

## Introduction

Magazines within agriculture and food have a long history of connecting niche audiences with informational and feature stories about production processes, products, and the people involved in agriculture and food (Adams, 1981; Fernie, 1971; Hays, 1993; Herring & Rost, 2007; Sperbeck, 1982). Moreover, magazines have traditionally focused content to resonate with specific populations that reinforce or perpetuate gendered stereotypes (Grove, 2016; Kalendar, 2020). The prominence of queer representation in agriculture and food industries is evolving and combines two traditionally unrelated topics: agriculture and queer identities. Similar to Dentzman et al. (2021), this study uses “queer” as an encompassing term to be consistent with prevailing literature, but “queer” relates to any non-heteronormative identity in relation to gender or sexuality (e.g., lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, asexual, gender non-binary, LGBTQ+, etc.).

Queer people in the United States have been engaged in a battle for equal rights for decades. According to Bronski (2012), writing about queer history took root during the gay liberation movement of the early 1970s, as activists and scholars began to reclaim and record stories which had long been overlooked. This uptick in capturing queer history coincided with the Stonewall riots of 1969 and subsequent Washington marches (Bronski, 2012). Today, same-sex rights are largely considered a debate of political party, but media have played a major role in amplifying and articulating each side of the issue. News coverage about same-sex marriage rapidly expanded when three queer couples challenged Hawaiian marriage laws (Li & Liu, 2010) in the *Baehr v. Miike* case, which went to the Hawaii Supreme Court in 1993. Equal rights for same-sex couples continued to garner additional media attention through June 26, 2015, when the Supreme Court came to a 5-4 ruling in favor of allowing same-sex marriage nationwide, at a time when 13 states still prohibited same-sex marriage (Zorthian, 2015). However, this decision was not the culmination of queer issues in the media. In 2018, Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy announced his retirement from the Supreme Court. Considered a swing voter, his retirement brought concerns to the queer community that same-sex rights may not be a battle permanently won (Fausset et al., 2018). In President Trump’s first term, the administration appointed three justices to the Supreme Court, and nearly 40% of Trump-appointed federal judges had a less-than-favorable decision history toward queer issues, so queer people and issues have continued to make headlines in the media (Phillips, 2021).

Queer people and farming communities have historically had a strained relationship (Leslie, 2017; Leslie et al., 2019; Jandt, 1980; Rosenberg, 2016b). Decades ago, some farms were revamped to become conversion camps, with the purpose of hosting queer people to convert them into heterosexual or cisgender individuals and return to society (Jandt, 1980). Agriculture, as an industry, was built on a foundation of heterosexual and familial relationships, both in practice and ideology (Leslie, 2017; Leslie et al., 2019). Additionally, youth organizations rooted in agriculture, like 4-H, have reinforced the idea of heteronormative family farming (Rosenberg, 2016b).

A troubled past has not stopped queer people from getting involved in farming. Using 2017 Census data, Dentzman et al. (2021) determined there are at least 11,852 farms operated by married, same-sex couples. The study comes with significant limitations because it only examined farms run by exactly two producers (45.5% of all farms in the Census) and did not include any queer farmers who were not married or did not self-report their partnered status, but the study still indicated a substantial number of queer people engaged in farming. There have been recent calls to expand the face of research to better understand queer inclusion in agriculture and agricultural education (Hoffelmeyer, 2020; Murray et al., 2020). Additionally, organizations like the USDA have increasingly emphasized the need for nondiscrimination,

as well as specific programming for queer individuals, to better support and measure the impact of queer people in farming (MAP, 2019). Additionally, projects like the *Sexualidades Campesinas* collect stories of sexually diverse farmworkers to combat discrimination and increase access to support services (Lizarazo et al., 2017). Agriculture-focused college students have also underscored the value in learning about different identities to build a more equal and empathetic world (Suarez et al., 2020).

The present study differs from previous media framing studies in same-sex issues because it is focused on professionals in the agriculture and food system, rather than the issues queer people face. The purpose of this study was to explore and determine the framing, tone, and prominence of queer identities in magazine articles in food and agriculture magazines.

## **Literature Review**

### **Queer Perceptions in Agriculture**

There is scant literature regarding queer farming and perceptions of queerness in the food system, from the agricultural production of food to its preparation and consumption. The title of farmer is typically associated with heterosexual men (Campbell et al., 2006), but over the years, queer farmers have increasingly entered the farming arena. One of the biggest barriers to becoming a farmer, acquiring land, is a gendered process (Sachs et al., 2016). Obtaining farmland often happens through marriage or inheritance, which requires close familial relationships (Pilgeram & Amos, 2015). As an alternative, queer farmers, especially lesbian farmers, have embraced the spirit of collectivism to acquire and share farmland (Anahita, 2009; Leslie, 2019). Women and queer people in farming have also approached the occupation with less traditional methods, typically being more comfortable incorporating niche farming methods, such as sustainable farming or organic farming (Trauger, 2004).

Heteronormativity and rurality have no natural link, as queer people have long flourished in rural life (Howard, 1999). However, organizations have traditionally pushed family farms to be led by a male farmer and his wife (Rosenberg, 2016a). Rural areas generally carry an assumption of intolerance of gender and sexual diversity, if not being outrightly homophobic (Johnson et al., 2016). Leslie (2017) called for research to decipher relationships between sexuality and agriculture to investigate the lived experiences of queer farmers, creating further need for this study.

### **Multidimensional Visibility in Media**

Queerness has been explored globally, in a variety of media, often through a multidimensional or intersectional lens by combining queerness with another identity, such as race or ability. Emerging from feminist and antiracist works, an intersectional perspective was birthed to give space for social movement politics (Crenshaw, 1991), arguing courts and societal systems only focused on issues facing an isolated, singular class or group of people at a time, giving rights to groups like Black women, in relation to either to their White women or Black men counterparts, but not simultaneously combining their gender and racial identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Identities are sometimes conflicting, as competing layers attempt to claim authority and definition for an individual (Gamson, 1995; Whittier, 2010). A multidimensional lens acknowledges systemic power imbalances in society, compounding oppression for individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups by giving name to the examination of social issues through the combination of multiple identity lenses (Collins, 2012).

