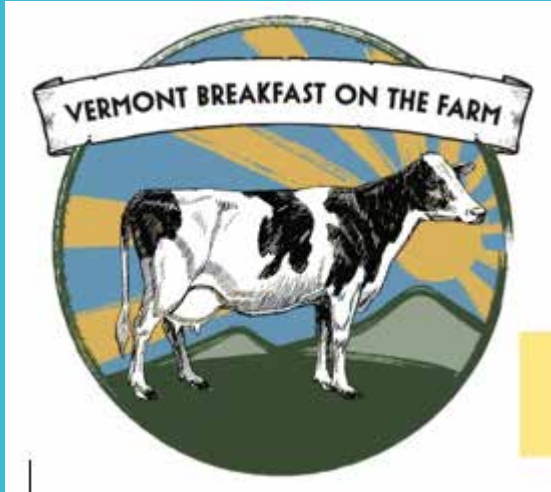


# Breakfast on the Farm event is an effective learning activity and improves consumer perceptions of dairy production

J. M. Smith\* and T.A. Ferris†

\*Department of Animal and Veterinary Sciences, University of Vermont (UVM)

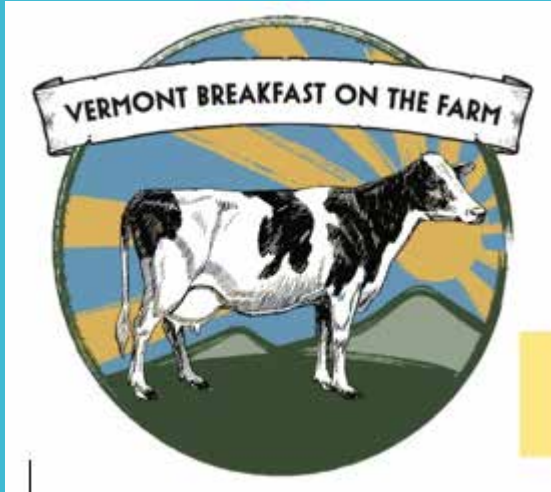
†Department of Animal Science, Michigan State University (MSU)



## Background

- Slightly over 1% of the US population is engaged in any type of farming as a principal operator (2012 NASS, US Census Bureau)
- Fewer than 2% of US dairy farms are located in Vermont
- Dairy is the #1 agricultural business in Vermont

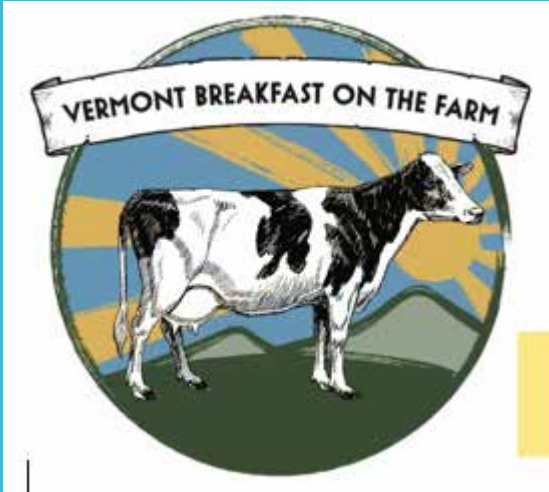




## Background: Consumer concerns

- **60% Strongly Agree** - If farm animals are treated decently and humanely, I have no problem consuming meat, milk and eggs.
- **53% Strongly Agree** - I would support a law in my state to ensure the humane treatment of farm animals
- **25% Strongly Agree** - U.S. meat is derived from humanely treated animals
- **27% Strongly Agree** - I don't care where my food was produced and long as it is affordable, safe and wholesome

