

# AGRITOURISM



# ENTERTAINMENT FARMING AND AGRI-TOURISM

## BUSINESS MANAGEMENT GUIDE

**Abstract:** *Agri-entertainment and -tourism – new, highly consumer-focused types of agriculture – may offer additional options for diversification and adding stability to farm incomes. Farmers have invented a wide variety of “entertainment farming” options.*

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*El Rancho Nido de las Golondrinas, Lemitar, NM  
 Living History Farm Herb Garden  
 Photo by K. Adam*

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*Diversification into ... such opportunities as agricultural or educational tours, u-pick operations, farm stores, pumpkin patches, agricultural festivals, and farm stands is not a substitute for a pro family farm agenda.... [However,] one of my fears is that if farmers and ranchers are too tardy in their response to this emerging opportunity, theme park operators will develop simulated farms and operate them as agri-tourism attractions.*

– Desmond Jolly, Director  
 Small Farm Program  
 University of California – Davis

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# Introduction

Joel Salatin, innovator in small-scale agriculture and proprietor of Polyface Farm in Virginia, has published a handbook for beginning farmers. (1) In it he offers a perspective on an important dimension of the future of American farming – education and entertainment. At least one state – Vermont – has re-directed the bulk of its support for agriculture into rural tourism. Salatin and other agricultural writers believe that this is what the public wants and will pay for.

While the popularity of specific enterprises – such as pumpkin patches or U-Pick orchards – may ebb and flow, the public’s desire for a “farm experience” remains. Small diversified farms are ideally suited to agri-entertainment. Unlike the mega-hog facility or a corn/soybean operation producing bulk commodities, the small farm can recreate an earlier, simpler, human-scale vision of farming. The chief qualification for the rural landowner who expects to make a living from the land through agri-tourism is the desire and the ability to cater to tourists and meet their expectations of a farm visit.

Tourism is an important industry in many states. For example, it is the second largest industry in New York and the largest in Arkansas. Most writers agree on three main components of rural tourism: small businesses, agricultural events, and regional promotion. Some state agri-tourism promoters lump direct-marketing methods such as CSAs, as well as farm sales of such specialty crops as flowers, garlic, and Asian pears, within the general category of agri-tourism. State-led agri-tourism initiatives work to expand existing businesses, create new festivals and farm markets, and tie this all together regionally to attract visitors. Federal, state, and corporate grants funded the 500-mile Seaway Trail along Lake Ontario in New York, providing advertising and promotion of its agri-tourism enterprises along the way.

There are three agri-tourism basics: Have something for visitors to see, something for them to do, and something for them to buy. How well you relate the various components (through a theme or otherwise) will determine how successful your entertainment enterprise will be. Things to see and do are often offered free, but there is still a lot

of money to be made selling to visitors. Research shows that tourists buy mainly food, beverages, and souvenirs.(2)

## Advice for New Ag Entrepreneurs

Starting any new enterprise can be risky. Before investing money, time, and energy in an unconventional agricultural business, new entrepreneurs should complete personal, market, project feasibility, and financial evaluations. Workbooks are available to help work through the questions that arise in enterprise planning. Technical and managerial assistance in these evaluations is available from a wide variety of sources. These include county Extension educators, local and regional organizations committed to rural economic development, small business development centers, state departments of agriculture, economic development agencies, banks, tourism agencies, state universities, and local community colleges. For a brief agri-tourism development checklist, see Appendix A. A business plan can then be developed (basically a spreadsheet) to evaluate the enterprise financially. For guidelines, see the 2004 ATTRA publication *Agricultural Business Planning Templates and Resources*.

## Things to See

### ***Educational tours***

In 1993, 14 farmers in largely agricultural Dutchess County, New York, cooperated in creating an educational tour using “crop art” as the focal point. Their aim was to publicize the plight of the family farmer and create a positive image of agriculture for the next generation of urban voters and consumers. The art consisted of large sculptures made from hay bales and other farm crops. (Different types of crop art will be discussed in more detail below.) One of the tour’s sponsors, Farm Again, is an organization that matches beginning farmers with retiring farmers to ensure that land is kept in family-sized agricultural production. Others involved in sponsoring the

project included Cornell Cooperative Extension, the local Farm Bureau, and the Dutchess County tourism agency.

