	192 (59.44%)	30 (58.82%)	222 (59.36%)
Age	18-24	26 (8.05%)	1 (1.96%)	27 (7.22%)
	25-29	32 (9.91%)	1 (1.96%)	33 (8.82%)
	30-34	33 (10.22%)	3 (5.88%)	36 (9.63%)
	35-39	36 (11.15%)	4 (7.84%)	40 (10.70)
	40-44	34 (10.53%)	5 (9.8%)	39 (10.43%)
	45-49	26 (8.05%)	2 (3.92%)	28 (7.49%)
	50-54	18 (5.57%)	6 (11.76%)	24 (6.42%)
	55-59	22 (6.81%)	3 (5.88%)	25 (6.68%)
	60-64	24 (7.43%)	6 (11.76%)	30 (8.02%)
	65-69	29 (8.98%)	8 (15.69%)	37 (9.89%)
	70 and over	43 (13.31%)	12 (23.53%)	55 (14.71%)
Educational Level	High school and below	78 (24.15%)	23 (45.10%)	101 (27.01%)
	Some college and higher	245 (75.85%)	28 (54.90%)	273 (72.99%)
Race	White or Caucasian	200 (61.92%)	35 (68.63%)	235 (62.83%)
	Non-white	123 (38.08%)	16 (31.37%)	139 (37.17%)
Household Income	Under $24,999	42 (13.00%)	20 (39.22%)	62 (16.58%)
	$25,000-$34,999	31 (9.60%)	12 (23.53%)	43 (11.50)
	$35,000-$49,999	33 (10.22%)	4 (7.84%)	37 (9.89%)
	$50,000-$74,999	92 (28.48%)	7 (13.73%)	99 (26.47%)
	$75,000-$99,999	42 (13.00%)	3 (5.88%)	45 (12.03%)
	$100,000-$149,999	52 (16.10%)	3 (5.88%)	55 (14.71%)
	$150,000-$199,999	16 (4.95%)	1 (1.96%)	17 (4.55%)
	$200,000-$249,999	3 (0.93%)	1 (1.96%)	4 (1.07%)
	$250,000 or more	12 (3.72%)	0 (0.00%)	12 (3.21%)
Employment	Employed	130 (40.25%)	29 (56.86%)	159 (42.51%)
	Unemployed	193 (59.77%)	22 (43.14%)	215 (57.49%)
Marital Status	Married	151 (46.75%)	17 (33.33%)	168 (44.92%)

	Unmarried	172 (53.50%)	34 (66.67%)	206 (55.08%)

Other Drivers

Motivational Score	Low Motivation (1.0 - 2.49)	10 (3.10%)	13 (25.49%)	23 (6.15%)
	Medium Motivation (2.5 - 3.49)	104 (32.20%)	25 (49.02%)	129 (34.49%)
	High Motivation (3.5 - 5.0)	209 (64.71%)	13 (25.49%)	222 (59.36)
Participation Barriers Score	Low Barriers (1.0 - 2.49)	42 (13.00%)	11 (14.17%)	53 (14.17%)
	Medium Barriers (2.5 - 3.49)	203 (62.85%)	28 (54.90%)	231 (61.76%)
	High Barriers (3.5 - 5.0)	12 (23.53%)	12 (23.53%)	90 (24.06%)
Social Constraints Score	Low Constraints (1.0 – 2.49)	150 (46.44%)	8 (15.69%)	158 (42.25%)
	Medium Constraints (2.5 - 3.49)	121 (37.46%)	37 (72.55%)	158 (42.25%)
	High Constraints (3.5 - 5.0)	52 (16.10%)	6 (11.76%)	58 (15.51%)
Trip Type	Neither Day nor Night	38 (11.76%)	29 (56.86%)	67 (17.91%)
	Day Trip	12 (3.72%)	1 (1.96%)	13 (3.48%)
	Night Trip	10 (3.10%)	5 (33.33%)	15 (4.01%)
	Both Day and Night	263 (81.42%)	16 (31.37%)	279 (74.60%)
Total		**374**	**100**	

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025

4.2.2 Logit Model for Agritourism Participation

A logistic regression model was employed to analyze the key determinants of agritourism participation. The model included gender, education level, age, income, employment status, as well as motivation, participation barriers, social constraints, and trip types. The results of the logistic regression are presented in Table 4.3. The model had a Pseudo R^2 of 0.365, indicating that the included predictors explained approximately 36.45% of the variance in agritourism participation. The likelihood ratio chi-square test (LR χ^2 = 108.70, p < 0.000) confirms that the

model is statistically significant, indicating that the independent variables collectively contribute to explaining agritourism participation.

The results show that age, income, employment status, motivation, participation barriers, social constraints, and preference for both day and night trips significantly influence agritourism participation. Age was negatively associated with participation, and the effect was significant at the 1% level (β = -0.040, p = 0.007), indicating that as individuals age, the likelihood of participating in agritourism decreases. This finding aligns with the descriptive statistics, which show that younger respondents exhibited higher participation rates. However, this result contradicts studies by Govindasamy and Kelley (2014), who found that additional years increase the likelihood of participation in wine-tasting events. Income positively affected agritourism participation (β = 0.000, p = 0.051), suggesting that individuals with higher income levels are more likely to engage in agritourism. Although the effect is marginally significant, this supports the idea that financial capacity influences discretionary spending on leisure and tourism-related activities.

