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Research Report

Cannabis Agritourism: International Perspectives

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Executive Summary

Cannabis provides a fresh take on agritourism. The purpose of this research is to assess the potential for a cannabis agritourism framework in Ontario (and Canada more broadly). The ways agricultural production becomes part of the tourism product is well addressed in the context of wine, but cannabis is a new and unexplored area. Like visitor experiences at wineries, cannabis agritourism presents opportunities for facility tours, sampling rooms and purchasing product grown on site (i.e., farmgate)

This report summarizes research that addresses the intersection of agricultural production, tourism experiences and the cannabis supply chain. Broadly, the research interprets the cannabis supply chain from the perspective of tourism, hospitality and service. A service-oriented marketing theory – Service Dominant Logic (SDL) – identifies the consumer as a key factor in the value chain, demonstrating that, where regulatory conditions are favorable, tourism and hospitality strengthen and extend the cannabis supply chain.

Qualitative research took place between 2021 and 2023 in Canada and the United States. Interviews and participant observation were used to collect data.

A service-oriented perspective that considers the consumer reframes value creation in the cannabis supply chain. Safe recreational consumption that addresses concerns around public health and safety and mitigates existing and anticipated adverse effects requires reconceiving cannabis products and markets through a service-oriented perspective.

Significantly, innovative business models combining agronomic expertise with experiential marketing highlight a new paradigm in which agricultural products are valued not solely for their physical attributes but also for the services and experiences they help generate.

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INTRODUCTION

Cannabis: A New Resource for Agritourism



Canada has a strong tradition of connecting agriculture and tourism in a variety of agritourism contexts. Agritourism encompasses farm-based tourism enterprises that adopt non-traditional agricultural activities that characterize them as tourism attractions (Nickerson et al., 2001; McGehee et al., 2007; Haugen & Vik, 2008). Farmers' markets and roadside stands, for instance, are popular places to buy local farm fresh produce and interact with farmers. Wineries offer guided tours through vineyards followed by wine tastings. Picking your own pumpkins is a fall time family activity. In the spring, people can learn how to make maple syrup in the sugar bush. These are all forms of agritourism in Ontario.



Legal cannabis is a new and unexplored frame of reference for agritourism and a potential next step in further developing the specialized sector of tourism in Canada. Leveraging cannabis as a resource for economic and social development, especially in rural areas, introduces a new and unexplored frame of reference for agritourism not yet addressed by tourism research.

As evidenced in wine tourism (Gu et al., 2020; Carmichael, 2005), allowing for an agricultural product to be purchased and sampled where it is grown provides significant opportunities for tourism.



Like the market for vintage wine (Dawson et al., 2011), a niche exists of cannabis consumers interested in visiting sites of production, alongside being exposed to regional foods and wine, they may also wish to purchase. Agritourism offers additional experiences that extend beyond the physical cannabis product itself. These services add value to the cannabis supply chain by creating place-based experiences where customers can engage with the product in its authentic geographical and cultural context. Alongside exposure to regional foods and wine, cannabis agritourism offers opportunities to diversify the emerging industry through experiential tourism that connects consumers directly with agricultural production.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to assess the potential of new market opportunities for cannabis by extending the supply chain with agritourism.

Guiding research question: *What unique opportunities arise from the intersection of tourism and the cannabis supply chain?*

Broadly, the research interprets the cannabis supply chain from the perspective of tourism, service, and hospitality.

Research Objectives

The main objectives of the research are to:

	identify the services that add value to cannabis production as a tourism attraction in the form of farmgate, facility tours, and sampling/tasting rooms;
	identify current exemplary cannabis agritourism best practices and marketing strategies that are in place and the benefits that have resulted;
	highlight opportunities for growth and potential partnerships between the agriculture and tourism sectors;
	inform government policy by providing recommendations that will facilitate the successful implementation of cannabis-based agritourism businesses in Ontario and Canada, more broadly.

Conceptual Framework

A Goods-Dominant Perspective of the Cannabis Supply Chain

The cannabis supply chain is a relatively linear, one-way flow of production and consumption, in which a producer creates value in the form of products for consumers. Value is characterized as a unidirectional exchange determined by the producer (e.g., THC percentage, terpenes) and accepted by the consumer.

Figure 1: A goods-dominant logic model drives value creation and delivery in the cannabis supply chain.



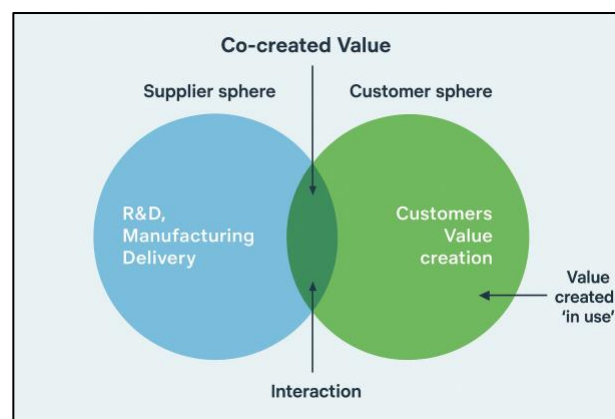
Prioritizing the tangible properties of cannabis, however, is a limited perspective that overlooks the intangible nature of service, thus insufficiently acknowledging the role of the customer and the relationships between actors in the value-creation process.

A Consumer-Centric, Service-Dominant Approach

This research addresses the cannabis supply chain from an alternative service-oriented perspective – or Service Dominant Logic (SDL) – reframing value as a co-creative process (Park & Vargo, 2012).

Instead of viewing the value of cannabis as a one-way transaction between producer and consumer, a consumer-centric approach views value as a collaborative interaction involving other actors or entities, especially the consumer. The value propositions of the service provider are met by the consumer's ability to create value from them (Vargo & Akaka, 2009; Normann & Ramirez, 1993). The customer is an *operant resource* capable of acting on other resources as a collaborative partner, co-creating value with the supplier (Lusch et al., 2007; Li & Petrick, 2008).

Figure 2: Value is co-created at the intersection of the supplier sphere and customer sphere.



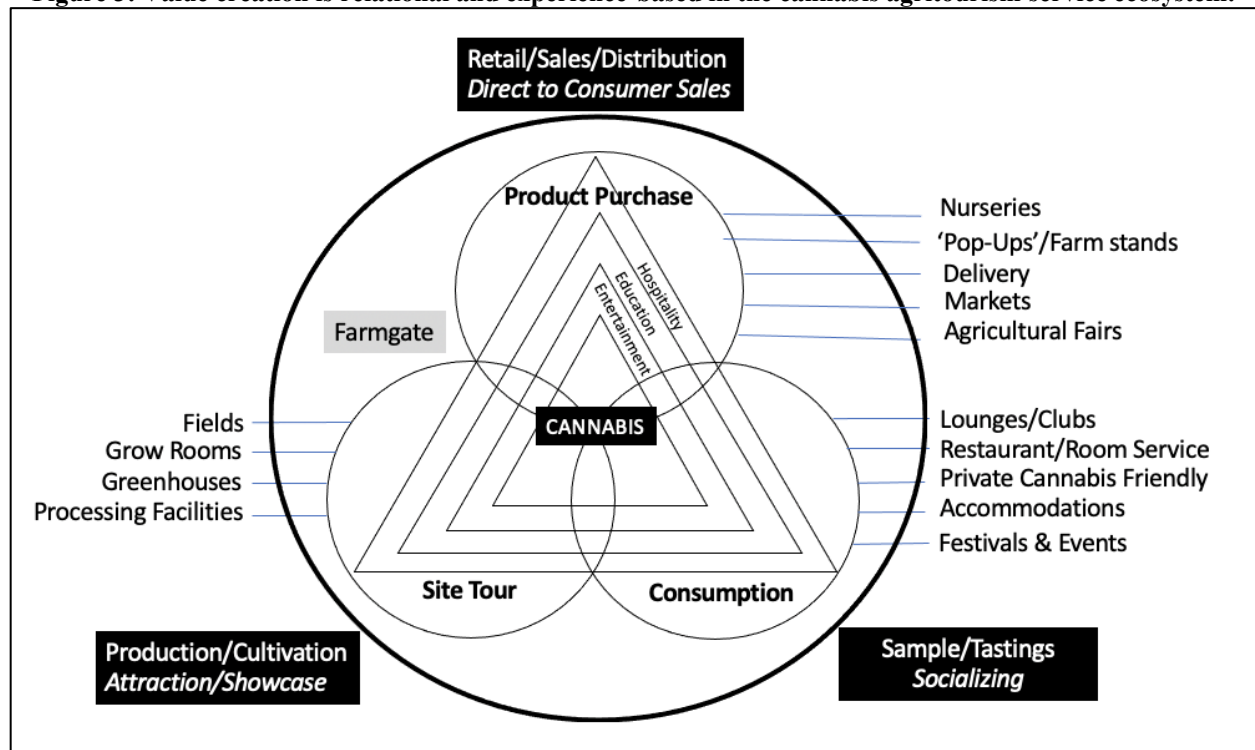
Customer participation in agritourism (Li & Li, 2021) is viewed as a platform for creating value through experiential learning. For agritourists, obtaining agricultural knowledge through an enjoyable experience is a value-creating activity (Rong Da-Liang, 2017). Tourism at wineries demonstrates the importance of tourist participation in the agritourism experience (Li & Li, 2021), wherein the consumer, along with the producer, is involved in the co-production of the experience during the actual consumption process (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Flanigan et al., 2014). Although growing and processing grapes on site is a “core service production activity” (Byrd et al., 2016), visitors consider experiences such as wine tastings and product purchases the primary benefits of the visit (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002). Wine tourism is a logical next step for consumers becoming acquainted with the product (i.e., wine) (Bruwer, 2003).