At the same time, Farm Again sponsored a farm tour project for school children as part of its aim to “re-invent agriculture” in a farming community on the edge of suburban sprawl.(3) This type of tour is part of an overall regional public education strategy, exemplifying comprehensive organization and far-reaching goals. At the other end of the scale, the Wachlin farm (“Grandma’s Place”), Sherwood, Oregon, provides a package deal for its specialty – school tours. They charge \$4 per child, and the children get any size pumpkin they can carry from the field, food for animals in the petting zoo, and a 20-minute talk on farming.(4)

While having several tour farms in close proximity is always desirable, most farmers interested in agri-tourism develop individualistic farm attractions. Many herb farms open to the public include a tour of the different herbs they are growing, and may include “nature walks” to show wild plants in their native habitat – riverbank vegetation, scarce examples of native prairie, rock outcroppings, or natural woods. (Former pasture land or plowed ground let go to weeds is not recommended for a nature walk.) For a profile of an herb farm that offers tours, see the ATTRA publication *Lavender Production, Products, Markets, and Entertainment Farms*.

Archeological sites are usually too fragile to become the focus of regular tours by the public. However, many farms have done well with recreations of former eras.

## **Historical re-creations**

Creating an agri-tourism attraction on your farm can be a lot of work and must be a labor of love. Some attractions grow out of the owners’ hobby collections – old farm machinery, log buildings, heirloom seeds, old bird houses, even a narrow-gauge railroad. Most, however, are created new from the owner’s concept – especially one that appeals to children.

## **A unique Iowa “little village”**

A unique form of agri-entertainment is the “little village” run by Farn and Varlen Carlson of Stanhope, Iowa. The tiny community includes a school, general store, church, livery stable, and blacksmithy. Appropriate artifacts fill the buildings, which are one-half to two-thirds scale. The Carlsons hope to add a barber shop, telephone office, bandstand, and fire station. There is an admission charge for viewing all the buildings, and the Carlsons cater to bus tour groups. Groups can also arrange to have barbecues at the village. Special events scheduled during the year include a threshing bee, an ice cream social on Father’s Day, Apple Cider Days in August, and a Christmas Stroll, when the Village is decorated for the season.(5)

## **Processing demonstrations**

Wineries and microbreweries have long appealed to the public’s fascination with how foods and beverages are made. Other possibilities are water-powered grist milling, sorghum milling, apple butter making, cider pressing, maple sugaring, sheep shearing, wool processing – all activities with an old-timey flavor.

### **A rural theme park**

Smiling Hills Farm, Westport, Maine, converted from a dairy farm into an agri-tourism business in the 1980s. The farm now draws 100,000 people a year and employs 100. Attractions include ice cream and sandwich sales, a petting zoo, a retreat center specializing in one-day mini-retreats, and activities for the 700 school children per day that may visit. Kids can climb in, on, and over a wooden train, a fire truck, and a small barn with a loft and places for cute photo opportunities. They can dig sand with kid-powered backhoes and steam shovels. Children mingle with animals in the petting barn area. Ducks and rabbits have the run of their own doll-house-like “Duck House” and “Rabbit House.” Group activities include tours, birthday parties, summer farm programs, wagon and sleigh rides, Halloween and maple season events, and cross-country skiing and skating in the winter.