Motivation was a strong predictor of agritourism participation, significant at the 1% level (β = 1.2450, p = 0.000). Respondents motivated by scenic landscapes, touring, and sightseeing in rural areas and small towns, particularly those featuring farmers' markets, wineries, breweries, or distilleries, were significantly more likely to participate in agritourism. This suggests that enhancing the experiential appeal of agritourism destinations through scenery, local attractions, and cultural experiences can further drive engagement. This is consistent with findings from Flanigan et al. (2015) and Lan et al. (2023).

Barriers to participation, such as distance to farms, lack of access to transportation, inadequate facilities, absence of modern amenities (such as restrooms, reliable internet, and cell phone coverage), and high visitation costs, were expected to discourage participation. However,

the results indicate that these barriers had a positive and statistically significant effect at the 10%

level (β = 0.471, p = 0.077), implying that individuals who encounter obstacles may still choose

to participate. This suggests that for committed individuals, the perceived benefits of agritourism

outweigh the associated challenges. While these barriers did not strongly deter participation,

addressing them through improved infrastructure, better accessibility, and affordability initiatives

could further enhance engagement in agritourism. This contradicts previous studies by Flanigan et

al. (2015) and Sirima (2023), which noted that barriers such as limited accessibility, inadequate

infrastructure, and ineffective marketing strategies hinder participation. Conversely, social

constraints, including lack of interest from family and friends, difficulty finding a travel

companion, and concerns about acceptance in rural areas, had a negative and statistically

significant effect (β = -0.758, p = 0.003). This suggests that social dynamics and interpersonal

relationships can serve as barriers to participation, potentially limiting engagement among

individuals who lack social support or travel companionship for agritourism activities. This aligns

with the findings of Choo and Petrick (2014).

Employment status had a marginally significant negative effect on participation at the 10%

level (β = -0.921, p = 0.055), indicating that employed individuals were less likely to engage in

agritourism. Unemployed individuals, including retirees and those with flexible schedules, were

slightly more likely to participate than those employed. This suggests that time constraints

associated with work obligations may limit engagement in agritourism despite financial capability.

Trip characteristics also played a role in participation likelihood. The trip type variable in the

regression analysis compared participants who preferred day trips, night trips, or both day and

night trips with those who did not take any agritourism trip, which served as the base category.

Participants who preferred both day and night trips were significantly more likely to participate in

agritourism compared to those who did not take any trips (β = 1.882, p = 0.000). This shows that individuals with a broader preference for both day and night agritourism experiences are the most likely to engage in these activities.

For participants who preferred only day trips (β = 1.603, p = 0.166) or only night trips (β = 0.720, p = 0.338), the effects on agritourism participation were positive but not statistically significant. This suggests that while these individuals may be more likely to participate in agritourism than those who took no trips, the association is not strong enough to draw firm conclusions.

Gender did not have a statistically significant effect on agritourism participation (β = -0.528, p = 0.207), suggesting that participation is not influenced by gender. This indicates that agritourism appeals equally to males and females, with other factors, such as motivation and income, playing a more decisive role. Similarly, education level was not a significant predictor (β = 0.411, p = 0.356), suggesting that agritourism is accessible across different educational backgrounds and is not necessarily driven by formal education levels. This finding is inconsistent with studies by Govindasamy and Kelley (2014), who found that college graduates participate more frequently in wine-tasting events. Zhao et al. (2022) found that higher education levels are associated with greater awareness and consideration of sustainable practices, which may encourage participation in agritourism.

The logistic regression model identifies age, income, employment status, motivation, participation barriers, and preference for both day and night trips as key determinants of agritourism participation. Younger generations, higher-income earners, and those motivated by scenic and experiential attractions were more likely to participate in the event. While barriers such as cost and accessibility did not strongly deter committed individuals, employment-related time

constraints and social dynamics continued to be limiting factors. Preference for both day and night trips significantly increased the likelihood of participation. Gender and education level were not significant predictors, indicating a broad demographic appeal. These findings suggest that enhancing accessibility, addressing barriers, and promoting short-term, experience-driven activities can further drive agritourism engagement and contribute to rural economic growth.

Table 4.3: Logistic Regression Analysis of Agritourism Participation

Independent Variable	Coeff.	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|
Gender	-0.528	0.418	-1.260	0.207
Educational	0.4101	0.445	0.920	0.356
Age	-0.040***	0.015	-2.670	0.007
Household Income	0.000*	0.000	1.950	0.051
Employment Status	-0.920*	0.480	-1.920	0.055
Motivational Score	1.250***	0.297	4.210	0.000
Participation Barriers Score	0.471*	0.266	1.770	0.077
Social Constraints Score	-0.758***	0.257	-2.950	0.003
Trip Type				
Day Trip	1.603	1.157	1.380	0.166
Night Trip	0.720	0.751	0.960	0.338
Both Trip	1.882***	0.433	4.350	0.000
Constant	-0.987	1.572	-0.630	0.530
LR chi2(11)	108.70			
Prob>chi2	0.000			
Log-Likelihood	-94.619			
Pseudo R2	0.365			
n	374			

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4.3 Analysis of Key Differences Between Agritourism Participants and Non-Participants

4.3.1 Chi-Square Analysis

A Chi-square test was conducted to examine whether demographic characteristics, including gender, education level, and employment status, significantly differed between agritourism participants and non-participants. The results are presented in Table 4.4.