A consumer-centric approach incorporates elements of *service* with agricultural production. Agricultural products can evolve into service propositions that offer both tangible and intangible benefits. Further, agritourism is made up of a “service ecosystem” that facilitates service offerings and exchange. Service ecosystems comprise resource-integrating actors (e.g., producers and consumers) connected by a shared institutional logic and mutual value creation through both B2B and B2C service exchange (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). The service ecosystem is embedded in institutional contexts, such as markets and legislation, that provide the key decision-making contexts for supply chain actors (Pop et al., 2018).

This report interprets cannabis agritourism largely as a service ecosystem – a dynamic network of farmers, tour guides, dispensaries, and tourists who co-create value through interaction. This framework highlights how service exchanges—not just product sales—generate economic, cultural, and emotional value.

The following figure reframes value creation in the cannabis supply chain from linear and transactional to relational and experience-based.

Figure 3: Value creation is relational and experience-based in the cannabis agritourism service ecosystem.



Methodology

International research was undertaken to address each of the “experiential pillars” of the agritourism service system.

The combination of participant observation, mobile methods, and in situ interviewing anchors analysis in landscapes and supply chains, allowing theory building that links practices and places across the farm, the tour, and the retail floor (Hanna et al., 2019).

Interviews yield rich, in-depth accounts (Valentine, 1997) and are used to investigate the nature of business-to-consumer relationships, best practices for farm tours, and regulatory compliance within the operation. Interviews offer an opportunity to reveal the enabling factors and best strategies already in place for cannabis agritourism on an international scale. The exploratory nature of this research is suitable for in-depth interviews because questions can be tailored to

specific participant experiences, when necessary. In addition to identifying key business-to-consumer connections, in-depth interviews provide insight into the factors conducive to a successful cannabis agritourism operation.

In addition to interviews, participant observation was used to collect data by way of site visits to locations engaging in components of cannabis agritourism. The purpose of site visits is to document the characteristics and components of cannabis agritourism as it has emerged in both Canada and the United States. In comparing the elements of cannabis agritourism that have emerged as well as the regulatory frameworks that have enabled experiential consumption of cannabis, the study provides a baseline against which the evolution of the sector can be assessed. As used by ethnographers, participant observation typically studies the everyday social life of those being studied and involves

Use of participant observation enables the researcher to engage in the role of an agritourist to understand the context of what is specifically being produced by agritourism operators. As an agritourist, the researcher can experience the phenomenon being studied by being immersed in a tourist culture in order to observe production processes from the point of view of a consumer. The purpose of participant observation is to better understand the tourist's viewpoint or experience, as well as to identify what cannabis agritourism operators are producing and how they produce it.

FRESH FROM THE FARMGATE

A Definition of Cannabis Farmgate

Cannabis farmgate refers to a sales arrangement wherein a federally licensed cannabis producer/processor or micro-grower diversifies their business by acquiring a product sales amendment – vertically integrating the supply chain and enabling producers to connect with and sell directly to the consumer through a provincially regulated retail storefront at the exact location as the production facility/farm.

Farmgate is a sales arrangement that:

- vertically integrates the supply chain;
- supports a retail business model (storefront at a production facility);
- offers a marketing strategy (direct to consumer/direct farm marketing);
- provides an experience at the point of purchase (customer’s perspective).

Characteristics of Cannabis Farmgate Stores:

- typically operated by small scale producers (micro-growers; but can include larger licenced producers);
- offer fewer products on shelves compared to traditional retail (i.e., less selection);
- emphasize local products (which are often competitors);
- offer fresher products (from “farm to shelf”)
- directly connect the producer with the customer
- make the production process more transparent
- are customer-focused
- represent a vertical integration of the commodity chain

Farmgate in Canada

While the term ‘farmgate’ is not mentioned in the Cannabis Act, Section 69 notes that possession, sale, and distribution of cannabis is only permitted if authorized by provincial statutes (Cannabis Act, 2018), meaning that each province has different regulatory frameworks for cannabis farmgate (and cannabis retail in general).

Health Canada federally manages cannabis production regulations, but it is up to the provinces to manage retail, including farmgate sales, as they see fit, resulting in an inconsistent regulatory framework across the country. Any policies and practices concerning cannabis farmgate stores are within the ambit of each province’s own legislative framework for cannabis sales.

Table 1: Farmgate stores operating across Canada.

Year Opened	Province	Farmgate Store	Licensed Producer
2021	Ontario	Thrive Cannabis (Closed)	Privately owned by Thrive until bought by Aurora in 2022 (closed in 2024)
2021		Royal Cannabis Supply Co.	Medz Cannabis Inc.
2021		The Station House	Sensi Brands

2025		Kingston Cannabis Inc.	Kingston Cannabis Inc.
2022		Level Up	Level Up
2021	New Brunswick	Le Backdoor	Crystal Cure (closed in 2024)
2021		The Trading Post	Eco Canadian Organics (E.C.O)
2022		The Studio	Sana Cannabis
2021		Hidden Harvest	Hidden Harvest (& Nursery)
2021		Stewart's Herbal Dispensary	Stewart Farms
2023		Green Herb Farm	Green Herb Farms
2024		Pinnacle Farms	Pinnacle Farms
2022	British Columbia	Sugar Cane Cannabis	Unity (Williams Lake First Nations)
2022		All Nations	All Nations Shxwtaiy Village
2023		ShuCanna Growers	ShuCanna Growers
2024		Victoria Cannabis Company (VCC)	Victoria Cannabis Company (VCC)

Farmgate Benefits

Benefits for the Grower

- a quicker turnaround time from harvest to shelf; products are not required to be sent to the provincial distribution warehouse
- meeting quota within someone else's parameters is not required
- opportunities to directly connect to and build relationships with consumers (direct to consumer) and serve a local market
- opportunities to engage with the local community
- providing a testing ground; consumer research to see what customers are looking for and to plan future moves for the business; an avenue for R&D
- the ability to form customer relations
- an avenue to establish brand recognition and build loyalty; marketing strategy; differentiator
- establishes/encourages a willingness to pay, counteracting higher prices for craft cannabis
- quicker responses to consumer demand
- showcasing state-of-the-art facilities
- partnering with local licensed cultivators as a marketing strategy; showcasing local, small-scale craft brands
- control of the brand is enabled through vertical integration
- the region becomes known for the brand, which lends well to tourism

Benefits for the Consumer

- provides access to cannabis (especially in remote areas without an existing retail outlet)
- fresher products (are a significant motivation for why people buy direct from the farm); one of the drawbacks of the current supply chain is the amount of time cannabis is stored before becoming available to the consumer on store shelves, which affects the quality (i.e., staleness) of the product
- provides educational resources and learning opportunities that support safe and responsible consumption, including learning about the production process
- offers a personalized experience; building familiarity (being a 'regular') could potentially appeal to some consumers
- destigmatizes cannabis (works to normalize) on a broader societal level
- highlights the local (which is a characteristic of culinary and wine tourism)
- serves a local market

- creates jobs/hiring local labour force
- a customer learning process promotes brand recognition/customer loyalty
- supply chain transparency is a value-added attribute

Visions of Tourism: Success Factors for Farmgate

Purchasing an agricultural product where it is grown provides significant tourism opportunities (Telfer, 2000). The spatial consolidation of production and retail facilities at the same location concentrates the supply chain, replicating models utilized by vineyards, where retail storefronts sell products made on-site. Like wineries, purchasing the product at the source is highlighted and leveraged as part of creating a tourism experience at a farmgate store. The opportunities available at wineries and distilleries largely inform how farmgate in the context of cannabis is understood. The opportunity to purchase farm-fresh products at the farm is a cornerstone experience of agritourism, as are facility/farm tours and sampling/tasting rooms.

The research reveals several success factors that contribute to farmgate tourism (and farmgate in general) and should be considered in future farmgate tourism planning. Further to these factors, Appendix B outlines the broader B2B relationships upon which farmgate relies.

Farmer/Grower Willingness, Advocacy & Long-Term Vision

Growers interested in incorporating tourism recognize that creating a destination for cannabis agritourism is a long-term vision that will take time to build. It is recognized by several farmers that this vision is long-term in nature and that patience and advocacy are required before the full potential of agritourism can be realized.

“We are looking to make this place into a destination – not just another place to buy weed. We are looking towards the future. Farmgate is a step in the direction towards creating a destination that revolves around cannabis.” (Participant C)

Connecting with the Consumer

Vertical integration of the cannabis supply chain diversifies business in a way that connects Licensed Producers (LPs) directly to the consumer – a rare circumstance in the cannabis industry. Farmgate is a mechanism that enables producers to adopt a consumer-focused approach to cannabis, which is otherwise not widely available due to restrictions on advertising. Communicating with the consumer is a valuable, yet non-traditional, characteristic of the production process that is critical to building a brand. Direct consumer communication enables a valuable two-way transfer of information. First, the information transferred from producer to consumer presents an opportunity to be transparent about producing a premium product and is considered a valuable feature of the farmgate offering. Second, the information that customers provide to producers promotes a higher quality of R&D than relying solely on feedback from retailers and sales representatives.

“There is a ton of value in being able to directly communicate with the consumer and build an emotional connection.” (Participant B)

“Business-to-business sales are not part of the brand. Driving volume to meet sales orders for provincial wholesalers is not part of the brand. Building quality relationships with the customer around quality is part of the

brand. Building quality takes time. Farmgate is a way for our small-scale operation to build quality relationships with the customer.” (Participant G)

Provide an Experience – Bring the Brand to Life (Sell a Product vs. Sell a Story)

Connecting with the consumer is part of providing the consumer with an experience. In addition to selling the physical cannabis product, producers have an opportunity to showcase their story. Guests can “live the brand’s story” through their experience.

