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AGRICULTURAL TOURISM IN THE U.S. A COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION PROJECT

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Many of America's farmers and ranchers have been struggling economically, as they attempt to make their operations viable in the face of fickle markets, changing prices, changing environmental and weather conditions, and global competition. One successful approach in these "changing times" has been to diversify operations beyond agricultural production. Such diversification can generate additional income for ag-operators, and in the process enhance overall rural economic development. One area of diversification is for ag-entrepreneurs to "add value" to the products they sell and thus increase their profit potential. Value-added is also providing various services or experiences with a particular product or mode of production. Related to this is agritourism, the development of agricultural, cultural, and natural resources for outdoor recreation and tourism. Many ag-operators have amenity resources people value, and can offer opportunities for a diversity of recreation and learning experiences. While the development of the agritourism industry in the U.S. offers opportunities for many farmers and ranchers to diversify and complement their existing operations, there are many challenges to be overcome, especially with regard to accessing information critical to decision-making.

Extension Specialists at Utah State University, University of Vermont, and University of Wisconsin collaborated in this multi-state project designed to provide web-based information and resources to assist ag-operators in agritourism development. After a thorough review and assessment of existing web-based resources was conducted, and needs were identified based on input from farmers and ranchers throughout the U.S., seven agritourism topical "fact sheets/checklists" were developed:

- Successes and Challenges in Agritourism
- Best Management Practices in Agritourism
- Risk Management and Liability in Agritourism
- Zoning and Health Considerations in Agritourism
- Agritourism Marketing
- Agritourism Associations and Networks
- Online Agritourism Resources

These agritourism "fact sheets/checklists" are available for downloading on Utah State University's Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism website at <https://extension.usu.edu/iort/htm/resources/agricultural>. Note: The seven agritourism topical "fact sheets/checklists" were initially developed in October, 2007, and updated in June of 2012.



Successes and Challenges in Agritourism

Agritourism can be a useful way to expand and diversify a farm or ranch, but it doesn't work well in every situation. Below are examples of successful agritourism experiences and a discussion of common challenges, which may help you decide whether agritourism is right for your farm or ranch.

Success Stories

La Mota Ranch - Hebbronville, Texas

The La Mota Ranch just outside of Hebbronville, Texas, is a cattle ranch, founded in the 1890s, and still owned and managed today by the descendents of the original owners. La Mota's primary business is its purebred and commercial cattle herds. Being amateur historians, La Mota's owners, the Hellen family, saw the value in promoting the unique mixture of Mexican and Texan ranching history along the South Texas border. They were further encouraged by the state legislature's recent recognition of the area's historical significance, so La Mota's owners capitalized on their natural amenities, historic buildings and local color to create a successful agritourism business. Owner/operator Bill Hellen attributes his success to identifying a market niche. In recent years La Mota Ranch received multiple busloads of tourists per week and charged around \$60 per person. The added income from running tours has allowed the Hellen family to keep the ranch working, and the involvement of the entire Hellen family in the tourist enterprise has made the business what it is. The La Mota owners became agritourism leaders in their region and helped develop other businesses through a regional agritourism collaboration known as the Llanos Mesteños South Texas Heritage Trail. www.lamotaranch.com

Doepkens Farm - Gambrills, Maryland

Doepkens Farm in rural Anne Arundel County, Maryland, began many years ago as a tobacco farm. In 1992, owner and operator Bill Doepkens began making the transition from tobacco to ornamental flowers, gourds and fresh eggs. Today, Doepkens is a working family farm that specializes in chrysanthemums and has gained wide attention for its stunning giant murals made of flowering mums. Each year around Halloween, tourists from Maryland and beyond come to see the living mural which measures just less than half an acre. Other agritourism activities at Doepkens Farm include make-your-own flower arrangements and pumpkin picking. In addition, they cultivate and sell on wholesale and retail levels a wide variety of agricultural and finished food products including jams, jellies, corn, soy, wheat, squash, gourds and flowers. A diverse offering of products and services as well as creative, unique marketing techniques can help farms succeed in the marketplace.

www.somarylandsgood.com/pdf/ttc.pdf

Shuster's Playtime Farm - Deerfield, Wisconsin

Fourteen years ago Don Schuster planted 1/3 acre of pumpkins. Six years later he had seven acres of pumpkins, and customers from all over the region came to pick pumpkins at Schuster's. Based on requests from customers for other agritourism services, Don and his wife Theresa developed additional agritourism activities as a way to increase farm visits, and thus increase pumpkin sales. The Schusters offer good advice to potential agritourism businesses. They say, "To get to our size takes time. We have seen many farms try to skip steps and before they know it they are out of business. There is a huge learning curve in this business. Anyone can grow a crop, but to harvest customers is a new venture for almost all farmers." Also, they add, "make sure to get good insurance." Lastly, the Schusters recommend that potential businesses join associations made of up other people in the business to "learn and grow from each other's experiences." www.schustersplaytimefarm.com