## **Crop art**

Invite a crop artist to turn one of your cornfields into a work of art. It will be the talk of the countryside and may attract national media attention (especially if an actor dressed in a pale blue wetsuit with antennae on his head runs around and periodically pops up at unexpected times near the artwork). The crop art displayed by the fourteen Dutchess County, New York, farmers attracted thousands of visitors, including 1,000 school children, a month. Additional people came to their summer on-farm educational programs intended to strengthen urban ties to agriculture. Many farms that encourage school tours aim to build goodwill and long-term customers, rather than charging for the tours.(6)

Crop art runs the gamut from the fanciful sculptures of Dutchess County to floral designs, from designs mowed in a field to Halloween pumpkin displays like those seen on the Rohrbach Farm near St. Louis. Most crop art—at least in the Midwest—consists of designs cut into standing grain crops in a field, or alternatively, designs created by different colored plantings. Such crop art is best viewed from the air or from a raised structure. There have also been proposals for creating mound-like structures with Native American designs outlined in edible native plants, and there are agricultural mazes—which provide something to do as well as see. There are a number of full-time professional crop artists advertising on the Worldwide Web, as well as maze designers and franchisers. (Mazes are discussed more fully below.)

Madera County, California, farmer Darren Schmall originated the “Pizza Farm” concept, a subspecies of crop art. One field is devoted to a circular arrangement of crops and animals. Pie-shaped wedges of pepper plants, wheat, tomatoes, and so on represent pizza ingredients. Several sections house hogs and cattle (representing sausage and cheese). This is reportedly one of the fastest-growing types of crop art. Children use a coin-operated feed pellet machine to feed the animals.

Visitors expect to pay admission to farm attractions—even to view (and photograph) crop art. Maze operators generally charge admission. Joel Salatin advises farmers to build a haybale observation deck with a view of the maze, so that grandparents can take photos. Sales of food, beverages, and photographic supplies can take place here. Charge for some things, and give something away free. “While no one is certain that providing some activities free of charge improves the net return to the farm, they undoubtedly increase the farmer’s gross receipts through increased customer traffic.”(7)

## **Natural features**

An outstanding natural feature on a farm may become a tourist attraction—a bluff or rock outcropping, a waterfall, a grove of persimmon trees, a stream, or a spectacular view. Water is a popular natural attraction; sometimes natural features of interest to a visitor may have been overlooked by the farmer.



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## **Festivals/ pageants/ special events**

Special events can mean either private parties or public events. They range from offering food, drink, and overnight accommodations to sportsmen to birthday parties, weddings, company picnics, and Halloween festivals. To put on an annual festival or pageant open to the public may be beyond the scope of all but the largest farm entertainment businesses. Individual farms often participate in a countywide or regional festival, with significant government and organizational sponsorship. A few farms are now hosting 700 to 1,000 visitors per day for their unique offerings. Farms along the road to well-known annual festivals can find many ways to participate in opportunities created by the increased tourist traffic.

### **Children's Activities for a Harvest Festival**

- Vegetable Contest (from children's gardens)
- Vegetable Bingo (cards with names and/or pictures; veggie seed prize)
- Flower Smashing (using rubber mallets to flatten flowers between thick sheets of paper, making nice, flower-patterned cards)
- Vegetable Shape Mobiles (sticks and cutouts from old office paper)
- Ecopots (newspapers made into little pots for planting seeds)
- Chia Pets (paint faces on old footie stockings filled with soil and grass seed)
- Potato Prints (tried and true)
- Making Recycled Paper (need blender, water, flat strainers)
- Hair Wreaths (raffia, flowers, ribbon)
- Bookmarks (tried and true – wax paper, flowers, and an iron.)
- Root/Stem/Bud/Seed (kids have cards with words and must match to appropriate produce after brief lesson)
- Seed Sprouts in Baggies (soaked bean seeds, paper towels, baggies)
- Leaf Prints (leaves, crayons, paper)

*(from Karen Guz, Horticulture Associate, Bexar County, Arizona, listserve: communitygardening@ag.arizona.edu, 6/25/98)*

living for the developmentally disabled. Many small herb or vegetable farms offer classes in cooking, arranging flowers, or making herbal medicines. They depend on these activities to help build a clientele for their main products.

Farms have traditionally offered field days, sometimes sponsored by a farm organization. Many tours are also considered educational.