“Tourism brings the brand to life.” (Participant G)

Selling Local – Selling Place

The connections between the producer and the consumer are part of a local embeddedness of place that adds value to the experience (Hinrichs, 2000). “Shop local” campaigns that showcase market-leading locally grown, processed, and packaged cannabis products convert well for tourism. Like wine, regions that are known for cannabis leverage this place-specific quality for tourism. The place becomes part of the product’s brand – it is part of the product’s storytelling. Once tourists have been exposed to various regional products, they may wish to purchase these local products. In addition to selling their own products, some farmgate stores showcase competitor products in the spirit of celebrating community and committing to local quality.

“During tourism season, visitors always ask for local products. They sell out quickly.” (Participant H)

Serving Locals

Although counterintuitive as a factor that supports tourism, serving the local population is an important characteristic of responsible tourism more broadly. Meeting community needs (i.e., a regular client base, some visiting weekly) is a defining element of a sustainable farmgate model. Serving the local market well can be leveraged as part of a brand that is known for servicing local clientele (and not just a tourist trap). Anecdotal evidence suggests that being connected to local farmers, knowing who grew the cannabis, as well as the freshness (i.e., quality) of the product, are more important than paying lower prices. Similar to going to a butcher shop, farmgate can be interpreted as a small-town approach to selling local products to locals (which is a characteristic of culinary and wine tourism).

“Farmgate is a way of building the community around the plant.” (Participant B)

“I can go to the grocery store and buy a \$4 bag of apples from Ontario, or I can go to the farmers market and spend \$10 on the same number of apples, but I am willing to spend more because I know who grew it and the amount of work that went into producing that apple. I know it is fresh and that it didn’t sit in a storage facility for 10 months. It’s a small-town approach to selling a product. Similar to going to a butcher shop.” (Participant C)

“People will come back for the value of supporting the local economy.” (Participant D)

Proximity to Tourism Resources: Connecting to the Service Ecosystem

The remoteness of many farmgate operations makes it critical to provide an experience that meets the standards of a worthwhile tourist destination, requiring connections to non-agricultural resources. The proximity to other tourist features, such as beaches, for instance,

lends well to developing destinations that revolve around cannabis, as do cannabis friendly accommodations. Connecting to the existing service ecosystem of the region is a resource for farmgate operators interested in tourism (more on this in the Farm Tours section). Similar to the wine industry, the development of cannabis tourism activities involves working with actors traditionally belonging to the tourism sector. Layering cannabis experiences with other features of a destination is an ideal circumstance for farmgate locations.

“You have to make it worthwhile for people to visit, which includes developing the farm as a destination. Lots of non-agricultural resources are needed” (Participant A).

Accessibility: Thoroughfare Vs. Remote & Rural

Ideally, the best locations for farmgate tourism are in busy parts of already established tourism destinations. The Station House in St. Thomas is located on a major thoroughfare, for instance, and on Vancouver Island, the Victoria Cannabis Company is located in a developing neighbourhood in the heart of an already established tourism destination. More remote locations might emphasize place uniqueness; however, customers need a way of getting to the store. This speaks to the previously mentioned success factor of connecting to the region’s service ecosystem (e.g., transportation modes). Stores in tourist areas are likely to be accessible to foot traffic.

“If your farmgate is not on a main boulevard but in an industrial space outside of town, how are you going to bring people to your location?” (Participant G)

“The rural areas don’t have the opportunities for natural foot traffic that come with retail settings in busy downtown areas. There needs to be a different strategy there.” (Participant C)

Offer Facility Tours

There is value in providing a transparent first-hand experience to consumers that reveals the cannabis production process. Without on-site tours, the value of a farmgate designation is potentially less impactful – just consider wine tourism without the possibility of people seeing the vineyards or talking to the winemaker. These tour elements are part of the destination experience without which, “farmgate is just retail.” (Participant H).

“Farmgate is a step in the direction towards creating a destination that revolves around cannabis. Our vision is for customers to be able to see the cultivation areas and then buy the products that were grown in those cultivation areas.” (Participant H)

“As long as you have the right protocols and procedures in place, I don’t see why you can’t have people coming through the facility for tours.” (Participant C)

Onsite Consumption

The ability to consume a product at the site where it is grown is a feature of food and wine tourism.

“Folks can purchase the product directly from the producer, but they can’t consume it on site. The value chain ends at the purchase.” (Participant G)

“People want to buy the plant that was grown here. They want to smoke it while seeing it growing in the field. That is a full circle. That’s what makes it so cool for people. It’s something people want.” (Participant D)

Connecting Seed to Sale

Farmgate stores make an important connection for the consumer about the source of the product they are purchasing. The cannabis supply chain is about getting the product to market, but it is also about getting the information about the product to the market. The information about the product, and how that information about the product is delivered to customers, is what adds value to the overall shopping experience at a farmgate store. Part of the customer experience is providing information to the consumer that enables them to understand the supply chain – a veritable source of value, especially given that “there is a lot of mystery around cannabis” from the consumer’s perspective. Farmgate is part of a growing “farm to table” trend wherein consumers value knowledge about the source of their food.

“There is a lot of mystery around cannabis. People have been kept in the dark.” (Participant C)

“Our vision is for customers to be able to see the cultivation areas and then buy the products that were grown in those cultivation areas. We see it as bridging a connection between the essential cultivation work and the products consumers can buy as a result.” (Participant C)

Summary of Challenges

The success of farmgate in Canada is yet to be determined. The purpose of this research was not to document the effectiveness of farmgate in Canada, but to offer an understanding of how tourism can add value to the supply chain by leveraging the farmgate concept. Nonetheless, the following are some points to consider about Farmgate that came up in the research.

<i>High Costs & Limited Capital</i>	Farmgate in Canada has largely been ineffective and labelled as not practical because it has very little financial benefit (i.e., it is not financially sustainable). Especially in an industry experiencing slim margins, costs are too high for a reasonable return on investment, and producers do not have the capital or the resources to build out and manage farmgate stores – including hiring staff to run the store and facilitate tours. The farmgate concept is expensive with no guarantee of a return on investment. The investment is not seen as being worth the return.
<i>Expensive Licensing Fees</i>	Some provinces require producers to pay a licensing fee, adding further to an already unaffordable endeavor. In British Columbia, for example, the first-year licensing fee for a farmgate store and renewal fees are the same fees as a standard retail cannabis licence (\$1000). The licensing fee for a winery, brewery, or distillery is \$550. In addition to the yearly fee, the farmgate store must also pay a one-time application fee of \$7500. These fees represent unaffordable fees that are a clear barrier to entry for farmers.
<i>Risk of Contamination –</i>	Although several farmgate operators envision tours as part of an experiential offering, bringing people “from the outside” into a clean, hermetically sealed facility on an ongoing basis creates risk for

<i>Indoor Vs. Outdoor</i>	contamination and maintaining quality. Tours of indoor cultivation pose a greater challenge with respect to quality control and security than outdoor sites. Large-scale bus tour group formats of up to 25 people entering a facility at the same time are not conducive to strict Health Canada regulations, dampening farmgate experiences by keeping consumers from getting too close to the plant. When more than one production facility/farm is part of a tour, the contamination level increases. For some operators, following the right protocols and putting the best practice processes into place is a way to circumvent risks of human contact with the plant. Outdoor sites can be leveraged to a greater degree due to their greater logistical flexibility, allowing for the creation of a unique experience. However, growers are aware that it is not yet the same opportunity as the winery model, where tourists can go into the field and interact with the plants. The opportunity to walk guests through a field and have them “exit through the gift shop” – similar to a traditional winery tour model - is not possible, given stringent health and safety production standards. Interestingly, in California, when asked if contamination was a worry, farmers responded with a confused “no”, qualifying that cannabis is an agricultural crop that grows outside in the elements and that all product goes through testing. Outdoor grows lend to the spirit of cannabis tourism. Indoor grows can also be part of an experience, but they emphasize the sanitized nature of the cannabis industry. As demonstrated in California, sun-grown (outdoor) cannabis has the biggest potential for cannabis agritourism. Outdoor cultivation is considered to be more amenable, logistically, to providing unique experiences for individuals wanting to better understand the growing process. This does not mean that indoor grows have no potential, but they require further consideration regarding health and safety.
<i>Regulatory Barriers</i>	Innovative ideas (such as facility/farm tours) are stifled by regulatory barriers. For example, although offering trim classes serves as a point of education and plant-touching experience – not to mention a labor-saving strategy for the producer and value extending strategy for the supply chain, the reality of this offering is unlikely given the perceived contamination risk of human contact.
<i>Negotiating Multiple Regulatory Bodies</i>	In Ontario, three regulatory bodies share governance of the supply chain: Health Canada, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, and the Ontario Cannabis Store. Farmgate operators need to negotiate the rules of these three entities and forge a path for the three regulatory bodies to function together.

