

Introduction

So What Is Agritourism?

“Agritourism” is the name of the sector that integrates recreational and educational farm and ranch enterprises with the travel and recreational sectors of our economy. Agritourism covers a wide variety of recreational, educational and other leisure activities and services, based on a farmer’s or rancher’s land, physical and human resources. Agritourism offers consumers unique leisure, educational and recreation experiences that they value and are willing to pay for. The wide range of activities covered under agritourism can be placed into three categories:

1) Agritourism activities that take place directly on the farm or ranch include:

- Hay rides and horseback riding
- Bird-watching and wildlife viewing
- Special events such as weddings, retreats, family reunions, meetings
- Photography and painting
- Farm or ranch work experience (roundup, branding, haying, fencing, calving, etc.)
- U-pick operations for harvesting fruits, vegetables, Christmas trees
- Corn mazes, wagon rides, children’s camps
- Seeing and feeding farm animals
- Hunting and fishing, either guided or unguided
- Snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, off-road motorcycling, mountain-biking
- School & educational tours and activities
- Guided tour of farm or ranch operation
- On farm/ranch get-a-way
- Stay at a dude ranch

2) Food-based activities that are operated by farmers and ranchers, and that may or may not take place on the farm or ranch include:

- Harvest and food festivals
- Farmers’ markets
- Winery tours and tastings
- Microbrewery visits
- Visits to food processing sites that make cheese, jam or cider, for example

3) Agritourism activities that celebrate farm or ranch heritage and history, and may or may not take place on the farm or ranch include:

- Barn dances, hoedowns, square dancing
- Visits to historical museums and sites that describe agricultural history, pioneer treks and settlements, farm machinery
- Rodeos, stock shows, county fairs or other events showcasing the ag industry

What Is Agritourism's Role In Colorado?

As a major part of the travel and tourism industry, agritourism has become increasingly important in the Intermountain West over the past two decades. Of the 3,142 rural counties in the US, 106 employed more than 1,000 people in travel and tourism jobs, with some counties recording 90 percent of total employment in the travel and tourism industry. These numbers speak for themselves; tourism is an industry with a major economic impact on Colorado counties, and this impact is likely to grow as US incomes rise and the demand for unique recreational experiences continues to grow.

A survey conducted in 2007 by the Colorado Department of Agriculture and Colorado State University found that the majority of survey respondents took up to three trips per year that included agritourism activities, and 26% reporting no such trips. Nearly 1/5 of all respondents participated in ag-related activities on their trips more than 3 times a year, a relevant target market for the state's agritourism sector and any farm/ranch enterprise hoping to attract these visitors. Of these travelers who participated more frequently in agritourism activities, 56% were Colorado residents.

Where Does Agritourism Fit Into My Business?

Although the agritourism sector is sizeable and growing, its potential role in any enterprise is entirely dependent on the broader business strategy, resources available and the operator's disposition to hosting the public on their farm or ranch. Agritourism can be a supplementary, complementary, or primary enterprise.¹

A supplementary enterprise — As a supplementary enterprise, agritourism could be a minor activity that would support the other products on your farm or ranch. For instance, if your primary enterprise is livestock production, you may decide to invite school groups to your farm several days a month to learn about your animals and your occupation. Occasionally hosting guests on your farm would make agritourism a supplementary enterprise to your primary enterprise if the share of resources invested, management effort needed and total revenues were fairly marginal.

A complementary enterprise — As a complementary enterprise, agritourism activities would more equally share the resource and management investments with other enterprises in your farm or ranch product mix. For example, you may have a fruit or vegetable production enterprise on your farm. If you were to sell half of your produce to a wholesaler and the remainder to pick-your-own guests on your farm, then the two enterprises (the wholesale market and the direct market) would be considered complementary enterprises.

The primary enterprise — As the primary enterprise, agritourism would be the dominant activity on your farm. For instance, you may decide to open a winery on your farm and invite

¹ Excerpted from "Agri-Tourism" Virginia Cooperative Extension, Publication 310-003, 2001.

guests to spend the day or the weekend tasting wine. As part of the wine tasting package, you may include overnight lodging in a cottage on your property. You may produce grapes for the wine on your farm to supplement your wine tasting activities. However, because agritourism is the main recipient of your investments in the farm and a large share of total revenues, it becomes your primary enterprise.

It is important for you, as a farmer or rancher, to realize that agritourism has the potential to become whatever you want it to be on your operation. Whether you use agritourism as a supplementary, complementary, or primary enterprise, you must be ready to think creatively and plan effectively in order for your new enterprise to be successful.

Decision-Making: If You Are Considering Agritourism...

Several types of assessments and planning exercises will help you to decide how and if agritourism can fit into your operation. These include:

1. Operational & management skills and resources inventory
2. Human Resources
 - a. Personal assessment
 - b. Family and business partner assessment
 - c. Assessing support from neighbors and broader community
 - i. Local government
 - ii. Economic development staff
 - iii. Chamber of Commerce and other businesses
3. Business strategic planning
4. Marketing planning & development
5. Risk assessment
6. Legal & regulatory assessment
7. Safety considerations

This guidebook is your first step in planning for agritourism. For additional information, please consult the resources section of this guidebook.

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