

BACKGROUND

- **Unique Natural Landscape:** Calhoun County is isolated by the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers and is chiseled by towering bluffs, deep hollows, and highly fertile soil.
- **Predominantly Agricultural Economy Since Settlement**
- **Strong German-Catholic Presence;** many German immigrants settled here in the mid-19th century.
- **Rich Native American Past:** The county is part of the Lower Illinois River Valley and has over 500 registered archeological sites.
- **Part of the Eastern North American Agricultural Complex**
- **Home of the Center for American Archeology, founded 1953**
- **Hard Times:** The county has frequent floods and has experienced significant population loss throughout the past century.

METHODS

Methodical approach:

Our project design was exploratory, inductive and based in ethnographic methods focused on the context of change through time.

Sampling strategy:

We used a purposive, non-probability sampling strategy in order to target well connected, small-scale farmers with rich historical knowledge of the county and a long history of farming. A majority of informants were affiliated with county organizations involved with agricultural outreach and education.

Data collection:

- Participant observation and field notes
- 8 unstructured interviews and 4 walking farm tours utilizing material and environmental probing
- 9 Semi-structured, formal interviews consisting of open-ended questions, free lists, scale questions, and object probing

Analysis:

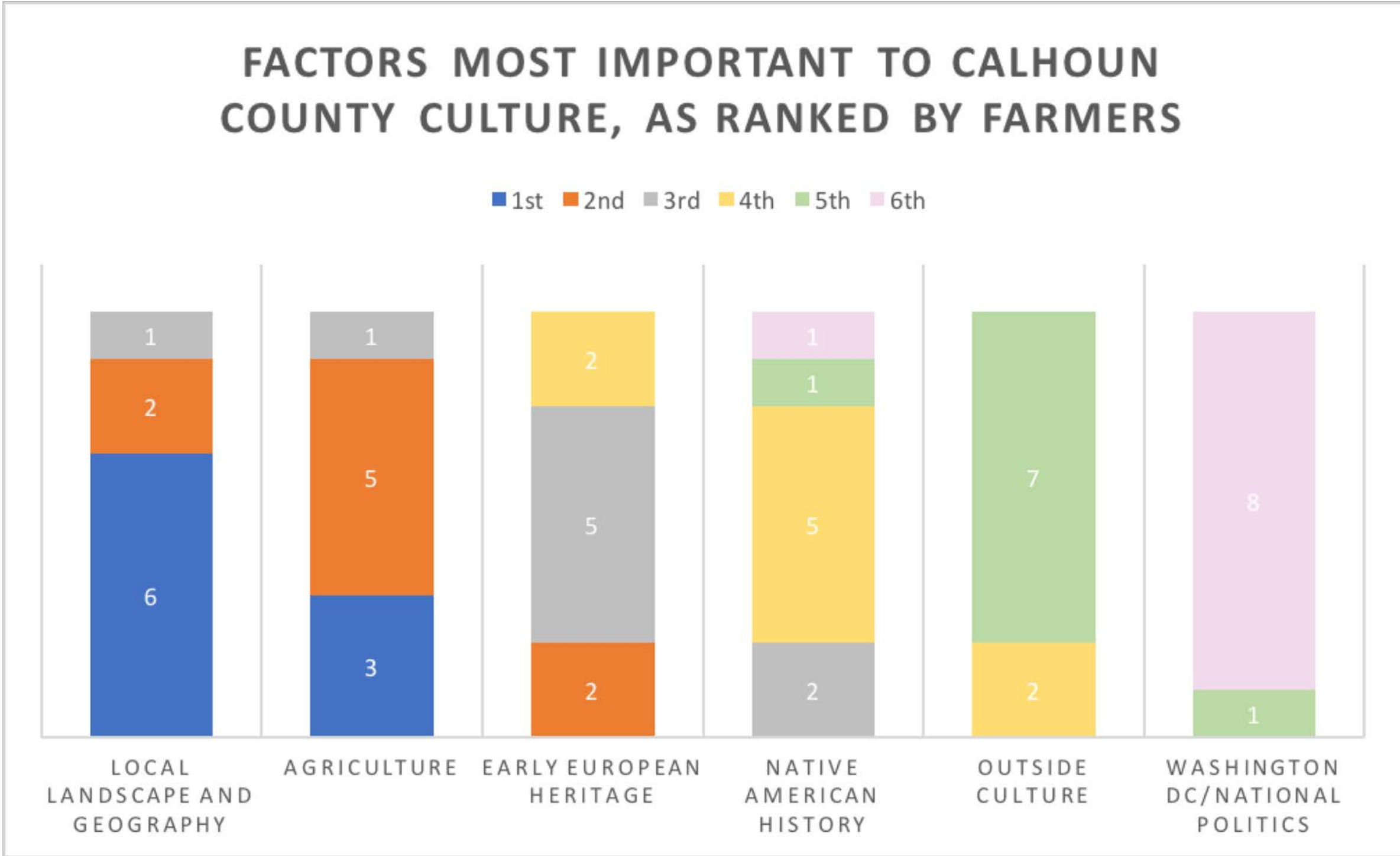
- Recorded audio data was transcribed by hand and aided with the use of a voice-to-text computer program.
- Inductive codebook development by hand and with the use of MAXQDA
- Thematic text analysis
- Descriptive statistics