<i>Mis-Identification of Industry Needs</i>	There is a question as to whether farmers/growers are even interested in retail. One perspective is that Farmgate does not adequately address the needs of the industry. More pressing issues, especially for small growers, are preventing forward movement in developing farmgate programs. These issues include: finding buyers for small batch cannabis; growing quality cannabis amongst competitors with a less superior product that can grow for less; high excise taxes; getting pushback from wholesalers if the product does not meet standard THC% requirements; dealing with wholesalers interested in catering to the needs of bigger producers; and provincial retailers declining product.
<i>The Unnecessary Middleman</i>	Although farmgate implies direct sales from a producer to the end consumer, the provincial regulatory environment for retail cannabis means the government is still involved as a middleman in cannabis farmgate operations. In Ontario and New Brunswick, for instance, all products sold through farmgate storefronts still go through the provincial wholesaler, making it possible for the province to make a margin on the product – the product does not even have to sell for the government to financially benefit. Some growers do not see the “cut” taken by the wholesaler as a financially viable model. One opinion is that if the margin were structured differently or at a reduced rate, producers would make more per sale, which would make the farmgate model more attractive.
<i>Exclusive Location, Ubiquitous Product</i>	Farmgate represents an alternative distribution channel for producer products, but not necessarily an exclusive channel. Although purchasing products from the producer at farmgate locations is highlighted as a feature of the buyer’s experience, the products are not necessarily exclusive to farmgate locations, meaning that the product can be purchased at other retail stores, which, for tourism, could dampen the appeal of purchase. For example, in Ontario, products sold at farmgate stores are available for purchase by any cannabis retailer through the provincial OSC wholesaler. This is arguably one of the reasons why the Ontario government recently put out a new policy around farmgate and the exclusivity of products.
<i>Greater Interest in Direct Delivery</i>	Direct delivery is a strategy to support small growers in British Columbia and could potentially be of greater interest to farmers than farmgate. For a fee paid to the provincial government, producers can deliver their own product to retail locations – circumventing part of the distribution process that requires potential storage at provincial warehouses. The arrangement is considered by some growers as a configuration of farmgate at a business-to-business level. Direct delivery eliminates a step in the supply chain, streamlining the process for small-scale B.C. growers. In this model, the provincial wholesaler is not part of the physical distribution

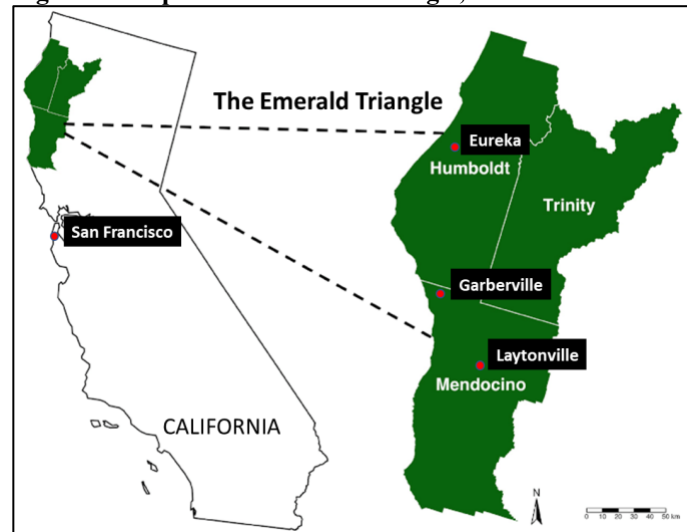
	process (but is still paid a fee by the grower). One of the benefits of directly delivering to the retailer is that it allows the producer to develop customer brand recognition by ensuring their products are consistently available at retail locations. Rural direct delivery is potentially a more favourable avenue to ensure products stay in the community without a farmgate site. Importance is placed by some small-scale growers on having their product stay local (i.e., stay in the region of production), and direct delivery enables control over this process.
<i>Locational Drawbacks</i>	A locational drawback is that grow operations are often located in industrial sites that are separate from or outside of major urban centres and, hence, far removed from a visitor market. Although farmers agree that farmgate offers a unique local experience, without a tour guide (or any sort of service/hospitality infrastructure) to connect the farmgate facility to tourists, farmgate as a resource for tourism remains a challenge.
<i>Insurance Costs</i>	The development of visitor access to cannabis grow facilities is also constrained by significant administrative barriers, particularly insurance requirements. Growers are required to carry costly crop-loss insurance and proposed premiums for allowing tours can reach high amounts, prohibiting the type of experiential tours envisioned by operators.

GLOBAL LESSONS: CANNABIS AGRITOURISM IN CALIFORNIA

Farm tours are a natural extension of interest in specialized local strains, growing techniques, and knowing the grower. This section presents a case study of the emerging sector of cannabis agritourism in California, USA. Until recently, touring cannabis farms was not a legal possibility (anywhere). Farm tours, however, are a familiar agritourism activity, offered in a range of formats and take place in a variety of settings (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008).

There is interest among wine enthusiasts, general consumers, and travelers to visit the establishments where actual production takes place (Dawson et al., 2011). Similar to the market for vintage wine, a niche exists for cannabis consumers interested in connecting products to the places in which they are grown. Once tourists have been exposed to various regional products, they may also wish to purchase these local products, highlighting an important link to the farmgate. For cannabis, the motive to see the source by visiting places of production is described as “cannabis authenticity” (Belhassen et al., 2007), paralleling the motivation of wine tourists who visit vineyards in the Niagara Region of Ontario, for instance.

Figure 4: Map of the Emerald Triangle, Northern California



Emerald Triangle Farm Tours

The Emerald Triangle, comprising Mendocino, Humboldt, and Trinity Counties, is a historically well-known cannabis producing region uniquely positioned to offer commercial cannabis farm tours. The region offers an important case study for identifying where the opportunities are emerging and what they look like in a legalized and commercialized space.

Cannabis Agritourism in the Emerald Triangle:

- has existed since 2018 on a small scale and is based on tour operators collaborating with independent farmers

- offers experiences based on guided, often customized (highly curated), multi-day, all-inclusive tours/visits to farms & nurseries, incorporating meals
- emphasizes education & best practices related to regenerative agriculture
- highlights only “sun-grown” (outdoor-grown) cannabis
- incorporates visits to dispensaries to purchase cannabis from the farms visited; the regulatory context in California allows for indoor consumption spaces, extending the cannabis value chain
- does not allow for ‘farmgate’; there are no licenses for growers to sell their product directly to consumers at the site of production; tours are a way to directly connect the consumer to the product and generate ‘off the farm’ sales
- delivers immersive experiences enabling tourists to physically interact with cannabis plants
- can include overnight stays at a variety of cannabis friendly accommodations (including ‘glamping’ among the plants).
- represents a layer of the experience along with existing tourism resources (e.g., redwood forests, beaches, wineries)
- is story-driven, emphasizing the history and heritage of cannabis cultivation in, and countercultural identity

Farm Tour Service-Ecosystem

The findings suggest a number of different characteristics of a ‘service-ecosystem’ around agricultural activities that contribute to the tourist experience. The following are value-creating activities within the broader service ecosystem.

Tour Guides as Strategic Connectors

Knowledgeable, ideally locally embedded tour guides play a central role in linking agriculture and tourism, thereby integrating cannabis production with tourism services by:

- acting as narrators, facilitators, and cultural brokers, connecting visitors with farmers, dispensaries, and local communities
- curating an experience, handling logistics, and providing access to farms that are otherwise largely out of the public’s reach
- using deep community ties to foster trust, authenticity, and insider access

Storytelling and Legacy Culture

Storytelling is an essential intangible resource that transforms cannabis farm tours into immersive experiences. As a core value-creating activity, telling stories transforms the product (cannabis) into a cultural and emotional experience. Tours are story-driven, emphasizing the history and heritage of cannabis cultivation in Northern California, as well as the region's countercultural identity. Narratives of “legacy” cannabis culture—rooted in the “outlaw” and “Back to the Land” movements of the 1960s–70s—blend local history, personal stories, and cultural symbolism to create a sense of adventure and authenticity, driving emotional engagement. Cannabis offers a new perspective on the value of agricultural heritage and rural culture in agritourism.

“This tour is not just about driving around and smoking. Cannabis tourism in Northern California is an epic adventure. This place has a story to tell. This tour is about finding the story and packaging it; showcasing it as an experience”. (Participant M)

“Seed-to-Sale” Journey

In California, customers are not able to buy cannabis directly from the farmer at the farm – a ‘farmgate’ arrangement or ‘direct farm marketing’ strategy – demonstrating the functional nature of retail in acquiring farm products as part of the cannabis agritourism experience. Instead, consumers typically visit dispensaries to purchase cannabis grown by farms on tour, either before or after the farm visit. This functional link allows tourists to meet the farmer who grew the cannabis and see where it was produced — a farm-to-table equivalent for cannabis. With the help of the tour guide, the disparate parts of the supply chain from “seed to sale” connect rural farmers to the consumer and the consumer to the product. From the farmer’s perspective, this arrangement creates enduring value. As one tour guide explained, the tour experience transforms visitors into lifelong consumers who recognize and trust the farmer’s brand, reinforcing the notion that value creation results from firsthand farm experiences that serve as the basis for the customer learning process.

Coming off the tour, people are consumers for life. People walk into a San Francisco dispensary, and say, ‘Whoa, that’s Farmer B’s stuff!’ They recognize the farmer. They buy their weed based on who grew it. (Participant M)

Farmer-Led Encounters and Experiential Learning

Farmers, farming practices, farms, and access to them are resources necessary for creating value in the service ecosystem. Value is created directly through the interaction between farmer and consumer (facilitated by the tour guide). Customers learn directly about regenerative, sustainable cultivation practices (e.g., no-till farming, “living soil”). In sharing stories and expertise with the consumer, farmers are not just producers but embody the brand. These encounters allow consumer education and direct emotional connection with the agricultural process. Direct consumer engagement offers farmers a valuable opportunity to strengthen their brand identity and foster loyalty (similar to Farmgate in Canada). By leveraging tourism to interact with consumers, farmers effectively “bring the brand to life”, turning casual visitors into dedicated brand ambassadors. Here, value co-creation involves the management of experiential interactions and exchange that enable consumers to appreciate the farm’s unique practices and culture, mirroring the vibrance observed in wine tourism, where personal connections significantly enhance the visitor experience and brand recognition (Santos et al., 2019).

