MAKING AGRICULTURE RELEVANT
Categorizing Texas Consumers’ Food-Related Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior

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Introduction

- Consumer-driven marketing
  - One-way v. two-way communication
  - Consumer decision-making is a cyclic process (Court, Elzings, Mulder, Vetvik, & Jorgen, 2009)
    - Requires message variations accounting for message context, past consumer behavior, and real-time assessment of company, organization, and/or industry promotional needs
Introduction

- Audience characteristics play a major role in how individuals consume and process information
  - Need to tailor messages to specific beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Krueter & Ray, 2003)
Introduction

To provide relevant information to consumers about U.S. food and fiber production, we need to understand our external audiences.
Purpose of the study

- To describe the perspectives of agriculture among individuals in Texas
  - Categorize Texas consumers based on their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to food and fiber production
  - Identify factors that influence those beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors
Methods

- Part of a graduate-level research design course
- Focus groups
- Personal interviews
  - Adult participants at central Texas farmers markets
Methods

- Data analyzed using constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)
  - Reflexive journals and debriefings used to establish confirmability and credibility
Findings: Consumer Categories

- **Traditionalist**
  - Grew up in FFA and 4-H
  - Live, breathe, and love everything that is agriculture
  - Surrounded by it at a very young age and cannot see their lives without it
  - Possibly their job or career
Findings: Consumer Categories

- Health conscious
  - Very concerned with wellbeing
  - Make health-oriented food choices and avoid highly processed products; high fat, high sodium, high sugar, and high starch foods
  - Like to know where their food comes from and how it was made
Findings: Consumer Categories

- **Indifferent**
  - Don’t think about agriculture on a regular basis or at all
  - Ag info doesn’t affect them or change their actions
  - Don’t really care about how their food was made or where it comes from
  - Buy cheap food because they have to eat
Findings: Consumer Categories

- Opinionated learner
  - Know agriculture is there, but don’t know enough about it
  - Aware of knowledge gap and willing to learn
  - Read a lot of articles online and once something is learned they form very strong opinions
Findings: Consumer Categories

- **Organic believer**
  - Consume strictly organic products
  - Against conventional agriculture, concerned with environmental and personal health
  - Don’t believe in use of pesticides, herbicides
  - Organic production is how it should be done
Findings: Factors

- Media Influence
- Involvement
- Production Efficiency
- Uncultivated
- Land Health
- Family History
- Long-term Thinker
- Financially Unstable
Findings: Factors

- Media Influence
- Financiably Unstable
- Long-term Thinker
- Financiably Unstable
Conclusions

- A deeper understanding of audience characteristics is necessary to develop effective messages for consumers
  - Livelihood and relation to agriculture
  - Education and/or desire for information
  - Information sources
Conclusions

- A deeper understanding of audience characteristics is necessary to develop effective messages for consumers
  - Financial status
  - Technology and media use
Implications

- First step in developing effective messaging for adult Texas consumers
  - Study improves understanding of consumer perceptions, behavior, and decisions related to agriculture, food, and natural resources
  - Study identifies factors that interest and motivate consumers
Implications

- Consumer categories and factors used to create a questionnaire
  - Distributed to nearly 30,000 homes in 7 states in Summer and Fall 2014
  - Survey data used to build a consumer prediction model to better understand factor effects
Recommendations

- For researchers and academics
  - Continue to study consumers in disparate regions
  - Work with industry to disseminate and use results
  - Instruct students in importance of consumer-driven marketing and audience analysis
Recommendations

- For communications professionals
  - Customize messages to reach specific sub-audiences
    - Avoid “one size fits all” approach to messaging
THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

Are there any questions?