Center for Food Integrity, 2015 Research on Consumer Concerns

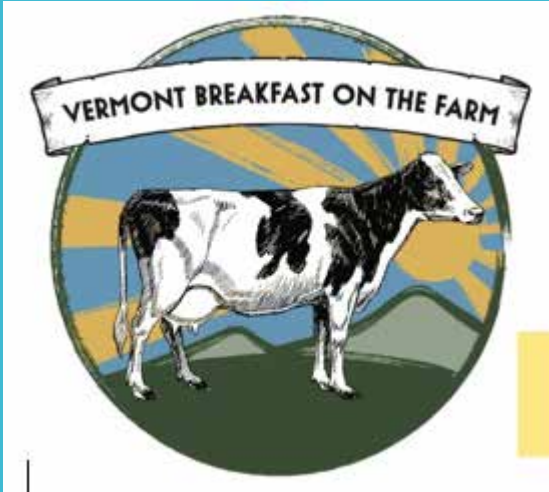


## Background: Producer concerns

- 90%\* - Consumer trust in modern dairy production methods
- 88% - Public understanding of animal welfare
- 87% - Consumer trust that dairy products are safe to consume, free of antibiotics and harmful hormones
- 86% - Efforts to educate consumers about modern food production
- 73% - Consumer acceptance of production technologies (e.g., rbST or antibiotics)
- 69% - Public acceptance of scientific information

\*Proportion of dairy farmers rating concerns as important or very important

Ferris, T., 2015, Michigan Dairy Industry Survey (Part I, preliminary)

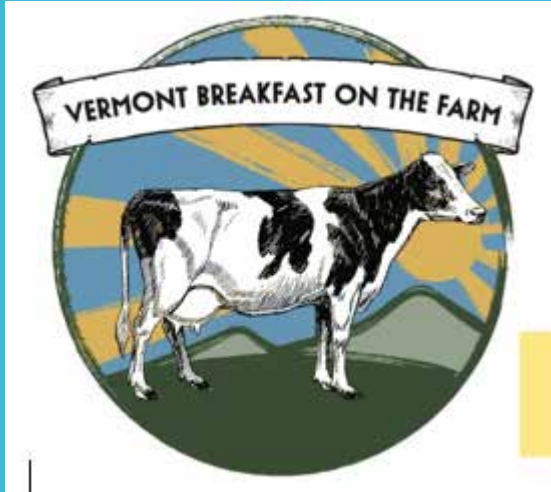


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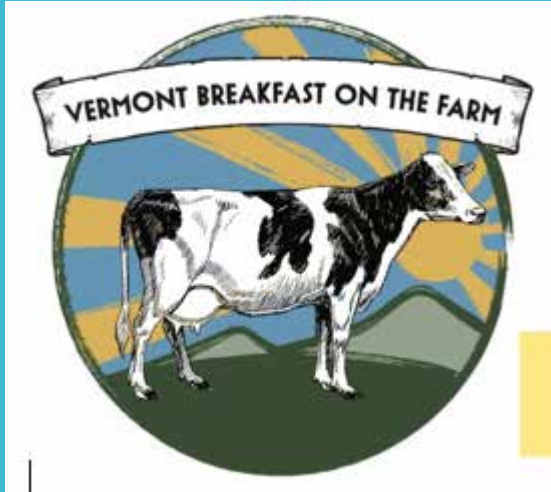


# Objectives

- To educate the general public about modern food animal production
- To improve consumer perception of dairy farming







## Methods



Michigan



Ohio



- Conduct a place-based educational event hosted by farm families to increase awareness about modern food production
- Use visual observation and educational stations on a self-guided tour to provide basic understanding and information about animal care, housing and various areas of farm management including milk safety and environmental management
- Engage agricultural organizations and the community to fund, organize and run the events