Farmers are an integral part of the cannabis tourism sector. It’s only because growers are growing cannabis that I can bring visitors. I partner with different vertically integrated operations that grow their own cannabis. Without the farmer, it wouldn’t be possible for guests to see the whole process.” (Participant M)

We practice no till – you can see the old stumps from last year; the soil has memory. All of the biology of past plants is there; the new plants can retrace the history of the soil, which becomes part of the plant itself. (Participant L)

Tourism is a way for us to access the consumer. Interacting with the customer is foundational to the brand. The farmer is the brand. (Participant J)

Immersion in Rural Landscapes and Local Life

Tours offer exclusive access to remote, scenic, and historically significant rural sites that symbolize the heart of California's cannabis culture. Interactions with local residents, visits to general stores, and exposure to everyday community life create authenticity and a sense of belonging. The novelty of and access to historical cannabis culture in remote rural environments serve as key assets to creating value. It is the accessibility to and appreciation of these environments that serve as the basis of value co-creation. Interacting with locals is a value-creating activity that reflects the importance of community to the cannabis tourism experience. Part of fostering a sense of belonging among guests is that tour guides themselves are embedded in the local community. Ultimately, meaningful interaction with locals is a hallmark of agritourism (Choo & Petrick, 2014). The local embeddedness of these interactions (Hinrichs, 2000) co-creates value in the form of an experiential interaction offering an encounter with the local community.

"The further you travel north, the less polished the experiences get; Humboldt is more 'rough around the edges' than Mendocino. It is a rare experience to bring people into rural space; people find value in that. People want to hear the story, but they don't know how to get here. I will help them do both!" (Participant N)

"A big objective is to make guests feel like they are part of the neighborhood. When the guest steps into my vehicle, they are instantly gaining a friend in the cannabis space. I want to help the guest feel like they are part of it all; they are an extension of the community at every point on the tour. The best Google feedback I get is that I made the guest feel like they belong." (Participant M)

Sensory and Symbolic Engagement

A major highlight of farm tours is the physical proximity to cannabis plants—walking through fields, smelling, touching, and visually experiencing the crop. This sensory encounter is often described as transformative or emotional, providing symbolic and experiential value that transcends mere consumption. The dominant competitive advantage in Northern California's service ecosystem is the formal regulatory institutional arrangement, an operant resource, that enables farmers to offer the value-creating activity of walking through cannabis fields.

"I can bring you into the garden as long as I know who you are. Testing voids the risks of human contact. Plants are going to be exposed to the local atmosphere; this is agriculture." (Participant L)

The big payout for most people is literally having a moment in the sun with the plants, breathing in the aroma, and taking in Mother Nature; that is the moment; that is the 'big reveal'. I've had people cry and dance around with joy. It is a life-changing experience. Some people have never seen a weed plant in their lives. It is such a personal experience. (Participant M)

Relaxed Consumption Agenda

Regulations around cannabis consumption within tourism and hospitality remain ambiguous yet form an assumed component of the tour experience. Much like culinary and wine tourism, a sense of place plays a pivotal role in the consumption process, offering an exclusive, location-based experience. Consumption becomes an integral aspect of the local brand, emphasizing the idea of experiencing the cannabis "of place, in place." This element is so central that tour operators allocate dedicated free time for guests to pause, consume, and personalize their experience. Value co-creation is derived from 'self-service' (Payne et al.,

2008) in which tour-goers are given the responsibility to manage their free time outside of the tour guide's agenda. In this case, consumption takes on a functional nature and is an expected component of the tour.

"I give guests time to take a moment and break off and consume and do their own thing." (Participant M)

B2B Hospitality

In addition to value-creating activities that take place between the tour guide and customer, value-creating activities also occur in a B2B context. In large part, B2B hospitality is about building, maintaining, and nurturing relationships based on mutual respect and cooperation throughout the supply chain. In California, a close relationship, forged by trust, exists between the farmer and the tour operator. This relationship adds value to the cannabis supply chain, heavily determining the accessibility of the farm tour experience. The relationship between the tour guide and the farmer stands as the most critical B2B relationship in the cannabis agritourism service ecosystem, resulting in a symbiotic relationship where tourism expertise and cannabis production mutually reinforce each other. Collaborative long-term partnerships (La Londe & Masters, 1994; Mentzer et al., 2001; Lindgreen et al., 2012) are a source of value co-creation and form a major competitive advantage in this emerging sector.

B2B hospitality represents an exchange among actors, extending beyond traditional consumer interactions. It is evident not only between tour guides and farmers, but also in the relationships between tour guides and the dispensary (i.e., retail managers, 'budtenders'). These strategic alliances (Telfer, 2000) highlight how B2B hospitality transforms the tour guide, farmer, and dispensary into a unified service ecosystem, resulting in a collective competitive advantage. The tour guide also extends hospitality to other elements of the tourism network. Within service ecosystems, B2B actors co-produce service offerings, engage in mutual service provision (Vargo & Lusch, 2016), and in this example, co-create value through professionalism and mutual respect that, in turn, enables robust B2C experiences.

B2B hospitality in the cannabis agritourism service ecosystem is a critical complement that supports business sustainability.

Figure 5: B2B Hospitality in the cannabis agritourism service ecosystem.



“You treat the farmer with the same hospitality as the customer. As a tour operator, I serve the farmer because it is part of the value proposition for the customer.” (Participant M)

“I do not make any money from making purchases at dispensaries on the tour, but it is an integral part of the trip. I am serving the retailers in the same way they are serving me and my guests. I don’t ask the general managers for anything; just that they treat my customers well and give them a great experience. I also ask them to show love to my employees when they come around with a tour. I will keep bringing guests to buy products from dispensaries that perpetually show us love.” (Participant M)

“As a tour operator, you need to have extensive knowledge and connections, not just in the cannabis industry. I took donuts to a concierge once, introduced myself, left my card, and just let them know that I am there to support them. And it’s not just concierges; it is the same for everyone else in the tourism network that supports the experience of cannabis.” (Participant M)

Industry Tourism

Very closely connected to B2B hospitality is industry tourism. In Canada, facility tours facilitate B2B relationships in the cannabis supply chain. It is common for ‘budtenders’ (i.e., sales representatives) and store managers to visit production facilities and learn about the products they sell to consumers. Budtenders and retail managers are a critical connection between producers and consumers. It is the retail manager who purchases the product and stocks the store shelves, and the budtender who gets the product into the hands of the end consumer. In representing the producer’s product, the producer wants retail operators to know as much about the product as they can, including where it comes from and who is behind the process.

B2B facility tours are indicative of important value-creating relationships in the cannabis supply chain. The opportunity for those who sell cannabis to see the production process brings the end customer one step closer to the production source; the budtender can create further value around the cannabis for the customer based on their first-hand experience at the production facility. Hosting tours to budtenders and retail managers is a way of communicating important information, as well as enthusiasm, about the product; it is an information flow that ultimately brings value to the end-consumer. The production process is indirectly part of the visitor experience between the customer and the budtender.

Tours are also a way for small-scale cultivators to connect with and learn from other small-scale cannabis cultivators in proximity to one another. Tours are an opportunity for farmers to learn new growing styles and observe how different environmental issues are negotiated in outdoor growing spaces.

“We tour retailers through the facility so they can meet the humans doing the behind-the-scenes work. We want to use this as a platform for education and for a deeper level of transparency.” (Participant B)

“Budtenders are representatives of the brand; they are the ones doing the actual selling and need to be excited about selling the product for the producer.” (Participant G)

“I want store managers and budtenders coming to my facility to see where the product comes from; show them what we do, meet the team. They get a deeper understanding of the brand. It makes the brand come alive for them.” (Participant D)

“Tomorrow I have three cannabis retail store workers, managers, and two of their employees because I want to show retailers the store, and I want the budtenders to come into my facility and brag about being at my facility and tell people to buy this weed.” (Participant B)

“A lot of our retail partners come out to the farm. Whether it’s a scheduled meeting with a group or if budtenders come up on their day off, they get a deeper understanding of the brand. This is the first time in the industry that we are able to close the loop and speak directly to consumers, walk people through, and have people be able to purchase the product as a result. It has been an eye-opening experience to see how important our budtenders are; initially, we didn’t go in expecting it would hold so much weight.” (Participant F)

Pathways Towards Sustainable Development

Cannabis agritourism SDGs are a way to normalize cannabis by way of a sustainable economic development agenda; the goals reframe cultural understandings of normality. Associating cannabis agritourism with globally recognized goals and a non-threatening language around cannabis works to break stigma in legal contexts. Appendix C summarizes the information below in a table.

Agritourism in Northern California supports at least two United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:

- Goal 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth; and
- Goal 12 - Responsible Production and Consumption.

Cannabis agritourism in Northern California operationalizes global sustainability goals through four local pathways:

- (1) preserving cultural heritage through authentic stories of place;
- (2) practicing regenerative farming unique to the region;
- (3) nurturing strong and participatory local governance;
- (4) and encouraging patterns of sustainable consumption.

Preserving Cultural Heritage Through Authentic Stories of Place

Storytelling plays a central role in preserving the Emerald Triangle’s cannabis heritage and directly supports Target 8.9, which promotes sustainable tourism that creates jobs while fostering local culture and products. Tourism, particularly through guided farm visits, is seen as a mechanism to sustain this heritage, especially with the arrival of mainstream cannabis brands with no historical connection to the region. Cannabis agritourism enables an authentic voice that preserves a cultural legacy and safeguards regional heritage in Northern California. These place-based stories convey knowledge of interdependent living systems and support a regenerative tourism paradigm (Bellato, 2024). Preserving California’s cannabis heritage is a cultural priority that aligns with the Goals (Li et al., 2025) while creating a distinctive tourism product that enhances the visitor’s connection to place. Heritage storytelling functions as cultural infrastructure that protects community identity and small producer legitimacy in a period of market restructuring.

