

# They don't know 'Diddly Squat': An exploration of students' knowledge and perceptions of agriculture through Clarkson's Farm

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## Abstract

*Documentary television series Clarkson's Farm has been lauded for its positive, entertaining depiction of British agriculture. Airing in 240 countries and territories, the program follows British TV presenter Jeremy Clarkson in his attempts to manage his operation with the help of more experienced farmhands. Researchers at The Ohio State University, curious about the implications of screening the show for audiences with varying degrees of agricultural knowledge, analyzed students' written responses to two episodes using a conceptual framework comprised of the Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model and agricultural literacy. We found that all students enjoyed the program, but students with less initial agricultural knowledge gained a greater appreciation for and understanding of agricultural practices, while their counterparts related to the content themselves and identified it as an example of a positive depiction of agriculture that could be used to educate others. We offer recommendations for implementing Clarkson's Farm as an educational tool and for further exploration of its potential future impact on agricultural literacy.*

## Introduction

The documentary series *Clarkson's Farm* portrays Jeremy Clarkson, a British broadcaster and journalist, experiencing the first year managing his farm in the rural Cotswolds' region of England (Fincham, 2021-2023). The first season premiered on the Amazon Prime streaming service in June 2021 (Whitehead, 2021a) with eight episodes featuring topics like farm management, livestock production, agricultural business and marketing, and conservation. Each episode follows Clarkson as he attempts new tasks on his Diddly Squat Farm, such as purchasing new tractors, planting crops, and introducing a flock of sheep to his operation. Clarkson is aided by more experienced helpers, whose advice he often ignores to great comedic effect.

The show aired in 240 countries and territories, and a second season was confirmed a month after the first aired (*Amazon Studios*, 2021). Season one of *Clarkson's Farm* has been rated 4.9 out of 5 stars

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through customer reviews on *Amazon* (2024). In late 2024, the first season had a 100% “Fresh” rating among television critics on review aggregator *Rotten Tomatoes*, with a 98% “Fresh” rating among audiences (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.). Season three, released in 2024, broke the UK viewership rating on Amazon Prime with more than 5.1 million viewers in a seven-day period (Frost, 2024). The show has a large following in China, with more than 5 million views on the streaming service Bilibili and a 9.6 out of 10 rating on the Chinese rating service Douban, with more than 80,000 reviews (Hawkins, 2024). Clarkson and his colleagues also received accolades from several British agricultural organizations for the show’s positive portrayal of agriculture (Murray, 2021).

Entertainment media, including films, television programs, and documentaries, have been a rich vein to mine for agricultural communications and education scholarship. Researchers have analyzed television programs like *The Bachelor* and *The Simple Life* to better understand their portrayals of agriculture and rural life and the potential impacts of those portrayals on audience perceptions (Specht & Beam, 2015; Ruth et al., 2005). These studies demonstrated that entertainment media, even those falling under the “reality TV” category, often peddle in negative stereotypes and depict farming as easy, often disgusting, and menial. Most worrisome is the fact that low rates of agricultural literacy, or “knowledge and awareness of the U.S. food and fiber industry” (Specht et al., 2014, p. 64), may exacerbate the effects of negative depictions of farms and farmers.

Past studies have explored the use of media as an avenue for education (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Nobel & Nobel, 1979; Parsemain, 2016). To encourage learning from and with media, viewers must declare a show to be realistic, relatable, and authentic (Parsemain, 2016). Even programs that seem disconnected from real life may be educational if they are “emotionally or psychologically realistic and resonates with viewers’ real-life emotions, experiences or situations” (Parsemain, 2016, p. 90). In their study of the impact of the show *Happy Days*, Nobis and Nobel (1979), noted Australian adolescents learned about relationships and gained social skills by comparing the program to their own life experiences. Reality television resonates with audiences when viewers can relate to on-screen talent and connect scenarios with their own experiences (Buckingham & Bragg 2003, 2004).

Popular culture media allows learners to explore classroom theories with a greater application of reality (Champoux, 1999). A study of agricultural educators in Pennsylvania revealed that more than half of educators utilized popular media to teach leadership theories in the classroom (Bruce & Ewing, 2009). Wimmer et al. (2012) found that post-secondary students could recognize leadership concepts and apply classroom lessons to scenarios depicted in *The Office*. Specht et al. (2014) explored how students’ agricultural literacy impacted their response to media depictions of agricultural topics, concluding that agricultural literacy was a predictor of respondent reaction, as increased literacy lessened the likelihood of a negative reaction (Specht et al., 2014). For those with little knowledge about a topic, exposure through visuals may increase their awareness of what they don’t know and prime their interest to learn more (Ditta et al., 2020).