Challenges of Agritourism

For every agritourism success story, there is a counter-story of a farmer/rancher who got out of the agritourism because it wasn't profitable. Most surveys of farmers/ranchers find that the business is full of challenges and hardships...and that's just the folks who are still in the business. One study in California identified "dealing with visitors" as the biggest challenge agritourism businesses faced (Holland and Wolfe). A study of Pennsylvanian businesses listed property tax problems, high insurance and liability costs, and the limits of seasonality and weather as the most significant of the many problems operators faced (Ryan et al 2006). Similarly, a New Jersey study found that marketing the business was the biggest problem, with liability concerns and dealing with customers a close second and third (Schilling et al 2006).

In sum, agritourism has great potential for farmers and ranchers seeking to generate additional revenue, capitalize on underused assets, and educate the public. However, it is not a "magic bullet" and not all agritourism ventures have succeeded.

Additional Resources

More Success Stories

University of Vermont Extension Impact: Agritourism

<http://www.uvm.edu/extension/liisa/template12/?Page=news&storyID=11722&category=ext2>

Oklahoma Agritourism Success Stories

http://www.oklahoaaagritourism.com/index.php?/news/success_stories

USDA Stories Across America: Opportunities for Rural Tourism

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/stories.htm>

Heritage Trails Examples and Resources

Green Routes A site for tourists to find heritage trails in Minnesota.

<http://www.greenroutes.org>

Trails-R-Us A resource for trail enthusiasts and entrepreneurs in Kentucky and beyond.

<http://www.trailsrus.com>

Southern Maryland Trails <http://www.somdtrails.com>

Dig In Vermont Authentic farm and food experiences in Vermont featuring trails.

<http://www.diginvt.com>

Glossary of Terms

Heritage Trail: Collaboration between multiple enterprises in a single region that capitalize on the unique culture, history and amenities of the region to encourage tourism and buying locally.

Market Niche: A specific subset of consumers who desire a product or service not provided through mainstream channels. Small businesses stay solvent by identifying and catering to a specific market niche.

References

Considering an Agritainment Enterprise in Tennessee? Holland, Rob and Kent Wolfe; University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service. Available at <http://www.shepstone.net/Brant/AgritainmentPlanning.pdf>

Obstacles in the Agritourism Regulatory Process: Perspectives of Operators and Officials in Ten California Counties. Keith, Diana, Ellen Rilla, Holly George, Ramiro Lobo, Laura Tourte, and Roger Ingram (2003) AIC Issues In Brief, Agricultural Issues Center, University of California (22). Available at <http://aic.ucdavis.edu/oa/brief22.pdf>

Agritourism in Pennsylvania: An Industry Assessment. Ryan, Susan, Kristy DeBord and Kristin McClellan (2006). Center for Rural Pennsylvania. Available at <http://www.ruralpa.org/agritourism2006.pdf>

The Opportunity for Agritourism Development in New Jersey. Schilling, Brian J., Lucas J. Marxen, Helen H. Heinrich, and Fran J. A. Brooks (2006), Food Policy Institute Rutgers University. Available at http://fpi.rutgers.edu/docs/pubs/2006_The_Opportunity_for_Agritourism_Development_in_New_Jersey.pdf



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Best Management Practices in Agritourism

Best Management Practices for an agritourism business include: 1) providing an authentic farm or ranch experience, 2) providing an educational experience, 3) providing excellent customer service, 4) providing adequate public facilities, 5) maintaining a safe and accessible environment, 6) creating good community relations, and 7) planning for your financial future.

When starting an agritourism business or assessing your existing operation, consult the available resources (see backside) and consider the following best management practices:

Authentic Farm or Ranch Experience

An agritourism business can be defined as any person, farm, or corporation actively engaged in the operation, management, or promotion of an agriculturally-related tourism business open to the public. This business provides visitors with an educational experience aside from one that is solely commercial. It is important to keep in mind that your farm/ranch is often the “face of farming and ranching” in your community, region, or state. A product you offer to visitors may be the experience of farm or ranch living. It is also important to understand what aspects of agriculture your local associations (agricultural, tourism, and marketing) emphasize in your region so that you can develop your own niche in coordination with other farms and attractions nearby.

Educational Experience

Farms and ranches can offer an agriculturally-oriented educational experience suitable for different ages. Food and fiber production, land stewardship, and history of agriculture are common topics that visitors enjoy learning about. Another way to diversify your operation and educate guests maybe on-property recreational activities (e.g., fishing, hunting, trail riding, cross-country skiing, or hiking).

Customer Service

This should be an integral part of your business planning. Training your staff to interact with customers in an appropriate way will ensure a safe and high quality experience for customers. It also ensures these customers will return and tell other potential customers about your business.