The empirical exploration of queer identity in magazine media has been sparsely covered, though some studies have examined issues of gender, sexuality, and race through other forms of media. For example, Eguchi and Keisuke (2021) examined streaming television content through a lens of queer and racial identities to provide an intersectional queer-of-color critique. D'Souza and Rauchberg (2020) examined discourses present at the intersection of queer identity and disability through cinematic media, further understanding how queerness can exacerbate challenges caused by other marginalized identities. Magazines have been examined to understand how people of color are used to promote "white" beauty standards in women's magazines (Akinro & Mbunyuza-Memani, 2019), describing how race can influence marketing and advertising for predominantly women audiences in magazines.

Occupation is not considered an "identity" and is not a protected class in current United States legislation. However, employment has helped marginalized groups feel more connected to and engaged with their institution, even if marginalized groups feel undervalued within that institution (Elliott & Smith, 2022). Therefore, queerness should be examined in the greater context of a chosen vocation to understand the representation and intersection of queer identity and how it relates to belongingness in a greater profession.

### **Inclusion in Agricultural Communication**

While queer discourse has not been widely explored in an agricultural communication research context, other researchers have been working in the inclusion space for many years, with an increase in attention recently. In the early 2000s, Donnellan (2004) analyzed surveys with respondents from heads of agricultural communication offices at land-grant universities and journalism placement officers at historically black colleges and universities to better understand methods for increasing diversity among staff and develop better collaborations between the two university systems, developing recommendations for a pipeline of talent between the two types of institutions.

More recently, source credibility has become a focal point in the literature, specifically as it relates to gender. A study by Bigham et al. (2019) found that female scientists were perceived to be more credible than their male counterparts by undergraduate students. Fortner et al. (2022) also examined source credibility, but from a social media standpoint. The authors found that non-white females may elicit higher engagement when disseminating information via X (formerly Twitter).

Even more recently, Steede et al. (2023) looked at Fortune 500 companies to determine visibility of efforts toward diversity, equity, and inclusion. The authors found many organization websites displayed DEI information with ease of access, noting most pages were accessible within two clicks. The study also indicated organizations' DEI websites either acknowledged work needed to be continued to create a more inclusive workspace, or the website was used to support the personal and professional wellbeing of employees. Even with these recent studies focusing on different facets of identity and inclusion, queer identities seem to be absent from the agricultural communication literature.

### **Magazines**

In general, few studies within queer culture or agriculture have focused on analysis of magazine stories or examined the feature story coverage of those who grow food. Magazines, while a valued source of scientific and cultural information (Naile & Cartmell, 2009), operate on a different news cycle than other periodicals such as newspapers and broadcast media, due to less editions being published throughout a year (e.g., quarterly or monthly compared to

daily newspapers and hourly broadcast updates). Media can shape the voice of an issue (Baker et al., 2011), but the type of media used can determine how much influence the voice has. Abrahamson (2015, p. 1) noted, “magazines can serve as a mirror of and catalyst for the tenor and tone of the sociocultural realities of their times,” extending the influence of magazines beyond just amplification of culture and into a more culture-shaping phenomenon. Instead of focusing on news media that often amplifies culture, this study is focused on magazines to examine the creation of culture over time, since the legalization of same-sex marriage.

Readers of all ages and demographics choose to consume magazine media for a variety of reasons (MPA, 2021). Food magazines are often read to learn more about food trends and cooking, or to learn about new recipes and influencers in the food industry (Wilson, 2003). While there is less literature on farmers’ desires to read specific magazines, some groups of farmers, like beef producers, prefer to use magazines to learn about association news and sales, breed improvement strategies, and success stories from other cattle producers, among other reasons (Underwood et al., 2024). Regardless of the magazine type, these articles fall into a special interest type, and there is shared interest in reading about other successful individuals in the niche industries for which the magazine is published.

## **Framing**

In communication and social sciences, messages are often created using framing (Randolph & Viswanath, 2004). Framing allows for information to be presented from a specific perspective or through a specific lens to influence how the audience consumes the message (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). At its core, framing helps understand how communication messages, which are socially shared and persistent over time, create symbolic and meaningful structure to understand the social world (Reese et al., 2001). Organizations and individuals use frames to simplify complex issues, to draw meaning to new phenomena, or to influence the consumption of the media (Baker & Irani, 2014; Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Kandzer et al., 2022; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

It is thus no surprise framing theory is often used in content analyses of same-sex marriage media coverage. Frames related to public policy or politics in general (Baker & Irani, 2014; Sherkat et al., 2011), equality and civil rights (Johnson, 2012), religion and morality (Baunach, 2011; Colistra & Johnson, 2021; Johnson, 2012; Whitehead, 2014), voice (Cabosky & Gibson, 2021), tone and visibility (Jacobs & Meeusen, 2021), and labels describing queerness (Hackl et al., 2013) have all been used.

Framing has also been frequently used as a guiding theory within the context of agricultural communication (Baker & King, 2016). Rumble et al. (2016) examined manifest and latent content of websites to analyze online agricultural awareness campaigns. An examination of agricultural websites was later conducted to determine the effective components of an agricultural center website (McLeod et al., 2018). Other studies have explored framing and prominence of a specific agricultural issue in online, print, social, and news media (Baker & Irani, 2014; Kandzer et al., 2022; Kent et al., 2021; Lawson et al., 2022; Mc Cormack & Wims, 2022; Regusci et al., 2022).

## **Queer Tone and Framing**

To date, empirical examination of media surrounding queerness has largely focused on legislation and framing of political issues. Zheng and Chan (2022) focused on queer social issues from the viewpoint of traditionally conservative- or liberal-leaning newspapers, to

understand the frames commonly used to support or oppose same-sex marriage. They found support often used human rights and benefits access frames, while opposition used frames of traditional marriage protection and securing traditional conservative voters. Colistra and Johnson (2021) used the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision to understand how the legalization of same-sex marriage was framed around the time of the Supreme Court case. Their examination used both television and newspaper content to uncover religious, civil rights, and political frames, but the authors also investigated the positive or negative tone accompanying the content in each of the frames.