Some of the best examples of farm diversification involve education. Two of the most notable are The Land Institute (which has just received a grant to launch a 50-year research project on perennial grains) and Heritage Farm, home of the Seed Savers Exchange and Seed Saver publications.

Launching such an enterprise takes considerable connections, savvy, outside-the-box thinking, and dedication. It is a life's work dedicated to something beyond just farming, and is certainly not for everyone.

## **Things to Do**

### **Farm schools/workshops/ educational activities**

The educational activities offered on farms range from day classes or short-term workshops to full-scale, accredited courses of study. Farm schools accommodate interns or apprentices, and some charge tuition for the learning opportunity. There are also farm schools geared toward residential

Many of the farms listed in the on-line database of Sustainable Farming Internships and Apprenticeships, maintained by the National Center for Appropriate Technology ([www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org)), have elements of an educational or entertainment farm. Several plantations on the Potomac River, including Mt. Vernon, have been turned into educational farms. The workers on Mt. Vernon grow 18th-Century crops and gardens, use 18th-Century tools, and dress in period costumes.

## **Accommodations for outdoor sports enthusiasts**

Some farms adjacent to recreational areas build a business catering to the needs of visitors to those areas. A farmer in Missouri opened a lunch counter for the convenience of parents bringing children to a nearby summer camp. Farmers in the Adirondacks regularly accommodate skiers and hikers with shade, food, and drink, sometimes extending to overnight accommodations. A 1500-acre wheat farm on the Great Plains became a pheasant hunting ranch in the off-season, with a lodge and a gift shop (more about fee hunting below).

## **Petting zoos/children's amusements/playgrounds/horseback riding/hayrides**

Old McDonald's Children's Village, Sacket's Harbor, is the largest petting farm in New York. Near Watertown, on the Seaway Trail, the Children's Village was started as a way to increase cash flow to expand a market hog and feeder pig business. Ponies, rabbits, ducks, lambs, baby goats, calves, and piglets are sure-fire attractions for city children (and their parents). Pony and wagon rides are part of the mix. Playgrounds and hayrides also provide something for children to do at Pick-Your-Own farms.

Balky Farms in Northfield, Massachusetts, invites school classes to visit during lambing season in March and April. Baby crias, pygmy goats, and bunnies are also winners. Cheviot, Dorset, and Navajo Churro sheep, geese, peacocks, emus, oxen, Black Angus cattle, relief heifers, miniature horses, and donkeys succeed with the more venturesome. Tendercrop Farm in Newbury offers "buffalo viewing," while Valley View in Charlemont hosts llama-picnic treks. More information on animal entertainment can be found in the 2004 NRCS publication *Success Stories – Agritourism, Direct Marketing, Education, Conservation, Agritainment*. (Call 1-888-LANDSCAPE or see [www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/RESS/econ/ressd.htm](http://www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/RESS/econ/ressd.htm).)

## **Pick-Your-Own (U-Pick)**

In the 1970s U-pick farms were at their height of popularity. Families with three or four hungry teenagers and full-time homemakers were still common. Canning a couple of bushels of green beans or putting a flat of strawberries in the freezer helped out the family budget significantly. Raw materials were harder to come by than labor, compared with today. Canning has been all but eliminated today as a home activity because it represents a lost opportunity for the housewife to be gainfully employed, instead of receiving nothing for her hard work (i.e., the opportunity cost of labor) putting up the winter food supply. Small batches of gourmet recipes may be stored in the family freezer, but more than 50% of U.S. meals are now commercially prepared and eaten away from home. While U-pick operations can still be found, successful ones are most likely to be part of the whole entertainment-farm enterprise mix.