Adequate Public Facilities

Your farm/ranch needs to have sufficient capacity (staff and infrastructure) to provide basic services such as parking, transportation, signage, customer assistance, education, and roads. In order to maintain a safe and customer friendly business, provision of services and facilities like restrooms becomes necessary.

Safe and Accessible Environment

You should ensure that your property and facilities are maintained and in compliance with zoning, health, food safety, and environmental regulations. It is useful as well to create a risk management plan for your farm/ranch. In addition, depending on your type of business, consider compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which mandates equal customer access to certain facilities (entrances, exits, and bathrooms).

Community Relations

To create good community relations, it is important to regularly provide opportunities for organized groups and individuals in your community to visit your property (e.g., schools and business associations).

Planning for your Financial Future

Regularly review your business plan and appropriately add value (price) to all farm/ranch services, products, and experiences in order to provide for the long-term sustainability of your business.

Resources

The following is a listing of available resources related to best management practices in agritourism:

State Resources

Your State's: Department or Agency of Agriculture, State Agritourism Organization, Department of Marketing or Tourism, University Cooperative Extension Service, and directories from the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils (<http://www.rcdnet.org/>), and Natural Resources Conservation Service (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>)

Authentic Experience

National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations

http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/about_geotourism.html

On-Farm/Ranch Education

Agriculture in the Classroom

<http://www.agclassroom.org>

Farm-Based Education Association

<http://www.farmbasededucation.org>

Customer Service

Agritourism in Focus a Guide for Tennessee Farmers Chapter on 'Customer Service'

https://utextension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/PB1754_ch5.pdf

University of California Small Farm Program

On-farm Customer Relations

<http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/agritourism/factsheets/factsheet2>

Financial Planning

Recreation Finance program

This program prints out reports of gross income, net income, visitation, cash flow and overhead.

<http://naturetourismfinance.tamu.edu/>

Agri-Business Council of Oregon: Agri-Tourism Workbook Section on Financial Considerations and Business Plan

<http://www.aglink.org/agbook/agritourism/workbook.php>

Small Business Development Center

<http://www.sba.gov/content/small-business-development-centers-sbdcs>



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Health and Safety Guidelines

National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (NIOSH)

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/agriculture/>

Toll-Free: 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)

TTY: (888) 232-6348

NIOSH Agricultural Research Centers

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/agctrhom.html>

National Safety Council

Farm safety & workplace fact sheets (scroll down for Agricultural Safety)

http://www.nsc.org/news_resources/Resources/Pages/SafetyHealthFactSheets.aspx

800-621-7615

The National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety

Under Resources

<http://www.marshfieldclinic.org/nfmc/>

Food Safety for Agritourism, University of Vermont Extension

<http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism/?Page=agfoodsafety.html>

Farm Animals & Visitors Public Health & Safety Tips for Animal/People Interaction"

Vermont Department of Health

<http://www.healthvermont.net/family/animals/faranimals.pdf>

Accessibility

Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act

800-514-0301 (voice)

800-514-0383 (TTY)

<http://www.ada.gov>

Agri-Business Council of Oregon: Agri-Tourism Workbook Section on Barriers and Access Considerations

<http://www.aglink.org/agbook/agritourism/workbook.php>



Risk Management and Liability in Agritourism

Farmers and ranchers are legally responsible (liable) for the well-being of their customers and employees. Considering safety and minimizing risk are important parts of business planning.

To protect your agritourism business, it is important to create a risk management plan. Some of the main areas of risk and negligence include site safety risk, product risk, employee related risk, and financial risk. To ensure the well-being of your business, it is recommended that you avoid certain activities, use liability waivers, purchase insurance, practice good management techniques, train employees, and pay attention to the legal structure of your business.

Checklist for Managing Risk

- Contact State or Local Agritourism Organizations and Key Consultants
Key consultants to determine your needs are lawyers, insurance agents, financial managers, and accountants. See backside for available resources and technical assistance.
- Understand Local and State Health and Safety Laws and Regulations
See AgMRC Zoning and Health Considerations Checklist (<http://www.agmrc.org>).
- Inventory Areas of Possible Risk
 - Site Safety: Consider physical site hazards including visitor activities and attractive nuisances such as farm equipment likely to attract children
 - Product: Consider what you are selling or producing and any health or safety regulations or considerations
 - Employee related: Know your employees and know what will be required on-site to safeguard their health and safety
 - Financial: Consider current record-keeping, billing processes, assets and debts
- Develop a Risk Management Plan
 - Site Safety
 - a. Post rules for customers and conduct regular inspections
 - b. Post and implement employee rules and regulations
 - Product
 - a. Establish a labeling protocol for products
 - b. Establish a protocol based on state regulations for handling products
 - Decide on the right type and amount of insurance coverage
 - a. Business liability
 - b. Product liability
 - c. Workers' compensation
 - Consider using preventative measures like waivers or product warnings if warranted.

