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**“Agribusiness Essential for Food Security: Empowering Youth and Enhancing Quality Products”**

**Proceedings of the  
30<sup>th</sup> West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference  
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# Investigating the Understanding, Interest and Options for Agri-tourism to Promote Food Security in the Bahamas

Dr. Erecia Hepburn

(ehepburn@cob.edu.bs) P.O. Box N4438 Nassau, Bahamas  
The College of The Bahamas

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## Abstract

The Bahamas has depended on the dominance of one traditional sector, tourism combined with the lack of economic innovation and the inability to maintain domestic demand for food security. The connection between the local farming community and the hospitality industry has been identified as one of the best opportunities to ease the over reliance on foreign agricultural products. Additionally, this connection can provide innovation and address aspects of food security, such as stability and availability. Previous research has indicated that agri-tourism is one way to reduce dependence on foreign imports. This research seeks to determine if agri-tourism has the potential to assist with food security. This study is based on data from tourist's surveys, who indicated they would like to do agri-tourism activities and interviews with persons in the agricultural sector. The investigation observed that barriers to food security were found on the supply side, coupled with issues of government support and lack of policies. While agri-tourism seemed to be touted as a benefit for agricultural production and food security, respondents indicated that without government support there would only be limited success. This research indicates a direct correlation between the potential to increase food security in the Bahamas by leveraging agri-tourism.

**Keywords:** The Bahamas, Agriculture, Agri-tourism, Food Security, Tourism

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## Introduction

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life,” (Food and Agriculture Organization: Food Security, March 2010). In order to address increase food availability and security, The Bahamas has to formulate new and innovative strategies to increase local production and limit leakages. One way to reduce dependence on foreign imports and increase food security is to encourage the production of agricultural products in the country not only for the domestic but also for the international market. It seems evident that growth and development in agriculture and the service sector cannot continue to be

mutually exclusive, and this research explores how agri-tourism might be one approach to stimulating food security by increasing availability.

While The Bahamas has been able to acquire its food need mainly through imports, fiscal crisis and external shocks have made the country aware of how “food insecure” it really is. The Bahamas is plagued with the dominance of one traditional sector, tourism combined with the lack of economic innovation and the inability to maintain domestic demand for food security, which has the potential for economic crisis if there are any serious “external shocks” or setbacks in mainstream tourism (Hepburn 2008). “The major sources of transitory food insecurity are year-to-year variations in international food prices, foreign exchange earnings, domestic

food production and household incomes. These are often related Food and Agriculture Organization: Food Security, March 2010.

Agri-tourism has existed in one form or another throughout the world; there have been several studies of agri-tourism in European countries, Canada, Mexico and America, but few focus on the Caribbean and even less on agri-tourism and food security. Some of the most notable studies in the Caribbean have focused on countries such as: St. Lucia, US Virgin Islands, Jamaica and Martinique. "The fact that very little research has focused on the relationship between tourism and food production and imports in the Caribbean," is the main reason this research was undertaken (Mwajande 2007, 36).

While studies have examined agriculture and tourism linkages at varying degrees the need to develop agri-tourism and food security linkages has been a concept that has eluded scholarly literature particularly in regard to The Bahamas. (Telfer 1996; Taylor et al. 1991; Torres 2003; Torres 2000; Timms 2006)

Food insecurity has the ability to cause sharp reductions in a population's ability to produce or purchase food and other essentials undermine long term development and cause loss of human capital from which it takes years to recover. (Food and Agriculture Organization: Food Security, March 2010). The Bahamas on average imports more than \$250 million in foodstuffs per year for its general population and the approximately 5 million tourists that visit every year. This astounding figure represents about 80% to 85% of its food consumption (The Bahamas Government 2011). In 2010 however the value of imports for food and animals was a little under \$450 million; this increase reflected the decline in production from the domestic market, the country has become food insecure. While the population of The Bahamas is below 400,000 annually, visitor arrivals to the country from 2000-2010 have consistently been over 4 million. With this annual increase of individuals there is also an increase in the amount of foodstuffs needed

to accommodate them.