Education level exhibited a statistically significant association with agritourism participation (χ^2 = 9.806, p = 0.002), indicating that individuals with higher education levels were more likely to engage in agritourism than those with lower education levels. This finding supports earlier results suggesting that greater educational exposure enhances awareness and engagement in agritourism-related activities. This finding is consistent with Lan et al. (2023), who found that education has a significant influence on the decision to participate in agritourism.

Similarly, employment status significantly influenced participation (χ^2 = 4.975, p = 0.026), with employed individuals being more likely to participate in agritourism than those who were unemployed. This result suggests that financial resources and access to leisure opportunities are important factors contributing to agritourism engagement. However, this finding contrasts with Lan et al. (2023), who reported that occupation did not significantly affect the decision to participate in agritourism.

In contrast, gender was not significantly associated with agritourism participation (χ^2 = 0.007, p = 0.933), indicating that males and females had a similar likelihood of participating in agritourism. This supports previous observations that participation is driven more by income and motivation than by gender-based preferences. This finding is also consistent with Lan et al. (2023), who found no significant difference in participation based on gender.

Table 4.4: Chi-Square Test of Independence for Agritourism Participation by Socioeconomic Characteristics

Variable	Participant (%)	Non-Participant (%)	χ^2 (df)	p-value
Gender			0.007 (1)	0.933
Male	131 (40.56%)	30 (13.51%)		
Female	192 (59.44%)	21 (86.49%		
Educational Level			9.806 (1)	0.002***
Some college & Higher	245 (86.18%)	28 (13.82%)		
High School & Below	78 (77.23%)	23 (22.77%)		
Employment Status			4.975 (1)	0.026**
Employed	193 (89.77%)	22 (10.23%)		
Unemployed	130 (81.76%)	29 (18.24%)		

<div align="center">

*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1

</div>

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025

4.3.2   T-Test Analysis

A T-test analysis assessed the mean differences in age and income between agritourism participants and non-participants. The results are presented in Table 4.5.

Age significantly differed between participants and non-participants ($t = 3.6401$, $p = 0.0003$). The mean age of agritourism participants (46.68 years) was lower than that of non-participants (55.43 years), reinforcing the earlier finding that younger generations are more likely to engage in agritourism activities. This suggests that age is a key determinant of participation, with younger generations exhibiting a greater interest in rural tourism experiences. However, this finding contrasts with Lan et al. (2023), who found no significant age differences in the decision to participate in agritourism.

Income also showed a statistically significant difference between participants and non-participants ($t = -4.139$, $p = 0.000$), with agritourism participants reporting a significantly higher mean income ($78,196.12) than non-participants ($44,215.19). This further supports the finding that financial capacity enhances the likelihood of participation, as individuals with higher incomes

may have greater discretionary spending power to engage in leisure activities such as agritourism. This finding is inconsistent with that of Lan et al. (2023), who found no significant income difference in the decision to participate in agritourism.

These results suggest that age and income distinguish participants from non-participants, with younger and higher-income individuals demonstrating a greater propensity to engage in agritourism.

Table 4.5: T-Test Results for Differences in Age and Income Between Agritourism Participants and Non-Participants

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	95% Cl	t-value	p-value
Age					3.64	0.0003***
Non-participants	51	55.43	1.98	(51.45, 59.41)		
Participants	323	46.68	0.90	(44.91, 48.46)		
Household Income					-4.14	0.0000***
Non-participants						
Participants	51	44,215.19	6258.52	(31,644.38, 56,785.80)		
	323	78,196.12	3107.49	(72,082.57, 84,309.66)		

<div align="center">*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1</div>

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025

4.4   Structural Equation Modeling Results

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the determinants of willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced food, with a focus on attitudes as both a direct predictor and a mediating factor. The model examines how latent constructs (environmental concerns, health awareness, personal image, and product quality) shape consumer attitudes toward locally produced food and, in turn, influence their willingness to pay.

The model fit was assessed using the Likelihood Ratio test ($\chi^2(76) = 224.36$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that the model is statistically significant and provides a strong explanatory framework for understanding consumer behavior in local food markets. Additional fit indices further support

the model's validity, indicating that the relationships between latent constructs and consumer behavior are well-defined and robust.

Table 4.6: Structural Equation Modeling Estimates for Willingness to Pay

Path	Estimate (β)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Direct Effects on WTP					
Attitude → WTP	0.818***	0.126	6.510	0.000	Strong positive effect
Gender → WTP	0.311*	0.180	1.730	0.083	Marginal significance
Age → WTP	-0.022***	0.006	-3.820	0.000	Significant negative effect
Income → WTP	4.22e-06**	1.80e-06	2.350	0.019	Significant positive effect
Education → WTP	0.407**	0.202	2.020	0.043	Significant positive effect
Marital Status → WTP	0.234	0.190	1.240	0.217	Not significant
Race → WTP	0.111	0.190	0.580	0.559	Not significant
Mediation Effects on Attitude					
Environmental Concern → Attitude	0.640***	0.057	11.160	0.000	Significant positive effect
Health Awareness → Attitude	0.565***	0.064	8.800	0.000	Significant positive effect
Personal Image → Attitude	0.683***	0.052	13.210	0.000	Significant positive effect
Product Quality → Attitude	0.444***	0.047	9.550	0.000	Significant positive effect