Tone was explored in other studies about queer issues, both on national and more localized levels. Jacobs and Meeusen (2021) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the tone and framing of queer people in the news, investigating how queer people were used as sources in queer stories. Others have focused on a specific state to follow legislation through the political process and understand how media frames the issue. Brown et al. (2018) discovered conflict was used as a dominant news frame and anger as the dominant emotional appeal, but other identities such as race were often used to help tell the story, even though the issues were focused on queer identity, further promoting the need to understand queerness in an intersectional context. Through these studies, however, the examination has largely followed the amplification of news and emotion, rather than understanding a cultural-shaping context. As magazines promote culture-setting better than other news media, this study is focused on magazine stories.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore and determine the framing, tone, and prominence of queer identities in magazine articles in food and agriculture magazines. Based on the literature review, this study developed three major foci: framing, tone, and prominence. This study was guided by three major research questions, starting with the following:

RQ1: What dominant frames were used in food and agriculture magazines' queer stories?

After establishing initial frames, several previous studies further examined the tone of an issue within the established frames. Colistra and Johnson (2021) analyzed religious, civil rights and political frames, but then investigated how each story represented queerness, with a positive or negative tone. Jacobs and Meeusen (2021) examined their content as negative or positive, but also added whether there was cause or instigation for negative tone. Prior literature has indicated a more positive tone for queer people in media as equal rights are achieved, but the agriculture industry and food system may be represented differently; therefore, the second question of this study was as follows:

RQ2: What tone was used to mention queer discourse in food and agriculture magazines?

Finally, the content in this study was examined to determine the prominence of queerness within the stories. Prominence can be used as a measure of a subject's value, based on the frequency of its reporting, dominant image or words used, or the amount of space given to a subject in a specific medium (Apuke & Omar, 2022; Boukes et al., 2022; Cotter, 2010; Fico & Freedman, 2001). The third research question was as follows:

RQ3: How prominent are queer stories in agriculture and food magazines?

Because prominence can be measured in a variety of ways, such as frequency of stories published or by examining specific sections of an article for keywords, we further distinguished this research question with two sub-questions. The first sub-question focused on prominence, operationalized as the frequency of stories published:

RQ<sub>3a</sub>: How has the frequency of queer stories in agriculture and food magazines changed since same-sex marriage was legalized?

The audience for agriculture magazines is typically agriculturists or those engaged in farming as a profession, which has heteronormative roots (Rosenberg, 2016b). The audience for food magazines is likely broader and therefore could engage individuals from more diverse social identities. Therefore, the following question was created to better understand where, within the story, an article first published a word or image relating to queerness:

RQ<sub>3b</sub>: Where do food and agriculture magazines first utilize queer indicators in their stories?

## Methods

To examine queerness in agriculture and food magazines, elements of both qualitative and quantitative content analysis were used. Content analysis involves a systematic, replicable approach to gathering media, assigning numeric values or meaning to the content, analyzing relationships between the content, and drawing inferences about the meaning of the content to its context (Riffe et al., 2019). Both qualitative and quantitative content analysis involves the systemic selection of criteria to be considered for analysis, but the methods for analysis can vary greatly between the two. The following sections outline the methods for this study, from sampling to analysis.

### Sampling

The sample of content was obtained in the spring of 2023. To examine content from both agriculture and the food industry, two types of online magazines were searched: agriculture and food. These were selected because both have a general topic area of food but may still have a contrasting enough readership to better understand differences in framing. The top 10 magazines by circulation were selected for each. In the agriculture magazine category, these were: (1) Progressive Farmer, (2) Successful Farming, (3) Farm Journal, (4) Living the Country Life, (6) Farm & Ranch Living, (7) Our Ohio, (8) Modern Farmer, (9) Top Producer, and (10) Countryside and Small Stock Journal (Mercier, 2018). Because Our Ohio is a geographically-localized magazine, it was removed from the list and replaced by (11) Hobby Farms. For the food magazine category, the top ten were: (1) Relish, (2) Women's Day, (3) Taste of Home, (4) Martha Stewart Living, (5) Food Network Magazine, (6) Cooking Light, (7) Rachael Ray Every Day, (8) bon appétit, (9) Edible East End, and (10) Allrecipes (Cision, 2017).

Each publication was searched through its online website using the following search terms: "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "transgender," "homosexual," "lgbt\*," and "queer." An individual search was conducted for each term, per magazine, and all results were archived. After each magazine was searched, duplicates were removed (i.e., if the same story was returned for the search terms "lgbt\*" and "gay," it was counted only once). Additionally, stories were removed if the search term was a proper noun (e.g., the subject was about someone with a last name of "Gaye" or was discussing a brand with "Gay" in the name).

The original search, before culling any articles based on the criteria above, returned 90 unique stories published between July 1, 2015, and December 31, 2022. Because the decision for *Obergefell v. Hodges* occurred on June 26, 2015, the data in this study were focused from July 2015 forward because "unlike news magazines, consumer magazines usually appear monthly" (Riffe et al., 2019, p. 97). Prior to this decision, studies examining queer discourse in media largely revolved around culture-shaping media like news and broadcast. Data stopped being collected after December 31, 2022, when this study began

analysis. After culling all articles that did not fit the parameters of this study, there were 38 agriculture magazine stories and 34 food magazine stories (total  $n = 72$ ). As each story was collected, the publication month, year, story title, and whether it belonged to one of the food or agriculture publications was recorded. Though the total sample size is less than 100, Lacy et al. (1998) asserted the minimum sample needed to analyze a five-year period of magazine articles is 20. Based on the comparison between the two magazine types, and the inability to conduct constructed year sampling based on the frequency of published stories with queer discourse, we believe 72 total stories is sufficient.