“Stories are being preserved; a legacy is being preserved; a way of life”. (Participant N)

Practicing Regenerative Farming Unique to the Region

Practicing regenerative farming aligns with Target 12.2, addressing sustainable resource use. While farm styles vary, cannabis cultivation in the region is historically defined by regenerative practices central to its sustainable identity. Similar to wine (LaCanne & Lundgren, 2018), cannabis promotes best practices in regenerative agriculture, offering visitors a direct view of sustainable farming (Meisel et al., 2023). Also, like wine (Dias et al., 2023), cannabis is a regional product that reflects local ecosystems, represents sustainable practices, and connects consumers to place of source. The importance of soil is inseparable from the role agritourism plays in linking the geographic features and cultural practices of place to the agriculture of the region—otherwise known as “terroir” (Paquette & Zhou, 2021). Growing cannabis in native, living soil exemplifies sustainability in a form that translates well for tourism. Visitors see cultivation styles representing sustainable agriculture, led by farmers eager to educate and inspire consumers. Local sustainability narratives are also rooted in legacy genetics and multigenerational knowledge with potential medical benefits. Maintaining legacy genetics and lowering the carbon footprint through regenerative farming are promoted as key product features. First-hand experiences allow guests to understand cultivation processes, reducing negative stigma and connecting consumers directly to farmers and their sustainable practices. In the Emerald Triangle, tourism hosts act as stewards of regenerative systems (Bellato et al., 2022), and guest education is part of an innovative service strategy linking agriculture and tourism (Rong-Da Liang, 2017) to the SDGs. Tours render regenerative practices visible, linking terroir, legacy genetics, and soil health in ways that position farms as stewards rather than merely suppliers.

“Regenerative agriculture is part of this place. We rebuild the soil with cannabis. I think we are creating models here for what regenerative farming can look like.” (Participant F)

“No till is a big part of living soils. Tilling contributes to climate change, but the earth needs to be covered at all times. We are constantly sequestering carbon. We leave all the old stumps in the ground so that the new plants can retrace the biology of past plants; there is memory there. The polyculture of native plants nurtures the environment, too; the leaves drop and go back into feeding the soil biology.” (Participant E)

“Terroir is the flavor of the region. Native plants love the native environment: the Redwoods, the ocean, the onsite composting, and the native soil. It is regenerative soil. The plant is an expression of the soil.” (Participant G)

Nurturing Strong Participatory Governance

In addition to the region’s natural assets, human resources are a critical foundation for sustainable tourism development. Strengthening participatory local governance directly advances Target 8.3, which promotes policies supporting productive activities, decent work, entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation, while encouraging the growth of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises. Tourism has emerged as a logical diversification strategy for cultivators seeking resilience in the face of regulatory shifts. Guided tours and curated visitor experiences are being developed as cultural assets that extend beyond economic function to embed heritage narratives into place-making: The creation of cultural assets is crucial for attracting visitors, but also serve as a mechanism for fostering community linkages and opening pathways for local participation in tourism: Central to this process is the recognition that local ownership and leadership are prerequisites for meaningful governance: Within the Emerald Triangle, community is both the cultural core of cannabis heritage and the primary arena for decision-making. Environmental stewardship forms the logic of community

formation, while tourism development—when grounded in local voices and collaborative processes—offers opportunities to regenerate place and shape legalization outcomes. Community-level partnerships ensure that local priorities guide implementation of global goals (Movono & Hughes, 2020), particularly amid tensions between legacy small-scale growers and industrial-scale cultivators. Cannabis agritourism in this context aligns with broader notions of social innovation (Graci, 2025) that provide alternatives to extractive systems, neglecting local values (Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023). By fostering decent work, stimulating innovative small-scale business ventures (Maton, 2024), and embedding shared heritage into visitor experiences, tourism becomes a platform for community empowerment and resilience (Pollock, 2017). Broad-based stakeholder involvement ensures a unique legitimacy that arises out of working closely with community members (Reddy, 2016) and developing linkages between key stakeholders.

“With the tour, I am trying to create assets inside of Humboldt. History and culture are huge assets to the story. There is a lot in Humboldt to showcase.” (Participant M)

“Farm tours open up channels for small-scale producers to better understand tourism in their own community and the role they can play in it.” (Participant L)

“The community creates the vision for the community. It’s part of coming together as an ‘agro-hood’ that supports one another.” (Participant K)

Encouraging Patterns of Sustainable Consumption

Encouraging sustainable consumption aligns with Target 8.4, which seeks to improve resource efficiency in consumption and production while decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation, and Target 12.2, which calls for the removal of market distortions that incentivize wasteful consumption. The contemporary cannabis supply chain sustains historical connections between production regions and urban consumers: Tourism, in this context, operates as a spatial assembler (Hanna et al., 2019), linking the disparate sites of a fragmented cannabis supply chain into an intelligible story and reducing information asymmetries. This process renders production visible to consumers, enabling them to situate products within broader socio-environmental systems. The reconnection between producer and consumer is consistent with agritourism models that foster sustainability by embedding purchasing decisions within local contexts (Volpentesta & Ammirato, 2008).

Educational elements within cannabis agritourism, including connecting consumers to the place of source, contribute to reducing market distortions by equipping consumers with the knowledge needed to evaluate product quality, production methods, and environmental impacts. Cannabis agritourism meets the SDG of helping people better understand the environmental and social impacts of products they purchase. Subsequent cannabis purchases are made more meaningful, connecting consumers back to the land in a way that celebrates the origins of cannabis heritage in California. This mirrors similar findings in food tourism, where education strengthens local economies by encouraging purchases from small-scale producers engaged in sustainable practices (Chen & Huang, 2016). By shortening the distance, both physical and relational, between producers and consumers, cannabis agritourism minimizes intermediaries in the supply chain, thus reinforcing trust, quality assurance, and place-based identity. Ultimately, the tourist encounter becomes a mechanism for “nudging” (Dolnicar, 2023) consumers toward locally sourced and regeneratively produced goods, extending the

sustainability benefits beyond the tour itself. Moreover, such experiences contribute to the gradual cultural normalization of cannabis, aligning with broader legalization trends. Further, immersive educational experiences make visible product origins, production processes, and community embeddedness that foster more intentional purchasing patterns, supporting both environmental objectives and the resilience of local economies.

“I think an educated consumer base makes for the strongest cannabis industry; that’s what will sustain the industry. And where are they [customers] going to learn about it? From experts who know things.” (Participant M)

SAMPLINGS/TASTINGS

Empirical evidence from qualitative research on cannabis tourism in Canada highlights a situation in which existing regulations do not adequately address social consumption, pointing to a significant area in need of policy consideration (Dupej & Choi, 2025a). Cannabis legalization raises debate over public and private spaces of legal cannabis consumption (Gourdet et al., 2021), the importance of which is further highlighted by tourism and hospitality.

The evidence suggests that legalization in Canada cannot be equated with commercial consumption, which points to where policy is still needed around recreational cannabis. The outcomes associated with legalization related to hospitality and tourism support guiding future policy changes around consumption.

Samplings/tastings speak to the importance of regulating service for social consumption, extending value in the cannabis supply chain, and serving a social function of providing the foundation of a responsible consumption culture (Dupej & Choi, 2025a).

“People want to buy the plant that was grown here. They want to smoke it while seeing it growing in the field. That is a full circle. That’s what makes it so cool for people.” (Participant G)

CONCLUSIONS

Limited Opportunities in Canada

Farmgate is a step towards establishing cannabis agritourism in Canada; however, currently, it is underutilized as a vehicle for tourism. The possibilities for cannabis agritourism are limited by the rules that largely address production and a lack of rules around spaces to responsibly consume cannabis as a social activity.

As evidenced in Northern California's Emerald Triangle, small-scale outdoor grows, or "sun-grown" cannabis, have significant leverage potential as a tourism resource – providing a glimpse of what might be possible for Canada. Given the right regulatory conditions, Canada has the potential to create regions known for its cannabis in the same way that Portland is known for beer and Bordeaux is known for wine.

Key Points

A service-oriented perspective that considers the consumer reframes value creation in the cannabis supply chain. Safe recreational consumption that addresses concerns around public health and safety and mitigates existing and anticipated adverse effects requires reconceiving cannabis products and markets through a service-oriented perspective.

The key points highlight the mutual reinforcement between agricultural production and customer-oriented services.

Tourism and hospitality strengthen the cannabis supply chain.

- Agritourism provides economic benefits to small and legacy farmers by connecting them directly with consumers and increasing brand loyalty.
- "B2B Hospitality", including "industry tourism", involving mutual respect among actors, contributes to a cohesive, sustainable network that supports rural livelihoods
- Long-term, trust-based partnerships between farmers, tour guides, and retailers build resilience in the local cannabis economy.
- Providing education via tourism experiences lends to fostering better-informed customers and more sustainable consumption.
- Cannabis agritourism can be positioned as an educational platform that builds informed and loyal consumer bases.

The cannabis supply chain is a feature of a place that can be leveraged as an experience.

- Connecting customers to the production processes as part of the visitor experience links cannabis to the people and practices of place.
- Regenerative agricultural practices, especially, reflect local values and emphasize the role of the farmer and their commitment to stewarding the natural environment, which are important components of the brand.
- These methods connect cannabis farming to the "terroir" concept found in wine tourism, emphasizing local ecosystems, soil health, and legacy genetics.

- Place-based sustainability is a characteristic of production and a feature of the product.

Tour guides are central to creating value.

- Tour guides link agriculture and tourism, connecting producers to consumers and providing a promising strategy to promote products.
- The dual role of guides in B2C and B2B domains enhances the visitor experience while building trust and collaboration within the cannabis industry.
- Tour guides are critical to customer satisfaction and supply-chain resilience.

Storytelling about and experiential engagement with the plant create emotional and symbolic value.

- Storytelling about “legacy” culture—especially the outlaw history and countercultural identity of the Emerald Triangle (i.e., the cultural qualities of place)—is a powerful intangible resource and key component of cannabis agritourism.
- When combined with sensory experiences (like walking through cannabis fields), storytelling enables fostering personal transformation, empowerment, and authenticity.
- This emotional engagement adds symbolic and cultural depth to the tourism experience, beyond simple consumption.

Cannabis agritourism preserves culture and heritage through authentic storytelling.

