



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 [The Opportunity for Agritourism Development in New Jersey](#).

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 pages 8-11 of [Agritourism in Pennsylvania: An Industry Assessment](#), [The Opportunity for Agritourism Development in New Jersey](#), pages 15-17 of [Taking the First Step](#), page 16 of [Oklahoma Agritourism](#), [Agricultural Diversification and Agritourism: Critical Success Factors](#) and [A Guidebook for Evaluating Enterprise Opportunities](#).

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 (Dunn, 1995: 169). Focus on freshness of produce and quality customer service. For more product and service ideas see page 16 of the [Oklahoma Agritourism](#). See also Appendix One of [Taking the First Step](#).

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 "Marketing in Agritourism" 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

Agritourism Development in New Jersey. www.foodpolicyinstitute.org/docs/reports/Agritourism%20Development.pdf

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

Taking the First Step. www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise/FirstSteps.pdf

Oklahoma Agritourism. www.oklahomaaagritourism.com/pdf/agritourism_resource_manual.pdf

Critical Success Factors. www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agtour/publications/Agritourism%20Report.pdf

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

A Guidebook for Evaluating Enterprise Opportunities. <http://www.rpts.tamu.edu/tce/NT/business%20planning.html>



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