U-pick offers several advantages to farmers. They are relieved of the burden of finding and paying temporary seasonal labor at harvest time. This type of labor is becoming harder and harder to find. The hours are long and hot; the work, back-breaking. If people can be persuaded to pick as entertainment and get a few cents off per unit, the farmer is way ahead. However, sustainable farmer Kelly Klobner has observed, "The whole premise of 'here we are/come out and get dirty picking our crops/then pay us handsomely for the privilege' is a hard sell" (8) in today's world and may depend on how attractively the experience can be packaged and how aggressively it is marketed. Above all, the average farmer's natural distaste for selling must be overcome and he must learn to think like a customer. This means, at a minimum, creating adequate parking, having restrooms, having a safe entertainment area for small children, and working with an insurer on liability issues. Small children are best kept away from the picking area, as they contribute disproportionately to damaged crops and "inventory shrinkage." Attention to these basics will help build repeat sales, a primary goal of all direct marketing.

### Related ATTRA Publications

- *Direct Marketing*
- *Lavender Production, Products, Markets, and Entertainment Farms*
- *Reap New Profits: Marketing Strategies for Farmers and Ranchers (with SAN)*
- *Agricultural Business Planning Templates and Resources*

U-pick operations do best when they are located within an hour's drive of a population center of at least 50,000 people. This stipulation leaves out much of the Midwest, mountain states, eastern Kentucky, and parts of the Deep South. U-pick is about selling to families who do not have the space to grow their own seasonal vegetables in quantities sufficient for canning and freezing. The mix of vegetables and fruits will depend on customers' tastes (constantly becoming more sophisticated), rather than on what can most easily be grown. Like other forms of entertainment farming, U-Pick will be adversely affected by any dramatic rise in the price of gasoline.

### **Themes for entertainment farming**

Most entertainment farming depends in large part on attracting visitors from urban centers. Your neighbors in all likelihood won't be your customers. Something about your farm must be so distinctive that it draws people from long distances—even Canada or Europe. Perhaps you could invite a Native American group to hold regular pow-wows on your land; you operate the food concession and give tours of your farm dressed in a pioneer costume. Hold a summer festival. Add a historical garden to increase the draw. Add a gift shop, an antique shop, a lunch counter, crafts, botanical products. Add a herd of buffalo. People will come from Europe to see a herd of buffalo or prehistoric White Park cattle when they won't cross the road to see your prized Black Angus. Have a widely publicized farm festival—harvest festivals with music and plenty of good food and drink, and maybe face painting and personalized cupcakes. In the fall, public schools emphasize the American fall holidays,

in which the pumpkin plays a significant role. Pumpkins are easy to grow, readily available, large, and colorful. Invite busloads of school children to visit your farm.

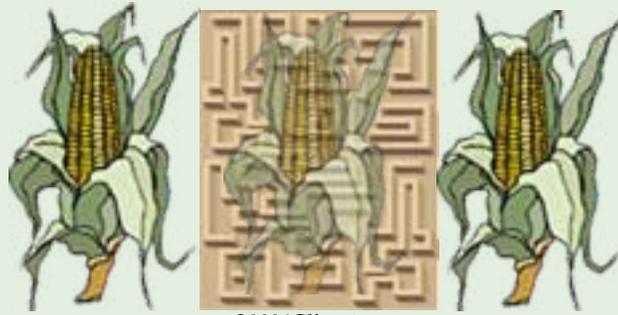
Following the disastrous Missouri/Mississippi River flood in 1993, the Rohrbach Farm, 50 miles from St. Louis, turned a significant portion of corn/soybean acreage into an entertainment farm featuring pumpkins. One field became a parking lot, with ample room for tour buses. When visitors come (by busloads) to view the large, attractive, free crop-art displays constructed by the Rohrbach clan, few leave without buying a pumpkin or something from the farm store.

The pumpkins are, of course, not pumpkins of eating quality. Those pumpkins remaining after the season is over are taken out into the woods to compost. One lesson the modern farmer learns, according to Joel Salatin, is that you have to accept a certain amount of waste and have to give something away free at times. (For a more complete account of activities at the Rohrbach Farm, see the ATTRA publication *Direct Marketing* and the Winter 1999 issue of USDA's *Small Farm News*).