## Coding Procedure

The first part of the analysis happened via a qualitative content analysis, which has elements of its quantitative counterpart regarding the systematic data collection and sense-making through a coding frame (Selvi, 2020). Both deductive and inductive coding were used to determine if the stories used a frame from prior literature or new frames emerged from the data. Deductive coding involves the systematic sense-making of data based on themes derived from prior literature, while inductive coding allows the researcher to use the data to interpret common themes (Harding, 2013).

Because previous literature acknowledged existing dominant frames in which queer discourse is present, including *equality/political*, *religion/morality*, and *conflict* (Colistra & Johnson, 2021; Jacobs & Meeusen, 2021; Zheng & Chan, 2022), those frames served as a starting point for deductive coding in this study. However, the present study differed from previous literature by focusing on magazine media instead of traditional news media. Therefore, the coders also began an inductive coding process for any frames which did not fit into one of the original three from news media. By adding an inductive coding process, we kept an open mind to the development of new frames, which may not have been dominant in news media.

Each story was assigned only one primary frame. Each of the coders performed a qualitative analysis to determine the general frame of each story, and then they met to find consensus and consolidate the frames into related themes. This process of coding separately and consensus-making helps create more trustworthy qualitative results (Tracy, 2010). Between the deductive and inductive coding process, 23 frames become apparent. These were later consolidated into seven dominant themes.

Tracy (2010) asserted qualitative research should reach resonance through transferability, overlapping the readers' experiences with the researchers' description. Transferability coincides with thick, rich descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation, using quotes to weave together the narrative explaining the qualitative analysis. In this study, the qualitative analysis was rather limited, due to focusing on the framing of queer discourse specifically, rather than the subject of the entire story (i.e., some stories may have referenced a queer keyword in only one or two sentences, allowing researchers to analyze a single paragraph in the story). The laser focus on queer discourse provided a way to synthesize the framing and tone for this study allowing for both deductive coding based on previous literature findings, as well as inductive coding for emergent and novel themes. However, this focus also served as a limitation when considering the broader context in which queer discourse is presented.

The lead researcher developed a coding sheet to allow for a complete research record of objective and accurate data about the content (Riffe et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2024). After the analysis of frames was complete, the coders analyzed the stories to see if queerness was presented with a *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral* tone by examining the surrounding words,

sentences, or paragraphs to the original search terms in the story and making a judgment of if the queerness was presented positively, negatively, or neutrally.

Lastly, the coders recorded the number of images and searched the following parts of the story for queer indicators to measure prominence: headline, subhead, lead paragraph, story body, images, and image captions. Queer indicators in text were words such as “lesbian,” “queer,” “transgender,” or other words that indicate a queer identity was present. Queer indicators in images included cues that acknowledged a queer subject was in the photo, such as a pride rainbow flag, two or more individuals who were presenting as the same gender and were physically touching, or words in the image that had a textual queer indicator, among others. Each section of the headline, subhead, lead paragraph, story body, final paragraph, images, and image captions were coded for the presence or absence of a queer indicator. These sections were later consolidated into a “highlight” section (headline, subhead, images, image captions) and “body” section (lead paragraph, story body, final paragraph) because these highlight sections are typically read first in a magazine (Pusnik et al., 2016).

### **Inter-coder Reliability**

To obtain inter-coder reliability and validate the study (Lombard et al., 2002; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999), the two coders were trained using a randomly selected 10 articles (50% food; 50% agriculture), which comprised more than 10% of the sample (Dooley, 2001; Yang et al., 2024). Krippendorff’s alpha was used to test reliability. Upon initial testing, all variables used for analysis in this study had coefficients between .79 and 1.0, consistent with desired inter-coder standards of reliability (Riffe et al., 2019). After reliability was established, the rest of the sample was divided. One coder finished 25% of the sample, while the other coder finished 75%.

## **Results**

This content analysis examined the framing, tone, and prominence of stories with queer-related subjects in magazine articles focused on food and agriculture. Specifically, the analysis examined magazine stories from 2015, commencing with the *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage, to 2022. Of the possible 1,600 monthly magazine editions from this study, only 72 stories had a queer subject represented.

### **RQ1: Frames of Queer Stories in Food and Agriculture Magazines**

The qualitative content analysis initially revealed 23 frames, which were consolidated into seven major themes, presented in Table 1. More than half of the stories used an *equality/queer representation* frame (51.4%;  $n = 37$ ). The next most popular was tied between a *political* frame and a *coming-of-age* frame, with each being represented by eight stories (11.1%). *Education/activism* (9.7%;  $n = 7$ ), *pride capitalism* (6.9%;  $n = 5$ ), and *crime/violence* (5.5%;  $n = 4$ ) came next, with the *religion* frame being used the least (4.2%;  $n = 3$ ).

**Table 1**

*Dominant Frames Used*

Frame	Frequency	Percent
<b>Equality/Queer Representation</b> <i>Bring attention to queer characters in stories or equal rights for queer characters</i> <i>(e.g., queer farmers creating space on their farm for queer and other marginalized identities who have been traditionally oppressed in agriculture)</i>	37	51.4
<b>Political</b> <i>Focus on queer legislation or political leaders speaking about queer issues</i> <i>(e.g., the presidential administration focused on countering legislative attacks on queer rights)</i>	8	11.1
<b>Coming-of-Age</b> <i>Tell the story of a person growing into their queer identity</i> <i>(e.g., a story of a man who realized their trans identity while making cheese and grew into their roles/identities as both trans and a cheesemaker)</i>	8	11.1
<b>Education/Activism</b> <i>Teach readers about queer culture or ways to engage in the fight for same-sex rights and representation</i> <i>(e.g., instruction for proper etiquette at a drag brunch)</i>	7	9.7
<b>Pride Capitalism</b> <i>Businesses feature “pride” products to boost sales</i> <i>(e.g., companies developing rainbow-colored products to sell during June)</i>	5	6.9
<b>Crime/Violence</b> <i>Focus on queer rape, violence, or discussion of queerness being illegal</i> <i>(e.g., focused on violent actions, like men sexually assaulting other men)</i>	4	5.6
<b>Religion</b> <i>Focus on the relationship between the church and queer populations</i> <i>(e.g., focusing on the potential breakup of the Methodist church over queer rights and issues)</i>	3	4.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## RQ2: Queer Identity Tone in Agriculture and Food Magazines

Descriptive statistics were used to determine what percentage of the total sample framed queerness *positively*, *neutrally*, or *negatively*. Nearly all stories were told using a *positive* queer tone (45.8%;  $n = 33$ ) or a *neutral* tone (43.1%;  $n = 31$ ). Only 11.1% ( $n = 8$ ) of the stories had a *negative* queer tone.