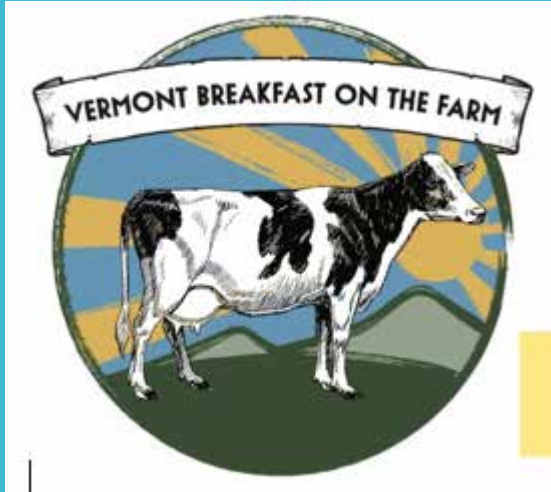
## Inputs and Outputs



- Over 100 volunteers staffed breakfast, biosecurity and educational stations
- About 550 visitors met the farm family, ate breakfast and visited educational stations and barns



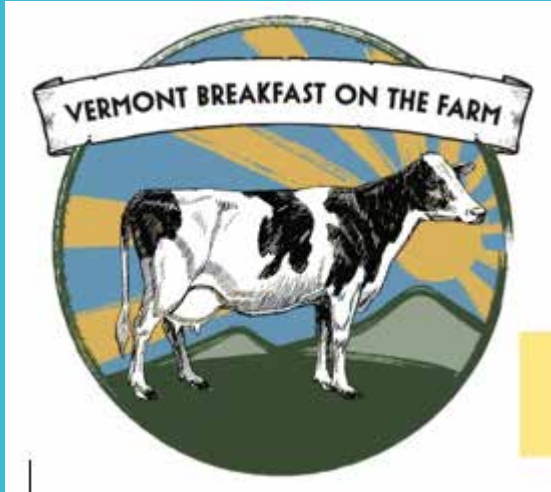




# Evaluation



- Paper questionnaire completed before leaving the farm
- Online questionnaire completed after event

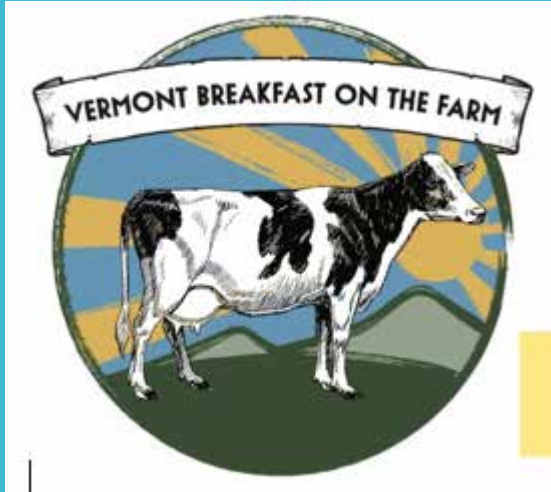


## Survey Completion

- 227 surveys returned
- Over 90% response rate for most questions







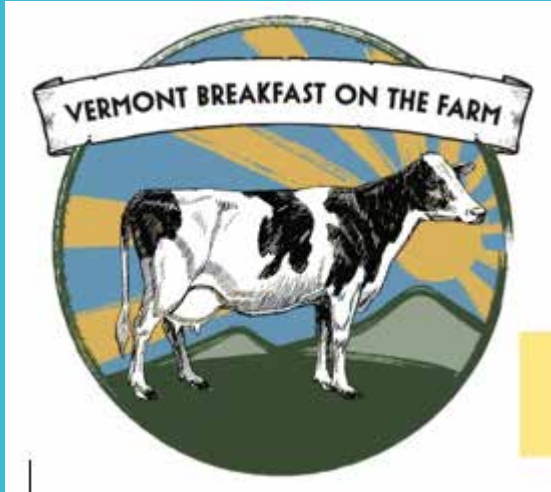
Who attended  
together



This was a family-friendly event!

A third came with friends, other family members, or children.





