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Sustainability Strategies for Value-Added Agricultural Producers in California's San Joaquin Valley

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Sharon L. Starcher

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Sustainability Strategies for Value-Added Agricultural Producers in

California's San Joaquin Valley

by

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MA, Fresno Pacific University, 2007

BA, Fresno Pacific University, 1999

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 31, 2016

Abstract

Economic and climate changes, combined with changing government regulations, are altering the strategic business model for small farm operators and necessitating their reliance on multiple income sources to maintain financial viability. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies of 3 small farming businesses in California's San Joaquin Valley that successfully implemented value-added products which contributed to their financial sustainability. Data from semistructured interviews and relevant documents were analyzed through the lens of system theory, utilizing in vivo coding to identify patterns and themes. Three high-level themes emerged: knowledge, marketing, and networking. The theme of knowledge reflects the value of pre-existing and new knowledge. The theme of marketing reflects 3 key areas including differentiation of value-added products, customer experience, and the value of word of mouth and social media marketing. The networking theme reflects the value of professional and community networking and connecting with family and friends. The findings of this case study may have implications for positive social and economic change. Farmers who sustain their operations and remain financially viable contribute to the local economy, provide continuing knowledge of agricultural practices to future generations, and contribute to the stability of available food. Providing information on successful value-added strategies used by a group of small farm operators may assist other owners of small farms looking to add value-added products and increase farm income. Doing so could lead to increased employment and a stronger local tax base.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this doctoral study to my father and my brother who were not with me in body during this journey, but I know they were watching over me. When the stress of the journey seemed to close in around me, I would think of them and know how proud they would have been and how they would have encouraged me. Their spirit and the love and support they gave me before they left this earth provided a foundation that keeps me pushing forward to be the best I can be.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies used by business owners, specifically owners of small farms in California's San Joaquin Valley, to sustain small businesses in the 2016 business environment. Small business owners, particularly agricultural business owners, must develop a strategic plan that will keep them competitive as they face internal and external challenges. Section 1 includes the background of the problem, the purpose statement, problem statement, nature of the problem, and the research question. The conceptual framework was based on von Bertalanffy's (1968) general system theory because small business owners, including farmers, face multiple challenges in their attempts to create a sustainable strategy and balance the interactions between internal and external forces. Section 1 also includes operational definitions as well as the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. In this section, I identify the significance of the study and conclude with a thorough review of the professional and academic literature related to the study.

Background of the Problem

As a result of the 3-year economic downturn which began in December 2007, the United States lost over 8 million jobs, the largest loss in the post-World War II era (Fairlie, 2013). A recession causes the negative effect of business closures (Fairlie, 2013), which also affect the number of small farm operators who play a major role in U.S. agriculture production (Alonso, 2011). In 2011, 96% of U.S. crop farms were family farming operations (Hoppe, 2014; MacDonald, Korb, & Hoppe, 2013) that generated over 80% of the total value of U.S. agricultural production (O'Donoghue et al., 2011).

The contribution of small business to the United States economy overall, and local economies specifically, creates an urgency for small business entrepreneurs to gain knowledge on how to sustain their businesses. Small farmers, like other small business owners, must differentiate themselves to sustain their businesses, and one way to accomplish differentiation is for them to establish a niche market through the creation of a value-added opportunity (Jang & Klein, 2011). Conventional farming practices in American agriculture are under pressure, creating new challenges for small farm operators (Jordan & Warner, 2010). Changing market demands and new technologies impact both farm and non-farm businesses in their strategic planning (Jasra, Khan, Hunjra, Rehman, & Rauf, 2011; O'Donoghue et al., 2011). Farmers have the potential to improve their position in the market by adding value-added products to their business strategies (Alonso, 2011) in addition to providing additional revenue streams (Connolly & Klaiber, 2014).

Problem Statement

California's small businesses employed one-half of the state's private workforce in 2013 (U.S. Small Business Administration [U.S. SBA], 2015). Small businesses fail at a rate of 50% within the first 5 years, and about 33% survive 10 years or more, with little differences across states or industries (U.S. SBA, 2014). The general business problem is that some small business owners, including farmers, are negatively affected by high failure rates within their first 5 years of operation. The specific business problem is that some owners of small farming operations lack strategies needed to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used by some owners of small farming operations to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The specific population consisted of three small business owners farming on 179 acres or less in the California San Joaquin Valley counties of Fresno, Kings, and Tulare. These business owners had continuously farmed and operated a value-added agricultural business for at least 5 years. This study may lead to positive social change by equipping farmers with information on value-added marketing opportunities that may provide new ways to connect with local communities. Study findings may also inform new entrepreneurs of the strategies and knowledge they need to sustain their value-added businesses more than 5 years, which may help lower failure rates among small agricultural businesses and stabilize employment.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative method to conduct this research. Qualitative research provides researchers the opportunity to assess practices through limited, but carefully-explored cases (Szyjka, 2012). Qualitative researchers uses how and why questions to gain an understanding of strategies such as those I explored—the strategies small farmers used to offer value-added products. Quantitative methods are a way of acquiring generalizable knowledge and applying the information to a broad population by identifying the relationships between independent and narrowly defined variables (Szyjka, 2012). Researchers use mixed method research to explore organizational issues by blending qualitative and quantitative elements (Bansal & Corely, 2012; Venkatesh, Brown, &

Bala, 2013). The purpose of this study was to gather new insights on entrepreneurial strategies in a specialized industry, which required more than collecting quantitative data alone or as part of a mixed method process.

Phenomenological researchers focus on searching for clarity about the same lived experience shared by multiple individuals (Bevan, 2014). Researchers use ethnography to investigate and understand (a) specific societal issues, (b) the interrelationship between people and their environments based on the cultural norms, and (c) the society in which they live (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013). A case study design allows researchers to explore the how and why, and to obtain details and perspective concerning a situation (Yin, 2014). The case study design was the most appropriate for my exploration of the specific business problem, because I sought to identify strategies for value-added production, and did not intend to evaluate cultures or ethnic groups.

Research Question

The research question for this study was, “What strategies do owners of small farming operations use to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years?”

Interview Questions

1. What prompted you to expand your operation to include a value-added product to your operation?
 - a. What other options did you consider before finalizing your decision?
 - b. How did family legacy, climate, economic, and/or legal issues influence your decision?

- c. What process did you use to develop and implement strategies for your value-added operation?
2. What strategies worked well for your value-added operation?
3. What strategies did not work well for your value-added operation?
4. How did you modify or adapt strategies during their implementation to improve the success of your value-added operation?
5. What other information about value-added production would you like to share?

Conceptual Framework

System theory served as the conceptual framework for this study since it provided the framework for evaluating business strategies. Von Bertalanffy introduced the idea of a general system theory in scientific exploration as early as the 1930s, but later emphasized the importance of evaluating systems from an historical perspective. Major tenets of system theory include the ideas that the order or organization of a system transcends its parts, that independent parts of an organization form a collective whole (von Bertalanffy, 1972), and that interactions between parts are dynamic and nonlinear (Suter et al., 2013).

Morgeson, Mitchell, and Dong (2015) emphasized that events affecting an organization may occur inside or outside the organization and may have a direct or indirect impact on behaviors and organizational outcomes. Von Bertalanffy (1972) described internal aspects as organizational in nature, and external influences as environmental in nature. The business environment consists of political, social, and economic aspects that require leaders to have sufficient knowledge to balance

interactions between the business and the environment to sustain the operation of the business (Rice, 2013).

System theory, as posited by Adams, Hester, Bradley, Meyers, and Keating (2014), was the appropriate lens for this study, as farmers face external political, economic, technological, legal, and environmental barriers, creating the need to find new opportunities to sustain their business in spite of internal and external factors beyond their control (McElwee & Smith, 2012).

Operational Definitions

I used the following terms in my research on small business strategies for sustaining agricultural businesses through value-added products.

Business failure: The inability of a business to achieve its goals, resulting in a loss of capital, which prohibits sustainability of the operation (Ucbasaran, Shepher, Lockett, & Lyon, 2012).

Coaching: The support structure that creates an interpersonal relationship with start-up entrepreneurs, assisting them in developing skills through learning and problem solving (Audet & Couteret, 2012).

Entrepreneur: A person who establishes and manages a business and is willing to take a risk in order to achieve growth and profit (Kaur & Bains, 2013).

SCORE: A nonprofit association funded with state and federal funds comprised of trained volunteer business counselors who provide counseling to entrepreneurs and business owners (Forster-Holt, 2013).

Small business: An independently owned and operated for profit business not

dominant in its field, employing less than 500 people (SBA, 2014).

Small farm: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a small farm as having 179 acres or less available for crop production (United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service [USDA, NASS], 2014).

Valley Small Business Development Corporation (VSBDC): A nonprofit, public benefit small business development corporation serving 12 counties in the California San Joaquin Valley. It provides small businesses and family farms with increased access to capital through a variety of direct and guaranteed loan programs (VSBDC, n.d.).

Value-added producer: An agricultural producer who owns the raw agricultural commodity and changes the physical state to generate a new product (United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development [USDA, RD], 2016).

Value-added product: The result of the production of a product that enhances the value of the product (e.g., fruit to jam), changes a product's physical state to generate more revenue for the producer of the commodity or product (e.g., corn to ethanol), or creates an expanded market and increased income (USDA, RD, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

A doctoral study or dissertation is recorded research rooted in a well thought out report that is open to the public (Shipman, 2014). For the public to gain a perspective from the researcher's view, the researcher must identify assumptions regarding his or her discipline as well as the constraints and boundaries of the research or study (Shipman, 2014).

Assumptions

Assumptions provide an opportunity to explore personal experiences related to the topic and identify personal views that should be set aside to avoid bias in analyzing information (Merriam, 2014). My first assumption for this study was that each study participant would be honest and straightforward in his or her responses. I also assumed that the participants would be able and willing to provide adequate information, including documents needed for my case study.

Limitations

Limitations of a study are any weaknesses or shortcomings that may likely affect the study (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013). Some limitations for this study included the potential for participant bias and the possible inability of each participant to accurately recall or identify what contributed to his or her success. Another limiting consideration was whether the interviewees might feel intimidated by the interview process and not feel comfortable providing complete or accurate responses to all of the questions. Szyjka (2012) stated that qualitative findings may be exclusive to a specifically identified situation, yet qualitative research is effective in dealing with complex issues and challenges. The conclusions and insights obtained by this research may be transferable to other similar businesses.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries or restrictions of the study that preserve the scope of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The primary scope of this study was small business cases with single or multiple owners farming 179 acres or less in the

California San Joaquin Valley counties of Fresno, Kings, and Tulare who continuously farmed and operated a value-added business related to agricultural products for at least 5 years prior to this study. The data collection was limited to three business cases, each representing a different value-added product or products, to identify strategies that might be common to all businesses and those that were unique to a particular business.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used by some owners of small farming operations to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Knowledge gained from this study may improve the ability of some small farm owners to improve their business strategies to sustain their agricultural businesses in California's San Joaquin Valley through value-added products.

Contribution to Business Practice

Agricultural production requires farm owners to be flexible and have the ability to adapt to external factors, especially weather and market demands. Farm owners must strive to be efficient and innovative (MacDonald, 2014). Due to economic, social, and political pressures, small farmers in the United States struggle to sustain their operations, creating the need to develop alternative farm enterprises (Barbieri, 2013). Some of the pressures include (a) changing market demands, (b) increasing economies of scale in production, (c) environmental regulations, and (d) weather variables.

Inwood and Sharp (2012) defined multiple adaptation strategies used by farmers and farm families during the United States farm crisis of the 1980s to overcome falling commodity prices. These included entrepreneurial stacking or creation of complementary

enterprises, including value-added activities (Inwood & Sharp, 2012). In this study, I identified strategies that some farmers used to successfully sustain their farming operations and continue to contribute to the local economy through value-added activities.

Implications for Social Change

Small businesses created by entrepreneurs provide avenues for initiating and promoting activities that contribute to maintaining economic and technological growth (Kaur & Bains, 2013). Farmers and rural entrepreneurs play a key role in community economies, so the trend of declining independent farm operators creates a concern among local, state, and federal agencies that the loss of knowledge and experience of agricultural practices may result in food production challenges (Alonso, 2011) and potential food shortages both locally and globally. The results of this study may provide owners of small farming operations examples of strategies used to add value-added products to their business in order to continue to contribute to the wealth and sustainability of their connected communities..

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The literature review is one specific stage of the research process that contributes to the foundation of academic writing (Seuring & Gold, 2012). The research question and problem statement provided the focus for the literature review. The problem statement refers to the lack of strategies that contribute to the sustainable management of value-added agricultural businesses beyond 5 years from inception. Over the course of the

review process, additional topics emerged that expanded the review beyond the research question.

In what follows, I review literature regarding the conceptual framework I used for the study, and specifically focus on current applications of the theory. In my review of the history of entrepreneurship, I draw on the literature to define entrepreneurship and provide a brief overview of entrepreneurship and family farming through the ages. The literature review encompasses information about farmers as entrepreneurs in the United States, followed by a section on strategic planning and management. A discussion of the characteristics of entrepreneurs and value-added strategies concludes the literature review.

Farmers need to maximize their returns, which may mean producing different crops or adding value by preparing them in various forms, which may be a positive alternative for many growers (Alonso, 2011). Lofstrom, Bates, and Parker (2014) emphasized that the self-employed represent a diverse group of individuals and skill levels, ranging from casual laborers to highly specialized or educated professionals. Shane (2012) suggested there has been an increased understanding of the entrepreneurial process amongst farmers, but a deficit remains regarding their understanding of how business ideas correlate with the entrepreneurial decision to pursue specific opportunities. Many opportunities exist to develop value-added products, but information is limited regarding the decision-making process needed to develop those specific opportunities (Alonso, 2011).

Journal Articles, Research Documents, and Books

This literature review consisted of peer-reviewed articles primarily published between 2012 and 2016, within the 5-year period of the study completion date of 2016. *Ulrich's Periodical Directory* served as a tool for verifying that sources cited in the literature review were peer-reviewed. Other literature I reviewed included authoritative books, seminal works, and government resources relating to the topic of small businesses, entrepreneurship, value-added producers, and the relationship of small business and agriculture to economic growth in California's San Joaquin Valley. A variety of database resources provided access to most of the articles including ProQuest, ABI/INFORMS Global, Business Source Complete, and Google Scholar.

The literature review includes 103 citations from current peer-reviewed articles dated 2012-2016, 11 authoritative government sources, and 2 books published since 2012. The literature review includes 14 citations from peer-reviewed articles, 14 authoritative government sources, and 1 book published prior to 2012, for a total of 134 sources.

Table 1

Count of References used in Doctoral Study Proposal Literature Review

Literature Review Source Content			
	Total	Total less than 5 years old at graduation date	% (within 5 years of 2016)
Peer-reviewed journals	117	103	88%
Books	3	2	66%
Government websites	14	11	78%
Total	134	116	87%

Research Framework

System theory served as the conceptual framework for this study given that it provides a framework for evaluating business strategies. Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1972) reflected on the introduction of the idea of general system theory in the late 1920s, emphasizing that if the term “organized entities” replaced the original term “organism” in his explanation of “the system theory of the organism,” then system theory could be applicable to social groups, personality, or technological devices. Von Bertalanffy (1972) emphasized that the general system theory should find use in a broader scheme, not just as a technical or mathematical theory, just as behavior theory applies to everything from bird watching to neurophysiological theories.

Entrepreneurship is largely about innovation and is a complex process that is multidisciplinary in nature, meaning that many parts affect the process (Qian, Acs, & Stough, 2012). System theory provided me a conceptual framework to gain insights into why small businesses succeed, and a lens through which to view multidisciplinary systems and related problems (Adams, Hester, Bradley, Meyers, & Keating, 2012).

Moeller and Valentinov (2012) stated that system theory stresses that organizations consist of 2 overlapping systems, internal and external, and business owners must react to both to maintain their business. In doing so, owners must maintain an open system, as opposed to a mechanistic view of their organizations. Von Bertalanffy (1972) described internal systems as structural or organizational in nature, while external systems are the functional or practical aspects outside the control of the organization. Examples of external factors applicable to small business owners may include (a)

accessibility to coaching or mentoring, (b) the influence of family in the decision-making process, (c) outside financial support or grants, and (d) traditional versus non-traditional marketing challenges (Harris, Gibson, & McDowell, 2014). Based on the findings of Harris, Gibson, and McDowell (2014), I concluded that internal strategies, combined with experience and innovation, contribute to better assessing efficiencies, refining processes, and focusing on financial objectives.

Suter et al. (2013) emphasized that system theory provided a macro and micro model for studying organizational theory, assessing individual and group dynamics, as well as structural relations. The primary role of an entrepreneur or organizational leader is to manage within multiple environments (political, social, and economic) and focus on the complexity of demands posed by each in order to achieve optimal performance and sustain the business (Suter et al., 2013). The primary emphasis of system theory is to gain understanding through a reflection on the relationships of critical factors (Neumann, 2013). Preparing to manage a new venture requires multiple competencies including the ability to monitor internal and external resources (Kaur & Bains, 2013). Decq, Chen, and Doumeingts (2012) emphasized that few systems run independently of their external environment. System theory is therefore an appropriate conceptual framework to explore strategies used to sustain agricultural business by incorporating value-added products.

Another theory I considered but rejected for the study was contingency theory, which was prominent during the early stages of organization theory and has recently gained a renewed interest as researchers have started reintroducing the concept (Van de Ven, Ganco, & Hinings, 2013). Contingency theory is an alternative open system theory

that emphasizes the synergy between the organization and its environment (Islam & Hu, 2012). Contingency theory differs from system theory primarily in its focus on larger, more complex organizations and the influence of internal or external factors affecting the performance of a business or organizational unit (Islam & Hu, 2012; Van de Ven et al., 2013).

Boer et al. (2015) characterized contingency theory as a lens to view an organization and understand how the organizational structure might need to change to sustain in a changing environment in order to attain high performance as an organizational whole. Contingency theory addresses processes and practices in organizational design and context (Boer et al., 2015). Assessing the need to achieve a high-performing organizational structure or organizational design does not fit the model of the small value-added producer looking to augment their operation; therefore, I determined that contingency theory was not a good fit for the study.