Resources

National Resources

USDA Risk Management Education Agency

Develops educational materials for 50 states.
http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/economics/in_focus/farm_if_risk.html

Digital Center for Risk Management Education

<http://www.agrisk.umn.edu>
National Ag Risk Library at the University of Minnesota,
St. Paul, MN, Toll-free 800-234-1111

Regional Risk Management Education Centers

Northeast Center for Risk Management Education

<http://www.necrme.org>
University of Delaware, 302-831-2538

North Central Risk Mgmt Education Ctr

<http://www.ncrme.org>
University of Nebraska, 402-472-2235

Southern Region Risk Mgmt Education Ctr

<http://srmece.uark.edu/index.html>
University of Arkansas, 501-671-2175

Western Center for Risk Management Education

<http://westrme.wsu.edu>
Washington State Univ., 509-335-6360

State Resources

Your State's: Department or Agency of Agriculture, State Agritourism Organization, Department of Marketing or Tourism, University Cooperative Extension Service, and directories from the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils (<http://www.rcdnet.org>), and Natural Resources Conservation Service (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>)

Health and Safety Guidelines

National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (NIOSH) <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/agriculture>

Toll-Free: 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)
TTY: (888) 232-6348

National Safety Council

Farm safety & workplace fact sheets
http://www.nsc.org/news_resources/Resources/Pages/SafetyHealthFactSheets.aspx (scroll down for Agricultural Safety) Toll-Free: 800-621-7615

NIOSH Agricultural Research Centers

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/agctrhom.html>
The National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety

Under Resources
<http://www.marshfieldclinic.org/nfmc>

Food Safety for Agritourism, University of Vermont Extension

<http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism/?Page=agfoodsafety.html>

Farm Animals & Visitors Public Health & Safety Tips for Animal/People Interaction, Vermont Department of Health

<http://www.healthvermont.net/family/animals/faranimals.pdf>

Risk Management Planning

Taking the First Step: Farm and Ranch Alternative Enterprise and Agritourism Resource Evaluation Guide. USDA, NRCS

<http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agtour/publications/AgritourismFirstSteps.pdf>

Risk Management Planning for Agritourism, University of Vermont Extension

<http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism/?Page=riskmanagement.html>

"Don't Break A Leg... Managing Risks on Your Small Farm," "Managing Marketing Risks" and other Risk Management Articles. *The Small Farms Program-Cornell University*
<http://agmarketing.extension.psu.edu/begfrms/ManagingRiskSmallFrm.pdf>

Articles on Risk Management Planning

USDA Alternative Farming Systems Info Center
<http://afsic.nal.usda.gov>

National Education Library 301-504-6559

Insurance Information

North American Farmer's Direct Marketing Association Member's liability insurance list
<http://www.nafdma.com> 62 White Loaf Road, Southampton, MA 01073, 413-529-0386

"Understanding Farmers Comprehensive Personal Liability Policy: A Guide for Farmers, Attorneys and Insurance Agents." *National Ctr for Agricultural Law, Research, & Information, University of Arkansas, School of Law*
<http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/readingrooms>
479-575-7646

Glossary of Terms

Liability: Legal responsibility of the business owner for the well-being of its customers

Insurance: Used to recover and/or manage the outcomes of business practices and risks

Waiver/Disclaimer: An agreement to forgo one's right to a legal claim

Negligence: The failure to exercise the care that a reasonable person would exercise

References: **Agritourism and Nature Tourism in California**, Univ. of California Agriculture & Natural Resources Pub No. 3484; **In the Eyes of the Law: Legal Issues Associated with Direct Farm Marketing**, Univ. of Minnesota Tourism Ctr.



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Zoning and Health Considerations in Agritourism

Agritourism businesses are subject to zoning and other regulations related to individual and environmental health. Such regulations are determined and enforced by federal, state, county, and/or municipal governments. Regulations can vary greatly by region, and it's important to be aware of and comply with regulations related to operating an agritourism business.

Zoning Considerations

Zoning is "the division of a city or county by legislative regulations into areas (zones), specifying the uses allowable for the property in these areas" (<http://www.entrepreneur.com/encyclopedia/term/82024.html>). Zoning ordinances can often be seen as a hurdle for beginning agritourism businesses. One survey found 13% of agritourism businesses surveyed had difficulties with zoning ([University of Tennessee Extension 2005](#)), and an online survey found that more than 50% had difficulties ([Eckert 2007](#)). Ordinances may prohibit particular commercial activities or require that specific facilities and/or structures be present. In some regions, ordinances have been altered to be more accommodating for farms involved in agritourism.

Zoning ordinances are generally handled by county or municipal governments. You can contact these entities (see backside) to determine which ordinances may be in place in your area. The nature of zoning ordinances and the ability to obtain zoning variances will vary greatly with each locality. For a discussion of zoning and home-based businesses visit <http://www.entrepreneur.com/encyclopedia/term/82024.html>.