- Farm tours and storytelling play a crucial role in preserving cultural and agricultural heritage, especially amid threats of corporate consolidation and loss of authenticity.
- Local farmers, tour guides, and community members narrate histories rooted in place.
- These stories legitimize cannabis and promote sustainable tourism that fosters culture, jobs, and local products.

Regulatory barriers and local politics shape value creation.

- County-level regulatory inconsistencies (e.g., permits, zoning, farm sales restrictions) limit the expansion of cannabis agritourism.
- Despite this, local engagement and community trust are crucial for navigating the political landscape.
- Policy frameworks allowing on-farm sales or on-site consumption could unlock significant untapped value.
- Regulations do not address the value created around cannabis through service.
- Regulations can also safeguard legacy genetics and cultural knowledge as intellectual property, recognizing their potential medical and economic value.

Regulations around social consumption extend the cannabis supply chain.

- Beyond production and retail, cannabis gains additional economic and cultural value when it is consumed in regulated downstream points of engagement in communal settings such as lounges, guided tastings, workshops, or tourism experiences.
- Social consumption shifts the cannabis supply chain into the experiential economy, where curated environments, expertise, and storytelling become value-adding components.
- Integrating cannabis into local cultural and tourism ecosystems extends the supply chain creating partnerships with restaurants, accommodations, transportation providers, and cultural organizations.

Cannabis agritourism is a source of environmental sustainability.

- Embedding regenerative methods within the visitor experience transforms sustainability from a background feature into a marketable asset that supports Target 8.4 and Target 12.2.
- Agritourism provides visibility to sustainable cultivation, turning the farm itself into an educational and environmental attraction.
- Distanced farmers in rural, remote legacy areas are brought together with consumers, making visible stewardship, sustainable practices, and localism that otherwise remain hidden.

Strong and participatory local governance is nurtured through cannabis agritourism.

- Local cannabis communities exhibit grassroots governance structures, where decision-making and innovation are locally driven rather than corporate-controlled.
- Cannabis agritourism supports entrepreneurship, creativity, and small business resilience in the wake of economic disruption from legalization.
- Tourism acts as a community-building mechanism, strengthening partnerships between small farmers, tour operators, and local officials, in line with SDG Target 8.3 (supporting productive activities and small enterprise growth).
- Participatory governance helps maintain local identity and fosters social innovation in response to market and regulatory pressures.

Patterns of sustainable consumption are encouraged through “seed to sale” experiences.

- Cannabis agritourism educates consumers about where and how cannabis is produced, connecting them directly with farmers and the cultivation process.
- Tour experiences often include dispensary visits where visitors can use the knowledge acquired on tours to recognize products— reinforcing traceability and ethical consumption.
- This educational approach helps shift consumer behavior toward locally sourced, small-batch, and regeneratively produced cannabis, contributing to SDG 12 goals on responsible consumption.
- A pathway for learning product origins enables consumers to connect farm narratives to retail choices, consistent with evidence from food tourism that education can reorient demand toward small producers and sustainable methods (Chen & Huang, 2016; Ammirato et al., 2020; Dolnicar, 2023).
- The potentially transformative consumer mindset around product purchases is an important outcome of sustainable tourism.

Recommendations for Cannabis Agritourism in Canada

The table below offers recommendations that support opportunities for cannabis agritourism (and cannabis tourism, more broadly) in Canada.

Considerations for Policy Makers

Task	Description	Example
Regulate cannabis as an agricultural crop.	Cannabis is currently under the jurisdiction of Public Health (federal government). Arguably, cannabis is an agricultural product that has evolved into a service proposition offering both tangible and intangible benefits.	Federal consideration is necessary for a re-categorization of cannabis and will require working with provincial industry leadership.
Support small growers.	Small farmers are playing one of the biggest roles in furthering the cannabis tourism sector. Farmers have a long-term vision for tourism – and hope, and are driving the trend towards sustainable agriculture in cannabis.	Flexible licensing for on-farm visitor experiences, combined with sustainability incentives such as tax credits for regenerative farming or reduced compliance fees for certified operators, can lower barriers for small-scale farmers.
Educate DMOs.	Destination marketing organizations are critical to linking growers with the tourism industry.	Deliver targeted training and professional development workshops and create DMO-specific briefing guides and toolkits.
Develop geographical indicators.	Cannabis (outdoor) is no different than wine when it comes to appellations for wine that take the region into account. This connects to the notion of terroir. Protecting the authenticity of cannabis brands based on the regions in which they were grown can be leveraged by tourism in the same way they have been for both wine and culinary tourism. An appellation is a legally protected geographical indication that identifies where an agricultural product originates (Stoa, 2018). Having appellations in place for cannabis would protect different	BC Bud and the BC Bud trail can both easily be marketed internationally.

	regional reputations and rich histories of cannabis cultivation from fraudulent association. The unique varieties cultivated in the region act like an attraction that drives people to travel to experience cannabis that is not cultivated the same way elsewhere (Rattu, Harvey & Breen, 2022).	
Merge the cannabis and tourism industries.	Governments at all levels need to support the merging of the cannabis and tourism industries.	Creating an official role to merge industries at the federal level would focus the work.

Considerations for Growers/Farmers

Division of Tourism Labour	If farmers want to engage in tourism, it is likely that greater success will be achieved if they work with tour operators or have some connection to the tourism industry. The business of tourism is left to the tour experts, and the business of growing cannabis is left to the farmers.	Growers/farmers can partner with the tourism industry, building a layer of tourism into the farm operation. Start an entirely different tourism business (from production and retail).
Understand the Local Service Eco-System; Create a 'Service Blueprint'	Also similar to wine, the development of cannabis tourism activities will also involve actors that traditionally belong to the tourism sector/system, which further expands the cannabis ecosystem.	Who are the stakeholders of the service ecosystem? What are the local resources that support the tourist experience (including transport, accommodation, food and beverage, attraction, and events)?
Connect and Build with the Municipal Government	Involvement in local politics is potentially a competitive advantage. Understanding the perspectives of municipal leaders will provide insight into the type of information needed to move decisions forward.	Participate in the municipal planning process and attend public meetings. Build relationships with economic development officers and frame cannabis within shared priorities (e.g., diversification, job creation)
Work with Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)	DMOs can support cannabis tourism by promoting local businesses on their websites and other promotional material.	Position cannabis as a cultural and agricultural asset within destination branding. Develop partnerships between DMOs and licensed

		operators; experience-focused marketing.
Create an emotional experience with a story.	Retail can map product origins, feature farmer profiles, and link product purchases to broader community benefits.	Narratives of place root cannabis in the land. Share the farmer's personal story to create a connection. Highlight the unique knowledge of craft and legacy growers. Connect the plant to human experiences Make the visitor part of the story by inviting them to contribute to a memory book.
Map out product origins – trace the seed to sale journey.	Tour operators and dispensaries can explicitly design visitor experiences to trace the seed-to-sale journey	Integrate farm narratives, cultivation methods, and sustainability practices into interpretive materials, such as actual maps or inviting in farmers/growers for special “pop-up” events.

What are the Alternative Options for Farm Tours?

Small-scale “industry tourism” – The small-scale nature of industry actors touring facilities/fields is accommodated for by safety protocols (e.g., sign a registry upon arrival, wear personal safety gear) and is amenable to insurance policies.

Take the risk & fight the power - If the farmer could afford it and wanted to take the risk, there is technically nothing stopping them (i.e., limited enforcement) from hosting farm tours to the public. The farmer has the authority to make the decision and invite people onto the property. Arguably, in doing so, this advances a “proof of concept”, albeit in the “grey area”.

Medical licence – Touring a medical cultivation site is allowed and has been since before legalization.

Grow hemp – Touring a hemp cultivation site is allowed and could act as an alternative.

Windows into Grow Rooms – Windows enable guests to see into grow rooms as part of the tour experience, without coming into contact with the plant. One drawback is the effect this might have on growth cycles.

Virtual Tour/Video Feed – Visitors can use technology to get closer to the plant without getting close to the plant. Farmgate stores could have monitors with video feed of grow rooms. Offering a virtual tour of the facility could also be an option.

Wait it out – Tourism (and consumption more broadly) is a long-term strategy for sustaining the cannabis industry.

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Appendix A: Definition of Concepts

Service:	The application of one's skills and knowledge (competence) for the benefit of oneself or another that constitutes the common denominator of all social and economic exchanges (Carbonell et al., 2009).
Operant resource:	The knowledge and skills that can be utilized with other resources to increase value creation; the consumer is an operant resource
Service Ecosystem:	A spontaneously sensing and responding spatial and temporal structure of loosely coupled, value-proposing social and economic actors interacting through institutions and technology to (1) co-produce service offerings, (2) exchange service offerings, and (3) co-create value (Lusch et al., 2010; Vargo & Lusch, 2011).
Co-created value:	Value is not produced by a firm alone and then delivered to a customer. Instead, value emerges through interaction, where both the provider and the customer integrate resources – knowledge, skills, experiences and context – to create value together (Vargo & Lusch, 2007).

Appendix B: B2B Relationships

Several business-to-business relationships are important for the supply chain integration of retail and production. These relationships are necessary for the efficient adjustment of the cannabis supply chain to allow licensed growers to sell product at the production facility. These relationships are foundational to farmgate operations; however, they are beyond the scope of tourism directly. The following is a list of B2B producer relationships necessary prior to farmgate offering value as a resource for cannabis tourism.