Current Application of System Theory

System theory provides a method for explaining a real-world phenomenon (Adams, Hester, Bradley, & Keating, 2014). System theory links propositions that provide an explanation which ultimately increase our understanding of the real-world systems encountered in business and a foundation for understanding systems that are multidisciplinary in nature (Adams et al., 2014).

Von Bertalanffy (1968) emphasized the importance of understanding that scientific theories, specifically the general system theory, are not restrictive to science, but valid for systems in general. Von Bertalanffy (1968) specified that the mathematical

approach followed in general system theory is not its only use, and emphasized the value of integrating the theory into natural and social sciences. Adams, Hester, Bradley, and Keating (2014) posited that system theory provides a lens for system practitioners, and serves as a method for viewing problems in multidisciplinary systems. Moeller and Valentinov (2012) applied the system theory lens in their discussion of the pressure felt by organizations when their environment suffers from stress and uncertainty. The system theory continues to serve as the foundation for understanding systems in most major fields of science and across a variety of disciplines (Adams et al., 2012), including this study.

History of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is the practice of starting a new business, which serves as an opportunity for knowledgeable individuals with creative ideas to contribute to economic growth (Acs, Audretsch, Braunerhjelm, & Carlsson, 2012; Yang & Chandra, 2013). Entrepreneurship is a human capability that has and will manifest in different ways based on events in time (Casson & Casson, 2014). Entrepreneurship is a relatively new term that has been used to describe activities of ancient civilizations that created novel commercial strategies to manage properties as well as maintaining provisions and armed forces dating as far back as the early second millennium B.C. (Landes, Mokyr, & Baumol, 2012). Continuous records of European activity exist from about 1200 A.D. (Casson & Casson, 2014). Civic records, royal records, and records of estate management provide early insights into business practices that demonstrate the entrepreneurial spirit has influenced business growth and development for centuries (Casson & Casson, 2014).

The Roman Catholic Church heavily influenced entrepreneurship in the 13th century. Bishops, abbots and priors engaged in selling wool, setting up local markets, and participating in the pilgrimage trade, which contributed to the economic growth of the 14th century (Casson & Casson, 2014). Perhaps one of the earliest examples of an entrepreneur is Marco Polo, the merchant-adventurer who contracted with a capitalist to fund his commercial voyages (Arthur, Hisrich, & Cabrera, 2012). England experienced significant economic growth early in the 14th century with the expansion of trading locations, more diverse commodities, and more opportunities to increase sales and revenue (Casson & Casson, 2014). In spite of wars and disease, Casson and Casson (2014) posited that a foundation for the growth of trade occurred during this late medieval period of the English economy when entrepreneurial activity of individuals, families, and business partnerships worked together to seek solutions to technological and institutional problems.

Entrepreneurial innovations contributed to improved agricultural practices, reduced food costs, and improved availability of food to a growing population (Casson & Casson, 2014). Larger farms and estates provided food for a growing population, at the same time canals were developed, providing transportation routes for materials and finished products, ultimately providing the foundation for the first Industrial Revolution in England and other parts of Europe (Casson & Casson, 2014; Trew, 2014). Richard Cantillon, an 18th century economist, observed people in villages of all sizes and wrote about merchants he observed as they made their living by buying products and merchandise at larger markets, and then transporting those items to smaller villages and

increasing the price to residents who did not have access to those products (Murphy, 1755/2015). Cantillon describes the very essence of the entrepreneurial spirit.

During the 18th century, industrialization occurred throughout the United States, which drove entrepreneurs such as Eli Whitney and Thomas Edison to seek capital to finance inventions (Arthur et al., 2012). The United States experienced rapid economic growth during the period following the Civil War. Entrepreneurs played a significant role in technological improvements, becoming admired individuals in society during the late 19th century (Landes et al., 2012).

The 20th century brought significant changes to the role of entrepreneurs, especially in the United States, with the impact of large corporations and society transitioning to a knowledge-based era. Entrepreneurs had to adapt to major economic and financial changes, technological changes, and a new global economy (Landes et al., 2012). By the mid-20th century, entrepreneurs transitioned from inventors to innovators and began to see greater personal gains (Arthur et al., 2012) as large firms began acquiring new ideas from outside sources rather than internal research and development teams (Lamoreaux, Sokoloff, & Sutthiphisal, 2013).

Romero et al. (2015) emphasized the transition from the 20th century to the 21st century brought changes to society in general, including how people socialize, buy, sell, and glean information. Twenty-first-century economic growth, according to Arthur et al. (2012), has a direct correlation to an increased knowledge-based environment. Nonaka, Kodama, Hirose, and Kohlbacher (2014) posited innovation stems from knowledge and Acs et al. (2012) emphasized that knowledge is a key source of economic growth and

identified entrepreneurs as a mechanism for facilitating knowledge.

History of family farming. The history of the practice of farming can be traced back over 10,000 years across most developing countries (Altieri, Funes-Monzolte, & Petersen, 2012). Even on a global scale, Altieri et al. (2012) posited that small farmers contribute to rural livelihoods, and local and national economies. Food supply has a direct effect on population growth, emphasizing the importance of an agrarian producing population, as seen in the Mayan civilization case where a direct connection exists between the collapse of the civilization and the agricultural failure (Puleston, Tuljapurkar, & Winterhalder, 2014). Family farming is one type of business that merges entrepreneurship with family stakeholders (Philips & Philips, 2012), largely because the family home and memories are intertwined with the farming business (Kirkpatrick, 2013). Kardel (2014) made a significant observation when he noted that as farming families prepare to pass the farming operation to the next generation, the farming model might experience innovative changes to support more family members.

Historically, farming has been a boom and bust type industry, driven by: (a) World War I and II, (b) Federal Reserve driven interest rates, (c) government subsidies, and (d) climate changes (Boehlje, Gloy, & Henerson, 2012). Inwood and Sharp (2012) posited that farm household and structure, and government policy have a dynamic relationship. Inwood's and Sharp's findings correlated with the theory that internal and external forces influence the sustainability of the small farm business.

Farmers and farm households in the United States face challenges in trying to balance economic, social, and family pressures in their endeavors to persist in the

farming lifestyle (Bowman & Zilberman, 2013; Inwood, Clark, & Bean, 2013). Unlike other non-farm businesses, farm succession and inheritance planning are significant factors that affect the persistence of the farming enterprise from generation to generation (Inwood, Clark, & Bean, 2013). Passing on the farm to another generation demonstrates that family farming operations are a way of life, a social value not necessarily tied to economics (Inwood, Clark, & Bean, 2013).

Farmers as Entrepreneurs in the United States

Farmers are entrepreneurs generating income from a variety of economic activities and, like other entrepreneurs, provide benefits to their community (Alonso, 2011). The role of farming in the United States plays a key role in rural communities, contributing to the economy, health and overall well-being of the communities in which they live and work (Alonso, 2011). Christensen (2014) emphasized from her findings that farmers value environmental responsibility and the social well-being of the local communities they serve. The role of farming in the United States plays a key role in rural communities, contributing to the economy, health and overall well-being of the communities in which they live and work (Alonso, 2011).

Farmers in the United States and other countries face new challenges in food safety and socioecological concerns as conventional farming systems face climatic, policy, and market issues, forcing farmers to look for innovative farming systems (Reganold et al., 2011). Many consumers seek environmental and social accountability, animal welfare, worker safety, and resource conservation, a driving force behind the value-added products such as the local and organic labels (Reganold et al., 2011).

Agricultural land in California decreased by 8% between the 2002 and 2007 census (USDA, NASS, 2007) and only gained 1% between the 2007 and 2012 census (USDA, NASS, 2014). O'Donoghue et al. (2011) emphasized that in spite of an overall reduction of land since 2002, production is expanding, largely due to improved risk management, changes in government policies, improved use of technology, and production practices. Specialization is another method of improving production; farmers specialize in fewer commodities, which enable them to become experts in production, enhanced ability to stay up to date on related technologies, and improve crop management skills (O'Donoghue et al., 2011). Market volatility and economic uncertainty of the 21st century equates into a risk management challenge for farmers as swings in farm income, driven by external factors, affect farm sector wealth (Boehlje, Gloy, & Henderson, 2012).

Agricultural size determination and statistics. Small business size determination varies in definition, driven by the Small Business Act and other legislative guidelines with oversight from the (U.S. SBA) U.S. Small Business Administration administrator (U.S. Small Business Association, 2014) for nonfarm industries. Value, capital stock, or number of employees is commonly used measurements in determination of size standard for nonfarm industries (Sumner, 2014).

Farm size classification is determined by the USDA National Agricultural Statics Services (USDA, NASS) and may be based on income or acreage (USDA, NASS, 2014). The definition of farm size is complex when evaluating programs and funding. The USDA, for the purpose of the U.S. Census, defines a farm as a tract of land cultivated for

the purpose of agricultural production and a small farm as having 179 acres or less, or earns \$50,000 gross income or less per year (USDA, NASS, 2014). Seeking out small farming businesses involved in value-added production farming less than 180 acres is reasonable for this study since that is an established criterion from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA, NASS, 2014). According to the 2012 Ag Census, the State of California is comprised of 63,504 farms with less than 180 acres. Fresno County encompasses 4,598 small farms, Tulare County 4,057, and Kings County 736 farms, all representing cultivation of 1 to 179 acres (USDA, NASS, 2014).

Survival rates. Hamrouni and Akkari (2012) investigated the life cycle of a company based on the Miller and Friesen (1982) five-phase model. These phases were (a) birth, (b) growth, (c) maturity, (d) decline, and (e) revival. Similarly, Gorshkova, Trifonov, and Poplavskaya (2014) identified four stages of (a) babyhood, (b) growth, (c) maturity, and (d) aging. Either model is equally appropriate to small business and farming operations, with the revival likely focusing on value-added products to increase revenue or build stability. Gorshkova, Trifonov, and Poplavskaya (2014) defined a young company as one that did not exceed 6 years of existence. While numerous theories and models explain the life cycle process, many share common themes, each suggesting a series of stages (Hanks, 2015). The U.S. Small Business Association (2014) reported survival rates for new businesses have changed little over time, with approximately one-half of new businesses surviving 5 years or more and approximately one-third surviving 10 years or more. The probability of survival increases with each year of operation (U.S. Small Business Association, 2014).

Agriculture as small business. In spite of some unique aspects of farming, agricultural production is much like any other operation or business with the common goal of creating an effective strategic plan to gain profitability in the market through value-added products (Jang & Klein, 2011). Small farmers are not able to compete in the global markets the same way as industrialized agriculture, so small farmers, like small business owners, must differentiate themselves and establish a niche market, or join forces through a cooperative arrangement (Jang & Klein, 2011). Walkerman, Bowles, Cartland, and Ross (2015) posited that challenges exist when integrating small-scale farmers into markets, but if achieved can have implications for rural employment and larger economic growth.

California's San Joaquin Valley is in the southern part of California's Central Valley, comprised of 18 counties and home to the most economically important activity in the state, agriculture (Bacon, Getz, Kraus, Montemegro, & Holland, 2012). For at least 100 years, agriculture in the Central Valley has existed on small and large farms (Bacon et al., 2012). Small farm enterprises, 179 acres or less, have continued to decline in California as demonstrated by a 90% reduction in small farm ownership between 1997-2012 (USDA, NASS, 2012). Due to the variety of agricultural products grown in the Central Valley and the longer growing season, more opportunities exist for value-added products than areas restricted to shorter growing seasons and fewer crop options.

Fresno County continued as the leading agricultural county out of 58 California counties in 2012, generating \$6.59 billion in gross value of agricultural production despite a 3.3% decrease from 2011(California Department of Food and Agriculture

[CDFA], 2014). Tulare County ranked second in 2011 and third in 2012, Kings County maintained an eighth place ranking both years (CDFA, 2014). The gross value of production includes all farm production, including products sold through usual marketing channels and those used on the farm where they are produced (CDFA, 2014). Value-added agriculture opportunities abound in California's San Joaquin Valley due to the diversity of crops grown; with over 350 different commercial crops currently grown in the area (Fresno County Farm Bureau [FCFB], 2014).

The Fresno area is home to a local SCORE office, an SBA office, the Valley Small Business Development Center, and the Small Business Development and Incubator, all contributing to small business development in the county. A significant need exists for small business owners to differentiate themselves, to find a niche for their product, and to understand the value of value-added agricultural commodities to compete effectively in the market (Jang & Klein, 2011). Entrepreneurs must evaluate new value-added or niche markets for their products, make strategic decisions to reduce costs, and maintain innovations to remain competitive and ultimately contribute to the local economy (Jang & Klein, 2011).

The U.S. Farm Bill and the USDA. The Farm Bill, renewed by the U.S. Congress about every 5 to 7 years, is a major policy determinant for agriculture in the United States (McGranahan, Brown, Schulte, & Tyndall, 2013). The U.S. Farm Bill has an 80-year history of establishing agricultural and food policies from commodity programs supporting farmers to forestry, credit provisions, renewable energy, and crop insurance affecting American farmers as well as producers and consumers on a global

scale (Outlaw, 2013).

The 2014 Farm Bill revised and consolidated existing grant programs under the Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act of 1976, providing \$30 million in funding to support direct marketing projects; half of the funds will be available for farmer-to-consumer direct marketing projects (Dept. of Agriculture: AMS, 2016). The other \$15 million will be available to support local and regional food enterprise projects, targeting improving and expanding businesses such as domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, and agritourism activities (Dept. of Agriculture: AMS, 2016). The farm bill authorizes the USDA to function, and more importantly to this study, provides funding for the USDA Rural Development Value-Added Agricultural Product Grants (Johnson & Monke, 2014).

American agriculture expanded geographically and developed technologically during the 19th and 20th centuries (McGranahan, Brown, Schulte, & Tyndall, 2013). In spite of the focus on industrialization of the food system, the Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act of 1976 promoted the development of direct marketing of agricultural commodities from farmers to consumers (Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act, 1976), creating the opportunity for value-added products to increase farm income. The USDA created the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) to provide funding and support for local food projects and to promote direct marketing (USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, 2015).

A service funded by the USDA, known as the Cooperative Extension Service, hires extension service educators, experts located throughout the United States, that assist

agricultural producers with research-based information about their product (USDA, 2016). Agricultural extension personnel play a key role in providing information to farmers on sustainable agricultural education (Ali, Altarawneh, & Altahat, 2012).

Federal Crop Insurance Program. United States farm policies continually evolve, and as such, debates about priorities and policies also evolve, but at the center of discussions is risk protection, a primary rationale for justification of federal farm programs (Coble & Barnett, 2013). Agriculture ranks as the 6th most productive industry in the United States, largely due to the ability to invest in new technology, which is possible because of financial support from federal farm programs such as reduced costs for crop insurance (Kirwan, 2014). The federal crop insurance program is a safety net in the risk management for farmers (Glauber, 2013). The basic premise of the federal crop insurance program is it provides insurance products that protect growers from price and yield risks (Langpap & Wu, 2014). Since its inception in 1938, the United States federal crop insurance program continually increased to take a prominent role in United States agriculture policy and as of 2012 represents the most prominent farm policy instrument (Goodwin & Smith, 2013). The subsidized premiums paid by farmers in the United States federal crop insurance program provide protection for hazards arising from widespread natural disasters (Goodwin & Smith, 2013). The federal crop insurance program is most popular with and effective for, corn, wheat, and soybean producers, rather than rice or cotton producers (Glauber, 2013). Risks such as weather and diseases may cause loss of production in addition to causing fluctuation in the agricultural supply and demand (Kirwan, 2014). It is important to note that larger operations have a greater liability than

small farms, but subsidies are proportional to the liability (Shields, 2015).

Value-added farms and economic growth. Aguinis and O'Boyle (2014) acknowledged that farming and manufacturing are important to the economies of the United States and other countries. Small farmers make a significant contribution to economic growth and viable agriculture (Walkerman, Bowles, Cartland, & Ross, 2015). Farmers look for innovative farming systems and technologies to appease consumers seeking environmental and social accountability through value-added foods (Reganold et al., 2011). Alonso and O'Neill (2011) emphasized that farmers who focus on value-added products provide additional products or alternative foods that may contribute to the local community and positively affect the socio-economic environment. Rimal et al. (2016) stated that farmers selling locally are more likely to spend locally, creating potential for improving local or regional economies. Many small farmers are too small to compete in the wholesale market and therefore rely on direct marketing methods (Rimal et al., 2016). Harrison et al. (2013) identified direct sales of farm products to consumers as critical to the viability of small to medium-size farms.

Value-added producer grants. Innovative agricultural enterprises need to generate more income from existing land (Jordan et al., 2013). Emerging forms of agriculture and land use are spawning a wide range of new agricultural enterprises, which must be adoptable by agricultural producers and appealing to rural communities (Jordan et al., 2013). Value-added products are one type of enterprise small farmers may consider for sustaining their farming operation and generating additional income from existing land.

Value-added producer grants (VAPG) offered by the USDA Rural Development Agency provide financial assistance to agricultural producers who desire to generate new products or create or expand market opportunities as a means to increase income (USDA, Rural Development, 2012). Funding opportunities are not limited to independent producers but are available to producer groups, farmer/rancher cooperatives, or majority-controlled producer-based ventures (USDA, Rural Development, 2016). Grant funds provide working capital for a variety of agricultural-related projects such as forestry, fishing, bio-based (non-food) projects, processing or marketing of locally produced agricultural food products, and anaerobic digester projects (USDA, Rural Development, 2012). The program requires an even division of funding for projects focused on local and regional supply networks, beginning and/or socially disadvantaged farmers, and funds for mid-tier value chain projects (USDA, Rural Development, 2013). Value Added Producer Grant funding for California totaled \$6,033,281 over 3 fiscal years, funding 38 value-added producers (USDA, Rural Development, 2013).