Examples of Zoning Ordinances:

- Limiting or prohibiting specific commercial recreational activities in an area
- Requiring flush toilets and other facilities for sanitation
- Prohibiting attractions, restaurants, or bed and breakfasts in certain areas
- Regulating location and size of structures

Health Considerations

Like zoning, there are legislative regulations in place aimed at protecting the health of both individuals and the environment. Health regulations will vary from place to place, but generally your county/local health department will handle these. Food preparation and safety, and waste disposal regulations, are often especially important considerations. Licenses and permits are generally required. Your County/Local Extension Agent should be able to provide the necessary information.

Examples of Health Regulations:

- Limiting the number of visitors allowed on a "home stay" farm or ranch
- Requiring one or more persons involved with food preparation or handling to obtain food handlers' permits or certificates
- Requiring certain types of equipment needed for food storage
- Requiring a certain amount of drinking water be available for visitors and placing requirements on water quality
- Enforcing specific requirements for septic systems and sewage disposal

The Bottom Line

Due to the variability of zoning and health regulations, it is important to check with local, county, state, and federal governments, and other organizations to identify which regulations may apply to your agritourism business. Useful agencies to contact include:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> State Agencies or Departments of Health/Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Chambers of Commerce |
| <input type="checkbox"/> County/Municipal Health Departments | <input type="checkbox"/> Secretary of State's Office |
| <input type="checkbox"/> County/University Extension Offices | <input type="checkbox"/> Tax Commission or Department |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Zoning or Planning Boards | <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. Department of Agriculture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economic Development Offices | <input type="checkbox"/> Agritourism Organizations and Cooperatives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tourism or Visitors Bureaus | <input type="checkbox"/> State Farm Bureau Federations |

References and Sources for Further Information

- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Regulations and Technical Assistance Materials.** ADA web site: <http://www.ada.gov>
- **Food Safety at Farmers Markets and Agritourism Venues, University of California Small Farms Program.** http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/farmers_market/safety
- **Food Safety for Agritourism, University of Vermont Extension.** <http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism/?Page=agfoodsafety.html>
- **Lancaster Country Smart Growth Toolbox**, including model zoning ordinance language for agritourism uses. <http://www.co.lancaster.pa.us/toolbox/cwp/view.asp?a=3&q=623913>
- **Changing the Rules: Planning for and Regulating Agritourism in California, University of California Small Farms Program.** <http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/agritourism/planners>
- **Zoning Laws a Challenge to Farms Wanting to Grow.** Eckert, Jane (2007). Available at <http://www.eckertagrimarketing.com/articledir/eckert-agritourism-zoning-laws-a-challenge.shtml>
- **Legal Structure Rules & Regulations for Direct Marketing Enterprises. From Direct Marketing and Tourism Handbook.** Gibson, Richard D. (1995). University of Arizona, Department of Agriculture. Available at <http://cals.arizona.edu/arec/pubs/dmkt/dmkt.html>
- **The National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety** Available under Resources at: <http://www.marshfieldclinic.org/nfmc>
- **Agritourism in Focus: A Guide for Tennessee Farmers.** University of Tennessee Extension (2005). Available at <http://www.extension.purdue.edu/extbusiness/stories/PB1754.pdf>



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Agritourism Marketing

“Marketing is the process of determining what customers want, and of using that information to produce and sell a good or service to satisfy that want” (Southern Maryland Resource Conservation and Development Board). Marketing includes identification of your customer base; a clear description of the goods, services, and experiences offered; and advertising and promotion of your agritourism business.

Create a Marketing Plan

One of the most important aspects of marketing your business venture is the formulation of a marketing plan. This should include:

- Who are your customers?** Identify customers coming to your area for similar attractions. Such information may be found through agritourism associations, regional tourism councils, or local chamber of commerce and other outlets. Be specific in identifying the group of consumers you wish to target.
- Become familiar with your market.** What types of agritourism activities are popular or increasing in popularity? Notice where growth is taking place in the industry and the types of activities and goods consumers are seeking. What changes and developments in the agritourism market might be expected in the foreseeable future?
- Your niche.** What makes your agritourism business unique? What would set you apart from competitors? Some examples: a farm/ranch operated by your family for generations with unique heritage components; a unique location with attractive amenities; specialized attributes of your products or services, such as organic produce or meat, raising exotic animals, or unique activities available.
- Budget.** A rule of thumb for a beginning agritourism operation is that 10 to 30 percent of gross revenues should be invested in marketing.

In your plan, clearly state marketing goals with regard to the number of visitors, revenue and expenses, etc. Assess your success in meeting these goals over time. Make sure your plan is flexible, so you can adapt to changes in the marketplace or results that do not match expectations as you monitor your business’s progress.

The Four P’s

Throughout the planning, building, and expanding of your agritourism business, it is important to keep these fundamental aspects of marketing in mind.