### **Purpose and Research Objective**

Much has been written about the steady decline of rural and agricultural populations in the United States (Cromartie, 2017; Dempsey, 2017) and the subsequent need to inform or educate the general populace about farming (Chapman & Lindner, 2018; Clemons et al., 2018; Doerfert, 2003; Enns et al., 2016; Frick et al., 1994; Mercier, 2015). Gaining perspectives from individuals with varied experiences demonstrates the relatability and value of the show as a learning tool (Wimmer et al., 2012). It has been shown that popular media can be an effective avenue for education among a variety of populations (Bruce & Ewing, 2009; Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Champoux, 1999; Ditta et al., 2020 Nobel & Nobel, 1979; Parsemain, 2016; Specht et al., 2014, Wimmer et al., 2012). Popular film and television have been shown to serve as an avenue for subtle education and value development among college students

(Buckingham, 2007; Kubey, 2010). The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore the application of *Clarkson's Farm* in a postsecondary classroom setting. The following research objective guided our investigation:

RO: Explore agricultural and non-agricultural audiences' perceptions and knowledge of agriculture and food production after viewing two episodes of *Clarkson's Farm*.

## **Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

### ***Media Effects and the Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model***

Communications scholars have long posited that media—everything from news to entertainment—impact the attitudes, beliefs, and subsequent behaviors of audiences (Livingstone, 1998). Researchers have proposed numerous media-effects models and theories since the “magic-bullet” theory of powerful, direct media influence was largely debunked by Paul Lazarsfeld and colleagues in the 1940s (Griffin et al., 2018; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). We looked to the Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model (DSMM; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013) to inform this study.

In their 2013 article introducing the DSMM, Valkenburg and Peter note that media effects research traditionally includes, to varying degrees, both media-related variables, such as media use and media processing, and nonmedia variables, like individual-difference variables and social context. The DSMM is a microlevel effects model, meaning it “bases [its] inferences on observations of the individual media user” (p. 222). The model is based on four propositions:

Proposition 1: Media effects are conditional; they depend on three types of differential-susceptibility variables: dispositional, developmental, and social.

Proposition 2: Media effects are indirect; three media response states mediate the relationship between media use and media effects.

Proposition 3: The differential-susceptibility variables have two roles; they act as predictors of media use and as moderators of the effect of media use on media response states.

Proposition 4: Media effects are transactional; they not only influence media use, but also the media response states, and differential-susceptibility variables.

This study focuses on Proposition 1, the conditionality of media effects. Media-effects scholars posit that audience's interpretations of media may be based on individual characteristics such as gender, class, race, and age (Kim, 2004; Livingstone, 1998).

Valkenburg and Peter (2013) further elaborated on the conditionality of media effects with three types of variables that can influence audience responses: dispositional susceptibility, developmental susceptibility, and social susceptibility. Dispositional susceptibility variables are “all person dimensions that predispose the selection of and responsiveness to media, including gender, temperament, personality, cognitions [e.g., scripts and schemata], values, attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and moods” (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013, p. 226). Developmental susceptibility is an individual's responsiveness to media based on their cognitive, emotional, and social development, while social susceptibility variables are “all social-context factors that can influence an individual's selective use of and responsiveness to media,” ranging from their peer groups and families to their cultural norms and values (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013, p. 227).

Researchers have utilized the DSMM to study the differential effects of playing the augmented-reality video game *Pokémon Go* on individuals with varying degrees of social anxiety (Bonus et al., 2018), as well as the susceptibility to flat-earth conspiracy theories among YouTube viewers who spend different amounts of time on the platform (Landrum et al., 2021). Bonus et al. noted that dispositional and social susceptibility variables, such as prior exposure to the franchise, social anxiety, and family or peer pressure,

influenced individuals' likeliness to engage with the game and reports of positive emotions associated with gameplay (2018). Landrum et al. (2021) used validated measures for science intelligence, conspiracy mentality, and religiosity, and found a relationship between these cognitive differential susceptibility variables and YouTube viewers' beliefs about the flat-earth conspiracy. Landrum et al. also acknowledged the possibility of additional deferential variables having an influence on our understanding of the impact of videos (2021). Using DSMM, we can better understand how individuals' susceptibility variables influence their response to media. Our analysis of written responses to *Clarkson's Farm* considered dispositional and social susceptibility variables as described by the participants.

### ***Agricultural Literacy***

In this study, we identified agricultural literacy as the primary dispositional-susceptibility variable. Agricultural literacy, broadly, is the general public's knowledge and understanding about agriculture (Enns et al., 2016; Mercier, 2015). Frick et al. (1991) offered perhaps the most comprehensive definition, describing agricultural literacy as "possessing knowledge and understanding of our food and fiber system. An individual possessing such knowledge would be able to synthesize, analyze, and communicate basic information about agriculture," with that "basic information" including plant and animal production; the economic, environmental, and societal impacts of agriculture; public policy; and the distribution of agricultural products (p. 52). The definition of agricultural literacy has evolved over the years from awareness of agricultural topics to measure individuals' deeper understanding of the topic (Cosby et al., 2022).