### **Mazes**

Mazes are another option. In 1993 Don Frantz (a former Disney producer) created a 3.3-acre dinosaur maze in a Pennsylvania cornfield, and later created the American Maze Company, now producing increasingly elaborate mazes around the country and advertising on the Internet. The success of this farm entertainment venture has inspired a number of competitors throughout the American Cornbelt. Frantz says, "We try to keep them entertained for about two hours (about the length of a movie), and charge them about what they'd pay for a movie." He recommends good crowd control, ample restroom facilities, refreshments, and other farm products to sell. Most important is an integrated marketing plan, which the top maze designers now all sell as part of their design packages.

The Jamberry Farm, Madill, Oklahoma, features a 3-acre maze, funded in part by a grant from the Kerr Center in Poteau, Oklahoma. Visitors pay \$5 to walk through the maze and the farm's 5-acre



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### Maze puts Colorado farmer in the black

A cornfield “Bronco” maze has put the Glen Fritzler 350-acre vegetable farm in the black for the first time in 10 years. Busloads of school-children and tourists pay \$6 each to walk through the maze, created by Utah designer Brett Herbst’s patented process. By the fall of 2000 Herbst had done 61 mazes. The Bronco is, of course, the mascot of Denver’s professional football team.

Herbst gets a fee for the design and a percentage of the gate. The Fritzler family mans the ticket booth and sells t-shirts, often until 10 p.m. on weekends. Fritzler is thankful to have found a good way out of the agriculture boom-bust cycle by offering to entertain the public and create a new stream of steady income. For more information on Fritzler’s maze, call 970-737-2129.

*From the listserve Market Farming, Sept. 12, 2000. Market-farming@franklin.oit.unc.edu.*

pumpkin patch (or ride a hay wagon). The farm also features a picnic area, a playground, and pumpkin sales. Personnel from the nearby Noble Foundation assisted in setting up the maze.

#### Joel Salatin’s List of Farm Activities

- |                     |                             |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| ✎ Petting zoo       | ✎ Straw bale maze           |
| ✎ Baked treats      | ✎ Arts and crafts           |
| ✎ Hay rides         | ✎ Haunted house             |
| ✎ Homemade toys     | ✎ Miniature golf            |
| ✎ Full food service | ✎ Observation deck          |
| ✎ Company parties   | ✎ Catering                  |
| ✎ Pumpkin patch     | ✎ Face painting             |
| ✎ Concessions       | ✎ Bonfire with marshmallows |

See **Appendix B** for more ideas about entertainment farming enterprises.

## Things To Buy

The bottom line for most entertainment farms is how much you can sell – either now or later – to the people attracted to your farm. Surprisingly, many farmers feel that even farmers’ markets are primarily useful in building a steady customer base, not in daily sales. These potential customers will get to know you and later seek you out to meet their unique needs. This is the principle of “relationship marketing.” Sell to people who come to know you and count you as a friend. Your farm store or gift shop should display your farm’s finest products to maximum advantage to build repeat sales.

### Food and drink

Outdoor activities on a warm day will make anyone thirsty. Ready-to-eat food and a selection of beverages are part of the experience of your entertainment farm. They can also be a profit center. Be as creative as you can, and try to have refreshments that fit your farm’s theme.

If you operate a winery, you will naturally have your products displayed. Think of opportunities for selling cold beverages to the grandparents photographing the maze, the u-pickers, the children who have just done 100 turns on the slide out on the miniature hay-mow. On a recent visit to an herb farm, I was offered the opportunity to buy a commercially bottled nutraceutical drink – containing St.

Johnswort, valerian, and guarana. Apple cider is a good drink for the Midwest, and people may want to buy a gallon to take home.

Homemade ice cream, sandwiches, fresh fruit, barbecue, and roasting ears are all possibilities for ready-to-eat food sales.