- Product.** Is there a market for what you are selling? Is there some way to change your goods or services to more adequately address a consumer demand? The quality of your staff and their training is also an important consideration in agritourism.
- Place.** Is your location one that is easily found by consumers? Will potential customers notice your agritourism business in passing? Are there other beneficial aspects to your location such as impressive natural scenery?
- Price.** Balance the price charged for your goods and services between the need to attract customers and maximize sales, and the need for those sales to yield a profit.
- Promotion.** Where and how to promote and advertise your business are important considerations. Advertising in agritourism and similar businesses has traditionally come mostly from customer to customer word-of-mouth communications. Advertising through various forms of media (websites, brochures, etc.) can also be effective in getting the word out about your agritourism operation. Membership in agritourism organizations and business associations, such as your local chamber of commerce, can help publicize your business and inform consumers specifically seeking the goods and services you offer. The popularity and usefulness of the internet can make it an effective place to market your business if used properly.

Promotion and Advertising

All of the following may be appropriate forums for promoting and advertising your agritourism business:

- Internet (websites, social media sites)
- Email and E-newsletters
- Brochures
- Radio
- Business Cards
- Newspapers
- Signs
- Direct Mailings

Contact List

As agritourism businesses generally depend on repeat customers, building and maintaining a good contact list for email and direct mailings to your customers is important.

Image and Partnerships in your Community

Creating a favorable public image is important both in attracting customers and in maintaining the ability to draw support from your community. In addition to providing customers, your community can provide you with potential business partnerships, promotion, and publicity. Others in your community can provide goods and services needed for your operation.

Public Relations

Recognizing the strength of your own stories and communicating them to the media, community members, visitors, and others is important for efficiently and effectively marketing your business.

References and Resources for Additional Agritourism Marketing Information

Market Maker is a searchable database of food industry marketing and business data
<http://national.marketmaker.uiuc.edu>

Marketing Strategies for Agritourism Operations. University of California, Agriculture & Natural Resources, Pub. 8444. <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/pdf/8444.pdf>

Marketing Your Agritourism Enterprise. University of Georgia, Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development.
http://ncsu.edu/tourismextension/documents/MarketingYourAgritourismEnterprise_000.pdf

Agri-Business Council of Oregon: Agri-Tourism Workbook - Section on Marketing Your Enterprise, <http://www.aglink.org/agbook/agritourismworkbook.php>

Agri-Tourism. Virginia Cooperative Extension.
<http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/agritour/310-003/310-003.html>

Agricultural Tourism Fact Sheets. University of California Small Farm Program.
<http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/agritourism/factsheets/>

Taking the First Step: Farm and Ranch Alternative Enterprise and Agritourism Resource Evaluation Guide. USDA, NRCS
<http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agtour/publications/AgritourismFirstSteps.pdf>

Agritourism in Focus: A Guide for Tennessee Farmers. Center for Profitable Agriculture. <http://cpa.utk.edu/level2/agri-tourism/training.htm>

Agritourism: A Web-based Resource. University of Vermont
<http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism>



Agricultural Marketing Resource Center
1111 NSRIC, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011-3310
866-277-5567, AgMRC@iastate.edu, <http://www.agmrc.org>



Agritourism Associations and Networks

Agritourism associations, resources and networks, and other related organizations can provide benefits for farmers and ranchers wishing to diversify their operations. Such associations often provide information and resources, and can prove helpful in three general ways. First, these associations can provide an advertising outlet for your business through websites, brochures, and other media. For example, many associations maintain websites that market attractions in a geographic area or map driving routes to participating farms, ranches, and other agritourism sites. Second, these groups can provide an opportunity to network, interact, and learn from others who are involved in similar businesses. This enables farmers/ranchers to build upon the experiences of others in similar ventures. Third, these provide information on trainings, conferences, trends, and recent research.

Following is a listing of some of the agritourism and related associations, networks, and websites specifically developed for agritourism businesses in order to directly meet identified needs related to marketing their businesses. In addition, there are governmental, non-governmental, and university organizations dedicated to assisting in the development and marketing of agritourism. Online at <http://www.agmrc.org>, there is a more extensive listing including entries from most states.

Agritourism Associations, Resources, and Networks

National

Agricultural Marketing Resource Center (AgMRC) <http://www.agmrc.org>

Farm Stay U.S.
<http://www.farmstayus.com>

Regional

Southwest Marketing Network
<http://www.swmarketingnetwork.org>

Dude Ranchers Association of America
<http://www.duderanch.org>

State

Alaska
Alaska Office of Tourism Development:
<http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/oed/toubus>

Alabama
Alabama Agritourism:
<http://www.alabamagrirtourism.com>

Arkansas
Arkansas Grown:
<http://www.arkansasgrown.org>

California
California Agricultural Tourism:
<http://calagtour.org>

Colorado
Colorado Dept of Agriculture, Markets:
<http://www.colorado.gov/ag/markets>