Strategic Planning and Management

Globalization combined with internet technology opportunities open doors to competition, creating the necessity for organizations to seek new markets and new innovative products to sustain growth (Tassabehji & Isherwood, 2014). Numerous books and articles about strategic planning and strategic management related to large organizations are on bookshelves and in archives. Song, Zhao, Arend, and Im (2015) emphasized that strategic planning positively affects profitability and Murimbika and Urban (2014) emphasized the importance of assessing existing as well as future needs

that will contribute to sustainability through competitiveness. Conversely, Chwolka and Raith (2012) emphasized that whether a business venture is successful or not is not contingent on the existence of a business plan.

Strategic planning. Strategic planning provides the direction for the organization and guides the coordination of activities, first at a corporate level, then at a functional level (Wu, Tseng, & Chiu, 2012). The basic functional levels for consideration are (a) management, (b) marketing, (c) human resource management, (d) research and development, and (e) finance or other areas that correspond to the functional areas of the organization (Wu, Tseng, & Chiu, 2012). Harris, Gibson, and McDowell (2014) posited small business starts begin with limited resources, but effective strategic planning may likely reduce the effect of such shortages. Small business owners who understand the business environment are better able to determine appropriate strategic choices for their business (Harris, Gibson, & McDowell). In earlier work, Mintzberg (1984) also discussed external forces that may influence the life cycle of a business but emphasized that internal forces are more orderly and should allow for more predictability, even in the face of external forces. In spite of different approaches, an overarching theme exists that supports the need for a strategic plan to be competitive and sustain the management of the new business venture. Entrepreneurs should also consider leadership development, which should include a development of values and beliefs that support the leadership plan and business strategy (Mirocha, Bents, LaBrosse, & Rietow, 2013).

Forster, Parrer, and Wöss (2013) stated that start-ups operate in a different organizational environment than established companies and often lack the early-stage

focus on the strategic planning of the product-market mixture that has a positive influence on growth. Overall, start-up entrepreneurs lack an understanding of the value of long-term strategic planning and change management, instead focusing on short-term and reactive change-processes (Forster, Parrer, & Wöss, 2013). Farmers value customer service and financial and marketing management as competencies, but also recognize the need for additional support in finances and marketing when diversifying existing farming operations (Phelan & Sharpley, 2012).

Strategic planning in the 21st century involves assessing the external socioeconomic environment, and the internal organizational environment, both important attributes of a business model (Boons & Ludeke-Freund, 2013). Some examples of the socioeconomic environment include financial markets, along with cultural aspects such as community spirit and stakeholder or shareholder engagement (Boons & Ludeke-Freund, 2013). The internal environment includes factors such as business size, life cycle stages, organizational features, market role, and value or importance of goals, but entrepreneurs must pay attention to both internal and external factors and adjust to the dynamics of each (Dragnic, 2014). Subjective evaluation of goals and performance based on the strategic plan and both internal and external factors plays a significant role in growth and survival (Dragnic, 2014).

Porter (1980) emphasized the importance of competitive advantage and strategic positioning in the endeavor to sustain any organization. Competitive strategy provides the framework to strengthen a company's position through an analysis of the following twocompetitive (external) forces (a) bargaining power of suppliers, (b) threat of substitute

products, (c) threat of new entrants, (d) bargaining power of buyers, and (d) rivalry among existing firms (Porter, 1980). Based on Porter's theory of competitive advantage, any activity in the supply chain that falls within the strategic function can generate competitive advantages (de Carvalho et al., 2015). Farmers strategies for pursuing new marketing opportunities include: (a) direct sales to consumers, (b) direct marketing to retail outlets, (c) creating and selling some type of value-added product, or (d) promoting visits to the farming operation (U.S. Ag Census, 2012).

Farmers may sell some or all of their products to retail outlet owners who resale the product to consumers through (a) grocery stores, (b) schools, (c) restaurants, or (d) hospitals (U.S. Ag Census, 2012). Direct sales to consumers may include selling at a roadside stand or farmers market, or providing the opportunity for consumers to pick their own produce (U.S. Ag Census, 2012). The important note is that direct consumer sales in 2012 in the United States exceeded \$1 billion and \$169.9 million in California during the same period (U.S. Ag Census, 2012). The United States sales represents an 8% increase in sales over a 2-year period (U.S. Ag Census, 2012), which demonstrates a growing opportunity for value-added producers in the United States.

Producers focusing on direct sales of produce or a value-added product with a limited shelf life are more likely to take advantage of geographical proximity of field to market and direct sales to consumers (Mount, 2012). Those producing value-added products with a longer shelf life may consider marketing on a larger scale, and capitalizing on the value and notoriety of the region (Christensen, Kenney, & Patton, 2015). Wines, for example, are a value added product commonly referenced by the region

of their origin, Bordeaux, Tuscany, or the Napa Valley in California (Christensen, Kenney, & Patton, 2015).

McElwee and Smith (2012) acknowledged external barriers to diversification exist for small business owners and farmers that are outside of the owner's control. The barriers entrepreneurs face are a mixture of financial, technological, legal, political, and environmental in nature (McElwee & Smith, 2012), and each influences the variables and parameters of the organization. Farming is diverse and faces external barriers such as land availability and product or output limitations due to soil types and climatic challenges (Alston & Pardey, 2014). In spite of barriers and challenges, farmers provide necessary food for humans and livestock, fuel, and fiber, which contribute to local and global economies (Alston & Pardey, 2014).

Internal system. The internal system as described by von Bertalanffy (1972) is structural or organizational in nature. Internal components, according to Tari, Heras-Saizarbitoria, and Dick (2014), on the high level relate to processes, procedures, and people; and the development of appropriate plans to improve these components (Tari, Heras-Saizarbitoria, & Dick, 2014). Small businesses must have an adequate business plan to make necessary adjustments based on both the internal and external environments (Boons & Ludeke-Freund, 2013). Boones and Ludeke-Freund (2013) synthesized prior empirical findings, and identified the most valuable components of a sustainable, new venture business model as: (a) the value proposition, reflecting social and economic value; (b) the supply chain, involving suppliers as stakeholders; (c) the customer interface, motivating customers to be socially responsible stakeholders; and (d) the

financial model, reflecting benefits to the organizational leaders, workers, and community.

Researching and preparing a good business model and combining it with a business strategy are key foundational components of the successful business enterprise (Boons & Ludeke-Freund, 2013). Boons and Ludeke-Freund (2013) emphasized the need for a channel for innovations that links production and consumption, and addresses external factors such as stakeholder expectations, which may focus on non-business areas also important to the sustainability of the business. Within the agricultural sector, changes in technology, markets, and consumer demands also factor into their business strategy (O'Donoghue et al., 2011). Farmers face both drivers and constraints in their decision-making process from consumers, stakeholders, and social movements that must be balanced (Reganold et al., 2011).

Small business owners need to recognize the benefit of facilitating systematic business planning, understanding that a business plan encompasses both the market performance and survivability, in addition to the overall process that will likely increase the firm's performance (Chwolka & Raith, 2012). The internal environment analysis should focus on understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the company, a strategy that allows for adjustment and alignment between the two environments (Dragnic, 2014). With advancement opportunities declining, more workers are seeking to start their businesses, and to be successful; new entrepreneurs must create a road map, a business plan that is a living document, updated, and reviewed continually (Haag, 2013). Harris, Gibson, and McDowell (2014) emphasized that knowledge about the specific business

and an understanding of the business environment, available resources, and overall firm capabilities will contribute to developing the best strategic choices for their business.

O'Donoghue et al. (2011) emphasized that new technologies, managerial techniques, and changes in market demands affect productivity and growth in agriculture. These factors correlate with factors identified as critical in non-farm small business sustainability.

To achieve organizational (internal) competency, small firms must strive to innovate and improve competencies (Alsaaty, 2011). Internal sources require communication and information gathering in an endeavor to receive ideas from employees, managers, or skilled workers through idea meetings, a goal-oriented team, and development of employee strategic thinking (Alsaaty, 2011). Small farmers, like other business owners, must be innovators and able to (a) operate in unpredictable scenarios, (b) manage all dimensions of the business, and (c) focus on production and distribution of new products (Schiuma, 2012).

Internal efficiencies, such as lowering costs without compromising quality, and continuous learning are key capabilities for businesses in a dynamic market (Santos-Vijande et al., 2012). Chwolka and Raith (2012) posited entrepreneurs could avoid poor start-ups with quality planning, and emphasized the higher the quality of planning, the more benefit to the entrepreneur. Changing the farming model from just conventional agriculture is a strategic decision for the manager of the farm business, but the family agenda may be a signification factor in the decision (Hansson, Ferguson, Olofsson, & Rantamaki-Lahtinen, 2013).

External system. External factors or the functional components related to

entrepreneurship comprise any coaching or mentoring, training or formal education, the role of the family as supporting the business decisions, and even customer support. External sources provide information on existing or potential opportunities and entrepreneurs should look to events, trends, organizations, and individuals for information (Alsaaty, 2011). Amel and Akkari (2012) provided further evidence that all start-ups, regardless of location, need managerial training, coaching, appropriate financial planning, and support to survive beyond the first 5 years of business. Cronin-Gilmore (2013) posited that a gap exists in research regarding strategic decisions made that may conflict with the potential success of small business owners.

In a 2011 study, entrepreneurs identified the economy and government regulations as significant external challenges to growth (Monahan, Shah, & Mattare, 2011). Other external factors and strategies the entrepreneur can control focus on customer service and creating appropriate network relationships (Harris, Gibson, & McDowell, 2014). External awareness combined with strategic capabilities is key to farmers engaging in any type diversification to improve the economic viability of the farming operation (McElwee & Smith, 2012). Long-term success for farmers largely rests on the decision of what to produce, influenced by external factors such as market availability, agronomic practices, land quality, and crop season (O'Donoghue et al., 2011). Small business owners face barriers to diversification, and rural entrepreneurs face particular challenges, such as climate change, when considering future business strategies (McElwee & Smith, 2012).

Entrepreneurial education and training are also key external factors that

researchers have identified as contributing to small business success in developed and developing countries (Klyver & Foley, 2012; Saunders, Gray, & Goregaokar, 2014; St-jean & Audet, 2012). Audet and Couteret (2012) emphasized small business coaches or mentors focus on the entrepreneur, providing support for implementing the entrepreneurs own strategy and vision, which are internal structural components. Farmers need to understand the potential for improving their position in the market by expanding value-added products to their business strategy, but limited information is available in academic research to help guide the farmer in this aspect (Alonso, 2011; Chen, 2013).

Management and Leadership

Forster, Parrer, and Wöss (2013) demonstrated start-up entrepreneurs need to develop leadership competencies in methodologies as well as personal skills sooner than later in the business start-up process to build success. Harris, Gibson, and McDowell (2014) indicated that a well-developed strategic plan, combined with appropriate and relative experience, contributes to the success of a small business. Wu, Tseng, and Chiu (2012) focused on Porter's five forces analysis as an example of a framework for business strategy development that will help a business succeed, even in a difficult economy.

Porter (1980) emphasized the importance of competitive advantage and strategic positioning in the endeavor to sustain any organization through a careful analysis of the (a) bargaining power of suppliers, (b) threat of substitute products, (c) threat of new entrants, (d) bargaining power of buyers, and rivalry among existing firms. These external influences not only fit within the bounds of system theory but also are key

components of consideration for a small agricultural producer looking to pursue a value-added product.

Entrepreneurs typically create and develop a new business with limited resources and with no supervisor or organizational structure to instruct them (Glaub, Frese, Fischer, & Hoppe, 2014). Personal initiative and the ability to transform thoughts and ideas into action require an entrepreneur to be a self-starter, proactive, and persistent in overcoming barriers (Glaub et al., 2014). Entrepreneurs are risk takers, motivated individuals, often called extraordinary individuals, making the discussion of leadership appropriate since extraordinary individuals need good leadership skills (McCleskey, 2014). Farmers, based on the findings of Irwin and Poots (2015), work in a high-risk environment, creating the necessity to identify problems and make decisions regarding a variety of situations.

Klyver and Foley (2012), Saunders, Gray, and Goregaokar (2014), and St-jean and Audet (2012) identified the contribution of entrepreneurial education as a key factor in the success of small businesses in developed and developing countries. Anuar, Nasir, Rahman, and Sadek (2013) indicated the importance in problem-solving skills as well as personality traits, self-confidence, information seeking and self-initiative for young entrepreneurs. Farmers desiring to enter the value-added environment need to be familiar with potentially unfamiliar challenges such as legal requirements and investments in money, time, and labor that are different from those involved in the farming side (Alonso, 2011). Management of the value-added part of the business is likely to be very different from traditional farm management, requiring additional training and new knowledge and skills as farm owners strive to supplement regular farming income or find outlets for new

and creative ideas (Alonso & O'Neill, 2011).

Characteristics of Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurial behavior is unique among humans, and these behaviors may differ even among those with the entrepreneurial drive (Carland, Carland, & Carland, 2015). Entrepreneurs originate from a variety of backgrounds but share certain characteristics as they strive to create value from their creative vision (Arthur, Hisrich, & Cabrera, 2012). Success does not come easily, as indicated by the 50% failure rate within the first 5 years, with little differences across states or industries (U.S. Small Business Association, 2014). Successful entrepreneurs demonstrate common success factors such as basic individual characteristic, preexisting knowledge, and suitable mentors, which are further detailed in this section.

Motivation. An entrepreneur's motivation to enter into a new venture may be rooted in a drive to meet physiological needs while other entrepreneurs may seek self-actualization, the highest level identified by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Carland et al., 2015). Maslow (1943) theorized humans possess a hierarchy of needs from a low level of physiological to the highest level of self-actualization. Vlotman and Ballard (2014) used Maslow's hierarchy to emphasize that the lower two tiers represent food-deprived countries, while the upper three tiers represent more food affluent countries. Vlotman and Ballard (2014) posited that farmers at the higher tiers would be most likely to focus on production plans that would better serve the community and the environment. Cizek (2012) emphasized that entrepreneurs are self-motivated, and primarily motivated by financial factors. Cizek's (2012) study also revealed that entrepreneurs valued time with

family time over increased income.

Key knowledge areas. Hamrouni and Akkari (2012) indicated that lack of an entrepreneur's industry/business knowledge was a key factor in failure among small business owners during the first 5 years of operation. Agricultural producers desiring to focus on a niche market may lack awareness as to where to gain funding or how to satisfy funders, and may require assistance seeking funding alternatives (van Auken & Carraher, 2012). Lack of a traditional agricultural background for beginning farmers on small and mid-size farms is likely to translate into a need for training, especially in how to seek capital and insure food safety (Harrison et al., 2013).

Strategies for Success. Jang and Klein (2011) posited that in spite of agricultural production being one of the largest segments of the global economy, small farm enterprises struggle to compete in traditional markets. In spite of small farmers having decreased in numbers, technology, establishing niche markets and product differentiation provides opportunities for them to increase profits (Jang & Klein, 2011). Agricultural production planning, like most production systems, requires an operational plan, which should include factors such as distribution, transportation and storage of inventory in addition to planting and agronomic decisions (Jang & Klein, 2011). Small farm owners must plan and develop the supply chain that best fits their goals, such as Business to Consumer (B2C), direct sales to consumers, and Business to Business (B2B), such as joining a cooperative (Jang & Klein, 2011). Harrison et al. (2013) emphasized direct sales of produce at farmers markets can be critical to small and medium-size farms. Direct sales may occur through farmers markets, roadside stands, or pick-your-own farms and in

California in 2012 direct sales to consumers totaled \$170 million, an 8% increase since 2007 (USDA, NASS, 2014).

Social Networking. Study results of Bolton and Lane (2012) revealed that entrepreneurial characteristics that lead to success included perseverance, risk-taking, and reactivity. Social networking is one proactive method that is important to incorporate because it provides an opportunity to connect with other entrepreneurs as well as prospective customers (Indrupati & Henari, 2013). Entrepreneurial networking is important, but practices differ significantly depending on whether entrepreneurs are part of a mainstream culture or a minority culture (Klyver & Foley, 2012). McElwee and Smith (2012) contended that farmers work within a limited social network, which may be a barrier to effective decision making on diversification options.

Manson, Jordan, Nelson, and Brummel (2014) identified three kinds of network relationships among farmers, each of which represents a specific connection. The first relationship identified by Manson et al. (2014) is a strong-tie network consisting of family and friends who are trusted, and knowledgeable individuals sought out in the early decision-making process. The second relationship Manson et al. (2014) identified is the tie between farmers and USDA extension agency staff who can provide resources and recommendations. The last and third type of network identified by Manson et al. (2014) were the farmer-to-farmer organizations, a channel for making personal contacts.

Another key knowledge area for the 21st century entrepreneur is social networking, which is connecting with other business owners as well as customers and target markets in an economical fashion (Indrupati & Henari, 2012). For example, small

to mid-size farmers are likely to find important social aspects at farmers markets (Harrison et al., 2013). Laursen, Masciarelli, and Prencipe (2012) posited that social interaction provides benefits such as access to channels of local knowledge, providing opportunities for firms to learn jointly and interact with the economic actors. At the individual level, local experience, social ties, and knowledge are important factors for the new entrepreneurial venture (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013). Social networking may also provide farm owners a method for learning about and introducing new technologies (Maertens & Barrett, 2013).

Mentoring. In *The Odyssey*, Homer recorded the story of a mentor relationship, likely one of the earliest mentions of such a relationship of an experienced person guiding or teaching an inexperienced person (St-Jean & Audet, 2012). St-Jean and Audet observed mentoring contributes to an entrepreneur's knowledge about the business world, improving their vision, self-image, and resilience in the face of difficulties. A mentoring relationship means a regular, consistent interaction over time, not controlling, but focused on reflections, reassurances, motivation, and being a confidant (Wilbanks, 2013). Mezirow (1997) stated that adult learners commonly focus on practical, short-term objectives, seeking to gain subject matter mastery, which is indicative of entrepreneurs, reinforcing Wilbanks' (2013) mentor role as one who reassures and guides.