One's agricultural literacy, like the effects of media consumption, may be based on a variety of factors at the individual and societal levels, including geographic location, political ideology, cultural background, education, occupation, and prior experience with agriculture (Anderson et al., 2014; Enns et al., 2016; Specht et al., 2014). While an individual may have exposure to agriculture, experiences will differ among individuals. Cosby et al. (2022) found individuals with informal agricultural knowledge, such as hands-on experiences, knowledge from popular media, and general discussions with social groups, can have misconceptions about a wide range of agricultural topics. Though individuals may possess agriculture literacy, they may not be agriculturally literate: able to express and communicate their knowledge of agricultural topics (Clemons et al., 2018). Exposure to new contexts provides opportunities for students, regardless of past agricultural knowledge, to enhance their agricultural literacy.

### **Methods**

This study utilized a conventional qualitative content analysis to explore the influences of *Clarkson's Farm* on agricultural and non-agricultural audiences. In this method, researchers avoid preconceived categories, instead, they immerse themselves in the data and allow codes to develop directly from the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The intrinsic approach also allowed for the recognition of contextual factors, for example, different realities and experiences of the participants, which served as the basis for their reflection assignments, the primary data sources in this study.

The population of interest comprised undergraduate students at The Ohio State University who were enrolled in AGRCOMM 2367: Agricultural Issues in Contemporary Society, a general education writing course focused on current issues in agriculture, food, environmental sciences, and natural resources. The course helps students develop a critical understanding of agricultural, environmental, and related issues facing the United States and the world while improving their writing skills. Issues are introduced and discussed throughout the semester, and writing assignments are connected to the content covered.

The course was open to any student who fit within the general education system at Ohio State and had completed at least one writing course prior to enrollment. Participants consisted of freshmen through

seniors with a variety of majors across the university. This study included 96 total students who were enrolled in the course in the spring and autumn of 2022.

The *Clarkson's Farm* activity was a two-part lesson that incorporated current issues, personal reflections, and class discussions. In class, students were shown the first episode of *Clarkson's Farm*, "Tractoring," in which "Jeremy Clarkson embarks on his path towards muddy misery and potential ruin by running his own farm" (Whitehead, 2021a, episode description). They were immediately asked to write a one-page reflection answering the following questions:

- What did you enjoy about the show? What did you dislike?
- What did you learn about food, agriculture, natural resources, or environmental sciences from the show?
- What did you learn about rural England?

Students were given the remainder of the class time to complete and submit their reflections via the course learning management system. The subsequent class periods were used for class discussions about the episode they had watched and their answers to these reflection questions. This process was then repeated the next week with episode two, "Sheeping," wherein "Jeremy decides to get a flock of sheep, not realising the added complications these high-maintenance animals will bring" (Whitehead, 2021b, episode description).

### **Data Collection**

We received IRB approval to access the students' one-page responses for analysis as educational data. The course instructor, a member of the research team, downloaded the submissions, reformatted every pair of responses into a single Microsoft Word document for each respondent, and removed all identifying information, such as names and class sections, after giving each respondent a code number. These code numbers and the respondents' colleges of enrollment were kept in a separate Microsoft Excel document for reference. Students were removed from the study if they failed to submit one or both assignments used for this analysis, resulting in a total of 84 participants.

### **Data Analysis and Trustworthiness**

The research team consisted of four investigators: two faculty members and two graduate assistants. We divided into two pairs consisting of one faculty member and one graduate student. One pair was assigned responses from students in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) ( $n = 36$ ), and one pair to students outside CFAES ( $n = 48$ ). Teams were created to allow each pair to focus on one audience group, ensuring findings were based on each audience's perspective in this study. All members of the research team watched the *Clarkson's Farm* episodes screened during the classroom activities before data analysis began to provide additional context to the participants' written responses. Researchers utilized line by line, inductive coding to find emergent themes from the data itself (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Thornburg, 2021). Each pair coded 10% of responses in their category together ( $n = 4$  for the agricultural participants;  $n = 5$  for the non-agricultural participants) to establish initial codes for their audience (CFAES or non-CFAES) and potential emerging themes, then completed the analysis individually. Upon completion of individual coding, the pairs met to discuss their emergent codes, then collapse the set into overarching themes. The entire research team then met to compare the themes and discuss consistencies and differences within the participant responses.

In qualitative research, trustworthiness can be measured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). In this study, credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with repeated readings of students' reflections and time spent discussing and reflecting emergent codes and themes. Through rich, thick descriptions and direct quotes of responses, the researchers have demonstrated transferability of findings. Individual audit trails kept by the

research team were used for reference when finalizing codes and themes, which provides evidence for dependability. Having demonstrated credibility, transferability, and dependability, the researchers have demonstrated how conclusions were drawn, thus establishing confirmability.