Actor	Role	Description	Supporting Evidence
Provincial Regulator	Enforce the Cannabis Act; clarifies compliance processes	An important relationship exists between the cannabis producer and the provincial regulator to the extent that, in some cases, the regulator is considered a partner and working with them is a collaborative experience in which help and clarification of processes are provided to the licensed producer. The relationships built between licensed producers and regulators are an important element in building the cannabis community more broadly.	<i>"We consider the regulators to be our partners. It has been a collaborative experience. They are there to help and to clarify, and we treat them as a partner as opposed to an inspector. We build relationships with the regulator like we do with any of our clients. We are here to educate one another, and this is important to building the cannabis community." (Participant C)</i>
Consultants	facilitate regulatory compliance for retail	Unlike liquor, farmgate requires complying with several government bodies: Health Canada, the AGCO, and the OCS. Third-party consulting bodies play an important role in supporting licensed producers in negotiating a "swirl-storm" of regulatory compliance that enables vertical integration.	<i>"We deal with three bodies of government: Health Canada, the AGCO, and the OCS. In order to understand how Farmgate pulls all of these government bodies together, we required hiring consultants to help us understand and then navigate the regulations. There is a big disconnect between what you need to do to meet federal compliance versus what you need to do for provincial retail."</i> <i>"The consultants were able to take care of everything from the SOPs to the inspection timings, the vaults, setting up merchandising for display – everything that had to do with the retail regulations. There is a lot of stuff that we definitely would not have been able to get done without them. We worked great collectively."</i> <i>"You don't have to be an expert in every single part of your vertical. In fact, I think that would be impossible. So, you need to surround yourself with good people who align with the right values."</i>
Retail Partners	retail management	The type of work necessary for operating a retail store is fundamentally different from the work of growing cannabis, and some growers have recognized that an important division of labour is necessary for effective vertical integration. Retail is another layer of the business adopted by LPs that want to sell cannabis directly to consumers. Additional non-agricultural	<i>"We are good at growing weed. We are not great at retail and quite frankly, don't really like it. We found that out quickly. So, we knew we had to find a retail partner that would help take us to the next step."</i> <i>"We have worked hard to build relationships with our retail partners."</i>

		skills are required for operating retail, and retail partnerships are an important business-to-business relationship that supports farmgate. Growers do not need to be experts in all parts of the vertically integrated supply chain, but they do need to align themselves with partners to operate a retail business in addition to a production facility. For farmers to continue their focus on cultivation, it will be necessary to have staff carry out tasks that support the non-cultivation parts of the operation.	<i>"We are good at growing weed. We are not good at retail and, quite frankly, don't really like it. We found that out quickly. So, we knew we had to find a retail partner."</i> <i>"You are an LP running a store. Retail is another layer of the business."</i>
Technology	POS that facilitates: compliance with provincial tracking and reporting requirements;	A point-of-sale (POS) system enables compliance functions within the cannabis retail environment. Specifically, it supports adherence to provincial tracking and reporting requirements and streamlines the approval processes associated with regulated sales.	<i>"The provincial inspector walked in, and when he realized we were using this POS, I think that helped because he recognized the system and understood the best practices behind those systems. "</i>
Government Stores	act as an advertising channel for farmgate stores	Alongside merchandising and placement of local products, education-based communication can connect consumers to the product's source of origin and drives curiosity in visiting farmgate locations.	<i>"The provincial store in town is good at referring people to the [farmgate] store because they often sell out of our product quickly. We only send out so many cases, and when they are gone, they are gone! The product sells out fast in the local area. If the government store doesn't have it, they will point the customer in our direction – go right to the source!"</i>
Budtenders	representatives of the brand; they are the ones selling the product, and they need to be excited to sell the product.	Sales representatives – also known as "budtenders" represent the farmgate brand at retail outlets by selling the final product to the consumer.	<i>"We never realized how much weight the budtenders carry in selling the product."</i>
Competitors	showcasing local products promotes craft cannabis	Working with competitors is part of the agritourism service ecosystem. This is important for creating a cannabis tourism experience that highlights the unique regional offerings. Showcasing competitors also signals that the store values authenticity and quality over exclusivity, which builds trust with visitors.	<i>"We showcase our competitors by bringing in select items for the shelves. We produce from local companies that live by the same commitment to value as we do. It is one of the ways we can foster community. Farmgate is a way to showcase the local."</i>

Appendix C: Summary of Local Pathways for SDGs

Cannabis Agritourism and Local Pathways Toward the SDGs — Summary Table

Local Pathway	Linked SDG & Target	Local Expressions in the Emerald Triangle	Tourism & Sustainability Outcomes
1. Preserving Cultural Heritage Through Authentic Storytelling	SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth Target 8.9 – Promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and fosters culture and products	• Guided tours share histories of the back-to-the-land movement, medical cannabis advocacy, and counterculture roots. • Tour guides and farmers act as storytellers, connecting San Francisco activism to rural cultivation. • Farm visits preserve intergenerational knowledge and identity amid corporate expansion.	• Protects cultural heritage and authenticity. • Creates meaningful employment for local guides and small-scale farmers. • Strengthens community pride and visitor engagement.
2. Practicing Regenerative Farming Unique to the Region	SDG 12: Responsible Production and Consumption Target 12.2 – Sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources	• Farmers use living soils, no-till cultivation, carbon sequestration, and native plant polycultures. • Farms emphasize terroir—the ecological identity of local soils and genetics. • Tour experiences highlight regenerative farming as climate action.	• Demonstrates visible sustainability practices to visitors. • Builds ecological literacy and appreciation for regenerative agriculture. • Positions farms as environmental stewards.
3. Nurturing Strong and Participatory Local Governance	SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth Target 8.3 – Promote policies that support small enterprises, entrepreneurship, and innovation	• Local tour operators and cultivators collaborate through trust-based networks. • Tourism diversification helps farmers recover from market collapse post-legalization. • “Agro-hoods” and community-led initiatives strengthen local agency.	• Enhances local governance and decision-making. • Fosters entrepreneurship and small business resilience. • Encourages community-led destination development.
4. Encouraging Patterns of Sustainable Consumption	SDG 12: Responsible Production and Consumption Target 12.8 – Ensure people have relevant information for sustainable lifestyles	• Tours often conclude in urban dispensaries (e.g., Solful) featuring farm-origin labeling. • Consumers learn about seed-to-sale supply chains and meet growers. • Education shifts buyer behavior toward small-batch, ethical, and regenerative products.	• Strengthens producer–consumer trust. • Normalizes responsible cannabis consumption. • Encourages market support for sustainable and local producers.

Appendix D: Under the Right Circumstances

Outlined below are several possibilities for how cannabis tourism could expand if the enabling regulatory frameworks were in place. Specifically, on-site consumption will open more opportunities for the industry.

Farm Stays: In addition to touring facilities, farm stays allow visitors to have an immersive experience in learning about cultivation. Accommodations could range from “glamping” in tents amongst cannabis plants to fully furnished renovated lofts with modern amenities.

Tasting Rooms: Tastings are a learning and sensory experience in which visitors sample locally produced cannabis. In addition to facilitating sales, tastings are a way for consumers to discover their preferences in a safe and controlled space.

Farmers' Markets: Farmers' markets involve consumers purchasing cannabis in a market setting rather than at licensed stores. The concept, design, layout, and set-up are much like traditional farmers' markets, but for cannabis growers and buyers. In addition to selling a variety of cannabis products, regular fruits, vegetables, and produce are also sold.

Retail Lounges: Coupling a lounge environment with a retail store enables an opportunity for creating a customer journey. As part of the journey, smelling, touching, and tasting are part of this experience. In addition to adding value by providing a unique experience that surrounds the cannabis itself, a retail lounge is a way for stores to differentiate in the marketplace.

Pre-packaged infused cannabis food and beverage in licensed venues: Restaurants, bars, cafes, and lounges are all venues for the pre-packaged category. Allowing for on-premise (sale and consumption of cannabis in the same location) provides an opportunity to implement an incremental revenue stream to businesses that would otherwise be unavailable.

Consumption Enclaves: Certain areas of a jurisdiction (e.g., a city neighbourhood) could be cordoned off and given a ‘cannabis consumption enclave zone’ designation wherein the sale and consumption of cannabis could take place at locations within the enclave. These spaces are contained, controlled, and separated from spaces of non-cannabis consumption. Additionally, those who visit the enclave are assumed to be consenting adults who accept cannabis and support a judgment-free environment.

Ordering Cannabis Room service: Accommodations could incorporate cannabis as part of room service that would enable guests to order a cannabis tea, for instance, and have it delivered to the room.

Cannabis Catering and Table Service: Similar to a culinary experience that incorporates beer and wine, cannabis can be paired with food. Additionally, there are components of cannabis that can be represented in mainstream menus as part of infused food options or cannabis food pairings. This would require a regulatory framework for allowing the use of cannabis ingredients as part of food preparation, as well as allowing businesses to serve the prepared food to customers.

Cannabis Consumption Clubs: Private clubs in which members pay a fee to consume in the space of the cannabis club ensure a gathering of like-minded, consenting patrons.

Appendix E: Future Research

Suggested Key Themes:

Sustainable agriculture: What role does cannabis agritourism play in enabling sustainable agriculture?

Developing appellations: To what extent can place designations connecting geographic features and cultural practices of place, as they relate to agriculture (otherwise known as “terroir”), be leveraged for agritourism?

Consumer perspective: What are the perceived benefits of cannabis agritourism from the consumer’s perspective?

Multi-region studies: What is the broader applicability of cannabis agritourism service ecosystems to cannabis producing regions in South America (e.g., Colombia, Uruguay) and Africa (e.g., Malawi, South Africa), comparing governance regimes and socio-cultural contexts and verifying sustainability claims through independent environmental and economic assessments.

Long-term consumer impacts: To what degree does going on a farm tour actually change consumption habits that benefit the long-term sustainability of these business models?

Community-based governance: What success factors contribute to managing the integration of service and production, as well as the potential for new cooperative models to emerge in the cannabis agritourism sector?

Regulating consumption settings with responsible-use policy: What regulatory frameworks best support safe on-site consumption at farmgate venues? How do different consumption-setting policies (e.g., licensed on-site lounges vs strict off-site rules) influence visitation and local resident attitudes?

Sustainability, land use and environmental impacts: What are the environmental footprints of cannabis agritourism operations and how do sustainability practices affect market positioning?