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025

4.4.1 Relationship Between Attitudes and Willingness to Pay for Locally Produced Food

The SEM results indicate that attitude toward locally produced food is a key determinant of WTP, with a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.818$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that consumers with favorable attitudes toward local food tend to have a higher willingness to pay for it. These findings show the importance of perceived benefits, including environmental sustainability, health considerations, personal image, and product quality, in shaping consumer attitudes. This supports the Theory of Planned Behavior, which posits that attitudes have a strong influence on behavioral intentions, including purchasing decisions. This result aligns with the findings of Bianchi and Mortimer (2015), Feldmann and Hamm (2015), and Dsouza et al. (2023), which demonstrate that attitudes toward consuming local food have a strong and positive association with the intention to buy local food in various countries.

Among demographic factors, gender, age, income, and education level were significant predictors of WTP, while marital status and race were not. Gender ($\beta = 0.311$, $p = 0.083$) was marginally significant at the 10% level, suggesting that WTP does not vary between males and females. This finding is inconsistent with Carpio and Isengildina-Massa (2008), who found that females are willing to pay an additional premium for local produce compared to male consumers. Additionally, Carfora and Catellani (2023) found that women viewed local food as costlier than men did, leading to a decreased intention to purchase it. Age had a significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.022$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that older consumers are less willing to pay for locally produced food than younger consumers. This finding differs from Carfora and Catellani (2023), who found that each additional year of age increased the willingness to pay for local produce.

Income was positively associated with WTP ($\beta = 4.22\text{e-}06$, $p = 0.019$), indicating that individuals with higher incomes tend to be more willing to pay a premium for locally produced

food. This aligns with Balogh et al. (2016), who noted that additional income increases WTP for local produce. Education also had a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.407$, $p = 0.043$, significant at the 5% level), indicating that higher education levels enhance WTP due to increased awareness of food quality, sustainability, and health benefits. This finding is consistent with those of Balogh et al. (2016), Govindasamy and Kelley (2014), and Carfora and Catellani (2023), who also found that educated individuals tend to pay more for local produce. In contrast, marital status ($\beta = 0.234$, $p = 0.217$) and race ($\beta = 0.111$, $p = 0.559$) were not significant predictors of WTP, implying that household structure and race do not play a significant role in determining consumer WTP. According to Tran & Su (2025), race has a significant negative impact on WTP for produce grown in Missouri; White consumers are less willing to pay compared to their non-Caucasian counterparts.

4.4.2 Mediation Effects of Attitudes and Latent Constructs

The SEM results confirm that attitude significantly mediates the relationship between key latent constructs (environmental concerns, health awareness, personal image, and product quality) and the willingness to pay for locally produced food. This suggests that consumer willingness to pay is primarily shaped by perceptions rather than direct external factors.

Among the latent constructs, the personal image had the most substantial effect on attitude ($\beta = 0.683$, $p < 0.001$, significant at the 1% level), indicating that consumers who associate locally produced food with social prestige or personal identity are more willing to pay a premium. Environmental concern ($\beta = 0.640$, $p < 0.001$) also significantly influenced attitudes, indicating that consumers who prioritize sustainability develop more favorable attitudes toward locally produced food, thereby increasing their willingness to pay. This contradicts the findings by Tran & Su (2025), who observed that environmental attitude had no significant effect on WTP for local

labels, suggesting that consumers prioritize supporting local farms over broad environmental benefits. Similarly, health awareness was a strong predictor ($\beta = 0.565$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that individuals who prioritize nutrition and food safety are more likely to pay a premium for locally produced food. Product quality ($\beta = 0.444$, $p < 0.001$) also contributed positively, suggesting that perceptions of freshness and superior quality significantly strengthen attitudes, thereby justifying a higher willingness to pay. This aligns with the findings of Huang et al. (2025), who found that health awareness increased willingness to pay for local produce, suggesting that health-conscious consumers value chemical-free production.

These latent constructs collectively shape consumer attitudes, which mediate the relationship between demographic factors and WTP. Since attitude strongly predicts WTP ($\beta = 0.818$, $p < 0.001$, significant at the 1% level), these findings confirm that internal perceptions influence consumer willingness to pay more than external constraints. This finding aligns with Carfora and Catellani (2023), who discovered that consumers' perceptions of local food attributes and their expectations regarding its quality, price, and availability influence their intention to purchase local food. Strengthening positive perceptions through targeted marketing, educational campaigns, and messaging that focuses on sustainability, health benefits, and product quality can further enhance the willingness to pay for locally produced food.

4.5   Willingness to Pay for Locally Produced Food

This section examines the distribution of willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced food and its determinants using a multinomial logit (MNL) model. The analysis provides insights into how demographic and socioeconomic characteristics influence WTP categories.

4.5.1 Distribution and Trends in WTP

Table 4.7 presents the distribution of respondents based on their willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced food. The results show that most respondents (50.53%) fall into the Low WTP category, indicating that they are either unwilling or only slightly willing to pay a premium of up to 5% for locally produced food. Approximately 34.76% fall into the Medium WTP category, showing a moderate willingness to pay between 10% and 20% more. A smaller proportion (14.71%) of respondents belong to the High WTP category, indicating a willingness to pay 25% or more for locally produced food.