All research team members also reflected on their respective experiences that could influence their analysis, including their varying firsthand knowledge of food and fiber production, their positionality as researchers, students, and faculty members in a college of agriculture, and their familiarity with British culture, agriculture, and Jeremy Clarkson as a public figure. All team members have prior experience with animal agriculture, including involvement in raising and showing a variety of livestock. Three of the team members have visited the UK at least once, and two toured agricultural facilities on their travels. Both faculty members were familiar with *Clarkson's Farm* and associated research prior to this study, while the graduate student members were introduced to the show through participation in this research.

### **Findings**

Throughout the analysis of the student reflections, six themes emerged: *humor*; *educational value*; *surprise*; *realism*; *emotion*; and *comparing U.S. to U.K.* The theme *realism* was represented in four sub-themes: *accurate and authentic portrayal*; *mistakes*; *missing pieces*; and *unrealistic situations*. These findings highlight the thinking of students as they watched *Clarkson's Farm*, with recognition of the similarities and differences between CFAES and non- CFAES students. Student quotes in this section are presented verbatim and have not been corrected for spelling, grammar, or punctuation.

#### ***Humor***

Overall, the non- CFAES audience encountered this experience with “no prior farming knowledge” (Student 4), and little interest in agriculture as a topic: “I thought [*Clarkson's Farm*] was going to be a boring TV show, one that I thought was easily going to lose my interest and even lead me to sleep” (Student 9).

After the first episode, however, non- CFAES students expressed their enjoyment of the show's format: “After watching one full episode though, it has my attention” (Student 9). Student 5 said, “It adds humor, education, and intrigue behind the practice of managing a farm. I think the show managed to do a fantastic job of making it both entertaining and informative.”

CFAES students found *Clarkson's Farm* to be “funny and enjoyable to watch” (Student 53). Students voiced their concerns about the potential for the show to be a boring documentary but were happy to find the show amusing and entertaining: “I think the humor made it friendly to an unfamiliar audience, because it made it feel sort of like how it would be if anyone else who knew nothing about farming had suddenly decided to do so” (Student 31).

Students had mixed reactions to Clarkson himself. Several students reported having some background knowledge of or previous experience with Clarkson: “I watched Top Gear a lot in my early 20's and enjoyed Jeremy Clarkson as the host of that show. So, seeing him in another show about farming was a pleasant surprise” (Student 71). Many believed Clarkson to be a positive element of the show and believed his “humor and personality bring a lot of life to the show” (Student 57). “Jeremy Clarkson is also one of my favorite people to watch on TV because of his great humor and oftentimes overconfident attitude,” wrote Student 69. However, a group of students also found Clarkson to be “a little annoying and ‘extra’ so to say” (Student 25), as well as “ignorant and privileged” (Student 2). While this did not completely detract from students' enjoyment of the episodes, they were clear in their dislike of some of the show's humor.

### ***Educational Value***

Though the depth of prior agriculture experience varied, all students found educational value in these first two episodes of *Clarkson's Farm*. Students learned more about new agriculture practices and gained a better understanding of agriculture in different countries. They were able to discuss agricultural practices with fluency, recalling terms and practices beyond a surface level understanding. However, the nature of learning varied between the non-CFAES and CFAES students.

Most CFAES students study some area of agriculture, environmental sciences, or natural resources, and therefore came into the experience with a greater understanding of agricultural practices. However, these students still gained knowledge about agriculture from watching *Clarkson's Farm*: "I learned that farming life is much more difficult and complicated than it seems" (Student 80).

Beyond the knowledge they gained themselves, CFAES students also pointed out the potential for *Clarkson's Farm* to educate others. "The show does serve as a way for people uninvolved in agriculture to learn about the ins and outs of farming," said Student 62. There was an overarching idea of the show having educational value in presenting agricultural experiences and processes to individuals outside the industry: "[*Clarkson's Farm*] teaches its viewers practically everything one needs to know in order to begin farming from scratch" (Student 82).

With their overall lack of farming experience, non-CFAES students represented a less agriculture-minded audience approaching the show. These students appreciated how the show started at the beginning, allowing them to learn alongside Clarkson: "Being new at something it doesn't matter how well off you are, you need to start at ground zero just like everyone else" (Student 39).

Though non-CFAES students came in with little agricultural knowledge, they were not devoid of perceptions of agriculture. "I always thought of farming as being an easy job that anyone can do," said Student 25. Student 24 wrote, "I was taught from a young age that farming can be taxing on the physical side but doesn't require much strategic planning or thought."

Through their viewing experience, many expressed a change of perspective in the modern realities of farming: "Having been given the opportunity to see the financial planning behind a farming operation ... has completely switched my childhood understanding of the profession" (Student 24).