## **Gifts and souvenirs**

There is a huge industry overseas manufacturing regional souvenirs for the U.S. If at all possible, have your gift items represent your farm, something that is actually produced locally. Stick to a theme, something that truly represents the uniqueness of your farm and your region. Items for sale on an herb entertainment farm can include everything from potted rosemary plants to a complete set of essential oils for aromatherapy. Wood carvings (traditionally done in the slow winter months), dolls, quilts, basketry, wheat weavings, pottery, packets of heirloom seeds, and decorative items such as fresh and dried flowers, pumpkins, corn shocks, and handloomed wool – as well as foods, such as meats, cheeses, other milk products, and winter squash – are all possibilities. One farmer realized that decorative shocks were worth more than his corn. Another sold echinacea flowers when the bottom dropped out of the market for echinacea root. Research by the North Central Region Extension Service revealed that wood is the medium preferred by tourists for crafts. This research also determined that women probably don't charge enough for the craft items they market, since men typically charge two to four times as much.

You will need an approved commercial kitchen for any value-added food products produced on the farm. This type of facility can cost \$100,000

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**Farmers who have become successful in value-added enterprises typically find retail profits so attractive that they begin to purchase, rather than grow, much of their raw material. The farm then takes on the character of a land-based business enterprise, not just a producer of commodities.**

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or more – if, typically, you must build a separate building from the ground up. You will need access to an approved slaughterhouse for any meat products. (For more information, see Joel Salatin's book.) Alternatives include a cooperative community kitchen or renting a commercial kitchen. Cornell University is even developing a mobile commercial kitchen. Be familiar with

your state's processing regulations if you are planning to sell on-farm processed food to the public. State health departments or departments of agriculture, universities, and business incubators can assist.

## **Shopping at the farm store**

Maureen Rogers of The Herbal Connection provides this advice (originally from *Bottom Line/Business*, 1/97).

The key to successful retailing for [the next few years] will be to make shopping not merely pleasant but entertaining as well. Despite the growth of catalog shopping, consumers will continue to go to stores. But the stores they visit will be the ones where they not only find what they like at the right price, but where they can have a good time. Bookstores with coffee bars are a good example.

A 1992 study of tourists' shopping habits, conducted by the North Central Regional Extension Services, determined that "after meals and lodging, [tourists] spend most of their tourist dollars on clothing, crafts, and local food products. Almost 70 percent buy gifts for future events and for mementos" (*Small Farm News*, September-October, 1993, p. 3). Consider installing a convenient automatic teller machine (ATM).<sup>(9)</sup>

Farmers must be prepared to sell themselves as well as their businesses, so image is all-important. People want to see an attractive facility and personnel – neat and clean. Location and appearance are the most important aspects of a farm business that caters to the public – not necessarily price.

Remember that return customers are the key to success. Eighty percent of your business comes from 20% of your customers, and it takes five times as much money/time/effort to get a new customer as it does to keep an old one.

## **A Maine farm store**

In the mid-1980s Gregg and Gloria Varney bought his parents' Maine farm after they sold their dairy herd. The farm included excellent crop land. The Varneys' first farm business was Gloria's yarn shop, which started people coming to their farm. This became the impetus for the Varneys to expand their offerings at the farm store to include their own meats (beef, veal, lamb, pork, chicken, and turkey), raw milk, and baked goods. In 1994, with the help of apprentices, Gloria and Gregg implemented a five-year plan to "learn how to make cheese and raise small scale animals with minimal grain purchases." After initially hitting a wall when they realized they needed a state-inspected cheese facility and pasteurizer that could cost \$10,000, they arranged to borrow the money from future customers, paying off the loans with food from the store. For example, a \$100 loan could be redeemed at a later time for \$110 worth of farm-raised food.

The goat-cheese operation has been a huge success, and it allows an April to November schedule that fits in well with their farmers' market schedule and the Thanksgiving season, giving them a break from the end of November for the next six months. In 1995 the Varneys became 100% organic with the conversion of the dairy cow operation. They now have more than 100 organic cows.