Table 4.7: Distribution of Willingness to Pay Categories

WTP Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low WTP	189	50.53%
Medium WTP	130	34.76%
High WTP	55	14.71%
Total	374	100 %

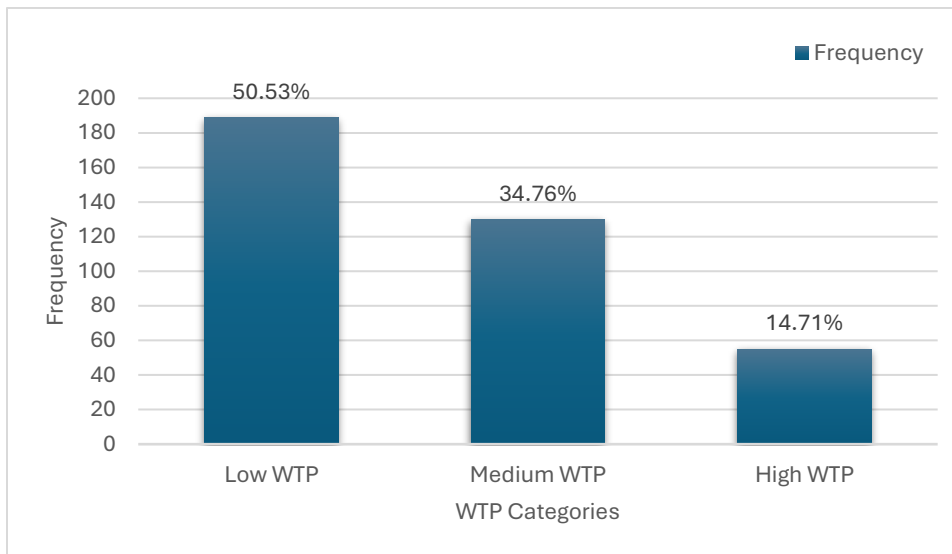**Source: Author's Compilation, 2025**

Figure 2. Distribution of Willingness to Pay for Locally Produced Food.

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025.

4.5.2 Multinomial Logit Results for WTP Segments

A multinomial logit (MNL) model was employed to examine the factors influencing Medium WTP and High WTP relative to Low WTP. The model fit was evaluated using the likelihood ratio chi-square test (LR χ^2 = 102.62, p = 0.000) and Pseudo R^2 (0.138), indicating that the model explains a meaningful portion of the variation in WTP.

For the Medium WTP category, attitude toward locally produced food had a positive and statistically significant effect (RRR = 2.290, p = 0.000), suggesting that more favorable attitudes increase the likelihood of moving from Low to Medium WTP. Race also showed a positive effect (RRR = 1.640, p = 0.067), though it was marginally significant at the 10% level. Other variables, such as gender, age, income, education, and marital status, did not show statistically significant effects on the Medium WTP category.

For the High WTP category, attitude had an even more substantial positive effect (RRR = 2.990, p = 0.000), confirming that positive attitudes significantly increase the likelihood of belonging to the High WTP segment. Gender had a positive effect (RRR = 1.900, p = 0.080), indicating that males are more likely to pay a high premium for locally produced food than females. Age had a negative effect (RRR = 0.940, p = 0.000), suggesting that younger generations are likelier to exhibit High WTP than older individuals. Income showed a positive effect (RRR = 1.000, p = 0.059), though only marginally significant. Education (RRR = 2.500, p = 0.049) and marital status (RRR = 2.410, p = 0.031) both showed positive effects, indicating that individuals with higher education and those who are married are more likely to belong to the High WTP group. In contrast, race had no significant effect on High WTP.

The results suggest that attitude is a key driver in differentiating between the Low WTP, Medium WTP, and High WTP categories, with positive attitudes consistently associated with a

higher willingness to pay. Gender, income, education, and marital status also play significant roles, particularly in distinguishing between Low and High WTP. Age, on the other hand, has a negative influence on High WTP, indicating that younger generations tend to be more willing to pay for locally produced food than older individuals. The findings emphasize the importance of understanding attitudes as a primary determinant of WTP and suggest that marketing strategies should focus on younger, more educated, and financially stable consumers with favorable attitudes toward local food. Additionally, marital status influences WTP due to household decision-making dynamics, which should also be considered in future marketing and policy strategies. Policies that improve accessibility to rural areas, such as better transportation infrastructure and affordable pricing for agritourism activities, could further enhance participation. These findings align with those of Flanigan et al. (2015), who emphasize the importance of addressing economic and logistical barriers to maximize participation in agritourism and local food systems.

Table 4.8: Multinomial Logit Regression Estimates for Willingness to Pay Categories

	Medium WTP			Marginal Effect High WTP		
	Coeff.	RRR	P value	Coeff.	RRR	P value
Attitude	0.827***	2.286	0.000	1.095***	2.990	0.000
Gender	0.379	1.460	0.136	0.643*	1.902	0.080
Age	0.004	1.004	0.600	-0.060***	0.942	0.000
Income	3.92e-06	1.000	0.142	6.49e-06*	1.000	0.059
Education	0.458	1.580	0.113	0.916**	2.500	0.049
Marital Status	-0.016	0.984	0.953	0.880**	2.411	0.031
Race	0.497**	1.644	0.067	-0.016	0.984	0.966
Cons	-4.949***	0.007	0.000	-5.066***	0.006	0.000
LR chi2(14)	102.62					
Prob > chi2	0.000					
Log likelihood	-320.489					
Pseudo R2	0.138					
n	374					

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025

Note: The base category is Low WTP. Coefficients represent the log odds of being in the Medium WTP or High WTP categories relative to Low WTP.