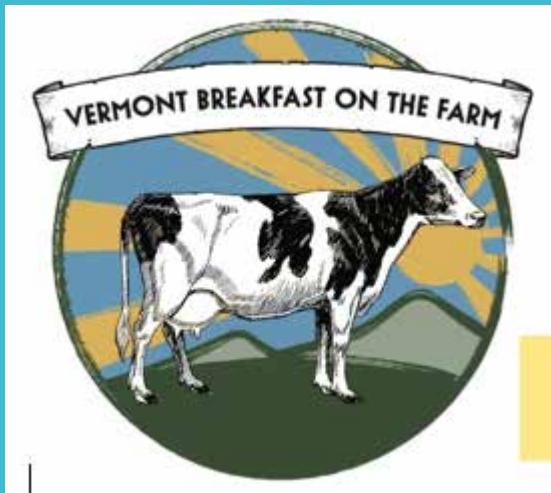
## Background of attendees

Less than 20% grew up on a farm. Less than 10% live on a farm.

Over one-third live near a farm.

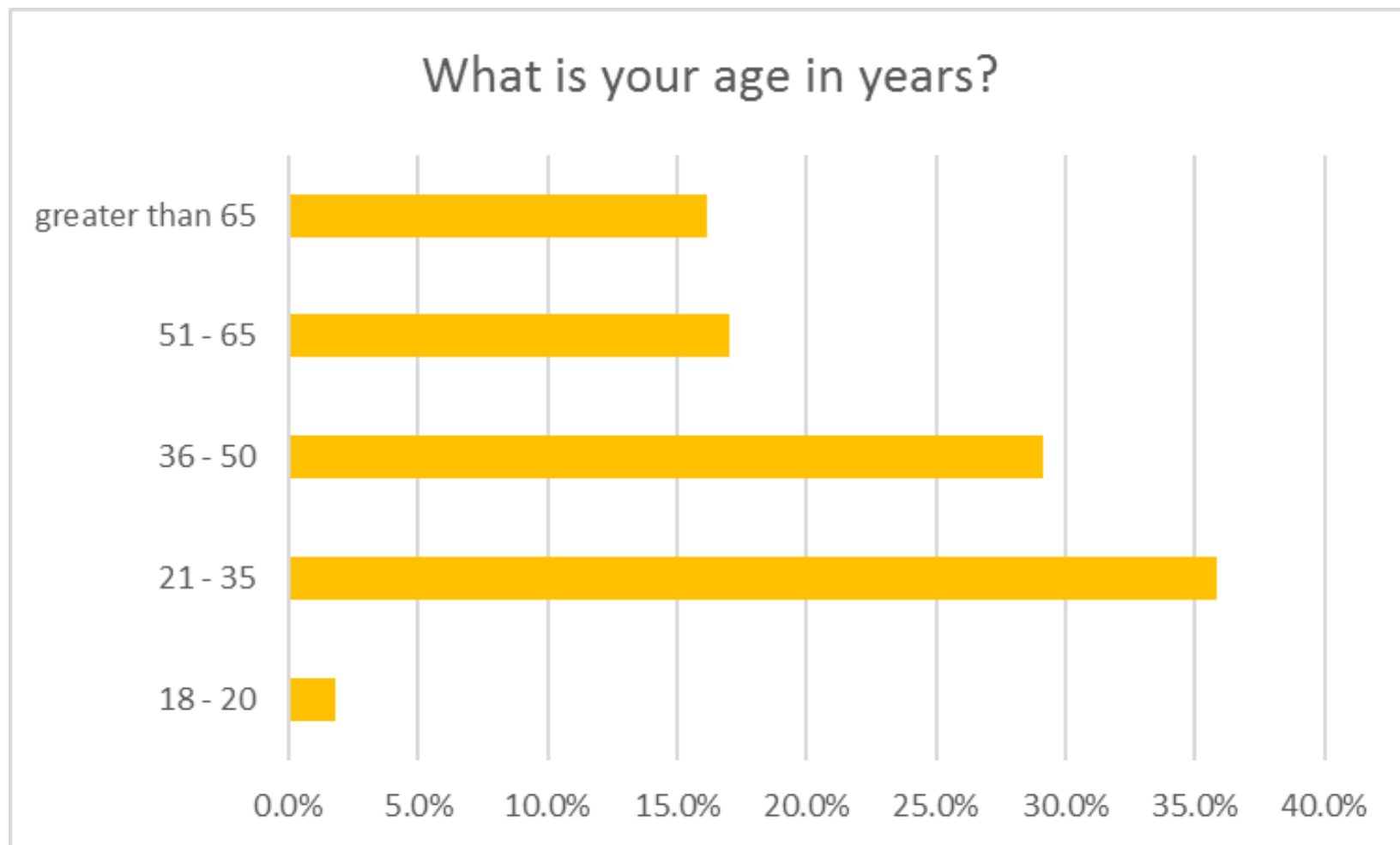
Over 90% White/Caucasian. Balance either Hispanic/Latino, Asian, or American Indian/Alaskan Native.