Positive tone examples ranged from advocating for more inclusive practices in agriculture, to exploring queerness as a brave new identity. One story stated:

Having a space where you’re welcome as a queer person is so important. Rise & Root is part of the agricultural center in Chester, where a lot of the farms are run by people of color, but I think we might be the only farm that identifies as queer. So how do we show up in those spaces, create the system that we want to be part of, and keep queering the norm?... How can we expect people of color to get into agriculture when we’re allowing this stuff at places where little kids are going with their families? As I was learning about all of this, I thought about how we need our own county fair for BIPOC and LGBTQI+ folks. We need to bring joy, power, and queerness back to agriculture.

On the other hand, negative tone examples were often written in more of a news-media format, relating queer issues and their relation to government, religion, the economy, or violent events. One example read:

A new clash involving religion, free speech and the rights of LGBTQ people will also be before the justices. The case involves [state] graphic and website designer [name

redacted] who wants to expand her business and offer wedding website services. She says her Christian beliefs would lead her to decline any request from a same-sex couple to design a wedding website.

Stories with neutral queer tones regarded the queer indicator as a matter of fact. An example of this would include a sentence such as “this person, who identifies as queer, has spent years studying their craft.”

The breakdown between the agriculture magazines and food magazines varied slightly. The most used tone in the agriculture magazines was *neutral* ( $n = 18$ ), while the food magazines’ most used tone was *positive* ( $n = 20$ ). Agriculture magazines also used a *negative* tone more frequently ( $n = 7$ ) than food magazines did ( $n = 1$ ). In either type of magazines, stories with a negative tone were published the least.

**Table 2**  
*Tone of Queer Discourse by Magazine Type*

Publication Type	Tone	Frequency	Percent of sample
Agriculture	<i>Positive</i>	13	18.1
	<i>Neutral</i>	18	25.0
	<i>Negative</i>	7	9.7
Food	<i>Positive</i>	20	27.8
	<i>Neutral</i>	13	18.1
	<i>Negative</i>	1	1.4
Total	<i>Positive</i>	33	45.8
	<i>Neutral</i>	31	43.1
	<i>Negative</i>	8	11.1

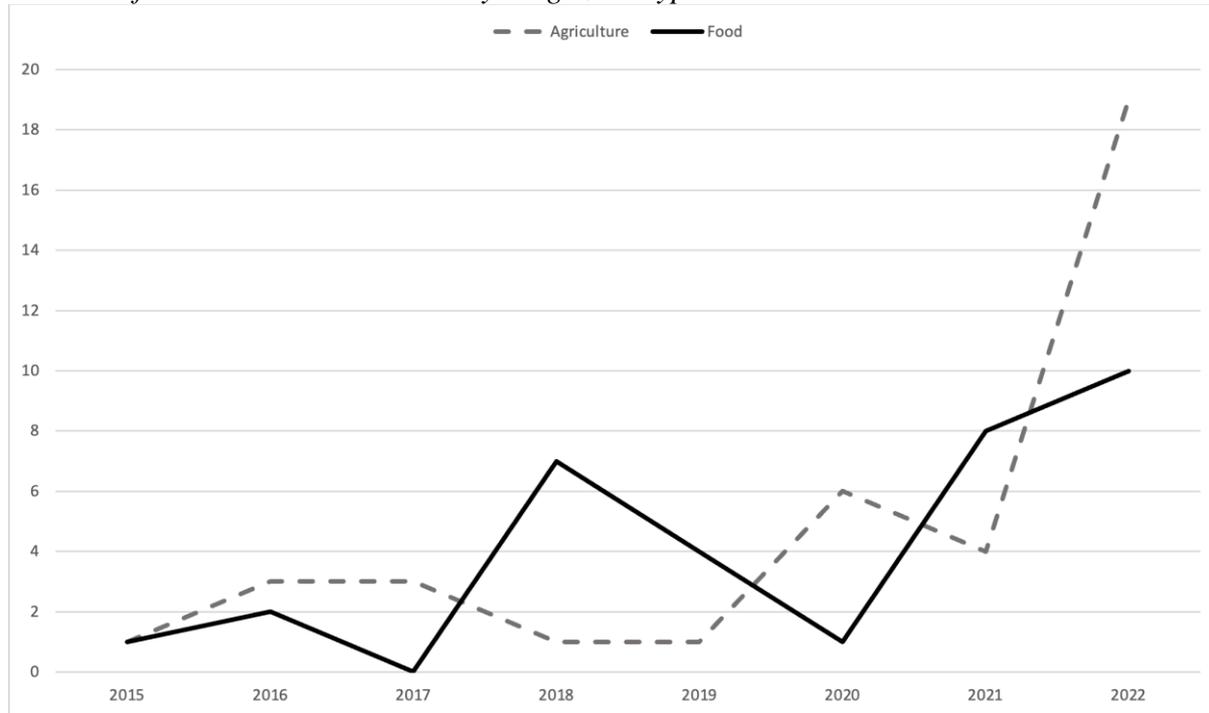
**RQ3: Prominence of Queer Stories in Agriculture and Food Magazines**

Prominence, in this case, considers the frequency of stories published in magazines and where queerness is portrayed throughout the story. To examine both facets of prominence for this analysis, two research sub-questions were posed.

