

Essex County Agri-Tourism:

Exploring Regional and Farm-Level Diversification



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Outline



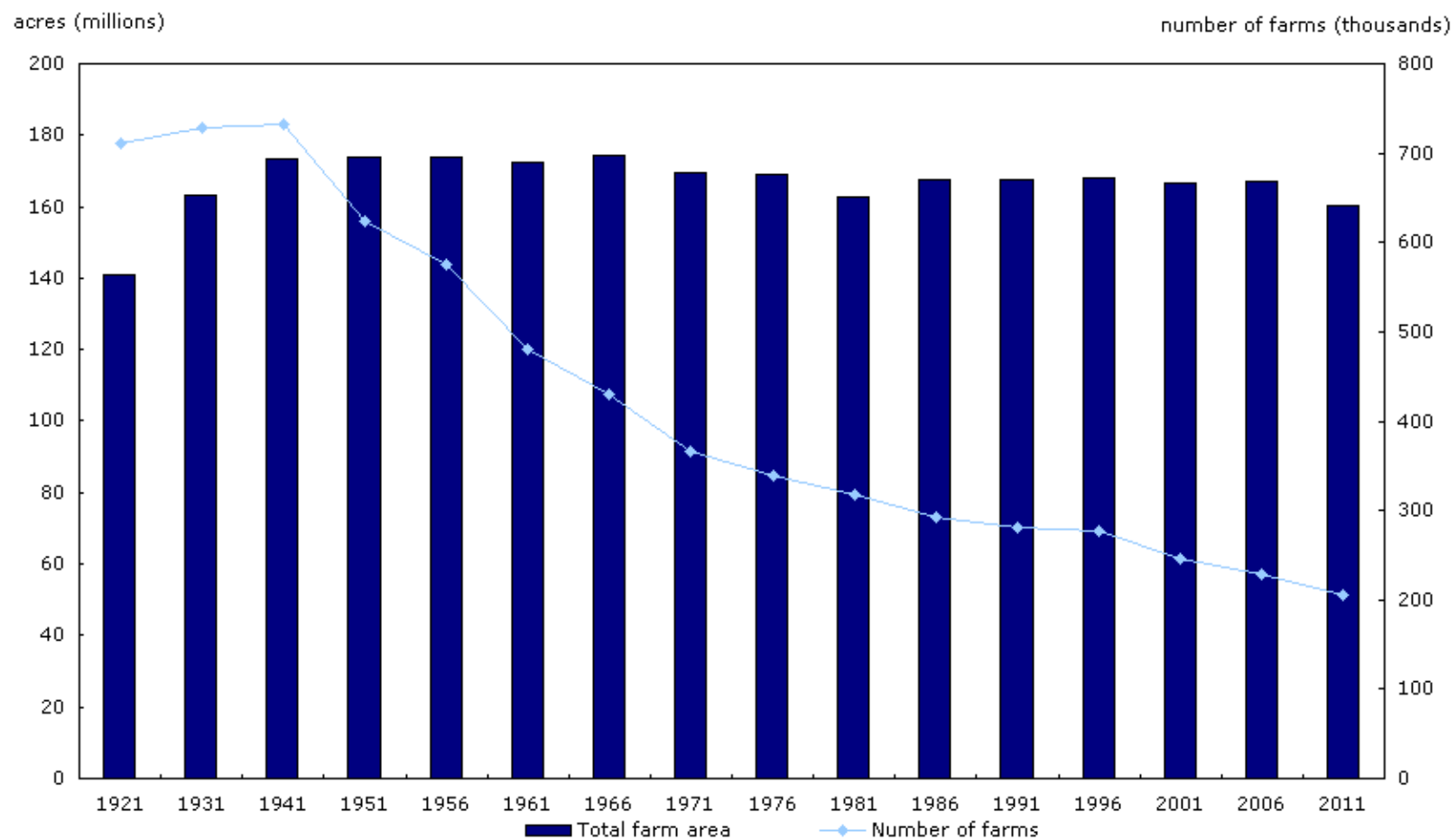
1. **Context**
2. **Knowledge Gaps**
3. **Research Aim**
4. **Methods**
5. **Results**
6. **Implications**

Agricultural Restructuring



“The Canadian agricultural sector continues to restructure as many farms **expand in scale** of operation, **consolidate, draw on technological innovations** to enhance productivity, and augment their sales”

- Statistics Canada, 2011 Census of Agriculture



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 1921 to 2011

Rural Restructuring



Trends in rural regions:

- Declining reliance on agriculture
- Growing presence of (ex)urban actors
- Changing expectations of rural space

Rural character has become a marketable asset



Agri-Tourism



“The act of visiting a **working farm** or any agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness operation for the purpose of **enjoyment**, **education**, or **active involvement** in the activities of the farm or operation” (Che, 2005)