Almost two-thirds of visitors were female.

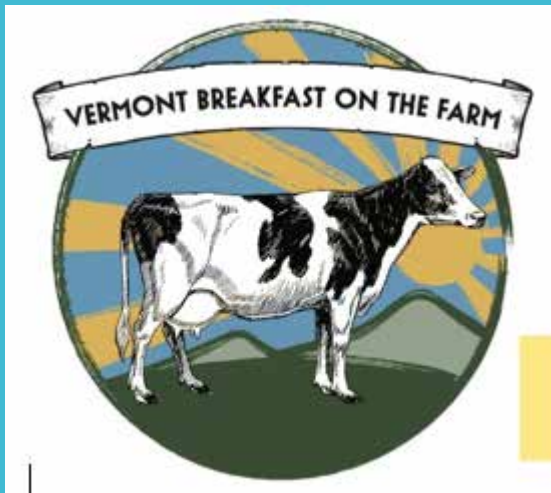


## Who attended? Age

Over a third of visitors were millennials.

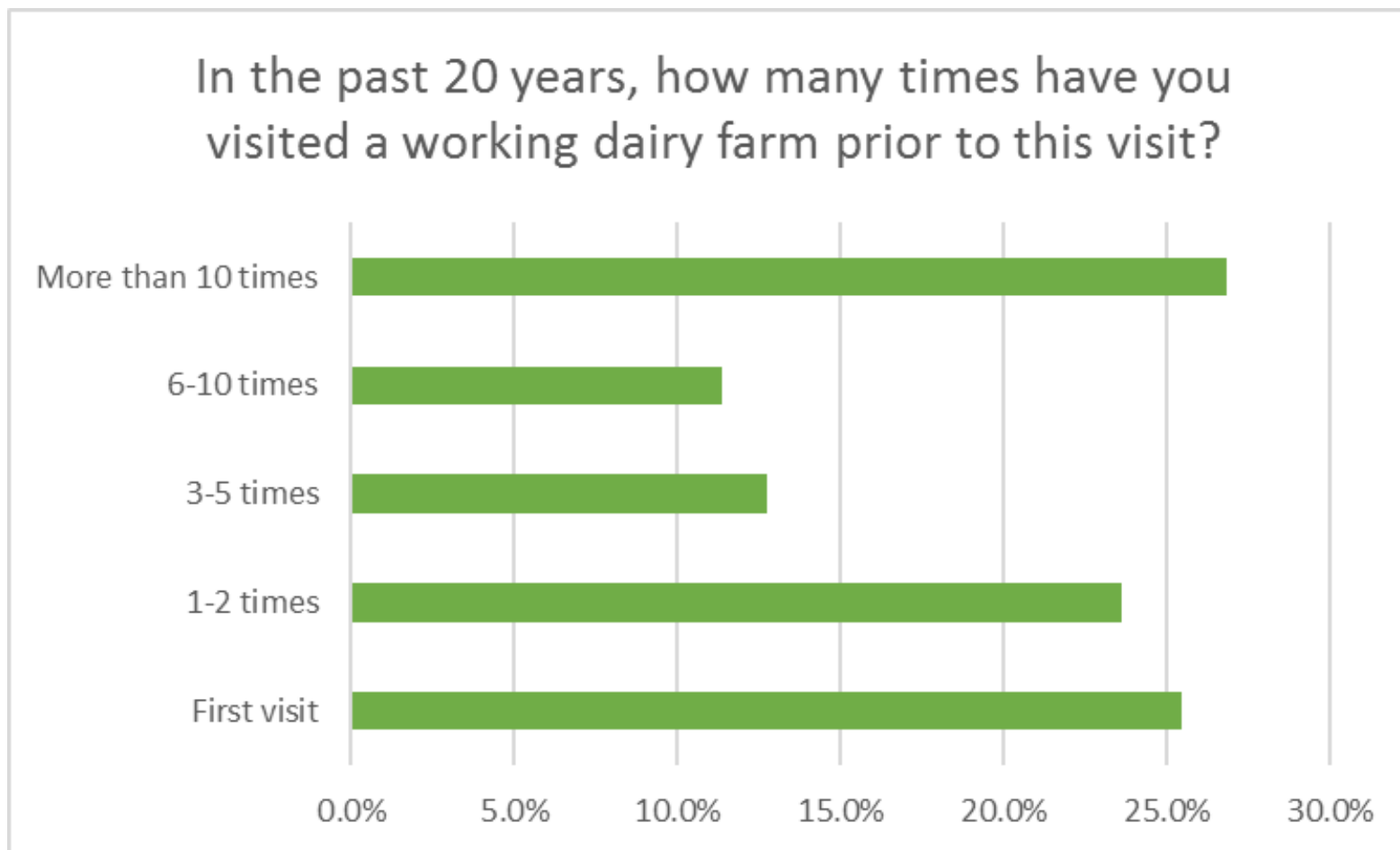