In The Bahamas agriculture has not made a significant contribution to the gross national product in decades and the need for food security is at the forefront for government officials, in particular those closely associated with agriculture. This research introduces an approach to establish the linkage between agri-tourism and food security in The Bahamas.

## **Methods**

### **Interviews (General Overview)**

All interviews were 35-minutes or less, open-ended questions with face-to-face interviews which addressed current views of the issue of study, agri-tourism and food security. The questionnaire was approximately one page and interviews varied in length from 25 minutes to 35-minutes, which were anywhere from 7-13 pages long once transcribed.

The majority of interviews were recorded via digital recorder and notes were also taken during all of the interviews, this was done to corroborate what was stated with what participants wanted to express while not being recorded. Interviews were conducted at several locations on the island and via electronic media and phone for other islands throughout the country. Once completed, these recordings were then transcribed and coded.

### **Agricultural Interviews**

There were eighty scheduled interviews (with only sixty taking place) with members of the agriculture sector, this included producers, processors, agribusiness persons, academics, and bureaucrats (government officials and workers). These interviews took place over several months October to May. Participants were asked for verbal consent before the interview took place. As several of the participants had been interviewed by the researcher on the objective of determining; 1) whether they knew what agri-tourism is and, if they did, how they would define it and 2)

Whether participants thought agri-tourism is a viable option for The Bahamas. The researcher asked those participants if their responses had changed for those questions. If they did not respondents were asked about food security and agri-tourism. Persons not interviewed before were asked the first two questions before proceeding with the interview 3) What is food security? 4) Is the Bahamas food secure? If yes, how secure is The Bahamas; if no how do we become secure? 5) Should the Bahamas aim to be food secure? 6) Should agri-tourism be pursued as a strategy to promote food security for the country? These individuals were selected by the role that they participated in agriculture and or tourism or in the development in the country.

### **Tourist Surveys**

Tourist surveys were taken from previous research and national statistics from the Ministry of Tourism. The survey was from previous research done by the research administered to approximately 1200 individuals at various points throughout The Bahamas. Surveys were administered on islands that have a large tourist visitation for that seasonal time period. Four islands were visited. There were 960 respondents from the Nassau International Airport, 48 respondents from the Exuma Straw market, 20 respondents from the Abaco International airport and 29 from Port Lucaya, Grand Bahama for a total of 1057 surveys. 90 of the remaining 143 respondents were discarded for being incomplete, which meant that only one side of the form was filled out, or major sections were left blank. The remaining 53 were discarded for various reasons, from being Bahamian, to completing another person's form.

Once selected, participants were asked if they wished to participate in the study. They were given an informational letter as outlined by the Institutional Review Board, IRB and verbal consent was obtained. Tourists were then given the survey form and a writing instrument and told that the survey form

would be collected once others were distributed to other tourist in the area. The survey took approximately 3-5 minutes to fill out, and was comprised of a combination of checklist, open ended, nominal and interval scale questions. The main open-ended question was defining agri-tourism if they had ever heard of the concept; the researcher also wanted to know what agri-tourism related activities tourist would like to participate in, the idea was to gather what the respondents thought. Nominal questions were used to gather factual information while an interval scale was used for income and age.

## **Results**

### **Interviews**

The overall theme that emerged from all the participants is that the majority 90% of respondents thought that agri-tourism would be a viable option for The Bahamas, once the country could get over other issues in the agriculture sector. There was a small sub-segment that did not make the link that agri-tourism could be a vehicle that would drive agriculture development. When asked about food security the majority of persons understood the concept of food security however the variation of definitions did not always encompass; availability, access, use and nutrition, that are developed in the FAO's definition. Ninety-seven percent of respondents (or 60 surveys) indicated that The Bahamas was not food secure, the responses for how to become food secure mainly focused on increased agricultural production and technologies. The remaining 3% of respondents indicated that The Bahamas were relatively secure because our foreign earning afforded us the opportunity to purchase food items. Again 97% of respondents indicated that The Bahamas should aim to become food secure the other 3% had indicated that we were already secure, even if they stated relatively. For the final question 80% of respondents (or 48 surveys) indicated that agri-tourism should be

pursued as a strategy to promote food security. While over 90% of respondents found that there was merit in agri-tourism development others (the remaining 20% or 12 surveys) did not designate agri-tourism as the main way to achieve food security. These participants stated that there was not enough local production to be thinking about alone for food-security.