CFAES students were able to take their learning one step further, making connections between their personal experiences and the experiences represented in the show. Students who were familiar with row-crop or livestock operations contextualized their own experiences with Clarkson's. They connected with familiar aspects of the show's agricultural practices, while also acknowledging several new ideas and concepts throughout the episodes. Students analyzed the farm's practices through the lens of their own experiences with agriculture by building on the practices presented in these episodes.

Overall, students found the show to be educational and found themselves learning more about different aspects of the agricultural industry: "Since this is very much a learning experience for Jeremy Clarkson himself, you get to learn a lot about the farming process as he struggles through it" (Student 69).

### ***Surprise***

CFAES and non-CFAES students alike were surprised at many aspects of the show, including finances, government regulations, and infrastructure. Many students had never experienced agriculture in the U.K. and were surprised about several practices presented throughout the show.

Students were shocked by the financial aspect of farming operations and the sheer amount of money that was being spent throughout the show: "You need thousands of dollars' worth of expensive equipment

to even have a chance about being profitable,” Student 46 wrote, while Student 64 said, “The biggest thing that stuck out to me was the cost required for farming.” Students realized after watching these episodes that farming often “takes a lot of money for just a little return” (Student 84).

For non-CFAES students, the cost of time was another revelation, as many did not realize cultivating and planting would take Clarkson as long as it did, and that the potential for profit loss due to time delays was significant. They were also cognizant of circumstances beyond Clarkson’s control – weather, pests, equipment malfunction, injury, regulations – which caused additional financial stress, logistical burden, and insecurity: “No matter how advanced, farming in the end is still dependent on the weather” (Student 20).

Both CFAES and non- CFAES students were attuned to the rules and regulations Clarkson was required to follow. Students identified how “government regulations concerning sprays...can really hurt the farmers in [the U.K.]” (Student 66). Overall, students believed the “U.K. has a lot more regulations than the United States” (Student 67). Many were surprised at the level to which the government exerted its control over farms: “I didn’t think it would be to the point in which they tell you where you can and cannot store things” (Student 22).

### ***Realism***

The theme realism was represented in four sub-themes: *accurate and authentic portrayal*; *mistakes*; *missing pieces*; and *unrealistic situations*. Together, these sub-themes represent how students perceived the applicability of the show to opportunities and challenges other farmers would face.

#### ***Accurate and Authentic Portrayal***

In general, CFAES students found *Clarkson’s Farm* to be a relatively realistic depiction of the agricultural industry. One student mentioned enjoying “the realism of the show and the way that its agriculture was portrayed” (Student 61). Others identified the portrayal of the cost associated with farming, stating the show “displays how hard it is and how costly it is to farmers” (Student 58).

Non- CFAES students overwhelmingly appreciated the inclusion of expert perspectives to counter Clarkson’s inexperience with agricultural practices. “I enjoyed how he was able to bring more knowledgeable people along and have them explain the process as well” (Student 22). Experts provided Clarkson, and, by extension, viewers, with additional insight into practical skills and best practices. They offered the institutional knowledge Clarkson lacked and offered the reasoning behind certain decisions.

Students valued the realistic portrayal of the struggles associated with owning and operating a farm: “[*Clarkson’s Farm*] shows you the full process of how hard farming is and a lot of the problems that come with farming” (Student 77). The show “brings out how hard it can be for farmers and presents a real message” (Student 53).

#### ***Mistakes***

Among both CFAES and non- CFAES respondents, many students reported negative feelings toward Clarkson based on his actions and attitude throughout the show: “I did not like how sporadic Jeremy is with his decision making” (Student 68). Students expressed their concern with Clarkson’s lack of preparedness, feeling he should have engaged in more research before pursuing his various ventures.

Non- CFAES students noted that Clarkson often blatantly disregarded the advice provided by his experts: “I wished that Clarkson would merely follow what he is exactly told” (Student 30). Students expressed frustration with Clarkson in these instances, feeling he incurred unnecessary time and monetary burdens due to his actions. A CFAES student agreed, stating, “Jeremy doesn’t think through his action” when he is making new decisions on his farm (Student 54).

Though some students expressed their frustration at Clarkson's inability to follow expert advice, non-CFAES students especially appreciated the inclusion of his mistakes in the show: "While he had people helping him and there were people for him to reach out to, you still watched him make mistakes, even several times. It made the show entertaining, but more importantly, authentic" (Student 7).

### ***Missing Pieces***

CFAES students pointed out some of the shortcomings of *Clarkson's Farm's* accuracy. Many pointed out that the show provided a shallow overview of topics, and they, therefore, struggled with areas that seemed to be missing important context. "There are times that the show seems to drift away from the farming aspect and shift to more entertainment purposes" (Student 70). Some students noted their background in animal agriculture and pointed out areas the show may have skimmed over. Students with experience in and knowledge of agriculture wanted more information about specific practices in the show: "I wish the show would go more in depth on what different crops are they planting and why" (Student 65). "[*Clarkson's Farm*] didn't go much into the health aspect of the sheep," wrote Student 74.