Saunders, Gray, and Goregaokar (2014), and Wilbanks (2013) emphasized time spent with mentors in informal conversations and interaction with social networks as crucial to the development of entrepreneurs. Developing social networks and connections within the local community will contribute to helping entrepreneurs adapt to their

changing environment (Thuong et al., 2013). In the farming community, USDA extension service personnel contribute to educating farmers, consumers, and families on business operations and provide nutrition education and food safety training (USDA, 2016). Entrepreneurial mentors contribute to individual entrepreneurs learning through discussions, explanations and sharing knowledge, but also provide encouragement (St-Jean, 2012). Regular face-to-face meetings have proven to be optimum to success as were the coach's listening skills, empathy towards their protégés, and commitment to the relationship, which must blend with a willingness of the mentee to cooperate (Audet & Couteret, 2012).

Operating a family farm requires a competence-based knowledge for all farming operations, but farm operators must continue to learn to improve operations and increase income (Manevska-Tasevska, 2013). Williams et al. (2012) emphasized that producers with post-secondary educations are more likely to adopt value-added practices than those with only a high school diploma. Since producers with higher education tend to look for value-added opportunities, USDA extension service educators recognize the need to target outreach and training to producers with less education or experience (Williams et al., 2012). Lack of knowledge about funding opportunities and funder requirements, especially a business plan, can limit the availability to necessary capital to enter a niche agricultural market (van Aukin & Carraher, 2012).

Value-added Strategies

Farmers have little control over prices, however they are able to control the degree of information they gather and utilize innovative measures that might contribute to

their sustainability (Micheels & Gow, 2012). Value-added strategies vary, but all focus on an opportunity for producers, especially the small-sized producers, to capture a larger share of consumer funds by developing and processing the products themselves (Hu, Woods, Bastin, Cox, & You, 2011). Many options exist for farm owners to become involved in value-added strategies, including creating or joining a cooperative.

Agricultural cooperatives provide an opportunity for small farm producers to organize or access value-added or niche markets for their products (Jang & Klein, 2011). Issues exist regarding maintaining and operating cooperatives that require additional research before a small farm producer joins (Jang & Klein, 2011). Cooperatives are a topic for future research and not part of this study.

A growing number of farm managers seek opportunities to pursue new marketing channels and incorporate direct sales to consumers, direct marketing to retail outlets, to create and sell value-added products or promote tours of their operations (USDA, NASS, 2014). Across the United States, direct sales from edible farm products accounted for \$1.3 billion in sales in 2012, and California ranked number one with \$170 million (USDA, NASS, 2014). Nationally, 94,799 (4.5%) of United States farms generated revenue from value-added products in 2012, and 4,281 farms in California capitalized on this opportunity (USDA, NASS, 2014).

Development opportunities. A lack of research exists on the multifunctional activities on United States farms and the overall impact on farm viability (Brown, Goetz, & Fleming, 2012). The reduced number of small farmers suggests that survival in the farming industry is challenging, and a need exists to maximize returns through new or

non-traditional enterprises and other efficiencies (Alonso, 2011).

Small and medium-sized farmers have an opportunity to diversify by engaging in agritourism, value-added production or direct sales to improve long-term profitability (Brown et al., 2012). Adding value to farm products may include craft items such as (a) flower arrangements, (b) goat milk soap, (c) grapevine wreaths or garlic braids (Born & Bachmann, 2006). For other producers adding value may mean some form of processing and marketing of (a) jams, (b) personal care products, or (c) offering a “pick-your-own” opportunity where the added value is the experience (Born & Bachmann, 2006). Another area for value-added opportunity is energy, creating fuel from agricultural products (Born & Bachmann, 2006).

Value-added production is a type of business duality, a new venture developed in conjunction with an existing business (Perks & Medway, 2012). Limited information exists regarding the decision-making process for developing value-added products (Alonso & O’Neill, 2011). Technology, establishing niche markets, and product differentiation provide opportunities for owners of small and mid-size farming operations to increase profits (Jang & Klein, 2011).

Transition

Section 1 focused on the problem that some small farm owners lack strategies to sustain their small businesses. The research question sought to determine what strategies some small business owners use to sustain their agricultural businesses through value-added products. Entrepreneurs gain business knowledge and obtain training and guidance in a variety of ways. Small business owners and farmers must balance changes in the

economic, physical, and legal climate, creating the need for them to rethink business strategies and investigate new ideas to improve the sustainability of their operations.

Section 2 includes the foundational information such as the role of the researcher, selection of the participants, ethics in research, and detailed support for the selected research method and design. Section 2 also includes information on the data collection process (instruments, technique, organization, and analysis) and concludes with an overview of the criteria for reliability and validity in a qualitative study.

Section 3 encompasses a presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, and implications for social change. Section 3 also includes recommendations for action and further research, followed by a personal reflection and concluding statement.

Section 2: The Project

In this section of the study, I provide the rationale for selecting the qualitative methodology and case study design I used to explore strategies that small farm owners use to sustain their agricultural businesses through value-added products. In it, I define my role as researcher and the ethical standards I adhered to during the research process. Equally important, I address specifics regarding participant selection criteria and the study population, and offer an extensive discussion regarding details of the data collection instruments, data collection process, organization techniques, and the process of qualitative data analysis, including a discussion about the use of triangulation and member checking. Section 2 also includes specifics concerning the reliability and validity of this qualitative study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used by some owners of small farming operations to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The specific population consisted of three small business owners farming on 179 acres or less in the California San Joaquin Valley counties of Fresno, Kings, and Tulare who had continuously farmed and operated a value-added agricultural business for at least 5 years. This study may lead to positive social change by equipping farmers with information on value-added marketing opportunities that may provide new ways to connect with local communities. Study findings may inform new entrepreneurs of the strategies and knowledge that might assist them in sustaining their value-added businesses more than 5 years, which may help lower failure rates among

small agricultural businesses and stabilize employment.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary data collection instrument for qualitative studies (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012; Yin, 2014). As a researcher, I served as the primary data collection instrument for this qualitative multiple case study. My roles during the research phase included (a) seeking qualified participants to interview; (b) scheduling and conducting interviews as part of the data collection process; and (c) coding, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting the data collected. I also assumed responsibility for protecting the rights of the participants throughout the data collection phase. The cornerstone of protecting participants' rights is ensuring that each participant understands the purpose of the research (Holland, Browman, McDonald, & Saginur, 2013; Yin, 2014). One way I assured the protection and rights of the research participants was to follow the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Completion of the IRB application and approval process before commencing the research ensured the research complied with the IRB and United States federal regulatory standards. I submitted required forms for approval to the IRB before I began any research as required by the Walden IRB (#05-31-16-0342041). Equally important was my understanding of and compliance with research guidelines detailed in the Belmont Report (1979), which addressed key areas of fundamental ethical principles for researchers: respect for persons and justice. I completed the National Institutes of Health web-based training course on "Protecting Human Research Participants," and received my certification (#1253874; see Appendix A).

I have experience with small business and entrepreneurship. I grew up in the small business environment; my father owned a hardware store and service business, and I assisted my husband in establishing and operating his business over 30 years ago. I have participated in the start-up of multiple nonprofit organizations and served as a key participant in the founding and development of the Mendota Bioenergy, LLC, a value-added producer group. I have a strong connection with an individual from the Valley Small Business Development Corporation who recommended potential study participants. Prior to this study, I did not interact with the Valley Small Business Development Corporation in the capacity of a business owner, and was never involved in the start-up process of any of the businesses included in this multiple case study.

Another important role of a researcher is mitigating bias and maintaining self-awareness throughout the data collection process (Stake, 2006; Tufford & Newman, 2012). During the data collection process, I was an active listener and maintained self-awareness, avoiding leading questions or comments, in order to mitigate biasing participant responses. Englander (2012) emphasized that questions must supersede existing knowledge of the researcher, and Pereira (2012) emphasized the need to focus on the participant's responses and avoid digressing from the study topic. Since I teach a course on small business planning and am involved with a value-added pilot project, I had personal knowledge of the topic, which provided a foundation for focusing on key components of small business start-ups and reduced the potential for tangential thoughts.

Managing personal bias involves researchers using personal experiences for comprehending the situation while nonetheless approaching the data in a critical and

reflective manner (Cronin, 2014; Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013; Snelgrove, 2014). Because of my familiarity with small business start-up and operations, I invited a colleague from a local business development organization to review the data and conclusions and to validate that the information and data collected were not exceedingly biased. Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, and Redwood (2014) and Tufford and Newman (2012) identified the use of theme identification as a best practice in striving to mitigate bias. My use of audio recording and journaling details based on observations also contributed to improved accuracy and reliability of the data (see Burghardt et al., 2012).

Case study research, according to Mikènè, Gaižauskaitė, and Valavičienė (2013), involves the pursuit of information via participant's viewpoints and understandings of life experiences related to the study. Using open-ended questions allowed me to pursue relevant information from case to case (see Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Yilmaz, 2013). By using an interview protocol of semistructured interviews guided by open-ended questions, I was able to remain focused on the conceptual framework and ask the same interview questions to all study participants. Probing questions allow for discovery of information relevant to research or a study (Benzer et al., 2013). Asking specific probing questions provided me the opportunity to discover strategies that owners of small farming operations need to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Participants

Participants in a qualitative case study must have experience in the phenomenon under study (Englander, 2012; Loh, 2012; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) and Dasgupta (2015)

emphasized that the logic of using multiple case studies is similar to replication logic in quantitative research, selecting each case to predict similar or contrasting results. Similar results, or literal replications, are possible when using as few as two or three cases (Yin, 2014). The key is to select cases that indicate the potential for similar results (Englander, 2012; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014).

This qualitative case study focused on value-added producers of agricultural products in Fresno, Kings, or Tulare County, California who farmed 179 acres or less and had operated their business continuously for at least 5 years prior to this study. The goal of a value-added producer is to generate new products, expand market opportunities, and increase income (USDA, RD, 2016). This multiple case study of three producers resulted in my identification of similar strategies for sustainability, even though each producer focused on different value-added products.

Identification of participants for a research study requires a clear definition of the research question and an understanding of who should benefit from the study (Poulis, Poulis, & Plakoyiannaki, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Yin, 2014). I used a replication logic based on the purpose of the study to select each business for inclusion. The eligibility criteria for the study participants required that each owner of the agricultural business (a) was at least 18 years of age, (b) was active in the daily operations of the business as owner or decision maker, (c) operated a business located in Fresno, Kings, or Tulare County farming 179 acres or less, and (d) had continuously operated the value-added component of the business under the same ownership for at least 5 years. After participants had signed the consent form, but prior to beginning the interview questions, I

requested the following demographic information: (a) the exact size of the farming operation; (b) the number of full-time, seasonal, and family employees; and (c) the specific county where the farming operation was located. These demographic questions contributed to the credibility of the study and to a logical literal replication process.

A colleague and staff member of the local Valley Small Business Development Corporation (VSBDC) assisted in identifying potential business owners to participate in this study, but did not have a business or personal relationship with individuals from the list so he did not make any direct introductions. The USDA Rural Development Office in Fresno also provided a list of farming operations that received value-added producer grants (VAPG) within the last 10 years; however, the operations on the list did not meet the study criteria because (a) they had not been in business for at least 5 years, or (b) the operations exceeded 179 acres. Because of my previous association with leaders of the California Center for Cooperative Development, they also assisted me in identifying some potential participants.

Initial interaction with potential participants in a study requires an awareness of the difficulty in recruiting participants and knowing that potential participants respond to higher volumes of personal communication (Mikene et al., 2013; Godfrey et al., 2012; Rowley, 2012). I first sent an email to each potential participant and included a personal introduction, how I obtained his or her name, the purpose of contacting them, and the criteria for participating in the study. I received one email response, but the farmer did not fit the criteria. After three days with no email responses, I followed up with the other potential participants via phone calls. In spite of quality conversations with a few of the

contacts, no one fit the criteria. Recruiting participants was difficult, but using purposeful sampling, emails, phone calls, and personal visits, I identified four viable participants who were willing to meet for an interview within 1-2 weeks from the date of contact. Due to the busy harvest season, the potential participants preferred to review the study consent form via email and each emphasized their limited availability to meet in person. I used phone and emails to follow-up multiple times before finalizing interviews with three of the four viable participants.

Research Method and Design

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that small farm owners in California's San Joaquin Valley counties of Fresno, Kings, or Tulare use to sustain their agricultural businesses by incorporating a value-added component to their agricultural business. I interviewed three value-added producers in the agricultural business sector using purposive sampling within these boundaries. Qualitative research allowed me to learn from individual personal experiences and to identify strategies that may be useful to other value-added producers.

Research Method

This study involved a qualitative research method to explore what strategies small farm owners used to sustain their agricultural businesses in California's San Joaquin Valley counties of Fresno, Kings, or Tulare. Using a qualitative research method enabled me to interview the owners of three small farming businesses that had implemented a value-added product and continuously operated for a minimum of 5 years prior to the study. Qualitative research provides a method for using interviews as a way to understand

the viewpoints and experiences of the participants (Mikene, Gaizauskaite, & Valaviciene 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative research involves inductive inquiry with direct involvement on the part of the researcher (Dasgupta, 2015), whereas quantitative methods are deductive, with little to no direct researcher involvement (Szyjka, 2012).

Quantitative researchers explain phenomena through numerical data, analyze data with statistics, and seek to develop explanations through measurements (Yilmaz, 2013). Quantitative approaches can provide large, representative samples, confirm or reject theoretical hypotheses, and summarize numerical data to demonstrate cause and effect relationships (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013). Quantitative methods require the use of standard or predetermined categories and closed-ended questions expected to fit the randomly selected representative samples (Yilmaz, 2013). Mixed method research focuses on organizational issues by blending qualitative and quantitative elements (Bansal & Corely, 2012; Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Since gathering new insight on entrepreneurial strategies in a specific industry was the purpose of this study and little information existed for entrepreneurs involved in value-added agricultural industries in the local area, the research required the collection of qualitative data rather than quantitative data alone or as part of a mixed method process.

Research Design

Some of the most common design options within the qualitative method include phenomenological, case study, ethnography, and grounded theory (Moustakas, 1994; Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Ethnographic inquiry involves extensive fieldwork that requires time for observations and immersion,

and strives to gain insight and understanding of cultures or social interactions to provide credible theoretical explanations of empirical evidence (Campbell et al., 2012; Schatz, 2013; Shover, 2012). This research is not focused on organizational culture, so the ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study. The grounded theory design involves a constant comparison between data collection and analysis that identifies relationships between concepts (Engward, 2013; Wolfswinkel, Furtmueller, & Wilderom, 2013) to form a new theory. Researchers use a phenomenological design to develop an understanding of how multiple individuals view a lived experience, requiring participants to have a direct experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). This research is not focused on individuals' lived experiences; therefore, the phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study. Case study designs provide the ability to focus on understanding the dynamics within a specific business setting (Eisenhardt, 1989). The case study design allows the researcher to explore strategies, focus on smaller sample size, and explore perspectives within a unique business sector (Yin, 2014). Since the focus of this study is small farm owners' strategies used to sustain their agricultural businesses, a case study was the most appropriate design for this study.

Case studies focus on an analysis of persons, events, or any holistically studied system (Hyett et al., 2014), such as this system theory based study. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some owners of small farming operations used to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The case study design, based on Yin's model of literal replication (2014), allowed me to

use a small sample to collect data through interviews and other sources of data to explore sustainable strategies among value-added agricultural businesses. I used a multiple case study design by conducting semistructured in-person interviews with three small farmers who use value-added products to sustain their businesses. Open-ended questions allowed the opportunity to obtain detailed information from each participant and obtain clarification at the time of the interview. Other sources of relevant data available included newspaper or magazine articles related to the value added component of each business and information from each participant's company Facebook page and website in addition to the comparison of literature reviewed. None of the operators interviewed sought help from the USDA or other sources, so a formal business plan was not available from any of the participants. Articles reviewed included details about the operation, which provided support for information obtained during each interview and other information, which supported the themes.

Semistructured interviews guided by open-ended questions with participating agricultural business owners who met the study participant selection criteria increased the likelihood of achieving data saturation based on a literal replication model. While the winery may be viewed as different from a farm, they are both agricultural businesses and the value-added components are essentially the same. Yin (2014) emphasized to achieve data saturation in a qualitative study the researcher must collect relevant data through interviews and document analysis. I collected relevant evidence through interviews and triangulated the data with information from relevant documents, and each participant's Facebook page and website to reach data saturation based on the boundaries of this case

study. Rowley (2012) emphasized that sample size should be small enough to allow the interviewer to gain depth and details related to the study. Yin (2014) stated that 2-3 cases would provide a literal replication if the cases selected predict similar results. The cases selected were similar in the value-added component and were expected to reveal similar results. To reach data saturation, I interviewed three small farmers with value-added products, continued member checking, and reviewed informational documents, Facebook and websites until no new data emerged. Each participant also provided a tour of their operation and I visited two participants at a farmers market where they were selling, which provided additional details based on observations.

Population and Sampling

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies needed by owners of small farming operations to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. Onegbuzie and Byers (2014), Stake (2006); and Yin (2014) emphasized that qualitative case studies allow the researcher the opportunity to study real world, living scenarios.

The study population consisted of three small business cases with single owners farming 179 acres or less in Fresno, Kings, or Tulare County, California area that had continuously farmed and operated a value-added business for at least 5 years. The purpose of this study was to explore strategies that owners of small farming operations used to sustain their businesses.

Robinson (2014) emphasized the importance of clearly defining the study population and providing inclusion or exclusion criteria to add credibility and coherence

to the study. Eligibility criteria for the farming operations selected as cases required that each farming operation included a value-added component and that the business site was in Fresno, Kings, or Tulare County. Each farm chosen as a case included a value-added agricultural manufacturing business in continuous operation for at least 5 years. I collected data from the owners of each farming operation selected as a case and gained in-depth knowledge of the strategies needed to sustain a value-added business. The eligibility criteria for participation by owners in those farming operations included (a) being at least 18 years of age, and (b) active in the daily operations of the business. Each participant was the founder and owner of his or her farm, with the ability to make all decisions related to the business and had operated their business for more than 5 years. In addition to contacting each participant, I searched their website or Facebook pages and identified articles about their endeavors in order to gain a better understanding of their place in their local community and the value of their knowledge. Two potential participants had Facebook pages with up to date information on their products, and good comments from satisfied customers. Two operations were featured on farmer market web lists as regular attendees of multiple markets throughout the area, which indicated their local involvement, likely success and popularity among customers. Two other potential participants had well-developed websites and a good web presence where they shared product information and product knowledge, and both offered onsite and online sales of their value-added products.