**RQ3a: Frequency of Stories Published with a Queer Subject**

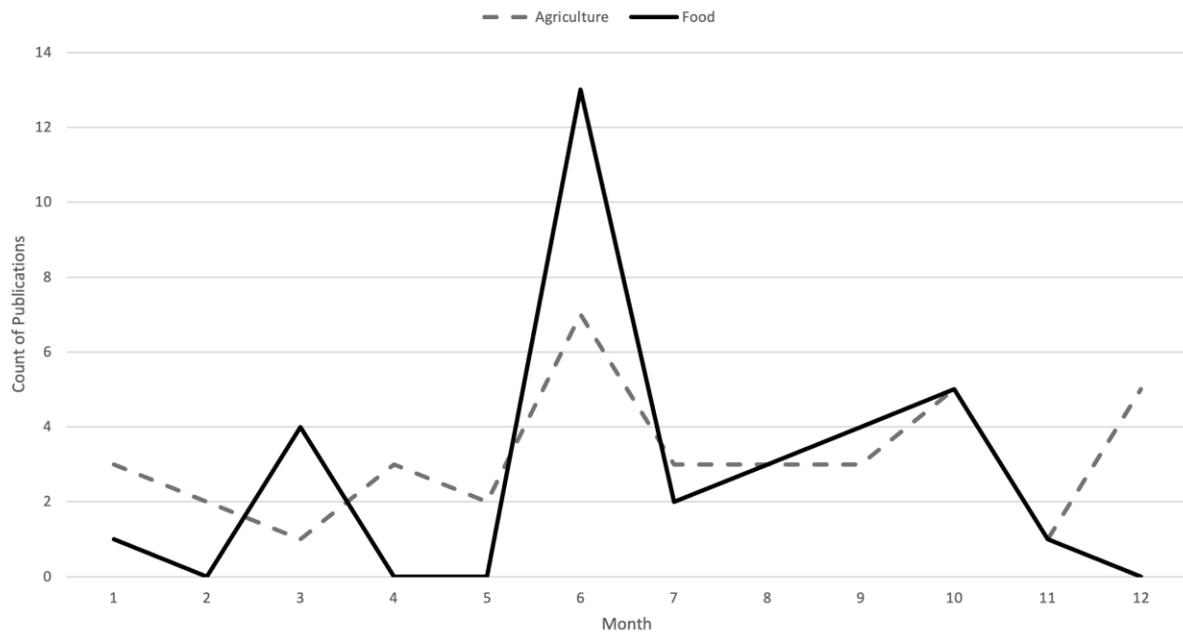
Out of the 72 total articles, 53 (73.6%) of them were published in 2022. In both types of magazines, the 2022 year more than doubled the number of queer stories published. The number of articles published each year per magazine type is presented in Figure 1. There were also leaders in each category of magazine examined, publishing more queer-related articles than others within the category. Modern Farmer led the agriculture magazine category by number of queer-related articles published ( $n = 20$ ), while Bon Appétit led the food magazines ( $n = 17$ ).

**Figure 1**  
*Number of Publications Each Year by Magazine Type*



The articles were also examined by publication month. June is a dedicated monthlong celebration of queer pride, and a spike of queer stories happened in both types of magazines for June. For agriculture magazines, the average number of queer stories published per month was 3.17. But there was a spike in one specific month, with seven articles published in June from 2015 to 2022. The average number of queer stories published in food magazines was 2.83, but 14 stories were published in the month of June.

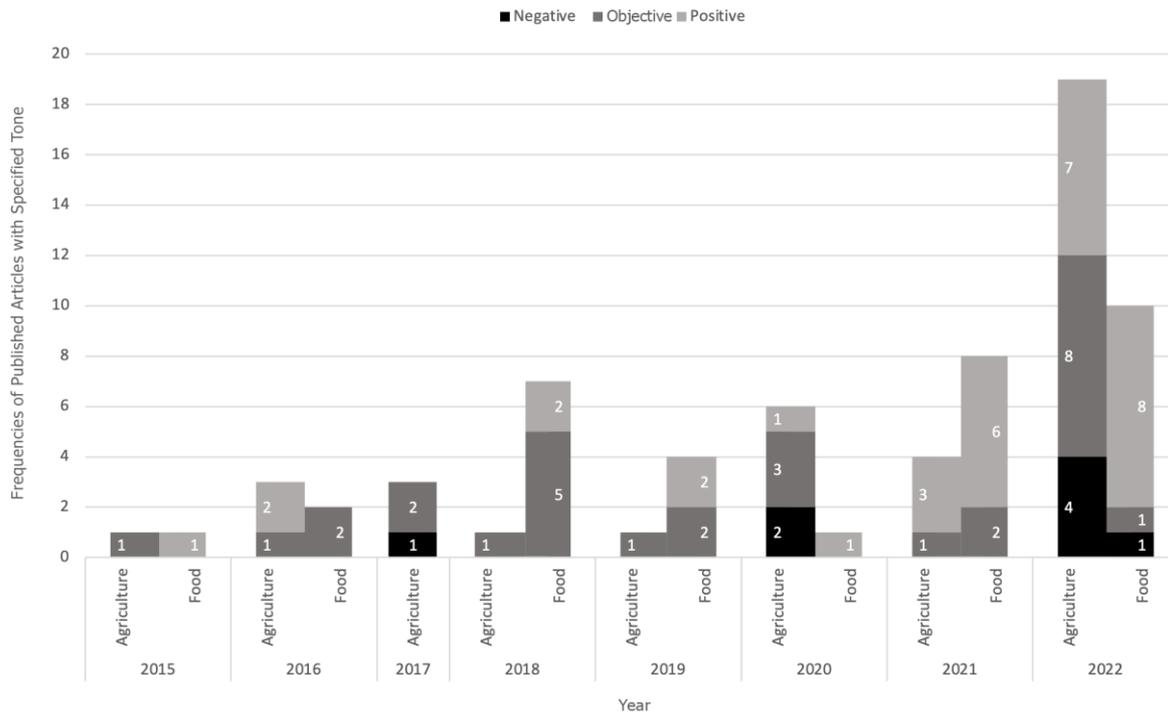
**Figure 2**  
*Articles by Publication Month*



To provide further analysis, we examined the articles published each year and the tone of queer discourse coded. Figure 3 provides an illustration of the comparison between agriculture and food magazines. Prior to 2021, most of the articles published had a neutral tone. After that, not only did the number of articles published per year increase in both types of magazines, but the articles with positive tone were greater than those with neutral or negative tone for both types of magazines.