To a lesser extent, non-CFAES students also picked up on gaps in presented knowledge. "I wish the short part of the episode about the one field planted by the previous farmer that got completely destroyed by a species of beetle was expanded," Student 32 wrote. "It would be a simple search to find a pound to dollar conversion, but when watching I did not have a solid reference point as to what the equipment cost," commented Student 19.

### ***Unrealistic situations***

Though non-CFAES students appreciated Clarkson's journey as a beginning farmer, they consistently called out the unrealistic nature of his situation regarding his financial capacity: "Jeremy Clarkson is most likely a very wealthy man, therefore, he has much more money to be able to start his farming operation and to be able subsidize his farming errors" (Student 26).

They perceived that Clarkson's wealth provided him with additional flexibility with his decisions, in that he could go over-budget when purchasing equipment or pursue what turned out to be an unprofitable sheep enterprise. This was the most noted element of unrealism in the show for non-CFAES students:

It seems as if Clarkson has unlimited money, and it doesn't really affect his wellbeing when unexpected problems come up and he has to pay for them. Most farmers don't have the amount of available help that Clarkson does either and it seems that maybe because he is doing a TV show, everyone he needs is available on the spot when he needs them. These two factors of the show make it feel unrealistic because the majority of farmers aren't capable of doing those things.  
(Student 40)

Students also wondered if Clarkson had unlimited access to local experts simply by virtue of producing a television show, and if farmers in a similar situation would have the same access to experts as did Clarkson. Although I understand that he needs to have some success for it to be an interesting TV show, I also am aware that most farmers do not have a wealth of resources and people at hand the way he does" (Student 1).

### ***Emotion***

Overall, CFAES students acknowledged some sort of emotional response to *Clarkson's Farm*. Students identified moments in the show where they felt a connection to the content. "[Episode 1] really made me have a certain appreciation for Clarkson Even though he made some mistakes ... he pushed on and continued to farm. Clarkson gave me some inspiration to push on despite that pressure and judgement" (Student 72).

Students mentioned having emotional reactions to the show when presented with situations they had personally experienced. A few students, who have raised livestock, revealed an emotional connection to Clarkson's struggles. They specifically mentioned the financial burden of the livestock industry and the emotional toll of culling animals.

[Clarkson] ... also was able to experience the feeling of having to cull the three ewes. That's one of the hardest parts of being in the livestock industry because keeping them is just a waste of money, but we often have a moral battle of wanting to keep them alive. (Student 66)

Though most non- CFAES students did not have much livestock experience, they were drawn to Clarkson developing an emotional attachment to his sheep. Many empathized with Clarkson when he was required to cull three of his flock due to their inability to breed. Only a few students were upset by the inclusion of this portion of the episode. Overall, students understood the reasoning behind the decision to cull the sheep, but they were "sad when Clarkson went to say goodbye to his sheep that were to be killed, and when he got there [it] was too late" (Student 45).

Non- CFAES students also developed an appreciation for farmers throughout the show, as they learned about the challenges they face daily. "Since I did not grow up on or near a farm or do not know anyone who is a farmer, I do not think I appreciate all the work that goes into it" (Student 6).

### ***Comparing U.S. to U.K.***

CFAES students made many comparisons between agriculture in the United States and the United Kingdom. Students identified differences in infrastructure, crop and animal management, weather, and topography. Many stated "that rural England is a very hilly area" compared to areas in the U.S. that they have experienced (Student 58).

Non- CFAES students generally made fewer comparisons between the U.S. and the U.K.: "I did not even think about England having a lot of rural areas, or at least as much as the United States" (Student 41). Non- CFAES students tended to focus on more physical characteristics of the setting: "Rural England is extremely beautiful, and this show has really showcased its beauty" (Student 42). Both CFAES and non-CFAES students fixated heavily on the amount of rainfall depicted in these episodes. Some students noted how the "weather is rather unpredictable" in the U.K. (Student 61).

The differences in infrastructure between the U.S. and U.K. were conspicuous to CFAES students. Students pointed out the size and quality of farm equipment in the U.K., stating that the U.K. does not "have fancy and brand-new equipment like here in the states" (Student 61). "After Clarkson purchases his Lamborghini tractor, he is surprised to find out that other local farmers in the area use tractors half of the size. This is different from farming in America as larger equipment usually means higher yield meaning more money" (Student 70).

For the few non-CFAES students who discussed infrastructure, their perceptions were mixed. Discussing the permanent piping system and stone fences, one student called England "old and technologically behind" and wrote that their technology "no longer works for modern-day farming" (Student 18). However, another student said, "from high tech machinery to massive tractors everything that farmers are doing has been upgraded or changed as technology has progressed over time" (Student 10).