The specific unit of analysis was individual farming operations in California's San Joaquin Valley counties of Fresno, Kings, or Tulare that met the eligibility criteria.

The three participants interviewed represented three counties; Fresno, Kings, and Tulare. Purposeful sampling provides a method of non-random sample selection that ensures representation of related cases in the study (Robinson, 2014). Purposeful sampling allows for selection of individuals knowledgeable about the phenomena or topic of the study (Palinkas et al, 2015; Robinson, 2014). Selecting cases through purposeful sampling allowed me to focus on owners who were knowledgeable about value-added production. To identify the desired unit of analysis, which was farm owners who operated a value-added component as part of their operation, purposeful sampling was the most appropriate sampling method. Purposeful sampling allowed me to interview owners who possessed the knowledge to provide rich qualitative and relative data about the value-added phenomenon resulting in confirmation that the selected population was appropriate for this study.

Yin (2014) emphasized collecting relevant data through interviews, and document analysis is key to achieving data saturation in a qualitative study. I continued collecting all relevant evidence through interviews and documents to reach data saturation based on the boundaries of this case study. Following three interviews, there was a noticeable recurrence of information in the participant responses as well as a correlation with the previous research. A multiple case study of only two or three cases is realistic and adequate for a multiple case study according to Marshall et al. (2013); Rowley (2012); and Yin (2014). Rowley (2012) posited that sample size should be large enough to bring credibility, but small enough to allow the interviewer to gain depth and details related to the study. Study participants had a long farming history, were very knowledgeable in

their craft, and had done considerable research, providing depth and details pertinent to the study. Appropriate case selection creates a scenario for increased likelihood of reaching data saturation through detailed questions and data collection (Robinson, 2014; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Semistructured interviews guided by open-ended questions with the three participating agricultural business owners who met the participation criteria and analysis of relevant documents resulted in data saturation based on a literal replication model.

After identifying farmers who had taken advantage of the VAPG in their farming operations or established a value-added component as part of a traditional farm, I determined the best method for introductions to those farmers by talking with my colleagues at the VSBDC who knew or were familiar with the participants. I also evaluated the farming operations to determine if they met the criteria for the study and to determine if the owners of those operations met the selection criteria and were interested in participating. After identifying at least three eligible farming operations, I attempted to contact each potential participant via email or phone. Some of the names of potential participants received from the USDA did not fit the criteria, having either too much acreage or they had only been in the value-added business for less than the 5-year minimum requirement.

The expert reviewer also provided a resource for potential candidates, but none of the candidates fit the criteria, or they had gone out of business. I live near a small winery, so I stopped by to visit with the owner who agreed to meet within a week. I also contacted the California Center for Cooperative Development in Davis, CA, an

organization specializing in working with small growers and cooperatives seeking the value added producer grants from the USDA. Having worked with this group about 6 years prior, most of their clients resided in Northern California, outside the boundaries of the study, however, I was able to obtain a name and contact of one qualified producer in Fresno County. I attended a local farmers market and identified two additional farming operations that met the criteria and obtained the owners' names and contact details.

After contacting four potential participants, I called or emailed each participant, validated that the individuals and the operations met the study criteria, and determined their willingness to meet for an interview. All four participants agreed to interviews, but due to their busy schedules, I encountered difficulty getting them to commit to a specific time. After 2 weeks, I completed interviews with three of the four participants that I recruited for this study.

Ethical Research

Ethical standards and compliance are critical to the research process, necessitating strict adherence to all Walden University IRB guidelines during the research and interview process. Protecting the rights of the participants entails providing confidentiality, developing trust, ensuring research integrity, and protecting against offensiveness (Robinson, 2014; Rowley, 2012; Wahyuni, 2012). To maintain a chain of information from each business I assigned a coded letter as an identifier to each business, however, no corresponding number was needed since only one participant was interviewed at each business. This alpha identification coding provided anonymity and protected the identity of each company and participant.

Yin (2014) and Wahyuni (2012) emphasized the importance of the approval process and the responsibility of the researcher in being sensitive to and protecting the participants. I did not target any known vulnerable individuals for participation in this study and protected the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Participant recruitment and collection of data began after Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB) approved the study proposal and issued approval number 05-31-16-0342041. Following Walden IRB approval, I used the approved informed consent form to discuss the study with potential participants.

Devine et al. (2015) identified the importance of avoiding financial compensation as an inducement for participation in a study. The participants did not receive direct financial compensation but did receive a \$10 Starbuck's gift card as a token of appreciation for their time, along with a thank you note and will receive a 1-3 page summary of my final study results.

Respect. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary, with no participants under the age of 18 and no one with known diminished autonomy. The consent form, reviewed and approved by Walden University IRB staff, met the ethical requirements. Yin (2014) emphasized adhering to IRB requirements as important to ethical research and the approval process.

The consent form included the withdrawal process so participants could withdraw from the study at any point, including following data collection, with no recourse or retaliation. Participants received a clear explanation that if they did not show up for their first interview and did not contact me to reschedule, I would consider them withdrawn

from the study and would not contact them again. If the participant wanted to withdraw from the study after data collection and prior to final study submission, they did need to provide notification via email, telephone, or inform me in person that they wanted their data removed from the study. They would not be required or requested to provide a reason for their withdrawal. If I received notification of their desire to withdraw, I would have removed all data collected from that participant from my computer by electronically erasing the folder specific to that client, electronically erasing any uploaded data from NVivo11, and shredding any printed information collected. None of the participants withdrew from the study prior to final study submission, so all participant information is included in the final study.

After the initial phone conversation with a potential participant, if they agreed to consider participating in my study, I emailed a copy of the Informed Consent form immediately following the phone conversation. In addition, I took a copy of the Informed Consent form to the interview meeting and reviewed it with each participant before asking them to sign and prior to the beginning of the interview.

The informed consent procedures included an explanation of the focus of the study, the role of the researcher, participants' voluntary participation in the study, and encouraged any questions from participants before they decided to take part in the research. Enama et al. (2012) emphasized the importance of verbally reviewing the consent form with each participant in order to answer any questions or concerns. I collected the consent form prior to the interview process and responded to any questions or concerns of each participant. Once the participant questions were satisfied, I asked

them to document their consent with a valid signature indicating that they understood and agreed to the terms described in the informed consent form, and I provided each participant a copy of the form to retain for their records.

I discussed the relevant company documents that might have been related to the study (business or strategic plan, pertinent information or correspondence from the USDA related to a VAPG) and each participant stated they did not have any formal documents for review. One participant emailed a newspaper and a magazine article about their business to me from their files, and all emphasized I could use their social media or website as an additional resource. I used internet searches, and the websites or social media pages to obtain supporting or relevant information. I assured the confidentiality of each participant's identity by using the alpha coding system noted previously. I also requested they avoid using the company name or their name during each recorded interview and supplied a tent card with their specific code to help them remember to use the code and not their personal identification. None of the participants stated their name or company name during the interview and no one wanted a non-disclosure form from the transcriber.

Justice. Each organization and participant received a coded alias in order to assure their anonymity, and all participants received equal treatment throughout the interview process. As noted previously, I used a coded identification system for each study participant. This system provided a way to identify each participant by a single letter, contributing to maintaining consistency of information gathered from each participant.

All data related to individuals and organizations participating in the study reside on a password protected cloud drive and an external drive for backup. The external drive and all printed study information will remain secure in a fireproof safe for at least 5 years following the study. After 5 years, I will electronically erase all electronic data and shred all printed copies of stored information.

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher in a qualitative study is the primary data collection instrument as posited by Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy, 2013; and Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012), and should be guided by a set of open-ended questions (Yin, 2014). As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument and utilized open-ended questions to obtain relevant information from each study participant as part of a semistructured interview process.

After I screened farming operation owners and selected the three operations for this case study, I conducted preliminary research before the interviews by searching for available information on value-added producer procedures in the USDA database and performed an online search of local newspapers and other agriculture-based magazines to locate specifics on each of the three selected cases. At my first meeting with the farm owner of each farming operation, I inquired if there was a business plan; none of the participants had a formalized plan. None of the participant were willing to provide some type of qualitative assessment addressing the percentage increase in profitability, except to confirm that their value-added products covered the property taxes and paid the water bills. One participant stated they were not otherwise employed and “weren’t rich”, but

were paying the bills as a result of the value-added component to their operation. I also requested copies of other source documents related to their value-added operations, primarily articles or presentations, which provided additional data for triangulation with the interview data. I received some articles from the participants of previous interviews, which validated much of the information they provided in the interview process.

During the face-to-face interviews, I asked open-ended and probing questions in order to explore strategies that small business owners used to sustain their agricultural businesses by implementing a value-added component to the existing business and strategic plans. I concluded the interview with wrap-up questions, providing an opportunity for each participant to offer additional information and I thanked them and discussed when they should receive a summary of the interview to review.

Best practices identified that each open-ended interview should last no more than one and a half to 2 hours (Englander, 2012; Wahyuni, 2012) and should take place at an off-site location (Yin, 2014). I discussed with each participant the most appropriate or convenient off-site location for each interview and each assured me they did not have time to leave their operation and were more comfortable in their private office with their phone turned off for the interview. Since these were individual operators with no employees on site, the interviews were private and lasted no more than one hour for each participant. Each participant approved that I could audio record the interviews and I took field notes on any visual clues or observations and verbal nuances. Before the interview, I reviewed the consent form with each participant, obtained their signature and I provided them a copy of the form for their files. The audio consent form is part of the consent

form. I used my phone timer to be sure I did not exceed the agreed upon time limit.

I did not conduct a pilot test, but before scheduling any interviews, I reviewed my questions and case study protocol with my colleague to determine if I needed to refine, modify, or adjust any questions for clarity. My colleague thought the questions were appropriate, but he advised using a relaxed tone, and explaining each question in layman's terms in order to bring clarity to each question as it relates to their specific operation. My colleague did warn me that it was highly unlikely I would get growers to meet anywhere but their office and just getting them to commit to 1-2 hours of uninterrupted time would be a challenge.

The questions I have developed for this case study are part of the study protocols (see Appendix B), and as such, the protocols served as a reminder of the information I need to collect and the importance of that information. Multiple researchers (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Yin, 2014) recommended the use of protocols as part of the data collection process. My interview protocol reminded me to ask more in-depth probing questions in key areas relating to specific questions during each interview to gain deeper insights. Since much information existed to share with each participant, including protocols and approval forms, a script served as a checklist. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) emphasized the importance of a script for reference, especially for new researchers. Summarizing and restating information is a recommended best practice in interviewing as noted by Harper and Cole (2012); Loh (2012); and Rowley (2012). Following responses to questions, I restated or summarized information as needed to verify I clearly understood the information stated by each participant, which improved accuracy and

validity by reducing the risk of incorrect interpretation.

Lincoln and Guba (1986) emphasized that member checking provides each participant an opportunity to review their individual analyzed data for validity. After each interview, I summarized the responses of each participant and emailed a copy for their review. Within three days of emailing the copy the participants each returned the document, one with a few minor notes, and the others stated they were comfortable that I had captured valid information and no further discussion was necessary. This type of member checking by each participant provides an opportunity to validate the interpretation of the information provided. This type of member checking process improves the reliability and validity of a study (Harper & Cole, 2012; Zohrabi, 2013). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used by some owners of small farming operations to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years prior to this study. Appendix B provided protocols for explaining the study and consent process and included demographic questions to ask prior to the interview questions. Appendix B also included the case study protocol and semistructured, open-ended interview questions with prompts to verify I understood the information.

Yin (2014) suggested that a tour might provide the opportunity to engage in a conversation, and allow the case study participant to think about and discuss situations about the study. Concerns about proprietary information and designs in these farming operations precluded me from requesting a tour as part of the data collection process. During each visit, the owner insisted on a tour of their operation or process facility;

however, I did not record the conversation or take photos during the tour, but did record notes for reference in a journal.

Data Collection Technique

Recruitment for study participants began after obtaining study approval from Walden University IRB. As part of the recruitment process, I explained the background, purpose, and potential benefits of the study as well as expectation from the participants in the study. Yin (2014) and Rowley (2012) emphasized the importance of providing the background as a way to capture the interest of potential participants.

Data collection in a case study can vary and may include observations, interviews, documents, archival data, or artifacts (Eisenhardt, 1989; Wahyuni, 2012; Yin, 2014). An advantage of interviews is that they require less pre-knowledge than designing an adequate questionnaire and a disadvantage is the data collection process is more demanding than distributing a questionnaire (Rowley, 2012; Sud & Thelwal, 2014). The development of substantive questions that are likely to lead to additional how or why questions are imperative to case study inquiry (Carter et al., 2014; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2014). None of the participants had a formal business or strategic plan available, but there were some news articles available specific to the participants or their business, which were used to validate interview data collected. Each participant provided an opportunity to see their operation or store, and I visited two of the growers at a local farmers market, which provided additional observational data as part of the collection process.

On the day of the scheduled interview, I arrived early to the interview location to set up the recording device, and had my questions printed for easy note taking. During

the interviewing process, I verified that I understood the responses by reviewing and summarizing the information provided by the respondent. Multiple researchers (Harper & Cole, 2012; Loh, 2012; Rowley, 2012) have recommended summarizing and restating information heard by the interviewer. As the primary collection instrument, I took time to seek immediate clarification by asking probing questions, paraphrasing the content expressed by the participants to demonstrate active listening, and avoid follow-up interviews. Bredart, Marrel, Abetz-Webb, Lasch, and Acquadro (2014) emphasized the value of asking questions, rephrasing or repeating, and being an active listener contributes to obtaining the right information.

Yin (2014) emphasized the importance of creating a case study database in addition to the researcher's report. I prepared a digitized transcription in Microsoft Word, which allowed me to search words and repetitive phrases. I prepared a summary of the transcript for each interviewee as part of the member checking process, and I set the track changes feature in Microsoft Word so any changes or notations made by the participant were easy to find and compare to my original notes. Allowing participants to review a summary of their interview as a type of member checking contributes to increased reliability of a study (Harper & Cole, 2012; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Yin, 2014). After each participant reviewed the summary of his or her individual interview, I verified I had correctly captured and interpreted the meaning of his or her responses. Member checking is important to quality control for qualitative studies (Harper & Cole, 2012; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

Data Organization Technique

Personal interviews allow for deeper exploration of subjective topics, and recording and transcription provide opportunities for review of the interviews for coding and identifying other details (Bevan, 2014; Dasgupta, 2015; Wahyuni, 2012). During the interview process, I reminded each participant to refrain from stating the name of the company or their name and to use the assigned respondent code because interviews were transcribed by a third party. I also provided each respondent with a confidentiality agreement from my transcriber in case they stated their name or company name. I also informed them that the transcriber I was using is a certified medical transcriber bound by her code of conduct to hold all information transcribed in complete confidence. After the transcription of each recorded interview, reviewed the data, incorporated my notes, and began the process of organizing the data as emphasized by multiple research experts (Anyan, 2013; Bevan, 2014; Wahyuni, 2012).

As soon as transcription was completed, I uploaded the interview transcript to NVivo11 for analysis. The analysis or coding process enables a researcher to identify common themes or thoughts between the transcribed interviews and notes (Wahyuni, 2012; Yin, 2014). After identifying key themes, I correlated those themes with the literature reviewed and the conceptual framework, system theory, and searched for new studies published that supported the findings.

A case study database should consist of distinct folders, the data collected, and the researcher's report (Davis, 2013; Gajewski, 2013; Yin, 2014). I created individual folders for each case, identified by a unique identification code, and each of these folders

included subfolders as needed to keep the data organized for easy access and review. Database maintenance and organization are important for maintaining the chain of evidence, or increasing reliability (Anyan, 2013; Gajewski, 2013; Yin, 2014). Following each interview, I visited their website and did research in farm publications. I created a PDF of all newspaper and magazine articles, then electronically filed them in the appropriate data folder or portfolio.

Qualitative studies typically consist of smaller samples than quantitative studies, and acceptability of sample size is not just about the number of participants, but largely relies on the relevance of the data collected (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Yin (2014) posits when performing a multiple-case study, consideration of case replications needed for the study is appropriate. The business owners selected for this case had all successfully operated for at least 5 years prior to the study, and the research questions focused on strategies that may have led to their success. When a researcher focuses on a multiple-case study with predicted similar results, and asks how or why that outcome occurred, Yin (2014) recommended that two or three literal replications should be satisfactory. The selection of three cases from farming operations that have operated a value-added business as part of their operation for at least 5 years prior to this study provided sufficient replication for this study.

The planned protocol to transfer all data related to the study to a password protected, external hard drive and delete all related files from the cloud drive and computer occurred after completion of the final analysis. Storage for the flash drive includes a locked, fireproof safe, which also houses hard copies of notes and documents

to insure the security of all data related to the research for at least 5 years following the study. Five years following the study, I will permanently electronically erase all data on the external hard drive, destroy the flash drive so it cannot be accessed or used, and shred all paper files.

Data Analysis

This multiple case study focused on three value-added producers in California's San Joaquin Valley counties of Fresno, Kings, and Tulare. Face-to-face interviews with the selected business owners were audio recorded and transcribed. Following transcription of interviews, I used data triangulation as part of the analysis process. Using data triangulation provides strength to the validity of a case study (Black et al., 2013; Carter et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). I triangulated data from the open-ended interviews with articles relative to each farming operation. Other forms of triangulation used in qualitative studies include investigator triangulation, or the use of different evaluators (Patton, 2015). These forms of triangulation were not appropriate for this doctoral study as a learning project. The other two of the four options addressed by Patton (2015) are methodological or theoretical triangulation, which use multiple methods for studying a problem or program. These 2 options were not appropriate for my qualitative multiple-case study since the study was not about identifying a theory. Data triangulation provides a strong foundation for substantiating findings (Black et al., 2013; Eisenhardt, 1989; Wahyuni, 2012). Data triangulation also provides an opportunity to compare all of the data gathered from multiple sources, and identified similarities of findings, and creates a comprehensive perspective of the problem (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

Since the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used by some owners of small farming operations to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years, using data triangulation to identify similarities between findings was appropriate for my study.