4.6   Robustness Checks and Model Validation

4.6.1   Model Fit and Selection Criteria

The choice between the Ordered Logit (Ologit) model and the Multinomial Logit (MNL) model was guided by theoretical considerations and model fit performance. The Ologit model requires the proportional odds assumption, meaning that the relationship between predictors and the outcome is consistent across all WTP categories. In this study, however, WTP was categorized into three distinct groups (Low, Medium, and High), which disrupted the strict ordinal structure needed for Ologit.

The examination of the Ologit model's cut points revealed uneven spacing, indicating that the proportional odds assumption did not hold; thus, a single set of coefficients could not adequately describe the data across all WTP levels. This justified the use of the MNL model, which does not require the proportional odds assumption and allows for category-specific effects.

Model fit comparisons further supported this decision. The MNL model demonstrated superior fit, with a higher log-likelihood (-320.490) compared to the Ologit model (-622.176) and lower AIC (672.978 vs. 1270.352) and BIC (735.766 vs. 1321.368). The likelihood ratio chi-square test for the MNL model ($\chi^2 = 102.62$, $p < 0.001$) also confirmed improved predictive power over the Ologit model ($\chi^2 = 95.280$, $p < 0.001$).

Given these results, the MNL model was selected as the preferred approach. It provides more accurate estimates and greater flexibility in capturing the factors influencing various levels of WTP, making it better suited for this analysis.

Table 4.9: Ordered Logit Regression Estimates for Willingness to Pay

Variables	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	z-value	p-value
Attitude	1.072***	0.152	7.070	0.000
Gender	0.284	0.199	1.430	0.153
Age	-0.015**	0.006	-2.410	0.016
Income	5.71e-06***	2.09e-06	2.730	0.006
Education Level	0.417*	0.221	1.890	0.059
Marital Status	0.144	0.205	0.700	0.483
Race	0.320	0.211	1.520	0.129
/cut1	3.259	0.359		
/cut2	4.679	0.363		
/cut3	5.648	0.370		
/cut4	6.157	0.373		
/cut5	6.720	0.380		
/cut6	7.529	0.401		
LR chi2(7)	95.280			
Prob > chi2	0.000			
Log likelihood	-622.1760			
Pseudo R2	0.0711			
n	374			

*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10.

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025

To ensure construct validity, Cronbach's Alpha was computed for the latent constructs (Environmental Concern, Health Concern, Personal Image, and Product Attributes), with values ranging from 0.705 to 0.787, confirming good internal consistency. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) identified four factors consistent with the theoretical constructs and explained a substantial proportion of the variance. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) further validated the measurement model, with goodness-of-fit indices (RMSEA = 0.072, SRMR = 0.073, TLI = 0.875, CFI = 0.904) indicating a robust model.

Table 4.10: Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Threshold	Interpretation
RMSEA	0.072	<0.08	Acceptable fit
SRMR	0.073	<0.08	Acceptable fit
TLI	0.875	>0.90	Marginal fit
CFI	0.904	>0.90	Good fit
Chi-Square (χ^2)	215.89		Good fit
Degrees of Freedom	68		
p-value	0.000	<0.01	Significant

*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025

Table 4.11: Reliability Test of Latent Constructs

Latent Constructs	Number of Observed Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Environmental Concern	2	0.787	Good reliability
Health Awareness	2	0.770	Good reliability
Personal Image	2	0.762	Good reliability
Product Attributes	2	0.705	Acceptable reliability
Attitude Towards Local Food	3	0.762	Good reliability

Source: Author's Compilation, 2025

Collectively, these results validate the reliability of the latent constructs and support the appropriateness of the MNL model for analyzing WTP segmentation.

4.6.2 Sensitivity Analysis and Alternative Specifications

To ensure the robustness of the multinomial logit (MNL) model for willingness-to-pay, several validation tests and alternative specifications were conducted. First, an ordered logit (Ologit) regression was estimated to compare with MNL, given the ordinal nature of WTP. However, MNL

outperformed Ologit, as indicated by lower AIC (672.9779 vs. 1270.352) and BIC (735.766 vs. 1321.368) values, confirming that treating WTP as unordered better captures consumer choices.

A correlation matrix was computed for the independent variables to address potential multicollinearity, as the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) does not apply to the MNL model. Results showed no severe multicollinearity, with correlations within acceptable ranges. Additionally, bootstrap standard errors with 1,000 replications were calculated, confirming the stability of coefficient estimates.

Out-of-sample predictions validated the model's predictive power, with predicted probabilities summing to 1.0 across all WTP categories, aligning with theoretical expectations. An alternative WTP categorization (0/2 = Low WTP, 3/4 = Medium WTP, 5/6 = High WTP) was tested against the initial one (0/1 = Low WTP, 2/4 = Medium WTP, 5/6 = High WTP), yielding consistent results. This suggests that the WTP classification does not significantly alter key insights.