While most students stressed the difference between the U.S. and the U.K., some students identified similarities between the two. One student believes "rural England is very similar to the rural places in the United States" (Student 68).

The community aspect of rural areas resonated with both CFAES and non-CFAES students. Students found that the “demographics are also very similar to (the U.S.) with older men being the owners/operators of the farms” (Student 54). They noted “rural England is a small, tight-knit community,” (Student 12), but were also quick to mention the competitive nature of the industry as “people would judge [Clarkson] on his non-perfect lines” (Student 3). Overall, students found that the U.K. industry is “relatively similar to agriculture in the United States” (Student 62).

## **Discussion**

Media outlets can have a substantial impact on audience attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Livingstone, 1998). Dispositional and social susceptibilities help to explain why individuals may differ in the ways they use and process media due to their individual differences and social context (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). In their reflections, students indicated a wide range of prior experience and preconceptions about agriculture before participating in the *Clarkson's Farm* classroom activity. Our initial goal was to explore the differences between CFAES and non-CFAES students, representing agricultural and non-agricultural audiences, but other dispositional and social susceptibility variables emerged in our analysis.

### ***Dispositional Susceptibility***

Dispositional susceptibility variables are personal characteristics that influence one's selection and responsiveness to media. They include gender, personality, prior knowledge, values, attitudes, beliefs, and motivations (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). Students identified their connection to the agriculture industry, citing everything from little to no agricultural knowledge to hands-on agricultural experience. Realism was a major theme that emerged from student responses. Regardless of background knowledge, students were able to interpret agricultural issues based on the portrayal presented throughout *Clarkson's Farm*. While students believed some aspects of the show were dramatized, the overall interpretation of key events helped students to reflect on their experiences. Students connected with Clarkson through his own learning process, especially during instances where Clarkson was allowed to fail. Though students expressed their frustration at Clarkson's stubborn determination to ignore expert advice and try things his own way, these mistakes helped the non-CFAES audience especially gain appreciation for the challenging nature of farm work. CFAES students related to the realistic depiction of the struggles involved in agriculture, making connections to personal difficulties they experienced in the industry.

### ***Agricultural Literacy and Preconceived Notions***

Reflecting on their own experiences in agriculture, CFAES students often highlighted the surface-level nature of the presented information. They extrapolated on show topics in their reflections, further describing the practices within the context of their own knowledge. Non-CFAES students noted their lack of agricultural experience and identified their own knowledge gaps. However, they were still curious to know more beyond what the show presented, seeking information that was not covered in these two episodes. Students' curiosity and emotional connection to *Clarkson's Farm* showcases the potential effectiveness of the educational elements of the show (Parsemain, 2016). Jeremy Clarkson himself assisted students in the learning process by presenting a level of agricultural literacy that connected in some way with all students. To the non-CFAES audience especially, Clarkson mirrored their own preconceptions and prior experiences, and thus served as a proxy to their own learning. For the CFAES audience, Clarkson's journey resonated with them and their own time learning similar agricultural practices (Buckingham & Bragg 2003, 2004).

***Social Susceptibility***

Students also identified social susceptibility variables that influenced their consumption of the show. As with dispositional susceptibility variables, social susceptibility variables influence how an individual selects and responds to media. They encompass all social-context factors and may include family and peer opinions, cultural norms and values, and industry standards (Valkenburg & Peter 2013).

***Preconceptions from Family, Peers, and Industry***

Students with little prior agricultural experience were quick to note their lack of familiarity with the industry. However, these students also discussed perceptions they had received from others, such as farming being an easy job. Others discussed brief encounters with farming through family or peer engagement in the industry, namely visiting a relative's farm.

CFAES students were most socially influenced by family and industry beliefs within their own agricultural experiences. Students discussed growing up on a farm, showing animals at livestock shows, and holding agricultural internships. These social variables influenced CFAES students' perceptions of the industry as a whole, as well as their interpretations of *Clarkson's Farm*.

***Major of Study – What and How They Learn***

Due to the structure of the course, a variety of major programs and interest areas were represented in this group. While we did not link students with their specific majors, and instead grouped them by their college of enrollment, many students self-identified their majors in their reflections. The majors prominently mentioned were business, environment and natural resources, animal science, and crop science. Many students utilized their major as an avenue to process the show's content.

CFAES students were almost automatically interested in the show due to the overlap between its content and that of their majors. Non-CFAES students initially approached the show with disinterest but quickly connected to the show's content and humor and engaged with the episodes throughout viewing. Likely through the foundational teachings of their majors, non-CFAES students utilized logic when analyzing the show's content. Self-identified business majors were especially invested in the problem-solving nature of the show, as they were guided through the puzzle of starting a farm from the ground up.