Connecticut
Connecticut Grown Farm Map:
<http://www.ctfarms.uconn.edu>

Delaware
Delaware Agritourism Association:
<http://www.defunonthefarm.org>

Georgia
University of Georgia, Ctr for Agribusiness & Economic Development:
<http://www.iiseyes.org/agnnet>

Hawaii
Hawaii AgVentures (Big Island Farm Bureau):
<http://www.hawaiiagventures.com>

Idaho
Rural Roots: <http://www.ruralroots.org>

Illinois
Illinois Agritourism: <http://www.agfun.com>

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Iowa

Visit Iowa Farms:

<http://www.visitiowafarms.org>

Kansas

Kansas Agritourism:

<http://www.kansasagritourism.org>

Kentucky

Kentucky Agritourism:

<http://www.kentuckyfarmsarefun.com>

Maine

Get Real Maine: <http://www.getrealmaine.com>

Maryland

Maryland Department of Agriculture:

http://www.mda.state.md.us/md_products/agritourism_sites-farms

Massachusetts

Massachusetts Agriculture Tourism Map:

http://www.mass.gov/agr/massgrown/agritourism_farms.htm

Michigan

Michigan Agritourism Association:

<http://www.michiganfarmfun.com>

Minnesota

Minnesota Grown:

<http://www.mda.state.mn.us/mngrown>

Missouri

AgriMissouri: <http://www.agrimissouri.com>

New Hampshire

New Hampshire Farmers' Market Association:

<http://www.nhfma.org>

New Jersey

Visit NJ Farms: <http://www.visitnjfarms.org>

New Mexico

Explore! New Mexico:

<http://www.explorenewmexico.biz/Agritourism.html>

New York

New York Farm Tours:

<http://www.iloveny.com/What-To-Do/Reasons-To-Love-NY/Farm-Tours.aspx>

North Carolina

North Carolina Agritourism:

<http://www.ncagr.gov/markets/agritourism>

North Dakota

North Dakota Agritourism

<http://www.ndtourism.com/whatdo/activities/agri-tourism>

Oklahoma

Oklahoma Agritourism Program:

<http://www.oklahomaaagritourism.com>

Oregon

Oregon Fresh:

<http://oregonfresh.net>

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Farm Vacation Association:

<http://www.pafarmstay.com>

Rhode Island

New England Farmways:

<http://www.nefarmways.com>

Tennessee

Tennessee Agritourism Association:

<http://www.visitnfarms.com>

Texas

Texas AgriLife Extension Service:

<http://naturetourism.tamu.edu/business-of-agritourism>

Vermont

Vermont Farms! Association:

<http://www.vtfarms.org>

Washington

Washington State Farmers Market Association:

<http://www.wafarmersmarkets.com>

Wisconsin

Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association:

<http://www.visitdairyland.com>

Wyoming

Wyoming Farmers Marketing Association:

<http://www.wyomingfarmersmarkets.org>



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Online Agritourism Resources

Much information on the Internet advises agritourism businesses about the ins and outs of the field. Below is a summary and synthesis of information from existing resources. If you would like to obtain the originals, links are provided at the end.

Why Agritourism?

Around the country, many farm/ranches are diversifying their product base and including value-added endeavors like agritourism to enhance profitability. According to the American Farm Bureau, agritourism is "an enterprise at a working farm, ranch or agriculture plant conducted for the enjoyment of visitors that generates income for the owner."

Agritourism has benefits for both the farmer/rancher and the consumer. In addition to serving as an additional source of income, agritourism can benefit farmers/ranchers by **1)** helping create name recognition for your agricultural products, **2)** helping educate consumers about farming/ranching and America's rural heritage, **3)** generating financial incentives for the protection and enhancement of your farm/ranch's natural resources and natural amenities, and **4)** generating "spillover" economic development opportunities in your community by bringing tourists into town who may then shop, eat and lodge locally. For more information on the benefits of agritourism see the introduction to [Getting Started in Agritourism](#) or page 12 of [Oklahoma Agritourism](#).

Is Agritourism For Me?

Agritourism is not for all farms/ranches, and many farmers/ranchers who embark upon agritourism projects don't achieve the level of success they anticipated. Others have thrived as tourism operators. Many interviewees in a study conducted by Rutgers University described negative aspects as well as positive ones. Part of running an agritourism business is putting yourself, your family and your farm "on display." Successful farmers/ranchers must occasionally deal with difficult and demanding customers. Before you decide to embark on an agritourism venture, ask yourself: **1)** am I comfortable putting my family and myself "on display"? and **2)** do I enjoy interacting with all types of people? For more information see [Are You Ready to Host Visitors at Your Farm? Agritourism Enterprise Assessment](#); Agri-Business Council of Oregon: Agri-Tourism Workbook, Section I - [Identifying Options and Evaluating Your Farm and Ranch](#); pages 8-11 of [Agritourism in Pennsylvania: An Industry Assessment](#); [Getting Started in Agritourism](#); and [Agricultural Diversification and Agritourism: Critical Success Factors](#)

Who Is My Customer?