Based on Yin's (2014) techniques for triangulating and validating findings, I supported findings with more than a single source of evidence by converging information from semistructured interviews, documents, observations, and relevant research. Data collected outside of the interview process, such as newspaper or magazine articles, emails, and strategic plans contributed to validating information collected through the interviews. Data triangulation provides multiple perspectives or views, reinforces findings from the interviews, and establishes credibility (Carter et al., 2014; Eisenhardt, 1989). Price and Ball (2015) cautioned that newspaper and magazine articles are reflective of the author, and may contain bias. There were few newspaper and magazine articles used, however, I critically examined the documents, assessed the author's profile, interests, and perspectives, and determined how the information applied to this study.

In vivo coding is a literal or verbatim coding that uses words or short phrases from the verbiage in the data record that are participant-generated, even if terms are particular to a culture or subculture (Saldana, 2013). NVivo11 is commonly used software that utilizes in vivo coding, and is appropriate for beginning qualitative researchers (Castleberry, 2014; Saldana, 2013). In addition to uploading participant transcripts into NVivo11, I uploaded portable document formatted (PDF) files, articles from the literature review, and other relevant data for analysis and query. Nvivo is software that provides

researchers the ability to manage data and identify themes (Azeem, Salfi, & Dogar, 2012; Bernauer et al., 2013). The output reports, combined with prior knowledge, allow the researcher to assess specifics of the study and generate a quality study (Anyan, 2013; Yin, 2014). Using NVivo assisted me in managing ideas, developing theories related to the data, and finding common themes that identified key factors related to new and existing strategies identified in the literature review.

System theory focused on multiple components and their connection to the whole (Pouvreau, 2014), which provided the foundation for this study and set the stage for answering the research question, what strategies do small business owners use to sustain their agricultural businesses. I used NVivo11 to analyze all open-ended interview questions and the relative data collected. I used NVivo11 for Windows to identify patterns and themes from analyzing individual interviews and other sources of data to categorize themes regarding value-added producers' strategies that contributed to their success. I assigned code letters participant to protect participant identity. I qualitatively analyzed data obtained from participants through interviews and other documentation that contributed to the body of knowledge related to the strategies that contributed to the success of the value-added business owners and compared the findings to system theory and the literature review. I cross-referenced themes identified through the literature review by seeking out similar words or phrases through NVivo11, then I coded the themes I found in the literature review and searched for those themes in my uploaded data. I also searched for new studies available that support my findings.

The findings from this study may provide information to small farm owners

regarding the strategies that are used by some farm owners to sustain their agricultural businesses. The research provides information on some successful strategies used by three value-added producers that may help some entrepreneurs build on an effective model to sustain their agricultural businesses. I have strived to produce high-quality analysis by looking at all of the data, focusing on the research question of the case study, and using prior knowledge to create a study that is accurate and significant. The completed study is available from ProQuest and I made copies available to Fresno, Kings, and Tulare County area organizations that work with value-added producers and agricultural business owners.

Reliability and Validity

To establish reliability and validity in qualitative research, researchers must establish rigorous data collection protocols (Cronin, 2014), create audit trails, allow member checking, and perform data triangulation (Dasgupta, 2015). The analogous criteria for validity in qualitative studies are dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Reliability

Reliability means the results of the study are an accurate representation of the total population identified in the study (Wahyuni, 2012). Reliability in qualitative studies is about building trust through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Reliability in qualitative research depends on the researcher to follow protocols, create audit trails, use member checking, and triangulation of data to create dependability so readers will be able to understand how the researcher

reached conclusions (Black et al., 2013; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Dependability. Dependability, as noted by Elo et al. (2014), is about the stability of data over time and under differing conditions. Black et al. (2013) emphasized that if another researcher is able to follow the decision trail of the original research, then the dependability of that study is high. Researchers must provide (a) a clear and concise audit trail, (b) a detailed description of data collection and analysis, and (c) details regarding the selection of themes (Zohrabi, 2013). I created an audit trail by taking comprehensive notes and outlining reasons for decisions made throughout the research process. The use of the query and report tools available in NVivo also provided information for the audit trail, demonstrating text search results, common themes, and coding results, which contributes to the dependability of this study.

Participants should review summaries of their responses to interview questions to verify the interpretation of the data collected and to make comments on the interpretation (Harper & Cole, 2012; Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). This type of member checking is a quality control process used to improve accuracy, credibility, and dependability (Harper & Cole, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Zohrabi, 2013). After summarizing responses to each participant's interview questions, I emailed the summary to each participant within a few days of the interview and asked that they review my summarization of their interview, and comment as needed to verify the accuracy of the information and my understanding.

In lieu of a pilot test, a colleague knowledgeable in small agricultural businesses conducted an expert review of the interview questions for clarity prior to meeting with

participants. This type of collaboration with an in-field expert allows for broader understanding and stakeholder perspective of the research problem based on their individual perspective (Muller et al., 2012). An expert, according to Muller et al. (2012) is a person who is able to represent the perspective of the stakeholder as well as their individual perspectives based on experience. The colleague who reviewed the study questions has over twenty years' experience in small business development and currently serves as director at a local business development nonprofit organization. The director focuses on helping small business owners in California's San Joaquin Valley grow and expand their operations in order to sustain their businesses. The program director and other mentors provide counseling, technical assistance, and training focused on assisting owners in developing sound business practices that help improve their bottom line.

Validity

The validity of qualitative data refers to the trustworthiness of the data, whether findings accurately reflect the situation, and adequate evidence exists to support the findings (Houghton, Casey, & Shaw, 2013; Stanley and Nayar, 2014; Wahyuni, 2012). One or more methods of triangulation of data (theoretical, methodological, environmental, or investigative) contribute to trustworthiness of qualitative data (Black et al., 2013). Three methods for triangulation of data as discussed by Carter et al. (2014) are: (a) theoretical triangulation that involves utilizing different theories to support or refute findings; (b) method triangulation, which may include interviews, observations and field notes; and (c) investigator triangulation, which involves two or more researchers being involved in the same study, providing multiple observations and conclusions.

Lincoln and Guba (1986) emphasized that trustworthiness in qualitative studies equates to internal and external validity in quantitative research, providing the strength of qualitative research.

Credibility. Credibility is about assuring participants are clearly identified, sample sizes are appropriate, and data analysis is properly documented (Elo et al., 2014). The focus of the research must be clear and the data must align with the focus of the study in order for the research to be credible (Polit & Beck, 2012). I clearly defined the credentials of the participants as they relate to the participant criteria. Exploring the topic or phenomenon under investigation and allowing participants to review the data establishes credibility in the analysis and findings (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). Member checking is important to the dependability and credibility of the study, so each participant received a summarized interpretation of the interview. Two of the three participants validated the summary provided with no modifications, one participant made one minor correction.

Other tools utilized to establish credibility included data triangulation, and the use of different sources of information from government sites, agricultural magazines, and participant social media sites that supported the interview information, which would build credibility for the research as indicated by Carter et al., 2014; and Petty, Thomson, and Stew, 2012. The method of triangulation most appropriate for my study was data triangulation since I focused on semistructured interviews with open-ended questions, observation, and document analysis. Yin (2014) emphasized the importance and value of using case study protocols. I triangulated data from government sites, agricultural

magazines, local news sources, and participant social media or websites to achieve credibility through data triangulation. As with dependability, establishing credibility means providing a detailed description of data collection (Zohrabi, 2013). I created a clear and concise audit trail of the data collection process and used a journal to note observations of each participant's production areas and store or farmers market booth.

Transferability. Transferability means determining whether the information might be applicable to other settings and is not context specific (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012; Wahyuni, 2012). Even though a case study focuses on an individual or even multiple cases and not the entire study population, transferability or application to other settings should receive consideration (Black et al., 2012; O'Brien et al., 2014). Stake (2006) emphasized the need to provide sufficient details regarding the research methods and adequate details so readers of a study can decide if findings might be transferable to a similar situation. Determining transferability requires good use of case study protocols and development of a case study database (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Yin 2014). As the researcher I provided detailed descriptions and established research methods by (a) utilizing an interview protocol check list, (b) following the established interview questions, and (c) uploading government source documents, and news sources to the NVivo database for inclusion in the word search and theme identification process. Providing clear details of the entire research process in the study allows a reader to determine if the findings from my study are transferable to their specific situation.

Confirmability. Confirmability largely depends on the study results reflecting the participant characteristics based on the context of the study (Au, Lo, Cheong, Wang, &

Van, 2016). In order to achieve confirmability, I established a data collection protocol and created an audit trail that includes (a) data triangulation, (b) member checking, and (c) search reports and queries used in NVivo. I scanned documents from my research, government source documents, and news sources as well as uploaded notes from the member checking into NVivo for inclusion in the word search and theme identification. The software word search provided an opportunity to crosscheck previous themes and document each step of the process, which will allow readers to understand how I reached the conclusions in the study based on the participants' knowledge related to the study question.

Data Saturation. Data saturation requires collecting data until no new data or information appears (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Marshall and Rossman (2011) emphasized that complete knowledge does not exist, but a thorough search for patterns, explanations, and links must occur, followed by a critical review and summary. Throughout the analysis process, I continued to review the interview transcripts and notes from the member checking to reach data saturation. Achieving data saturation requires using a variety of strategies such as triangulation, member checking and moving back and forth between the data as noted by Chan, Fung, Chien, (2013); Stanley and Nayar (2014); and Torresan et al. (2015). I used member checking and moving back and forth between the data in the research and review process in my study until no new information emerged.

After reviewing each interview transcript, I provided a list of the questions with a summarized synthesis of the transcript information specific to each question and sent to each participant for review and comment. All participants approved the summary of

information as being accurate and complete. During the interview and member checking process, common themes were prevalent.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 focused on the role of the researcher in the data collection process, identifying the criteria for participants, how participants were selected, how I gained access to participants, and the strategy for establishing rapport with the participants before the interview process. This section provided detailed information on the research method and design as identified in Section 1 *Nature of the Study* and clearly justified the selected method and design.

Ethics in research is a significant consideration in the field of research. This section provided detailed information on the informed consent process, the forms participants signed, the process and procedure for reviewing the forms with each participant, the process for participant withdrawal, the method for creating anonymity, as well as the details on data storage and deletion. Section 2 also identified the data collection process and protocol, data organization techniques, and the approach to data analysis. This section concluded by addressing the qualitative reliability and validity constructs, which are different from quantitative, but essential to the strength of qualitative research. Section 3 will include the presentation of the findings, the implications for social change, and recommendations for action and further research. Section 3 will also include a reflection of my research experience with the DBA doctoral study at Walden University and a conclusion for the reader.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 contains the following subsections: (a) Introduction, (b) Presentation of the Findings, (c) Application to Professional Practice, (d) Implications for Social Change, (e) Recommendations for Actions, and (f) Recommendations for Further Study. This section also contains a discussion of the themes I identified during the study, and concludes with reflections, a summary, and conclusions related to the study and the study process.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used by some owners of small farming operations to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The study findings indicated how some small farmers use value-added products to increase their revenue stream and sustain their farming operations. During the study, the following themes emerged regarding development of a successful value-added strategy: (a) pre-existing and new knowledge; (b) value-added product differentiation, and marketing through social media and word of mouth; and (c) the value of professional and community networking, and networking with friends and family. The findings and themes related to value-added strategies discussed in this section are intended for use in developing strategies for owners of small farming operations desiring to expand to value-added products. Strategies identified may be important to farmers in California's San Joaquin Valley since value-added agriculture opportunities abound in the area due to the diversity of crops grown, with over 350 different commercial crops currently grown in the area (Fresno Co. Farm Bureau, 2014).

Presentation of the Findings

The discussion in this section is focused on the three themes that emerged from the study. During the study, I used semistructured interviews to obtain information related to how the participants were successful in their value-added businesses. I followed up the interviews with member checking and found that none of the participants had formalized business plans or documents for review. Instead of organizational documents, I researched additional information on how small farmers might benefit from value-added production, how to start a value-added business, and on the role of farmers markets, direct marketing, and agritourism among small farmers to complete data triangulation. I also reviewed the participant's Facebook pages, using customer reviews and comments to validate the participants' comments regarding their community connections and the value of the customer experience. Each participant provided me the opportunity to see their operation or store, and I visited two of the growers at a local farmers market, which provided an opportunity for additional data collection by observation. This exploration was designed to answer the primary research question that guided this study: What strategies do owners of small farming operations use to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years? The themes identified were (a) pre-existing and new knowledge; (b) market differentiation for value-added products, customer experience, and word of mouth and social media marketing; and (c) the value of professional and community networking. These themes correlated with the principal components I identified in the literature regarding successful business strategies for entrepreneurs. It is also noteworthy to mention the correlation with the theory of

Ansoff (1957), who emphasized the need for business firms to continuously grow and change to retain market position. Ansoff (1957) emphasized four growth alternatives: (a) increased market penetration, (b) market development, (c) product development, or (d) diversification. Ansoff (1957) summed these alternatives up as product-market strategy, emphasizing that the synchronized quest for each of these may be critical to surviving economic competition and retaining market position. The participants of this case study applied these alternatives in some combination.

The findings from the study aligned well with the conceptual framework I selected, system theory. Each emergent theme shows the need to balance interactions between the business and external influences to sustain the small farm operation. System theory emphasizes the necessity of recognizing the interrelationships of internal and external influences, rather than focusing on individual components (von Bertalanffy, 1972). Each theme identified is dependent on the other to assist small farmers in developing a sustainable business model, and each theme has an internal and external component, which must be considered by the farmer.

Emergent Theme 1: Pre-Existing and New Knowledge

The first theme to emerge from the data collection was that knowledge, existing and new, is valuable to the overall success of the business. All three participants had post-secondary degrees, two of the degrees held by the participants were in fields directly linked to their agricultural business, and one participant's degree was in psychology, not directly related to the business. All participants emphatically acknowledged the value of their education in developing the business strategy, which correlates with previous

research. Williams et al. (2012) noted that producers with post-secondary educations are more likely to adopt value-added practices than those with only a high school diploma.

Brouder and Eriksson (2013) posited that knowledge, as well as local experiences, are important factors for the new entrepreneurial venture. Equally important are the findings of Hamrouni and Akkari (2012), who found that entrepreneurs who lack industry/business knowledge were more likely to fail during the first 5 years of operation. All participants were longtime residents in their local farming communities and emphasized the value of existing knowledge, combined with previous experience, input from family, fellow farmers, and others in the community as contributing factors to their strategic planning and ultimate success. All three participants emphasized the value of their experiential knowledge and advanced education, but they also acknowledged the value of seeking external input to supplement existing knowledge. There was a common thread among the participants regarding filling knowledge gaps to create the most effective strategy for expanding their business.

Participant A discussed his desire to plant cherries because they were his personal favorite, but discovered that local processors did not contract with a farm with less than 10 acres; he had 2.5 acres. Researching and surveying other producers at farmers markets led Participant A to realize his small acreage could grow multiple varieties of berries that customers did not have access to, which could also extend the fresh fruit season for consumers and add to his income. Producing these value-added products could help him extend his income throughout the year. Participant A also recognized the value of seeking mentors and using his agricultural network of contacts to gain knowledge before selecting

his replacement crop.

Participant B acknowledged that his time working at Costco while a student resulted in valuable contacts once he opened his winery. His employment at Costco also provided him with marketing concepts and competitor insights. Participant C mentioned her working relationship with the manager of the UC Davis research site next to her property and stated, “The manager there has been very helpful over the years.” All three participants noted the importance of seeking advice and information from other experts, both for selection and care of the crop, and to acquire marketing strategies. The participants’ feedback specific to the theme of knowledge aligned with the findings of Harris, Gibson, and McDowell’s (2014) who showed that access to coaching or mentoring, combined with experience, contributed to improved efficiencies and processes. An understanding of the business environment is critical for business owners seeking the best strategic choices.

Another key to business success, according to Evans (2012), is to make certain to plan and research, and to clearly assess risk to avoid pitfalls. Participant A discussed his research for deciding what to plant in place of existing walnut trees that did not provide an adequate income to support the small farming operation. Participant B researched the best varieties of grapes to add to his existing vines to complement his wine making. Participant C researched the options for making a profit from her 30 acres of Valencia trees instead of removing them to plant a different variety.

Participant A, a licensed agronomist for over thirty years, stated, “growing was going to be easy (as an agronomist), marketing was going to be a challenge.” Participant

B acknowledged that his time working at a winery was extremely valuable in contributing to the success of planning his winery, remodeling the old barn into a "wine cellar," and developing his signature wines. Participant C acknowledged her farming background and working with her husband's bee and honey business as vital to helping her create a strategy for her orange juice business.

There were some gaps in the knowledge of the participants regarding funding options and opportunities. None of the interviewees were aware of VAPG or other opportunities for financing provided by the USDA. Participant A did not need to seek out loans because his off-farm employment provided sufficient financial resources to establish his berry farm and value-added business. Participant A did emphasize that other small farm operators may not have the benefit of an off-farm income, so "funding could be a barrier" to starting a value-added component to their existing farming operation. Participant C had looked into unspecified grants, but stated, "I haven't had the time or know how to apply for those." Participant B could not get a loan from banks or the SBA, largely because of the period from investment to income. The winery had a substantial up-front investment to build the facility and make the wine, then had to wait some time before the first sales were possible. Eventually, Participant B obtained funding from his family. This participant was not aware of the VAPG program or other USDA-related programs that may have provided funding, despite the time from investment to income stream. Producers' Lack of information on funding options specific to agriculture correlates with the findings of researchers van Auken and Carraher (2012) who noted that agricultural producers may lack awareness as to where to gain funding or how to satisfy

fundors, and may require assistance seeking funding alternatives. Table 2 below illustrates the key findings related to knowledge, supported by significant statements from interview data.