## **Results**

### **Tourist Surveys**

This section presents the results of the tourist survey that took place on New Providence, Abaco, Grand Bahama and Exuma. The main information to be gathered from the survey was demographic information and to determine what visitors currently do and if they would like to participate in agri-tourism activities.

The results of the survey were compared to the national statistics available from the Ministry of Tourism (MOT). Information from the MOT was utilized because this ministry has interviewed tourists leaving The Bahamas since the early 1970's, through the "Exit Survey". 1,200 participants completed the survey, however only 88% of them provided sufficiently valid information. 45% of Stopover Visitors spent, on average, \$1,175.1 per visit. This is an estimated total of \$1,881.08 million; fifteen percent (15%) of their expenditures were on meals and drinks. (Ministry of Tourism 2006).

### **General Statistics**

The researcher determined that 64.44% of visitors were from a suburban area, 14.15% were from a rural area while 21.41% were from an urban area. 60.94% of tourist were married, 3.02% widowed, 7.50% divorced and 26.77% were never married. Household income was on a different scale from the ministry's, respondents were group in higher income brackets. 2.60% of visitors were under \$20,000, 5.63% fell in between the \$20,000 - 49,999 range. 8.13% of household

incomes were in the \$50,000 - 79,999 while 12.40% fell within the \$80,000 - 109,999. 12.08% of respondents indicated a household income of \$110,000 - 139,999 and another 10.31% stated household incomes of \$140,000 - 169,999. 20.83% of survey respondents had a household income of \$170,000-199,999, 5.10% for \$200,000-229,999, 1.04% for \$230,000-259,999 and 11.46% \$260,000 or more. The ministry household income survey reports two levels, above \$60,000 and below that number, so direct comparison was not made. Data summarized in

Table 1 A comparative visitor profile between the researcher and the ministry is found in

Table 2.

There was a notably larger percentage of females surveyed by the researcher when compared to the MOT statistics. This could have affected the survey's results but it is unlikely as (Catalino et al. 2004) determined that females have a higher preference for agritourism activities, which was also indicated in this research. (Catalino et. al. 2004).

Visitors indicated that they did several activities while in The Bahamas which is displayed on the first graph (Graph 1) the second graph (Graph 2) indicates what agri-tourism activities they would like to participate in if they were made available. Farmers Market, product tasting, agri-festivals and horseback riding were the leaders for agri-tourism activities. With the exception of horseback riding, the other activities have the potential to stimulate local agriculture which in turn promotes food security.

## Discussion

Like most Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the Bahamas imports far more merchandise than it exports and relies substantially on its strong service sector (tourism and banking) to generate revenue to purchase imports and sustain the local economy. Government expansion into other sectors of the economy has not been fully explored. Consequently, the trade imbalance remains a major issue in the country. With the implementation of new trade agreements, rising food, fuel and energy costs, the government will need to play a central role and identify ways to mitigate the losses while ensuring that there are adequate provisions in place. This balancing the costs and benefits of trade, coupled with the variation of international food prices, foreign exchange earnings, and domestic food production has to take in considering issues of food security.

The Bahamas is one of the few countries in the Western hemisphere that has not signed onto the WTO, but has observer status, even though it is extremely dependent on imports, particularly agricultural imports.