**Figure 3**

*Comparison of Food and Agriculture Queer Discourse Tone Across Publication Year*



*Note:* There were no articles in food magazines published in 2017 with queer discourse, so it is not represented in the figure.

### **RQ3b: Location of Queer Indicators in Magazine Stories**

Finally, the prominence of queerness in each story was examined by coding the presence or absence of queer indicators (e.g., gay, lesbian, queer, bisexual, homosexual, lgbt, etc.) found throughout the story. Since readers tend to first read or look at the headline, subhead, images, and image captions before the body text, the codes were combined to determine the presence or absence of queer indicator words or images in these “highlight” sections to which people most pay attention.

A chi-square analysis with magazine type as the independent variable and presence of queer indicator in highlight portions of the magazine story as the dependent variable was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, 72) = 10.71, p = .001$ , Cramer’s  $V = .09$ . Of the food magazines, 64.7% ( $n = 22$ ) had a queer indicator in the highlight section of the story, while 35.3% ( $n = 12$ ) of the stories did not. In the agriculture magazines, 26.3% ( $n = 10$ ) stories had a queer indicator in the highlight section, while 73.7% ( $n = 28$ ) did not.

### **Conclusions and Discussion**

Results from this work offer not only a benchmarking of the appearance and prominence of queer identities in food and agriculture magazines, but also a deeper understanding of communicating group identities in a feature communication format. While the number of publications has increased since the supreme court decision legalizing same sex marriage, the number of stories about using queer discourse was minor when compared to the total number of stories published in the same magazines. The sample of 72 stories comprise a minuscule number of articles when considering more than 1,000 editions were published in the 20 magazines studied across eight

years. Because our study used search terms, the exact number of stories published is ambiguous, but 72 stories seem to be a relatively small number in comparison to the total number of published stories without a queer subject or indicator. We recognize a limitation of this study is that we did not analyze the articles outside of our sample for direct comparison, but we believe it is still worthy to note the disparity between the number of articles which appeared in our sample and those which did not fall within our search parameters.

Whether this lack of visibility was intentional or not, we believe this could indicate marginalization of the queer community and may represent a need for more adequate representation in agriculture and food media. Dentzman et al. (2021) noted at least 11,000 farms were operated by married, same-sex couples. The Census, however, omitted unmarried queer farmers and those who did not self-report their partnered status, and has a limitation from excluding more than half of the farms in the United States because they were not run by exactly two producers. This may indicate that queer representation is missing as a whole across the country but applies to this study because it demonstrates the difficulty in making proportional conjecture for queer farmer visibility in media.

## **Framing**

If magazines can serve as a catalyst and mirror of sociocultural realities in time (Abrahamson, 2015), then queer equality and representation can be viewed as an ongoing and ever-evolving issue in the early 2020s. The results of this study revealed the food and agriculture magazines examined largely tell queer stories through a lens of equality or give additional representation and placement to queer people or issues. This differs slightly from previous literature about news media, such as that of Colistra and Johnson (2021), who found dominant frames of religion and equality. A possible explanation of this difference stems from the varied type of media studied. In news media, the rapid news cycle nudges stories to focus on issues rapidly evolving, such as a new government office candidate or the introduction of a new bill. Religion is another frame that could be more representative in news media because of the locality of news. As magazines cover larger time periods and geographic spaces, it is difficult to report on rapidly evolving issues like politics or segmented issues such as religion, where different geographical areas may subscribe to one faith over another. Magazines often, but not always, use feature-style stories, which gives more opportunity to dig into the background and context of a person, place, or item, allowing more space to report on queer influence in the story. We acknowledge future research is needed to qualitatively explore the decision-making process for magazine editors to determine what influences their decisions when curating stories and selecting each story's angle, or frame, to publish.

One frame which did not appear in previous queer framing studies, but did in the current study, was pride capitalism. Pirani and Daskalopoulou (2022) argued queer theory had not been applied well to marketing principles in the past. Our current study found, recently, some publications leaned into opportunities to maximize productivity for audiences who may not be traditionally queer (e.g., allies). Some articles analyzed in this study used a pride capitalism frame to market a traditional product (e.g., food) with a new rainbow packaging to lean into a queer pride celebration in June. This type of marketing can come off as performative, but there is also an opportunity provided for companies to create new clientele in queer populations, or secure loyal clients with a dedicated allyship. However, this type of marketing could also lose sales, such as the example with Bud Light using a trans woman to market its beer and losing a staggering number of sales (Sullivan, 2023).

Theoretically, framing has been examined to help understand the angle and intent of an author or media group in disseminating communication to an audience (Colistra & Johnson, 2021; Fico & Freedman, 2001; Hackl et al., 2013; Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Kandzer et al., 2022; Kent et al., 2021; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). This study adds to the body of framing literature by looking at the frames for specific discourse related to an issue or identity within a larger story. In doing so, we assert a dominant frame for the context of an entire story could be further dissected to see how specific issues within the story are prominently displayed or obscured by the author or editor. Framing theory has been largely analyzed throughout time, and our framing analysis has helped verify frames for queer discourse in the media. However, this study also describes emergent frames when considering queer discourse, evolving the body of literature in this field. This study was a content analysis exploring how and where queerness is portrayed throughout magazines. Examining these articles through a framing lens allowed us to explore how and where queerness was portrayed throughout the stories, but we did not look at the audience of the magazines to understand why they subscribe or read that specific publication. Future research, using the uses and gratifications lens, is needed to better understand the alignment of the motivations for a magazine's audience with the content the magazine publishes.