Table 2

Key Findings on Knowledge Supported By Significant Statements from Interview Data

<i>Key finding</i>	<i>Participant A</i>	<i>Participant B</i>	<i>Participant C</i>
Existing knowledge contributed to success	Being an agronomist for over thirty years provided the knowledge needed to grow any crop.	Working in retail wine sales was extremely helpful.	The years I spent helping with bees and honey sales was valuable when starting my own business.
	Of course, my degree and college education provided the foundation for doing my research.	A degree in business provided a foundation for knowing how to start the business.	Growing up in farming meant a lot to my success and helped in overcoming farming challenges.
		I grew up on the farm and knew what challenges to expect from the growing part.	Prior experience in agriculture and in farmers markets was helpful.
		My enology degree and working at a large winery were key to my own blends.	My education really helped, especially as a woman; it really gave me the knowledge and confidence I needed to succeed.
New knowledge needed to fill knowledge gaps	It was important to do research and ask questions of others in the business.	Know your competition and know how to market.	Ask advice and don't be afraid to take that advice and put it into practice

Emergent Theme 2: Value-Added Product Differentiation, Experience of the

Customer, and Word of Mouth and Social Media Marketing

The second emergent theme from the data collection revealed different marketing-related strategies that contributed to the success of the business such as using social media to sell direct to customers or businesses, and modifying the business model to adapt to customer requests. MacDonald (2014) emphasized the importance of a farmer being flexible, efficient, and quick to adapt to market demands. Jang and Klein (2011) emphasized that small farmers must differentiate themselves in their goal to sustain their business, and noted that one way to accomplish differentiation is for them to establish a niche market. The ability to adapt to consumer demands and capitalize on direct sales strategies were consistent strategies discussed by the participants as essential to their success.

Farmers' strategies for pursuing new marketing opportunities include (a) direct sales to consumers, (b) direct marketing to retail outlets, (c) creating and selling some value-added product, or (d) promoting visits to the farming operation (U.S. Ag Census, 2012). All of the participants in this study pursued one or more of these marketing opportunities, each capitalizing on what distinguishes them from other competitors. Two of the three participants used all of these methods as part of their business strategy.

Value-added Product Differentiation

Participant A began his direct marketing by offering customers a you-pick experience, and he sold his blueberries at farmers markets, always educating consumers about selecting ripe, quality blueberries and promoting their health benefits. The blueberry bushes produced more berries than could be sold at farmers markets, so the

grower collaborated with local restaurant owners who featured his brand and berries on their menu, which provided a channel for B2B sales and increased traffic to his you-pick location. Participant A noted these strategies worked well and increased visitors to his farm. Once the other variety of vine berries began producing, the you-pick business continued to expand.

Participant B started with a limited wine selection and recognized the value of an attractive label to attract buyers to a new wine in the market. Participant B stated that a unique and intriguing label would “hook the buyer the first time, but the product inside is what sells the second time.” The vintner collaborated early in his value-added business with a local organization dedicated to the conservation and preservation of wild cats through education, incorporated the organization’s logo and mascot’s photo on their label, and added a paw print that bleeds from the label onto the bottle. This collaborative effort contributed to differentiating the brand from wines from other regions, connecting the brand to a local foundation and to the local communities of people who supported that foundation.

Participant C utilized direct sales to consumers by packaging small bags of fresh oranges and producing fresh squeezed all natural, orange juice. This grower began selling her value-added products at farmers markets, but does not sell online due to the short shelf life, and need for refrigeration of her product. Her Class A permit does not allow her to sell her orange juice to retail outlets so she cannot create a B2B partnership like Participant A. The Class A permit is issued to food operators registered with the local environmental health agency and only allows cottage food operators to sell direct to

consumers (CDPH, n.d.). The Class B permit would allow for direct and indirect sales, but despite requests from local markets and restaurants to carry her juice for resale, the grower "did not want to go through another permitting process."

Two participants added agritourism to their value-added product offerings, another diversification option referenced by Brown et al. (2012). Joo, Khanal, and Mishra (2013) emphasized that agritourism is a way to generate publicity for local products, a model reinforced by two of the three participants who attributed agritourism as part of their success. Participant A, as previously discussed, offers a you-pick experience to visitors, which he considers part of the "value-added" component. Consumer farm visits are categorized as agritourism, and the value-added part is the farmer and his passion for educating customers and creating a memorable experience. Participant B began offering wine tasting to attract customers to his small winery and to introduce his wines, but the business "evolved to a venue for events and weddings, which compliments the wine sales." Participant B hosts outdoor concerts throughout the summer, guests pay \$5-\$15 depending on the entertainment, and guests bring their lawn chair and wine glass for wine tasting; catering trucks sell food and drinks. Customers are also able to reserve the venue for private parties or weddings. Participant C refrains from offering onsite visits or you-pick options, largely due to the difficulty in customers locating the out of the way farm, the difficulty in picking the fruit without ladders, and the success at the farmers markets selling fresh squeezed orange juice and small bags of fresh oranges.

Word of Mouth and Social Media Marketing

Participant A emphasized word of mouth and social media marketing as key to his

you-pick business. Local word of mouth advertising, combined with social media "likes" and "comments" connected his small 3-acre farm to the world. Tour buses include a stop at the farm site because of the farm's social media presence and bring over 10,000 visitors annually to the small 3-acre farm. Participant B began marketing in 2005 using radio, TV, and newspaper ads, but now relies primarily on word of mouth and social media, using radio ads sparingly to promote special events such as specific concerts. Participant C also uses social media and maintains a Facebook page with her farmers market schedule and product availability. Participant C markets a product with a relatively short shelf life, so customers seeking her fresh, all natural orange juice follow her to farmers markets to obtain a fresh supply weekly. Participant C only sells at farmers markets and Participant A sells at farmers markets and his roadside stand. Oberholtzer, Dimitri, and Jaenickes' (2014) research supports this model, stating that consumers are most likely to purchase local food at farmers' markets and roadside stands. All three participants utilize some social media for marketing and agree as to its value. Social media is an inexpensive and effective electronic form that provides a channel for product visibility, viral marketing, and word-of-mouth promotion (Taneja & Toombs, 2014).

Experience of the Customer

Participant A emphasized that a major part of his value-added business is the customer experience. In addition to his reputation for raising excellent berries, making tasty preserves and cobblers, the grower earned a reputation for providing great customer and a family experience on his farm. According to this farmer, a visit to the farm and picking the produce "sells an experience to customers, connecting families to memories

and connecting the community to fresh local products." The small farmer's you-pick option on the farm site draws local consumers and tour buses full of international visitors. A small roadside stand provides visitors the opportunity to buy pre-picked produce at a slightly higher cost than you-pick, or purchase value-added products such as homemade jams, ready to bake frozen cobblers, fresh frozen berries, and berry wines.

Each participant noted how he or she marketed the uniqueness of their product as a way to differentiate him or herself from the competition. Participant B created a unique on-farm winery and event venue in addition to the wine tasting room. Participant A identified different varieties of berries not available at local farmers markets, and he markets the farm visit as an experience and memory making opportunity. Participant C notes her juice is chemical free, all natural, and fresh, and there are no other sellers at the farmer's markets with the same product. Each participant provided an example of Anoff's (1957) theory in practice, creating a situation where the product and experience are not separate. This is an important element for other value-added producers from small farms to consider in their strategic plan for sustainability and success.

The option to utilize direct sales through farmer's markets or onsite stand for their unique value-added products in conjunction with their fresh produce is an effective approach for small farm owners.

Table 3

Key Findings on Marketing Supported By Significant Statements from Interview Data

<i>Key finding</i>	<i>Participant A</i>	<i>Participant B</i>	<i>Participant C</i>
Market differentiation methods for value-added producers	I teach them how to select the best berries and encourage “taste testing” as they pick.	I used unique and attractive labeling to get noticed as a new name in the business.	I only sell direct to customers at farmers markets –
	I sell to local restaurants who feature my logo on their menu, which created a B2B channel and increased traffic to my farm.	Creating the venue to get more people out so you can sell more wine was a natural transition or extension of the wine tasting	My juice is chemical-free and fresh.
	In addition to the U-Pick opportunity, I have a small store on the premises and I sell at several Farmers Markets in the area.	Bringing out bands to play “in the park” has been good, can generate up to 1200 people in one night.	
Experience of the customer	I sell an experience as part of the U-pick and farm visit option.	In addition to weddings and parties; we arrange outdoor concerts in the summer for our customers to enjoy.	If there are a few bad oranges in the bag or a customer isn’t happy, we do what we can to make it right for them.

(table continues)

<i>Key finding</i>	<i>Participant A</i>	<i>Participant B</i>	<i>Participant C</i>
	<p>A common story by our visitors is that, one of the fondest memories of their childhood is: “I remember that my Grandma had berry bushes down by the river. We would pick them and make a pie. It was the best thing ever!” Today, Parents and Grandparents want their children to have these very special memories too.</p> <p>During the season the farm is visited by hundreds of people, a day, from all over the world who want to experience where their food comes from</p> <p>Key to the small operator is to sell an experience, not just a product.</p>		
Social media as a marketing channel	I mostly use Facebook for advertising and promoting the U-Pick experience and berries	I market my wines on our website and promote the summer concerts where people can register.	People follow me on Facebook to know which farmers markets I will be attending and to know when the season will begin and end.

(table continues)

<i>Key finding</i>	<i>Participant A</i>	<i>Participant B</i>	<i>Participant C</i>
	We had a tour group stop once and that business has really taken off as the travel guides and tourists posted on social media about their experience and the fun they had.	We started with TV, radio & newspaper ads, which were expensive, but eventually those stopped working. We use Facebook and Twitter.	Facebook is easy to keep up to date and keep our customers informed.
Value of word of mouth marketing	The partnership with high-end restaurants generated income as visitors heard from staff about the berry farm.	Once we opened the facility as a venue, word of mouth was a major method for spreading the word to others looking for wedding or party locations. In 2005 we spent \$20,000-\$30,000 on advertising, in 2006 we only spent \$500 because the word of mouth was working well. We do currently use radio to promote larger events, targeting stations that match the generation of the featured group.	Customers provide good ideas and suggestions when we see them at the markets

Emergent Theme 3: Networking

The third emergent theme from the data collection was that some networking was an important part of the strategy of success for the business. Each participant discussed networking in different ways; such as professional networking, community networking, and the importance of family and friends. Participant A noted he took time to get to know

other producers at farmers markets, networking with customers of other sellers before he decided what to plant after deciding to replace walnut trees on the property. Participant B discussed how prior employment and contacts from that job still create networking opportunities that have helped him market his product in stores. Participant C discussed the value of seeking out others for help and advice, and interacting with customers, but did not mention specifically the term networking. Saunders, Gray, and Goregaokar (2014), and Wilbanks (2013) emphasized time spent with mentors in informal conversations and interaction with social networks as crucial to the development of entrepreneurs.

Harris, Gibson, and McDowell (2014) emphasized the importance of entrepreneurs creating appropriate relationships through networking. Each participant noted different practices in how they networked and what groups were critical to their networking efforts. Participant B noted he is a member of a vintners association and he participates in other wine groups. These groups promote local area wineries and breweries and coordinate promotional events to educate people about local wines and family wineries; both are important networking examples specific to the wine industry. Harris, Gibson, and McDowell (2014) emphasized creating appropriate network relationships is an external factor the entrepreneur can control, unlike other external factors such as weather or government regulations.

Participant A also relied on the local network of restaurants using local products and branding in their menus and Participant B relies on local grocery networks who specialize in marketing local wines. Participant A and C focus heavily on the farmer

market networks, while Participant B supports local fundraising events and sees benefit from the network of people who attend and support the events. Thilmany and Watson (2004) reminded readers that farmer markets were a major part of United States communities before the rise of the retail agribusiness system, and re-emerged in the late 70s, following the passage of the Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act of 1976. Thilmany and Watson also predicted that farmers markets would continue to grow (in the 21st century) as producers connect on a personal basis with consumers.

The participants interviewed for this study all mentioned the importance of the community and providing the customer with a quality product and experience at the farmers markets or at the farm site. Participant A discussed the experience of a family picking berries as one of the "most wholesome family experiences you can have . . . A way to get connected to our food." Participant B spoke of how people enjoy the country venue, away from the city sounds. Participant C talked about the personal connection with customers at the farmers markets, educating them about food and farming, and making that personal connection that "we believe big organizations have lost."

All three participants use social media to promote their products, advertising hours open for you-pick, wine tasting, or listing their farmers market schedule. Participant B had a professional website, offering online sales, family history, and a list of locations selling his wines in addition to his Facebook page. Participants A and C focus on managing just a Facebook page and do not have professional websites to maintain. These participants find Facebook easy to manage and provide updates and messages about product availability. Indrupati and Henari (2013) identified social media

as a proactive method of networking because it presents an opportunity to connect with other entrepreneurs as well as prospective customers. Participant C noted the value of the personal connection to customers at farmer's markets and the ability to stay connected through Facebook. Participant C noted the importance of building a good reputation, so customers seek them out and inquire about their attendance at specific market locations: "Facebook is easy to keep up to date and keep our customers informed."

Table 4

Key Findings on Networking Supported By Significant Statements from Interview Data

<i>Key finding</i>	<i>Participant A</i>	<i>Participant B</i>	<i>Participant C</i>
Networking with other professionals	Join groups on social media or stay connected to see what others in the field are doing.	Connect with the right people who can help you promote and market.	I asked a lot of advice from good citrus growers and my PCA (pest control advisor)
	Networking with other producers at farmers markets and networking with customers contributed to selection of the berries I planted.	Being part of professional groups that promote local winemakers has been an asset contributes to marketing to new customers and staying current on industry news and trends.	The manager of the [nearby] UC Davis Research Center has been very helpful
Community networking	Over the last 9 years the community 'lives' their life around our berries.	Fundraisers are always good – I can help a cause – and I get to network with a different crowd – new connections to my wines and venue.	I like talking to customers and other vendors at the farmers markets

(table continues)

<i>Key finding</i>	<i>Participant A</i>	<i>Participant B</i>	<i>Participant C</i>
	Farmers markets contribute to meeting new community members and increases visits to our farm.		Sometimes customers will post suggestions on our Facebook page which may be a good marketing tip or idea to develop Farmers markets provide a way to personally connect with the consumer, provide good customer service.
Networking with friends and family	My kids are involved with 4-H so I spend time working with them and their friends. Friends like to use our yard for parties, another way we meet new people.	A friend from my Costco days introduced me to the vice president of the company, who introduced me to the regional wine buyer who got my lines in (the store). My dad encouraged me to start the business when I was young and single and was my biggest supporter.	My son and daughter have worked with their dad's bee business and are good resources and sounding boards for ideas, they have been around farmers markets and marketing most of their lives.

Data Collection Overview

Of the three data sources, I collected the largest amount of data from interviewing the participants and observing their operation, store, or activity at a farmers market. I reached data saturation when the interview data became repetitive and correlated with information from the USDA and other research articles, and no additional information

was added. I also viewed Participant B's website to gain information on the family farm history, where he markets his wines, confirm his association with professional organizations he mentioned, and identify what non-profit groups he supports. I noted Costco is a seller of his wines as he stated, along with other wine outlets in the San Joaquin Valley and the site included a list of restaurants that feature his wines. The website is professional, easy to navigate, and provides clear information on events and weekly entertainment. The website also provided validation for the responses to the semistructured interview.

I also reviewed the Facebook pages mentioned by Participant A and found the site to be up to date, with excellent customer comments and reviews, validating the participant's insistence that he sells an experience. Participant A added a new product since our visit, Boysenberry wine, and encouraged visitors to stop by at specific times for wine tasting. Participant C also had an up to date Facebook page where she announced her season was over in August, earlier than normal due to the freeze last winter and the current drought. There were great customer reviews, photos of the display at farmers markets and a warm invitation to look for them next season at local farmer markets. The customer reviews and comments validated the interview responses regarding customer satisfaction, connecting with the community, and providing educational information to customers.

Additional information relevant to producers desiring to prepare foods as part of their value-added products is information on the cottage food industry law in California. The California Homemade Food Act went into effect January 1, 2013, and allows

private-home kitchens to prepare or package certain foods (CDFA, n.d.). Although this is a state law, applicants must apply with their local county department of public health to secure a permit. Participant A mentioned previously using a commercial kitchen to make preservatives, but can now make them in his home kitchen. I also spoke with a potential participant who stated they only sold fresh peaches and provided a you-pick experience, and bed and breakfast option. They did not make preserves or pies to sell due to the "state laws." They may not have known about the relatively new cottage food act, which might have provided an opportunity to generate additional revenue after the regular harvest season.

Using NVivo 11 data analysis software, I entered the interview data and relevant documents, which identified the following three themes important to the participants as success strategies: (a) pre-existing and new knowledge, (b) market differentiation, marketing through social media and word of mouth, and (c) the value of personal networking.

Applications to Professional Practice

One of the challenges of farming in the United States in the 21st century is maximizing returns; farmers have the potential to add revenue to their operations by adding value-added products (Alonso, 2011). Value-added production is a type of business duality, a new venture developed in conjunction with an existing business (Perks & Medway, 2012). The main objective of the study was to identify strategies used by some owners of small farming operations to offer value-added products to sustain their business. After studying the literature review in section one in conjunction with the

results of the study in Section 3, I found significant supporting research amongst multiple studies that align with the outcomes of this study. First, the conceptual framework of von Bertalanffy's (1968) system theory aligns with the fact that farmers face multiple challenges in sustaining their farm operations and must balance the interactions between internal and external forces. The study findings also align with the research reviewed for this study, which emphasized the potential of value-added products for sustaining farm operations (Alonso, 2011; Chen, 2013). The three participants interviewed operated very different, but successful value-added operations. The owner of a 10-acre vineyard started a winery, the owner of 3-acres of walnuts converted to growing multiple varieties of berries, making value-added preserves and wines, and promoting a you-pick, on farm experience. The other grower, the owner of 30 acres of Valencia oranges, created a fresh squeezed all natural orange juice business.