The substantial dependence on agricultural imports means that The Bahamas is extremely dependent on foreign countries to feed its citizens. The Bahamas exhibits a need to develop some level of food security and alternative methods of generating economic activity if the country is to navigate towards food security. Participants agree that food security is something that the country should be aiming for. The question is what avenue is needed to take to stimulate and promote it.

According to a representative of the Department of Statistics of the Gross Domestic Product, agriculture comprises approximately three percent, and with limited technological advancements, government policies and minimal subsidies, the country does not even have the ability to feed itself (Ministry of Marine and Agriculture Resources 2008). Development of the agricultural industry can potentially ease the over reliance on foreign foodstuffs, while providing a safety net for the country in terms of food security and safety.

Agri-tourism has two different components, the forward linkage and the backward linkage. Forward and the backward have the ability to stimulate agricultural production while also enhancing the tourism product. The forward linkage is defined as, any variety of agricultural activity or service that takes place at the agricultural enterprise, which convinces and promotes visitors to participate and spend a portion of their discretionary income on any of the activities, offered on site. (Hepburn 2008) The backward linkage definition of agri-tourism used in this research is: the collaboration and usage of other economic sectors (e.g. agriculture and tourism) in The Bahamas, so as to stimulate the economy as a whole and to create synergy effects between distinctive sectors. These sectors often have a long history of non-collaboration and lack of integration. For The Bahamas, several studies have advanced the need to establish linkages with particular focus on "backward linkages" with the agriculture sector (Ramsaran 1979; Taylor et. al. 1991;

Agricultural Census 1994; Meyer 2006; Eneas 1998). These studies discuss that in The Bahamas the development of an agri-tourism sector would encourage forward and backward linkages, which in turn would promote food security. Both forward and backward linkages promote agricultural production, food availability and diversify the tourism product.

Several elements are thought to pervade both the characteristics and strength of linkages. These factors are categorized as demand-related, supply- or production-related, and marketing/intermediary factors. One principal demand-related factor influencing linkages is the environment of tourism development. Studies note a trend for foreign owned or managed enterprises to rely mainly on imports, thus creating only weak links to local production. By introducing agri-tourism into the equation stronger link would be made by foreign own enterprises as it would be demand driven. "Researchers suggest the opportunity for creating demand for local foods is greatest among certain nationalities and with more adventurous non-mass tourists. Another important factor that influences demand for local products is the promotion of regional foods (Torres 2003).

For The Bahamas, linkage creation is not only possible but also necessary for a myriad of reasons. One of the most important reasons is for food security. Ensuring food security is pivotal for a country like The Bahamas which is extremely vulnerable. "Most studies on economic vulnerability provide empirical evidence that small states, particularly island ones, tend to be characterized by a high degree of economic openness and export concentration. These lead to exposure to exogenous shocks, that is, economic vulnerability, which could constitute a disadvantage to economic development by magnifying the element of risk in growth processes, without necessarily compromising the overall viability" (Briguglio et al. 2006).

One way to promote economic resilience can be formulated using an agri-tourism development framework. "A complementary

way to enhance the benefits of tourism is to expand the backward economic linkages by increasing the amount of local food used in tourism industry" (Telfer 1996). The creation of linkages with the tourism and agriculture sector would also create another attraction for the country and introduce local agriculture to the tourist. Researchers note studies of "tourism demand stimulating the production of high value regional specialty foods and local fresh produce. They suggest that this industry may help boost the export of locally grown specialty products" (Torres 2004).

While it is acknowledged that the development of forward and backward linkages are important to The Bahamas, it should be noted that "not all linkages are the same, nor are they likely to have a similar effect on local agricultural producers. Redefining linkages as relations, including such characteristics as information flows between demand and supply as well as access to agricultural inputs have to be taken into consideration as we move forward with agri-tourism especially in relation to food security (Timms 2006) "The term "linkages" for most studies is synonymous with investigation of the proportion of imported food to domestic food utilized by the tourism industry (Pattullo 1996) The aim of creating linkages is to reduce the high import content in the tourism sector, which is achieved by substituting foreign imports with local suppliers" (Meyer 2006) thus ultimately promoting one rung in the food security ladder.