For the logit model, robustness was assessed by comparing continuous motivation scores, participation barriers, and social constraint scores with their categorical counterparts. The primary model exhibited better fit, with lower AIC (211.3473 vs. 218.6056) and BIC (254.5141 vs. 261.7724), higher LR chi² (108.59 vs. 101.33), and improved Pseudo R² (0.3645 vs. 0.3401). Both models were statistically significant (Prob > chi² = 0.0000), but the primary model's superior log likelihood (-94.6736 vs. -98.3028) confirmed its enhanced precision.

These robustness checks, alternative model specifications, multicollinearity assessments, out-of-sample predictions, bootstrap validations, and alternative WTP categorizations collectively demonstrate that the MNL model provides a stable, reliable, and theoretically sound estimation of WTP determinants.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter summarizes the results analyzed and draws conclusions, recommendations, and limitations from the results presented and discussed.

5.1   Summary

The research explored the factors influencing agritourism participation and the willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced food in Georgia. The study utilized primary data collected from 374 respondents. It employed statistical methods, including descriptive statistics, Chi-Square tests, T-tests, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), and Multinomial Logit Model (MNL), to examine the main determinants. Various socio-demographic and behavioral variables were considered, including gender, age, education level, income, employment status, marital status, race, motivations, barriers, social constraints, and attitudes toward local food.

The sample consisted of 374 respondents, with a majority (59.36%) being female. The age distribution showed the highest concentration of participants in the 35-49 years category (28.61%), followed by those aged 65 and older (24.60%) and those aged 18-29 (16.04%). A sizable proportion (72.99%) of respondents had at least some college education, and 62.83% identified as White or Caucasian. Income levels varied, with 38.50% of respondents earning between $50,000 and $99,999. Most respondents were employed (57.49%), and 44.92% were married. Regarding agritourism preferences, 74.60% preferred both day and night trips, indicating a strong interest in both types of trips.

The logistic regression model identified several key determinants of agritourism participation. Age, income, employment status, motivation, participation barriers, social constraints, and preference for both day and night trips were significant predictors. The results

indicated that younger generations were more likely to participate in agritourism (β = -0.0401, p = 0.007), with income having a positive effect on participation (β = 0.0000113, p = 0.051). Motivation was a strong predictor, and motivated participants driven by scenic landscapes and rural experiences were much more likely to participate (β = 1.2496, p = 0.000). Interestingly, transportation and distance constraints had a positive, albeit marginal, effect on participation (β = 0.4708, p = 0.077), indicating that motivated participants would attend despite challenges. Social constraints, such as a lack of interest from family and friends, negatively impact agritourism participation (β = -0.7579, p = 0.003), suggesting that social experiences and interpersonal relationships can hinder participation. A preference for both day and night trips was a strong predictor of participation (β = 1.8820, p = 0.000), indicating that individuals who enjoy a wide range of agritourism activities are significantly more likely to participate.

Chi-square tests examined the relationships between demographic characteristics and agritourism participation. Education level and employment status significantly influence participation (χ^2 = 9.8063, p = 0.002 and χ^2 = 4.9752, p = 0.026, respectively), with higher education and employment status increasing the likelihood of participation. In contrast, gender did not significantly impact participation (χ^2 = 0.0070, p = 0.933). T-tests further revealed significant differences in age and income between participants and non-participants. Agritourism participants were younger (mean age = 46.68 years) and had higher income (mean income = $78,196.12) than non-participants, suggesting that financial capacity and age are key factors driving participation.

Structural Equation Modeling examined the relationships between attitudes, latent constructs, and WTP for locally produced food. The results confirmed that attitude toward local food is a key determinant of WTP (β = 0.818, p < 0.001), with personal image (β = 0.683, p < 0.001), environmental concern (β = 0.640, p < 0.001), health awareness (β = 0.565, p = 0.001),

and Product quality (β = 0.444, p < 0.001) strongly influencing consumer attitudes. The model fit was assessed with a likelihood ratio test ($\chi^2(76)$ = 224.36, p < 0.001), indicating that the model provides a strong explanatory framework for understanding consumer behavior in local food markets.

The Multinomial Logit (MNL) model was employed to investigate the factors influencing various levels of willingness to pay for locally produced food. The results showed that attitude was the most significant factor in determining willingness to pay. For Medium WTP, positive attitudes toward local food increased the likelihood of being in this category (RRR = 2.29, p = 0.000). For High WTP, favorable attitudes were even more significant (RRR = 2.99, p = 0.000). Income, education, and marital status were also positively associated with High WTP, indicating that financially stable, educated, and married individuals are more likely to pay a premium for local products. In contrast, age had a negative impact on High WTP, with younger generations exhibiting a higher willingness to pay.

These findings highlight that socio-demographic factors, attitudes, and other variables, such as motivations, barriers, and social constraints, play significant roles in driving agritourism participation. To increase participation, agritourism operators should primarily focus on reducing logistics barriers and promoting the educational aspects and sustainability benefits of agritourism. It is important for targeted marketing to focus on younger, higher-income, and well-educated consumers who have the highest likelihood of participating in WTP.

This study contributes to the understanding of agritourism behavior, providing insights for promoting sustainable local food systems and suggesting tailored strategies to enhance consumer participation in agritourism activities.