Each farmer had at least one undergraduate degree and previous business and job experience, which was attributed to his or her success. Harris, Gibson, and McDowell (2014) emphasized that knowledge about the specific business and an understanding of the business environment is essential in developing strategic choices. Research also identified that education and training are also key in contributing to small business success (Klyver & Foley, 2012; Saunders, Gray, & Goregaokar, 2014; St-jean & Audet, 2012). Critical to the discussion is that each participant sought out others knowledgeable in their crop or product, and researched opportunities and options before embarking on their value-added journey.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge about key strategies used for

adding value-added farm products and services that may contribute to sustaining the farming operations. Information from the semistructured interviews indicated several key components common to the success of the participants and the literature review. The primary themes included existing and new knowledge, specific marketing strategies, and the value of personal networking. None of the participants prepared a formalized business plan, but each identified strategies that worked and provided the most benefit for sustaining their value-added product or service business. Brouder and Eriksson (2013) emphasized that at the individual level, local experience, social ties, and knowledge are important factors for the new entrepreneurial venture, which correlated with findings from this study.

Critical to expanding an operation is finances, which was a major roadblock for one grower, and another could have benefited from additional funding to get her business operating sooner if they had been aware of grants from the USDA. The USDA provides grant funds for growers seeking to start a value-added component to their operation, known as the Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG). The 2014 Farm Bill revised existing grant programs to provide \$30 million in funding to support direct marketing projects for farmer-to-consumer direct marketing, to support local and regional food enterprise projects, and targeting improving and expanding businesses such as domestic farmers' markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, and agritourism activities (Dept. of Agriculture: AMS, 2016). Other potential sources of income include (a) government subsidies, (b) custom work and other agricultural services, (c) sales of nonfarm products, (d) dividends or refunds from cooperatives, (e) insurance payment, (f)

cash rent, and (g) agritourism (Persson, 2013). Agritourism was recognized as a complimentary option to some of the participants in this study; however, the other sources were not the focus of this study, but are options small farmers should consider. Shields (2015) emphasized that larger operations have a greater liability than small farms, but subsidies are proportional to the liability.

Fresh, ripened on the vine produce or fresh squeezed orange juice with no chemicals sold at farmers markets, locally produced and marketed wines, and agritourism are just a few ideas for adding value to the existing farming operation. Whatever the idea, this study provides information to help other small farmers understand the knowledge, pre-existing and new, needed to create a successful strategy for value-added products or services. The information in this study also provides guidance on cost-effective marketing strategies for differentiating products or services, for connecting with existing and new customers and for generating a new revenue chain to support and sustain the small farm.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include the possibility that farmers who deliver value-added products may play a role in contributing to the health and wealth of their connected rural communities. Alonso and O'Neill (2011) emphasized that farmers who focus on value-added products provide additional products or alternative foods that may contribute to the local community and positively affect the socio-economic environment. The participants interviewed for this study discussed the value of community connections and the importance of providing the customer with a quality

product, service, or experience.

The findings from this study indicated there is value for individuals within a community connecting with their food source. Whether they visit the farm to taste wines made from the grapes just outside the winery door, eat fresh berries while picking them to take home for a pie or put on their ice cream, or seek out the fresh orange juice at the farmers market, the experience of the customer is paramount to sustaining the value-added business. Facebook comments from each participant's page were copied into a Word document and uploaded to NVivo to validate the participants were connecting with their communities and providing the positive experience they each spoke about in the interviews. Facebook comments for Participant A provided validation and specific indicators that customers were connecting with the farmer socially and emotionally. Words like friendly, family, fun, and best demonstrate the importance of the feelings experienced by customers, the impact of families seeking healthy food combined with the social component, and the significance of the friendliness of the owner.



Figure 1. Twenty-five most frequently used words from Participant A's Facebook reviews. Produced with NVivo v11.

Participant C's Facebook comments reflect similar outcomes but focus on the value of the availability of the product at farmers markets, the importance of locating the product at multiple local markets, and the freshness of the product. Once again, these words validate the community connections to healthy choices for the local society discussed by the participant.



Figure 2. Twenty-five most frequently used words from Participant C's Facebook reviews. Produced with NVivo v11.

Participant B's Facebook comments tout the wine, but the venue and events clearly draw customers to the winery. Comments include relaxing atmosphere, good entertainment, great Friday night outing option, and good wine. It is clear that adding a destination venue to his wine tasting room make a positive impact on the business and the surrounding community.



Figure 3. Twenty-five most frequently used words from Participant B's Facebook reviews. Produced with NVivo v11.

The findings from this study indicate that the rural experience of a you-pick farm, outdoor venue and wine tasting, or farmers market create memorable experiences for local families. This study validates the findings of Alonso (2011), who posited that the role of farming in the United States plays a vital role in rural communities, contributing to the economy, health and overall well-being of the communities in which they live and work.

These small farmers demonstrated the value of giving back to their communities by providing excellent service, value-added products, and creating life-long memories. Providing a memorable experience of picking berries as a family, seeing where berries

come from, and teaching a new generation the value of connecting with their food provides long-term value to individuals in the local communities and contributes to the social well-being of community members. Offering wine tasting and an outdoor event venue by the producing vines, providing summer entertainment, and supporting local nonprofit groups demonstrates the importance of connecting on a personal level with customers and the community, and supports the research from the literature review. These opportunities contribute to the sustainability of the farm, but also contribute to society as a whole. Hardesty, Christensen, Muck, Boorinakis-Harper, and Fake (2015) noted that sales dollars from direct marketing create a larger economic ripple than other industries such as new housing development and big box stores. This study provides a foundation for helping small farmers sustain their farming operation while contributing to the wealth of their connected community, a significant contribution to social change.

Recommendations for Action

Small farmers considering adding value-added products and services to their farm operation should examine the findings of this study. Farmers should specifically note the importance of existing and new knowledge, the importance of specific marketing strategies such as product differentiation, word of mouth, and social media marketing, and the importance of personal networking when developing their business plan.

Prior knowledge in farming provides a foundation of understanding of the land, tools, economic and legal challenges, weather, and agronomic practices. Considering the knowledge currently available from a variety of resources will provide an opportunity for farmers to recognize gaps in what they need to know to develop the value-added

production, allowing them to seek mentors or others to fill the knowledge gap. This study validates the research in Section 1, emphasizing the importance of these specific strategies as key to success of a value-added product to increase financial stability and business sustainability.

The first recommendation from this study is that farmers should review and assess their experiences, knowledge, and education. A business plan may be the most appropriate tool for ascertaining this information as it applies to the operational mission. There are many business-planning resources available, most include some form of questions asking what, why, and who questions to guide the overall process. Addressing these questions will contribute to identifying gaps in knowledge so the farmer can seek other resources to fill the gaps. A key resource for small farmers is the USDA and supporting agencies, which were developed to provide support and funding to promote direct marketing of farm products. Two primary agencies beneficial to the value-added producer are the Agricultural Marketing Service and the Farm Market Promotion Program. Despite their success, the participants interviewed for this study did not prepare a formal business plan and did not seek help from the USDA or Agricultural Marketing Service staff, which may have been beneficial since none of those interviewed were aware of the VAPG. The VAPG (Value-Add Producer Grant) is an opportunity to obtain funds to develop a value-added product as part of the farming business.

The second recommendation is to perform research specific to marketing the product or service. Identify what sells, how the product or service is different, how they could do a better job with the product than the competitor, and how it will be marketed. It

is important to identify the marketing channels that work best for the specific product or service. If considering attending and selling at local farmers markets attend markets in the area, talk to other vendors and customers, see how the chosen product might stand out or identify an opportunity to fill a gap in products. Evaluate what similar, or related products are being sold and at what price. Find prices and items that might compete for customers and determine if there is a profit in selling at or below the same price. If selling a product virtually, or in local stores or restaurants, follow the same market evaluation process.

Another strategy used by two of the participants that have value is collaborating with local stores or restaurants. Some local restaurants will place logos or other branding on the menu, which promotes the brand recognition and may increase sales at the local farm stand, farmers market, or online store. Some small farmers are too small to compete in the wholesale market and may rely on direct marketing methods (Rimal et al., 2016) to increase farm income. Harrison et al. (2013) identified direct sales of agricultural products to consumers as critical to the viability of small to medium-size farms.

The third recommendation is to network with others in the area and identify past and present relationships that may provide leads for market channels. Manson, Jordan, Nelson, and Brummel (2014) identified three kinds of network relationships among farmers: (a) ties with family and friends, (b) connection with USDA staff, and (c) farmer-to-farmer organizations. A tie with family and friends is an opportunity to discuss ideas with individuals who are familiar with the operation and are familiar with individual personality traits. As previously noted, connecting with USDA staff provides a broader network of professionals with diverse training, knowledge, and access to a multitude of

resources. Farmer-to-farmer organizations provide a channel for making personal contacts with others who may provide additional information about the value-added product or business plan. McElwee and Smith (2012) contended that farmers work within a limited social network, which may be a barrier to effective decision making. It is important to look outside the typical network of family, friends, or business contacts to develop useful strategies for success.

Social networking is one proactive method that is important to incorporate into a small business because it provides an opportunity to connect with other entrepreneurs as well as prospective customers (Indrupati & Henari, 2013). Social media has become a valuable networking tool, increasing knowledge, and growing the value chain (Roblek, Pejic Bach, Meško, & Bertoncej, 2013). If a value-added producer maintains a Facebook page and updates regularly it provides customers the opportunity to follow their business and track them and their product to various farmers markets, know when produce is available to pick or buy, or if the roadside stand or store will be open on a holiday or weekend. All three participants maintained up to date Facebook pages and customer reviews provided positive feedback, ideas for improving the product or experience, and recommendations to others, all at no cost to the farmer. Paid options are available on Facebook, but none of the participants used this option and still felt their Facebook page was a valuable marketing tool.

Through publications, I will provide small farmers and local agencies who work with start-up farming operations, with a copy of this study to inform them of the findings and possible solutions that may be beneficial in identifying strategies needed to offer

value-added products to sustain their businesses. Small farms have decreased in numbers, but establishing niche markets and product differentiation provides opportunities to increase revenue (Jang & Klein, 2011). As the findings revealed, small farmers desiring to add a value-added component to their operation should ensure that they draw from current knowledge and experience, and seek additional knowledge related to what value-added product will provide the best return on their investment. Farmers should network with other professionals and potential customers to gain new information, and identify the most effective method of marketing to their customers. Table 5 provides basic information on the USDA Value-Added Producer Grant.

Table 5

USDA Value-Added Producer Grants General Overview

Basic information about USDA Value Added Producer Grants	
Applicant Criteria	Independent agricultural producers Producer groups Cooperatives of farmers or ranchers Producer-based business ventures
Fund matching requirements	50% of total project costs
Maximum Grant Amount	\$75,000 for planning grants \$250,000 for working capital grants
Use of Funds	Planning activities: such as feasibility studies and business plan development Working capital expenses: such as processing costs, marketing and advertising expenses, limited inventory and salary expenses

(table continues)

Getting started	Obtain a Data Universal Number System (DUNS) and register with the System for Award Management (SAM)
Application assistance	Local Rural Development Office and website
Additional details, links, forms, resources	www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/value-added-producer-grants

Recommendations for Further Research

An additional area of research could include value-added producers within the same geographical area that operate larger farms. The farm size criterion was 179 acres or less; however, the biggest operation consisted of 60 acres, one-half of which was dedicated primarily to creating a value-added product. Farmers producing value-added products with a longer shelf life may consider marketing on a larger scale (Christensen, Kenney, & Patton, 2015). Larger operations may have more value stream options or may reveal different biases or experiences.

Another recommendation is to use findings from this study to develop a quantitative study with a survey to target a larger sample of value-added producers. The scope of this study included only one farmer from each of three counties. A larger sample size may result in findings that may be more generalizable to value-added producers throughout California. A survey may also help to reduce participant anxiety that may arise from the interview process. A quantitative study may uncover different success strategies used by value-added producers.

Another viable future topic might be seeking additional information on how farmers use social media specifically related to strategic planning. The value-added producers interviewed identified the importance of social media for marketing, but how

do other farmers use this technology. Berthon, Pitt, Plangger and Shapiro (2012) emphasized that social media is a function of the technology, culture, and government within a particular context. Technology continues to evolve and impact society on multiple levels; farming is no exception. Understanding how social media is used in the context of the agricultural environment may provide a more comprehensive view of the social media phenomenon among farmers.

Reflections

My motivation for selecting this study topic was largely a result of my personal involvement in a value-added start-up organization and a personal interest in the growing number of farmers markets in the local communities. As a small business owner and business instructor, I was interested in understanding how small farming operations could increase their revenue stream through value-added products. The determination of a problem statement took several iterations, but I found the final research question to be valuable in understanding many new aspects of the value-added business. This DBA Doctoral Study process provided an opportunity to learn more about the art of research, searching for and assessing data and information, and learning to evaluate information through a variety of lenses.

In my role as the researcher, I sought out qualified participants to interview, scheduled and conducted interviews, and analyzed and interpreted the data collected. During the data collection process, I avoided leading questions to mitigate bias. I found participants to be open once they knew the purpose of the interview. I was aware of the uniqueness of each operation but surprised at the similar responses to the questions. Each

participant was more than willing to share their successes and failures to help others who may want to pursue a value-added business.

The process of the DBA journey has provided me with valuable skills in researching, writing, and speaking, which I am using as I teach undergraduate students. I have gained insight as to the value of identifying the lens by which I view a topic, which has made me reflect on my world view and question the view of other researchers. Preparing for interviews provided valuable training in listening techniques, note taking, and learning to ask questions for clarification. Overall, I am a better writer, instructor, scholar, and leader because of this endeavor.

Summary and Study Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used by some owners of small farming operations to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The specific population consisted of small business owners farming on 179 acres or less in California's San Joaquin Valley counties of Fresno, Kings, and Tulare, that continuously farmed and operated a value-added agricultural business for at least 5 years. Due to the variety of agricultural products grown in the Central Valley and a long growing season, more opportunities exist for value-added products than in regions where there are a shorter growing season and fewer crop options.

Farmers have multiple options for increasing farm income and adding value to agricultural products. Some farmers rely on supplemental income such as (a) off-farm income, (b) government subsidies, (c) agricultural related custom services, (d) land rent

or (e) agritourism. Other options for adding value using farm products may include craft items, some form of processing and marketing, or offering a "pick-your-own" opportunity. Whatever supplemental income options farmers consider, it is important to look at how a change will be affected by the economic, physical, and legal climate. Rethinking business strategies and investigating new ideas to improve farm income operations requires research and consideration for long-term effects.

Farmers need to assess what they know about their products and ascertain the most efficient and effective option for additional income that fits their farming operation. In addition to personal knowledge and existing skills, farmers must seek out others to aid them in filling the knowledge gaps. Small farmers desiring to expand to a value-added product should connect with USDA staff to capitalize on staff knowledge and the extensive resources available, including information specific to value-added products, marketing, and funding options. Farmers should specifically note the importance of existing and new knowledge, the importance of specific marketing strategies such as product differentiation, word of mouth, and social media marketing, and the importance of personal networking when developing their business plan. Based on the findings of this study, in some circumstances the financial viability of some small farming operations could be improved by the addition of some value-added products.

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Appendix A: Certificate of Ethical Compliance



Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Research Question

The research question for this study is, What strategies do owners of small farming operations need to offer value-added products to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years?

Selecting Respondents and Explaining the Study and Consent	<p>Initial contact will be by phone:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide introduction, how their contact information was obtained and discuss study and qualifications – • Use a bulleted list from the Consent Form to be sure all points are covered • Owner or key decision maker / at least 18 years of age • Active in the daily operation as owner or key decision maker • Operation is in Fresno, Kings, or Tulare County • Farming 179 acres or less • Continuously operated the value-added component under the same ownership for at least 5 years <p>If criteria is met and participant states interest or willingness to participate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email Informed Consent Form immediately following phone conversation • Include in email a follow-up scheduled time to call to discuss consent form again, and • if they agree to participant, schedule a time and place for interview (Have some recommendations prepared for locations near their office)
Third Party Transcriber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain use of third party transcriber; and use of confidentiality agreement in case they accidentally state their name or company name during the

	<p>interview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcriber is a certified medical transcriber, bound by her code of conduct to hold all information transcribed in complete confidence.
Setting Interview Time and Place	<p>Following receipt of Informed Consent and confirmation of criteria and agreement to participate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule time and place for interview (quiet, off site, away from distractions). • Share preferred method of contact with each participant in the event of questions or schedule change (email, phone, text).
Interview Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greet the participant • Review forms and obtain signature • Engage in a casual conversation to relax the participant • Ask a few demographic questions as part of the initial conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exact size of farming operation • Acres, employees (Seasonal, full-time, family members employed) • Specific County of farming operation • Discuss the process and give the participant their company and participant number • Provide a tent card on the table or desk to help them remember not to use their name or the company name during the recorded interview
Recording the Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record each interview (unless requested not to, then take notes); • Remind participant not to use personal name or company name during the recorded session
After the Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss documents available based on consent form, and • Establish time to pick up document copies at participants office.

Transcribing the Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have each interview transcribed, • Review transcriptions, and • Incorporate additional notes and information from document review.
Member Checking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpret each interview transcript individually and prepare a paragraph of responses to each interview question; • Send to appropriate participant for review/comment; • Establish timeframe when information should be available and time allowed for review.
Additional questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine if information is missing based on transcript analysis and/or member checking; schedule follow-up as needed.
Coding the Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code all responses using NVivo11; review and evaluate against literature review.

Interview Questions

1. What prompted you to expand your operation to include a value-added product to your operation?	
a. What other options did you consider before finalizing your decision?	
b. How did family legacy, climate, economic, and/or legal issues influence your decision?	
c. What process did you use to develop and implement strategies for your value-added operation?	

(table continues)

2. What strategies worked well for your value-added operation?	
3. What strategies did not work well for your value-added operation?	
4. How did you modify or adapt strategies during their implementation to improve the success of your value-added operation?	
5. What other information about value-added production you would like to share?	