## Conclusion

The Bahamas, a relatively young nation, is challenged to achieve continual sustainable development. The economy's main concentration on the tourism sector has consistently placed the country in a vulnerable position. Prospects for long term prosperity have to be developed and enforced. This research examines agri-tourism linkages as it pertains to food security focus on The Bahamas.

Agri-tourism has expanded its reach to



several countries around the world. While there are countries that utilize this as an opportunity for merely keeping the farm in the family, other countries use it as a means of “food security.” Regardless of the reason for the development, agri-tourism has flourished in these areas, contributing to jobs, diversification and economic vitality. Using models from these worldwide initiatives can help develop successful agri-tourism strategy for Caribbean nations like The Bahamas. (Hepburn 2008)

Numerous researchers identified instituting a link between the tourism sector and the agriculture sector as it would be valuable for not only the host country but for generating an authentic culinary experience. There is no proportional relationship between tourism demands for food to local agricultural production. One approach is to stimulate local agricultural production by channeling tourism industry benefits to farmers and reducing economic leakages. Agri-tourism has the capability to stimulate local agricultural development through linking the tourist sector (Torres et al. 2004).

While noted that there are always several alternatives, in the case for food security, which comprises of a need for economic diversification and limited leakage, agri-tourism has the ability to be one of the prominent alternatives with a high amount of benefits while minimizing costs to the country. The Bahamas is one of the few countries in the Western hemisphere that has not signed onto the WTO even though it is extremely dependent on imports, particularly agricultural imports. The substantial dependence on agricultural imports means that The Bahamas is extremely dependent on foreign countries to feed its citizens. The Bahamas exhibits a need to develop some level of food security and alternative methods of generating economic activity if the country is to navigate towards food security.

Food security is a multi-dimensional concept, which encompasses agricultural production, trade, income, food quality, clean water, sanitation, governance and political stability. According to the World Health

Organization (WHO), food security is built on three pillars:

Food availability: sufficient quantities of food available on a consistent basis

Food access: having sufficient resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet.

Food use: appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as adequate water and sanitation. This report will focus primarily on food availability, which addresses the supply side of food security. (Food and Agriculture Organization 2010)

Food security issues are most often addressed by agricultural departments. An obvious means of ensuring food security is to have significant local production which The Bahamas is struggling with at this time. While local crop production is said to be increasing by Mr. Minns, Ministry of Agriculture Statistician it has not happened on the level to reduce the food bill.

Today tourism is arguably the largest and fastest growing economic sector in the world, in figure 1 an upward trend of visitors is noted for The Bahamas. Coupled with this growing tourism industry in the Caribbean is the recognized dependence of the region for the tourist dollar. All of this means, however, that the level of global competition that the Caribbean is facing is unprecedented. “But increasing globalization demands that we focus on those areas in which we have a natural comparative and competitive advantage and it is generally agreed that tourism is such an area for our region (Vanderpool-Wallace).

This study’s objective was to examine the prospects for utilizing agri-tourism as a vehicle to promote food security in The Bahamas. Agri-tourism was determined to be a viable option for the country to pursue. The principal reason was assisting in diversification of the tourism product, while fostering growth in the agriculture which could then stimulate food security.

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**Table 1: General Survey Respondent Statistics**

| Demographic                  | Amount |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Farming Background           | 20%    |
| No Farming Background        | 79%    |
| Uncertain Farming Background | 1%     |
|                              |        |
| Suburban                     | 14.1%  |
| Rural                        | 21.4%  |
| Urban                        | 10.3%  |
| Married                      | 60.9%  |
| Widowed                      | 3.0%   |
| Divorced                     | 7.5%   |
| Never Married                | 26.8%  |
| Income Range                 | %      |
| Under \$20,000               | 2.60%  |
| \$20,000 - 49,999            | 5.63%  |
| \$50,000 - 79,999            | 8.13%  |
| \$80,000 - 109,999           | 12.40% |
| \$110,000 - 139,999          | 12.08% |
| \$140,000 - 169,999          | 10.31% |
| \$170,000 - 199,999          | 20.83% |
| \$200,000 - 229,999          | 5.10%  |
| \$230,000 - 259,999          | 1.04%  |
| \$260,000 or more            | 11.46% |

**Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Islands of the Bahamas**

|  | 2009 | 2008 | Author<br>2008 |
|--|------|------|----------------|
| <b>Main Purpose of Visit</b>                   |      |      |                |
| Vacation                                       | 70%  | 70%  | 81.46%         |
| Business                                       | 6%   | 7%   | 6.35%          |
| Honeymoon                                      | 5%   | 5%   | 2.08%**        |
| <b>Primary Reason for Choosing The Bahamas</b> |      |      |                |
| Beaches  | 59%  | 60%  |                |
| Climate  | 51%  | 51%  |                |
| Rest and Relaxation                            | 42%  | 43%  |                |
| <b>Likely Return in 1-5 Years</b>              | 87%  | 87%  |                |
| <b>Likely Recommend to Friends/Rel</b>         | 93%  | 93%  |                |
| <b>Used Travel Agent</b>                       | 28%  | 30%  |                |
| <b>Age (in years)</b>                          |      |      |                |
| 25-54  | 55%  | 56%  | 82.49%         |
| >= 55  | 20%  | 19%  | 17.51%         |
| <b>Sex</b>                                     |      |      |                |
| Male   | 49%  | 49%  | 42.33%         |
| Female   | 48%  | 48%  | 57.67%         |
| <b>Race</b>                                    |      |      |                |
| White  | 82%  | 82%  | 93.22%         |
| Black  | 8%   | 7%   | 3.63%          |
| Hispanic                                       | 4%   | 4%   | 1.17%          |
| Mixed Race/Heritage                            | 3%   | 3%   | 0.12%          |
| Asian/Pacific Islander                         | 3%   | 3%   | 0.71%          |
| American Indian/Alaska Native                  | 0%   | 0%   | 1.15%          |

A comparative visitor profile between the researcher and the ministry is found in

Table 2.

(continued)

|   | 2009 | 2008 | Author 2008        |
|---|------|------|--------------------|
| <b>Education</b>                              |      |      |                    |
| College Graduate or Above                     | 66%  | 67%  | 82.71%             |
| <b>Annual Household Income (thousands US)</b> |      |      |                    |
| \$25,001 - \$50                               | 8%   | 7%   | Different<br>Scale |
| \$50,001-\$75                                 | 11%  | 10%  |                    |
| \$75,001 or more                              | 61%  | 62%  |                    |
| <b>Previous Visits</b>                        |      |      |                    |
| First Time                                    | 39%  | 41%  | 54.87%             |
| Repeat  | 61%  | 59%  | 45.13%             |
| <b>Travelling Party Size</b>                  |      |      |                    |
| One   | 18%  | 16%  | 36.04%             |
| Two   | 42%  | 44%  | 32.08%             |
| <b>Household Size</b>                         |      |      |                    |
| One   | 14%  | 12%  | 13.50%             |
| Two   | 39%  | 38%  | 30.67%             |
| Three-Four                                    | 35%  | 38%  | 37.32%             |
| <b>Country of Origin</b>                      |      |      |                    |
| USA   | 81%  | 81%  | 88.72%             |
| Canada  | 8%   | 8%   | 2.96%              |
| Europe  | 6%   | 6%   | 6.67%              |
| Other   | 6%   | 5%   | 2.31%              |
| <b>Average Length of Stay (nights)</b>        | 6.8  | 6.6  | 6.8                |

\*\* other Information on age, sex and avg. length of stay were obtained from immigration card data. Information on race was obtained from the Tour Operator & Media Exit Study. All numbers are subject to revision