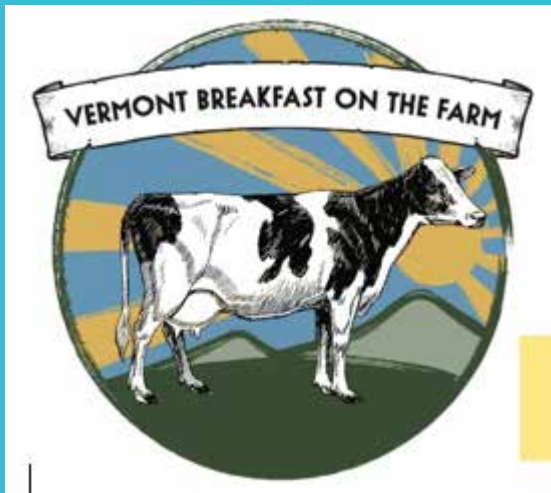




## Who attended? Farm experience

About a quarter of visitors were making their first farm visit.

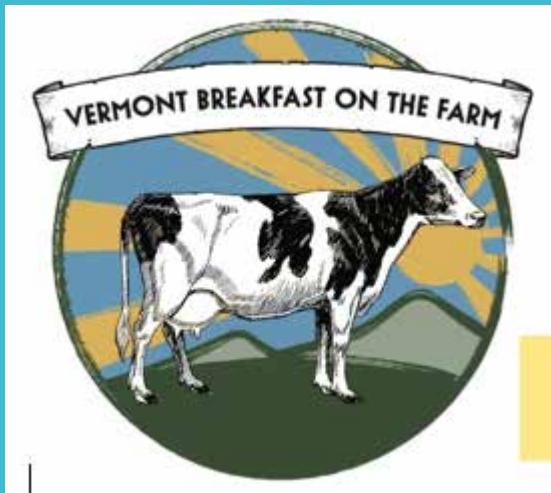




What did  
attendees  
learn?