5.2   Conclusion

This study aimed to identify factors affecting agritourism participation and willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced foods in Georgia. Results showed that agritourism participation is primarily driven by age, income, employment status, motivation, social constraints, and preference for both day and night trips. Younger generations with high incomes, employed individuals, and those whose motivations were based on the scenic beauty of the agritourism destination, ecotourism, and rural experience were more likely to participate. Barriers such as transportation challenges, distance to farms, and lack of amenities were identified, sugesting that overcoming these logistical issues could increase agritourism engagement.

Attitudes towards sustainability, health awareness, personal image, and product quality significantly influenced the willingness to pay for locally produced food. Consumers with a positive attitude towards local food systems, particularly younger and more educated individuals, were more likely to pay a premium for such foods. The Multinomial Logit Model (MNL) also revealed that favorable attitudes significantly increased the likelihood of higher WTP categories, as well as income, education, and age, which affected WTP.

These findings suggest that it is possible to increase willingness to pay among more affluent, younger, and educated consumers by improving their attitudes toward local food through specifically designed marketing campaigns that emphasize local food sustainability, health benefits, and quality. The research highlights the importance of addressing participation barriers in agritourism and promoting positive consumer attitudes toward local produce. By focusing on enhancing accessibility, eliminating logistical barriers, and emphasizing the environmental and health benefits of local food, stakeholders can encourage participation and promote sustainable agritourism in Georgia.

5.3   Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study on agritourism participation and willingness to pay (WTP) for locally produced food in Georgia, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Targeted Marketing and Education Campaigns**: It is recommended that agritourism operators and local food promoters focus on targeted marketing campaigns that specifically appeal to younger, more educated individuals who have shown the highest likelihood of participating in agritourism and paying a premium for locally produced food. Educational campaigns should focus on the environmental, health, and economic benefits of agritourism and local food. Highlighting the unique experiences, such as scenic landscapes and cultural experiences, may further attract this demographic.

2. **Addressing Accessibility Barriers**: The study identifies significant barriers, including transportation and access to agritourism sites. It is recommended that agritourism operators collaborate with local governments to enhance transportation options, such as implementing shuttle services to agritourism locations or improving public transportation routes. Making agritourism sites more accessible through better signage, facilities (e.g., restrooms, mobile connectivity), and more precise information on how to reach them will encourage greater participation, especially among those who may not have personal transportation.

3. **Incentive Programs for Participation**: To encourage participation, financial incentives or reductions in spending may be necessary, especially for middle- and low-income groups. This could involve discounted agritourism packages, subsidized transportation costs to the agritourism destination, or free admission for specific audiences, such as families or students. Reducing financial barriers can lead to broader participation in agritourism.

4. **Enhance the Local Food Experience**: To increase the willingness to pay for locally produced food, operators should promote stronger connections between agritourism experiences and local food systems. This could involve integrating more farm-to-table dining experiences, cooking demonstrations, and workshops on sustainable farming practices. Providing educational information about the sourcing and benefits of local food can help increase consumers' perceived value of these products.

5. **Improved Infrastructure and Amenities**: Agritourism destinations should invest in infrastructure improvements, such as providing better facilities (e.g., restrooms and seating areas), increasing signage for easy navigation, and ensuring reliable internet and mobile phone coverage. This will ensure that participants have a positive experience, which could lead to repeat visits and word-of-mouth recommendations.

6. **Continual Monitoring and Research**: It is essential that stakeholders continually monitor and evaluate agritourism participation trends, barriers, and changes in consumer behavior. Agritourism businesses can refine their strategies by capturing visitor preferences, levels of satisfaction, and the effects of different marketing and incentive programs. Continuous research will also help identify shifts in demographic characteristics and emerging consumer needs, enabling agritourism enterprises to modify their offerings suitably.

5.4   Research Limitations and Future Studies

Several limitations in the existing agritourism literature impact the robustness and applicability of the findings. One limitation relates to the issues in securing a reliable WTP and behavioral intention measure. Conventional measures, including contingent valuation and choice experiments, are often problematic and may influence participants due to hypothetical bias that may not capture all consumers' valid preferences. The complexities of agritourism experiences,

which involve many factors, can make these traditional methods inadequate for understanding consumer behavior (Torquati et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2020).

Another limitation is the lack of longitudinal studies tracking how exposure to agritourism influences consumer behavior over time. Most research provides only short-term insights, but understanding the long-term impacts of agritourism experiences on WTP and local food consumption is essential for creating sustainable strategies in the long run. Without these longitudinal perspectives, it remains unclear whether agritourism leads to lasting shifts in consumer behavior (Wu et al., 2020; Adamov et al., 2020).

This study utilized data collected through Qualtrics, which, although efficient for accessing respondents, may not fully represent the demographic and geographic diversity of Georgia. This sampling method may introduce selection bias, as it overrepresents individuals with internet access and survey engagement while potentially excluding certain rural or underrepresented groups. As a result, the generalizability of the findings to the entire Georgia population is limited.

Future research should also consider more nuanced segmentation in both willingness to pay and participant demographics. Studies could classify WTP into multiple categories, including "no willingness to pay," to capture the full scope of consumer intent. Clarifying age groups (such as young, middle-aged, and older participants) may yield more targeted insights into demographic effects. There is also value in differentiating barriers into specific types (structural, interpersonal, intrapersonal) to identify which barriers exert the most positive or negative influence on agritourism participation. Segmenting these factors would enable researchers to design more tailored interventions that address the distinct needs and constraints of various consumer segments.

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