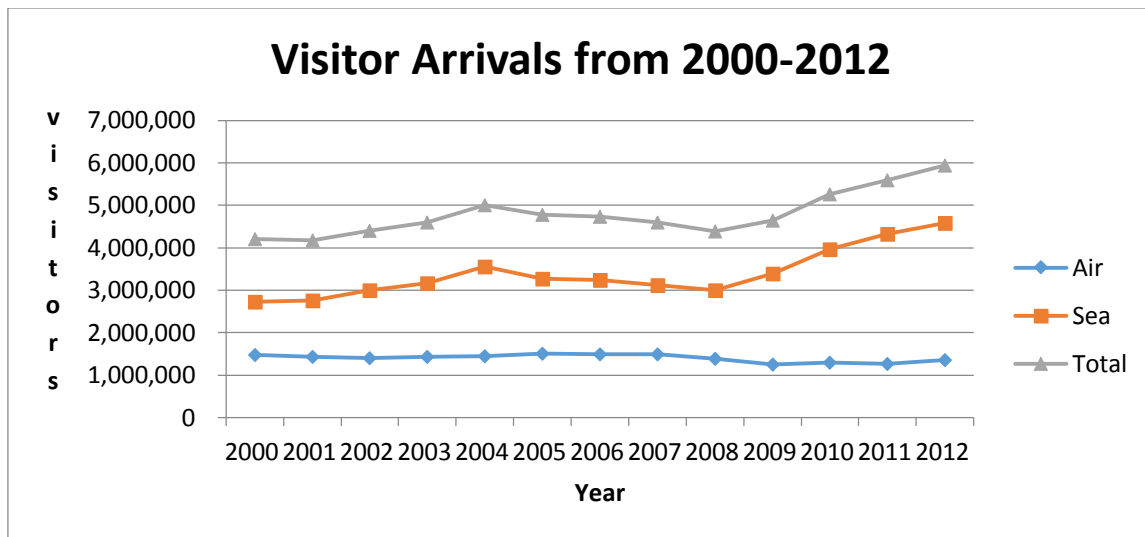
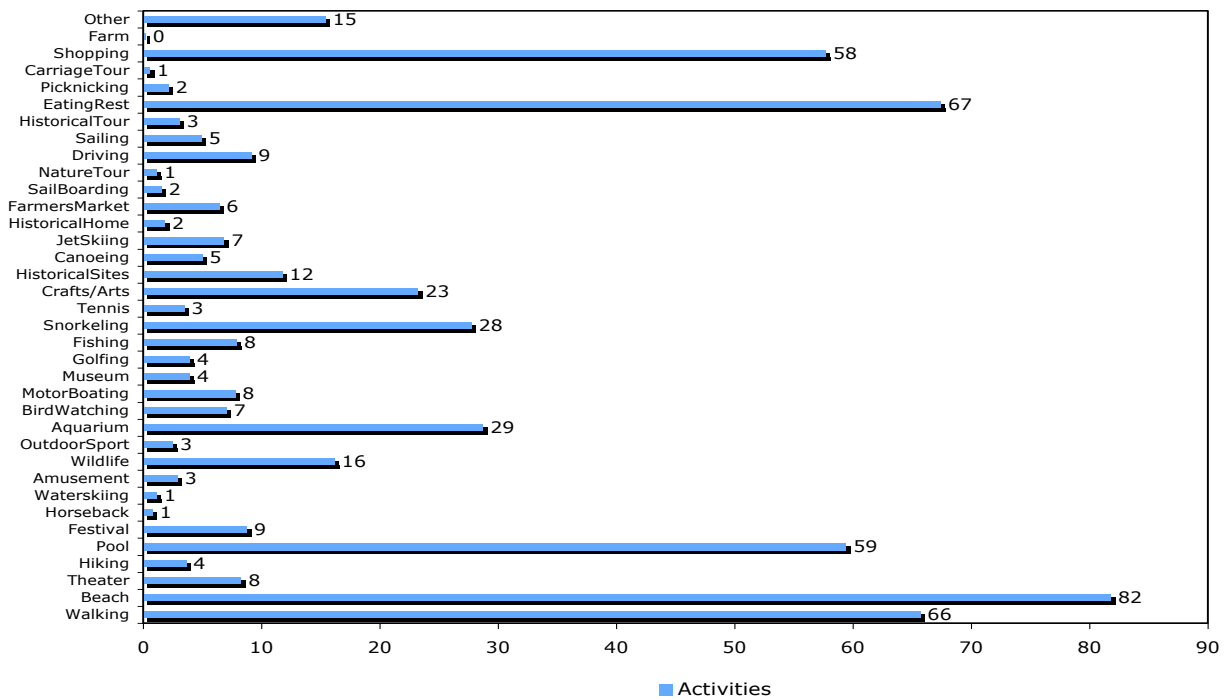
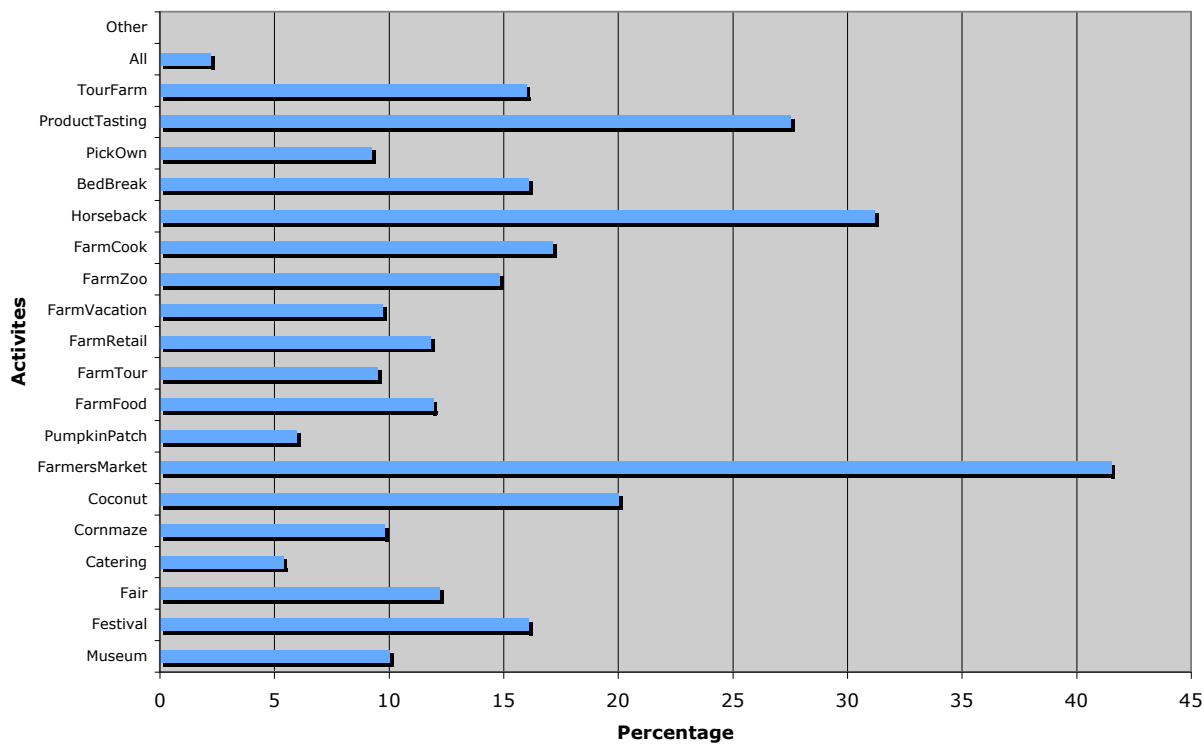


Figure 1: Visitors Arrivals  
Ministry of Tourism 2013



Graph 1: Tourist Activities



**Graph 2: Agri-tourism Activities**