Knowledge Gaps



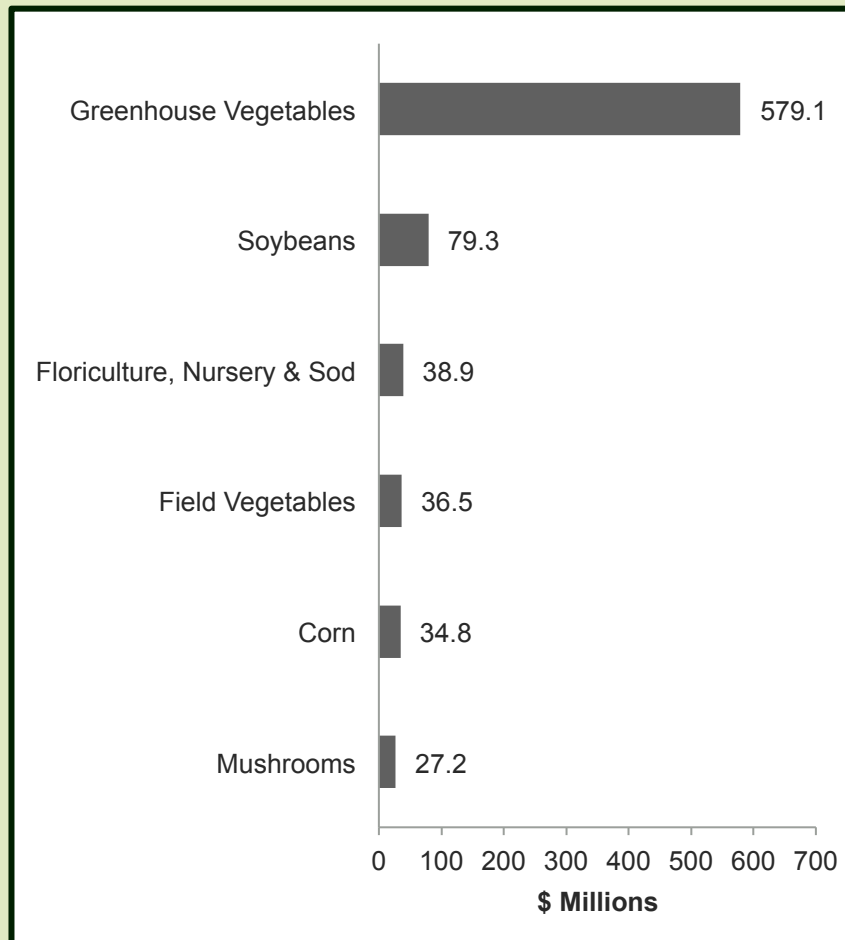
1. There is a lack of consensus about the rationales and processes behind diversification into agri-tourism
2. More needs to be understood about agri-tourism farms within the context of culinary and wine tourism
3. In general, the Canadian context is under-represented

Research Aim



To document and understand the **evolving role of agri-tourism** as both a **feature of the regional brand** and a **form of farm-level diversification** in Essex County, Ontario.

Essex County, ON



Lake Erie North Shore



Source: VQA Ontario

Methods & Stakeholders



Methods:

1. Background research
2. Farm/winery level interviews
 - o 8 farms
 - o 6 wineries
3. Data analysis

Stakeholders:

Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island;
winery owners, agri-tourism farm owners



Results: Organization Level



- Culinary & Beverage Promotion
 - Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island
 - Primary Actor
- Farm-Focused Promotion
 - Essex County Federation of Agriculture
 - Windsor Essex Economic Development Corporation
- Top-down implementation



Results: County Brand



“Fully ripened and bursting with flavour, a local tomato can be on your dinner plate the same day it was picked!”

– Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island

SIP.
SAVOUR.
SMILE.
REPEAT.



Source: visitwindsoressex.com

Results: Farm Level



Agri-Tourism Farm Categories

Experience Focused

Reconnection to: agriculture
& rural places

Activities: on-farm market,
pick-you-own, corn mazes,
petting zoo, etc.

Food Focused

Reconnection to: agriculture
& food

Activities: on-farm market,
culinary events

Results: Pathways



- Pathways to agri-tourism varied:
 - Retirement project
 - Supplemental income
 - Opportunity to sell weather-damaged crops
- Additional income was not the only driver



Results: Farms & Tourism



“Tourists... we don’t really want ‘em!

– Experience-Focused Farm Owner

“[Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island] said we needed to up our game... So she suggested and we did it, we hosted a dinner in the orchard last year.”

– Food-Focused Farm Owner

Results: Winery Level



Singular focus: attract more visitors
and share more wine

Finding niche through:

- Unique cuisine
- Event spaces
- Tasting Opportunities



Results: Wineries & Networks



“It’s very cooperative... with a lot of fun, good people that... loan equipment back and forth and give you good advice and stuff like that, which makes it more of a **community.”**

– Winery Owner

Results: Tourism & EPIC



Source: EPIC Wineries

Food & Beverage Alignment



- Farms and wineries that contribute to the food & beverage branding move in-step with Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island
- Unclear if strategic direction has industry buy-in
- Some agri-tourism farms may not benefit from increased visitation

Collaboration & Networking



- Having an active member group enables:
 - Cost sharing
 - Peer-to-peer learning
 - Greater tourism presence
 - An avenue for engagement



Implications for Rural Ontario



- Destination Marketing Organizations hold power in creating a rural narrative
- Presents opportunities and threats to farmers:
 - Opportunity – Engage in Tourism
 - Threat – Exclusion & Changing Rural Perceptions
- Engagement with farmers as stakeholders

Questions or Comments?