## **Tone**

In previous studies, tone of queer discourse has been established as positive or negative, sometimes also analysing cause or intent of the issues (Jacobs & Meeusen, 2021). The present study found a lesser likelihood for queer issues to be told with a negative tone. It is important to note, however, in this study there were a similar number of stories that presented queerness with a positive tone as there were stories that presented queerness with a neutral tone. While additional research is needed to understand the editorial decisions in avoiding a negative tone, or if the avoidance is intentional, one possibility is that magazines may stray from the negative tone because it is difficult to justify giving editorial space to an argument instead of capitalizing on feature-worthy subjects. The high number of stories which present queerness in a neutral tone are interesting, because it describes components of queer identity without alluding to the greater queer rights controversy happening in the political sphere (ACLU, 2023). Neutral stories may also allude to a greater cultural shift, in which there is editorial space being given to queer identities, reporting them as a matter of fact, rather than using them to fuel negativity. Additionally, the frequency of positive-tone stories increased over time within both food and agriculture magazines, which may indicate a shift toward more acceptance of the queer community in recent years within magazines.

## **Prominence**

Prominence can shed light on the perceived importance of a subject, measuring the frequency of a subject's reporting, dominant image or words used, or the amount of space given to a subject in a specific medium (Apuke & Omar, 2022; Boukes et al., 2022; Cotter, 2010; Fico & Freedman, 2001). When analyzing the frequency of queer stories published in both types of magazines, a stark increase occurred in 2022. If there was political cause, there should be an expected increase in the number of stories in 2015 and 2018 due to queer rights legislation being challenged or introduced at the federal level. However, 2022 holds the only large increase, which is currently unexplained. Future research is needed to determine possible causes of queer representation in this type of media.

Coinciding with the pride capitalism and equality frames, a stark increase in the number of queer stories published was noticeable in the month of June, when compared to

other months throughout the year. As June is regarded as the LGBTQ+ Pride month-long celebration, this increase makes sense, because the stories are published in a time when queer visibility is at a high. It is our opinion that communicators should use caution when using pride capitalism frames as to not water down the importance of the issue as has been done with other social issues, like sustainability and “green washing.” Pride capitalism may be construed as performative, and a marketing campaign focused on this could be classified as the relatively new term, “rainbow washing.” We suggest the pride capitalism frame is often perceived as negative because it comes across as performative. However, there are times when companies may utilize this capitalist frame if their actions back up inclusion of the queer community beyond the month of June. For example, companies which launch new initiatives to reduce bias in the hiring process for transgender candidates or develop a rainbow cookie to sell in November in celebration of a queer employee of the month may have a more positive public perception. In these instances, the companies have invested resources to make their practices and celebrations more inclusive, and the capitalist promotion is a secondary piece instead of the primary focus.

Finally, agriculture magazines were less likely to publish a queer indicator word or image in one of the most-read parts (e.g., headline, subhead, images, or image caption) of a magazine story. This could be explained by Rosenberg’s (2016b) description that agricultural communities are largely based on conservative, heteronormative practices and therefore do not advertise queerness as a selling point of the story. While the agriculture magazines still publish a similar number of queer stories when compared to food magazines, these stories are marketed differently, making the queer indicator a small part in the body text, instead of placing the queer indicator prominently in the story to draw readers into the text.

## **Implications**

Several implications exist from this study, but it should be acknowledged that the sample size makes the implications less generalizable. The first implications are for communications practitioners who may try to place queer stories in agriculture or food magazines.

Based on the prominence of queer issues found in this study, a writer or communicator may have a higher likelihood of getting their story published in June. While future research is still needed to determine why 2022 had such an increase in stories with queer discourse and representation, it may be more likely for these stories to get placed now, as opposed to even a few years ago. For agriculture magazines, having a queer identity as a component of the story can help tell the story, but based on the results of this study, it may be helpful to remove any queer indicators from images, image captions, headline, and subhead. Our study found a significant difference in the placement of queer indicators in stories, with agriculture magazines being less likely to publish a queer indicator in the headline, subhead, image, or image caption of a story. Future research is needed to determine if this was an intentional editorial decision, but our results suggest a story with a queer indicator placed lower in the body text may have a higher likelihood of acceptance for publication. This line of research should be continued to understand the “why” behind this change. Magazines are a valued source of information (Naile & Cartmell, 2009), but an exploration from a uses and gratifications theoretical lens may help understand if the lower prominence of queerness in the magazines was audience or editor driven.

Few studies about the number of queer farmers in the United States have previously been conducted, but Dentzman et al. (2021) has acknowledged a growing number of people in this population, especially because queer people have found ways to build community through niche agriculture and farming methods, like collective farming (Anahita, 2009;

Leslie, 2019). Because of this, it is likely more queer people are breaking into the workforce of agriculture and food industries. Current queer agriculturists and those seeking to start farming should pitch their stories to magazines and newspapers to help create more opportunities for queer coverage in the media.

Agricultural communication studies examining aspects of identity and inclusion exist (Bigham et al., 2019; Donnellan, 2004; Fortner et al., 2022; Steede et al., 2023), but this study seems to be one of the first to understand queerness in an agricultural communication context. This exploratory content analysis is important, but there are several areas of queer representation in agricultural communication and media that need further understanding. For example, there is more to understand as it relates to the quantity, motivations, and media consumption of queer farmers in the United States. Queer individuals represent a subset of the overall audience, and it would be helpful to know if they desire for representation or specific content in magazines align with heterosexual, cisgendered audiences. We also call for future study to determine the editorial intention behind publishing queer-related stories.

Future scholarship could also build on this study with a larger sample size or replicate the study with other magazines, focused on different subject areas. Additionally, scholars may want to investigate the audience reception to stories about queer people to determine if there is benefit or detriment to a media outlet publishing stories with queer representation in food and agriculture magazine. Moreover, future work should repeat this study in a new timeframe with political and social issues continually evolving around queer identities.

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