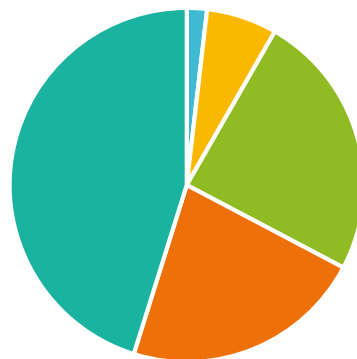
## Visitors reported learning a lot or very much about

how technology is used in dairy production	83%
how cows are housed	76%
what cows eat	67%
how calves are cared for	63%
how crops are grown and stored	57%
how cows receive health care	49%
how farmers protect water quality	49%
how antibiotics are kept out of the food supply	37%

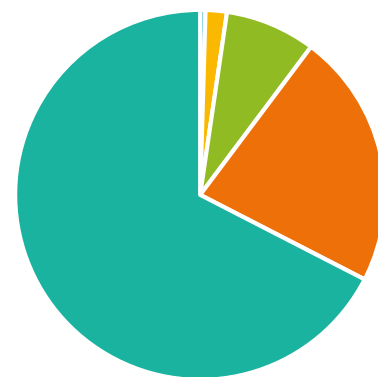


## Perceptions: Treating animals humanely

Before



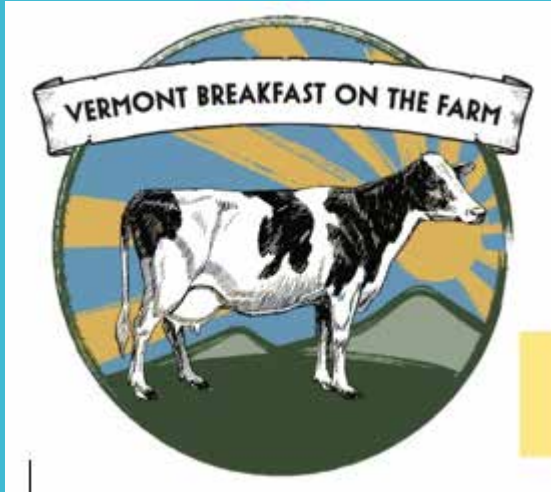
After



■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Level of agreement that  
dairy farms are treating  
animals humanely

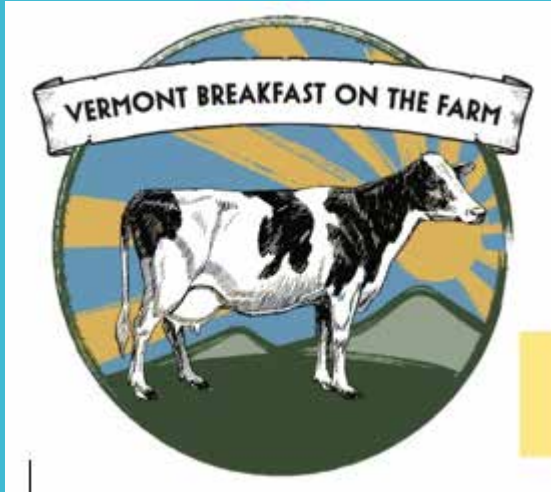
1 = strongly disagree  
5 = strongly agree



## Factors influencing perceptions

- Seeing how dairy animals are housed and cared for (65%)
- Interacting with volunteers at the educational stations (59%)
- Openness of the farm to allowing the public to visit (58%)
- Learning how farmers protect the environment (51%)

(Percentage selecting this item as a major factor influencing their perceptions of dairy farm operations)



## Take aways

- About 1/3 indicated they would purchase more Vermont dairy products
- About 1/3 indicated they would be more likely to disregard negative comments about how food is produced
- About 2/3 strongly agreed that they would share what they saw and learned with others





**Nea-Tocht Farm**  **Ferrisburgh, VT**

**August 22, 2015 9 am - 1 pm**

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Any questions?