*Clarkson's Farm* had educational value for all students in this study. No matter past experiences or education, students came out of this experience with a better understanding of the agricultural practices presented throughout the episodes. CFAES students went a step further with the educational possibilities of the show. They found *Clarkson's Farm* to be a positive representation of the agricultural industry and felt that the show could be used for the education of individuals with less social connection to the industry. Non-CFAES students, representative of a non-agricultural audience, positively received the content and came away with changed perspectives and appreciation for the agricultural industry.

**Implications, Limitations, & Recommendations**

This study demonstrates the power of *Clarkson's Farm* to introduce a non-agricultural audience to agricultural practices in an approachable and manageable way. Non-CFAES students identified agricultural issues and discussed their perceptions of these issues. Students were able to comprehend complex agricultural practices after watching just two episodes of *Clarkson's Farm*. As evidenced by student reactions, this popular show is a valuable tool for agricultural educators who work with non-agricultural audiences. With the show airing all over the world on a popular streaming platform, *Clarkson's Farm* provides an easily accessible avenue for introducing agricultural topics.

The show can also serve as a guide for agricultural communicators who are seeking effective ways to present agriculture content to non-agricultural audiences. The show exposes agricultural audiences to new or unfamiliar methods, providing opportunities to reflect on their own practices.

Though students encountered the experience with different backgrounds and agricultural knowledge, their reflections depicted a similar understanding of the presented topics. This indicates the value of *Clarkson's Farm*, and similar popular media, to encourage discussions between agricultural and non-agricultural audiences.

### ***Limitations***

While this study offers several useful theoretical and practical implications, there were some limitations present. The sample of undergraduate participants is one limitation. Students were sampled from one general education course, for two different academic semesters. While students were grouped based on the college in which they were enrolled (college of agriculture or non-agriculture college), additional student background information was not gathered as a part of this study. Participants' knowledge of and experiences with the agricultural industry were assumed based on their college enrollment. CFAES students were assumed to have more background knowledge of agricultural issues and practices while non-CFAES students were assumed to have a limited knowledge of agriculture. While splitting the research team into pairs allowed for clearer coding of the audiences, it did limit the exposure each research had with the overall data set and subsequent insights different coders may have offered. In addition, we did not assess students' familiarity with the show prior to this activity. Although specific information was not gathered, some respondents did report having past knowledge of Jeremy Clarkson from his time hosting *Top Gear*, a popular British car show. Past exposure to *Clarkson's Farm*, or familiarity with Jeremy Clarkson, may have influenced students' responses in this study.

### ***Recommendations***

For educators seeking to implement *Clarkson's Farm* into their own curriculum, we recommend a few practical adaptations to assist in grounding the experience within the context of U.S. agriculture. Throughout their reflections, students would often relate the concepts depicted in the show to similar or different U.S. practices. To assist in grounding the experience, we recommend leading discussion post-viewing to explore regulations, types of crops and livestock raised, growing cycles and practices, and conservation programs. For an agricultural audience, this discussion will help to relate the show to their own knowledge. For non-agricultural audiences, discussion will help them understand how these practices translate to the realities of agriculture in the United States.

Based on the responses from both CFAES and non-CFAES students, utilizing *Clarkson's Farm* could be effective for any course with the intention of introducing agricultural topics to students, such as agricultural issues or public perceptions courses. Additionally, this show could serve as an introduction to British agriculture for students participating in study abroad experiences in the United Kingdom. Episodes are lengthy and often cover multiple topics. Showing full episodes may not be suitable for your class structure. We recommend adapting the show by integrating short clips of specific topics. This would allow for simple integration of *Clarkson's Farm* into existing course curriculum.

Due to the structure of the course and the time limits associated with a general-education course, this activity was limited to two course sessions. With the show's structure, only the beginning of processes, such as planting and sheep breeding, were discussed. To solidify student learning, it would be beneficial to show additional episodes where the culmination of these processes, such as harvesting and lambing, are depicted. If additional full episodes are not possible due to time constraints, clips from these episodes would also be sufficient in filling some of the knowledge gaps identified by the students of this study.

In this study, reflections were completed individually following each of the two episodes. In future studies it would be beneficial to analyze focus group discussions following the episodes to gather a combined perspective of the show. While differences between CFAES and non-CFAES students were identified, there is also the potential to look deeper into individual major differences and the influence this may have on students' social susceptibility. Research could also explore the influence of gender, personality, prior knowledge, values, attitudes, beliefs, and motivations (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013).

Beyond classroom study, future research could explore the impact of *Clarkson's Farm* on a non-collegiate audience, such as upper-level high school students or older adult learners of agriculture and non-agriculture backgrounds. With the approachability of the content and its international impact, *Clarkson's Farm* is well-suited for exploration of a broader audience. Examining differences in the response to *Clarkson's Farm* in a variety of audiences could further enhance our understanding of media influences on agricultural literacy.

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