Exploring Contemporary Agricultural Identity: Community, Landscape, and Connections to the Past

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do farmers relate to their heritage, natural landscape, livelihood, and the Native American past of the Lower Illinois River Valley?
- How do farmers perceive the presence of archeological sites on their land and the Center for American Archeology in Calhoun County?
- What common ground might farmers and archeologists share?



Freelist and ranking question results:

- When asked to list factors that were important in creating the culture of Calhoun County, Native American history nor Archeological activity were mentioned by any participant.
- When ranked by importance in shaping the culture of Calhoun County, Native American history ranked poorly compared to landscape, agriculture, and early European heritage.

CONCLUSIONS

- Calhoun County farmers care deeply about the preservation of the land, seeing themselves as stewards of the county and local landscape. This sentiment, shared with archeologists, may be used to better communicate goals and cooperate with farmers in the future.
- All farmers surveyed believe that agricultural livelihood and the unique landscape of Calhoun County play an important role in shaping their identity.
- Farmers in Calhoun County relate closer to their European heritage and family history than the Native American past of Calhoun County.
- Farmers in Calhoun County are moderately skeptical of outside interference.

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RESULTS

Exemplar Quotes

Themes

Close-knit, exclusive community

“I moved here forty-something years ago and I’m still an outsider. It’s almost as if if your grandad isn’t buried out back, you aren’t from here”

“It’s very close knit...because of the rivers, people didn’t go very far years ago”

Unique landscape and agriculture as a connection to identity

“Parts of Germany look just like southern Calhoun County, with the rolling hills. That’s why a lot of them stuck around, it reminded them of home and you could have great orchards.”

“It’s between the limestone, the weather and being a peninsula in between the two rivers; it’s just a perfect coming together to raise fruit.”

“I feel that I have a responsibility to maintain the land and pass it along to next-generation improved and I think most families have had that same attitude toward farming”

Identity with European heritage

“Germans like their beer ... I work in the beer stand [at the church picnic]. Oh my gosh, the beer!”

“...that’s my German mind on this”

“The writer was a good German.”

Minimal connection to Native American past in Calhoun County

“I don’t know so much about how important Native Americans are to the culture. A little, because we have ‘Old Settlers’ Days’ reenactments.”

“I don’t think Native Americans are still a part of our history. We don’t have any Native Americans around here, it’s not who we are.”

“I’m not certain what tribes were in the area. I know they hunted with spears and bows and arrows; we can see those artifacts around here.”

Desire to be unhindered by outside influences on private property

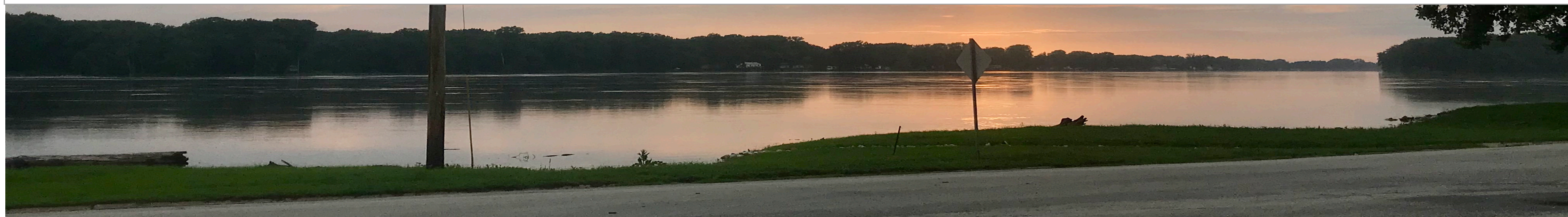
“A farmer with a planned building wouldn’t want to be stopped on his own property because he dug up something. I can’t think of any examples, but [archeologists] have slowed highway construction before.”

“If people are digging on his land, that’s land that he can’t use.”

“An intrusion on his private property would be pretty bad.”

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Archeologists should embrace the common goals of preservation and stewardship of the land and history in order to overcome the local perception of archeologists as outsiders or obstacles to agricultural success.
- Institutions of archeology should further explore how to promote community involvement, transparency, and inclusion to promote closer cooperation between farmers and archeologists.
- Several farmers surveyed displayed an openness to learning more about the past. Future research should be performed in order to uncover what kind of education and outreach initiatives may be best received.



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Map from <https://bridgehunter.com/il/calhoun/>

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