The people that choose to visit farms are often seeking "authentic" experiences. Many times these people are not directly involved in farming/ranching, but are interested in learning about it. Your customer could be **1)** a tourist with an interest in preserving farms and the rural way of life, **2)** someone interested in establishing a deeper connection with his or her food than what shopping at the supermarket allows, **3)** someone interested in exploring rural landscapes and seeking rural wildlife, **4)** someone who probably lives in the same state or region of the country as you do since most agritourism customers travel only regionally for their experiences, **5)** someone who is likely to be middle aged or younger and physically fit, or **6)** a group such as an extended family or school or church group. For more information see page 11 of [Oklahoma Agritourism](#) and pages 11-14 of [Agritourism in Pennsylvania: An Industry Assessment](#).

What Is My Product?

There are many types of agritourism. The most popular agritourism activities include **1)** bed and breakfasts, **2)** meals featuring farm products, **3)** hayrides, **4)** farm/ranch tours, and **5)** direct sales (e.g. roadside vegetable stands and pick-your-own produce). Agritourism entrepreneurs are constantly redefining their products.

Your product needs to address a demand in the tourism industry that is not satisfied elsewhere. There are many things you can do to make your product stand out from the pack. These include making sure your product is: **1)** clearly different from the other stuff out there, **2)** of very high quality, **3)** seasonal in nature or **4)** original and innovative. Focus on freshness of produce and quality customer service. For more product and service ideas see page 16 of [Oklahoma Agritourism](#). See also Appendix One of [Taking the First Step](#) and the many online resources at [Agritourism and Farm Products, Mississippi State University](#).

How Can I Evaluate My Potential Agritourism Site?

Agritourism is a way to add value to your farm/ranch without adding acreage. Not all properties have the right mix of natural and physical amenities to take advantage of the benefits of agritourism. Your product and what you do with it will depend in part on the landscape and natural resource endowment of your farm/ranch. Evaluate factors such as **1)** land use, **2)** characteristics of the landscape, **3)** how close your farm/ranch is to population centers, **4)** the types of buildings you have, and **5)** your human resource assets.

For more information about evaluating your physical potential for agritourism see pages 20 and 21 of [Oklahoma Agritourism](#) and pages 4-14 of [Taking the First Step](#). Also see page 11 of [Agritourism in Pennsylvania: An Industry Assessment](#) for general information.

How Do I Market My Agritourism Enterprise?

You may want to consider the following issues when designing your marketing strategy:

1) does your marketing approach emphasize the uniqueness of your product, **2)** do you know your customers and have you directed your appeals to the specific types of people that you are targeting, and **3)** have you selected an appropriate name? The [Direct Farm Marketing and Tourism Handbook](#) (see pages 169 to 174) reminds potential agritourism operators to “avoid creative names that may serve to confuse your customer” and suggests using the owner’s name in the business name to create “a more intimate and sincere relationship with the consumer.” **4)** Have you identified advertising strategies? Most studies show that word of mouth is the most effective way to promote agritourism ventures. Luckily, this is the least expensive way to promote your product as well. But remember, successful word of mouth depends entirely on customer satisfaction. Other effective, low-cost methods include brochures and websites. See also pages 18-25 of [Taking the First Step](#) and the AgMRC checklist in this series.

Glossary of Terms

Business Diversification: Increasing the number and variety of products manufactured and sold by a particular business. This can make a business more independent and protect itself from the whims of the market.

Amenities: Non mass-producible assets that make an area a better place to live or visit. Examples include good weather, beautiful scenery, historic buildings, abundant wildlife, etc.

Value-added: Making a product worth more in the market by additional processing or marketing. Examples include turning fruit into jam or marketing the natural landscape to tourists.

References

Agri-Business Council of Oregon: Agri-Tourism Workbook. www.aglink.org/agbook/agritourismworkbook.php

Agritourism and Farm Products. www.naturalresources.msstate.edu/business/agritourism.html

Agritourism Enterprise Assessment.

www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism/saregrant/agritourism_enterprise_self_assessment.pdf

Agritourism in Pennsylvania. www.ruralpa.org/agritourism2006.pdf

Critical Success Factors. www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agtour/publications/Agritourism_Report.pdf

Direct Farm Marketing and Tourism Handbook. www.ag.arizona.edu/arec/pubs/dmkt/directfarmmarket&tourbook.pdf

Getting Started in Agritourism.

www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism/saregrant/getting_started_agritourism_cornellext.pdf

Oklahoma Agritourism. <http://producer.oklahoaaagritourism.com/files/OKResourceManual.pdf>

Taking the First Step: Farm and Ranch Alternative Enterprise and Agritourism Resource Evaluation Guide. <http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agtour/publications/AgritourismFirstSteps.pdf>



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