Their product line in the farm store has expanded, as well. Surplus vegetables go into value-added products such as pickles, relishes, and stewed tomatoes. Other excess is used to feed the pigs and chickens. This integrated operation is a big hit with customers, who now have no question about where their food originates. People now come to the farm not just to buy their food but to spend time there and let their children see the animals.(10)

The Varney Farm is not the only farm in Maine oriented toward tourism, and there are regularly

scheduled regional farm tours. Tickets to farm daytrip tours in Maine, generally including two or three farms in a single county, cost \$12 to \$15 per person, with children under 12 free. Lunch is extra.

### **Highlight a garden path**

Appleton Creamery is a small-scale goat farm and dairy where Brad and Caitlin Hunter also grow flowers and organic vegetables, including many heirloom varieties. Brad, a home brewer and wine maker, has included in the garden two essential ingredients for beer and wine – hops and grapes. A collection of bird houses surrounds the traditional cottage garden, where the Hunters grow edible flowers and herbs to use in the farm's goat cheeses, and a path through the garden leads to the barn, where visitors can see the goats.

The grounds also house "garden sculpture" created out of found objects – old farm equipment, flea market furniture, cast-off children's toys.

## **Nature-based tourism**

A further option for recreational farming is leasing wooded land or marginal cropland for hunting, fishing, or hiking. Hunting leases are the most common form of recreation leases and can range from one-day trespass fees to guided trips and lodging. Of course liability, licenses, and regulations are important considerations in planning for a recreational lease.(11) Such use can sometimes be combined with overnight lodging, campgrounds, and a farm store. Texas A&M University, <http://survey.tamu.edu/ntactivities>, has a program at its La Copita Ranch to train land managers in hosting this type of tourism.

For information and technical advice on licenses and regulations, contact local offices of the following agencies.

- Fish and Wildlife Service
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- State Department of Natural Resources

Another source of information on hunting leases is *Managing Your Farm for Lease Hunting and a Guide to Developing Hunting Leases*.(12)

## **e-Commerce**

With a click of the mouse a worldwide audience can gain access to your information. More and more sites featuring particular farms and selling farm products directly to consumers are joining the organization-sponsored producer directories now on-line. Some farm Web sites are listed in ATTRA's *Direct Marketing* publication.

## **Liability**

Liability issues for farms that host the public are generally resolved with appropriate insurance. Insurance needs will vary by operation. Neil Hamilton's book *The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing* provides guidance on choosing and consulting with an independent insurance agent (see **Resources**, below). Insurance representatives can provide guidance on specific steps for reducing risks of your operation. A new database on farm injuries can be found at [www.nsc.org/necas/](http://www.nsc.org/necas/).

Specific examples of how individual farms have handled insurance needs may be found in the NRCS publication *Success Stories – Agritourism, Direct Marketing, Education, Conservation, Agritainment*. (Call 1-888-LANDSCAPE or see [www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/RESS/econ/ressd.htm](http://www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/RESS/econ/ressd.htm).)

## **Complying with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)**

Modifications to allow the differently abled access to your farm attraction include the following.

- space reserved for handicapped parking
- a farmstand with a hard packed or paved surface
- one bathroom accessible to the handicapped (can be rented)

- a ramp to a platform that's slightly higher than the hay wagon (for handicapped access to hayrides)
- a "long reacher" for apple picking
- raised beds for strawberry picking
- for seasonal events, a sign saying, "If you need assistance...."
- large-print signs, brochures, or audiotapes of brochures.
- door openings at least 32 inches wide (to accommodate wheelchairs) and doors able to be opened with a closed fist (knobs are out).
- rugs taped to the floor with velcro.

### **Guarding against risks to children on the farm**

#### Age 0-5

Careful supervision by adults. Physical barriers such as locks and fences. Safe distractions. No riding on farm machinery.

#### Age 5-10

Consistent rules; discussing safe behavior; careful supervision of activities.

#### Age 10-16

Consistent rules, with consequences for infractions and rewards for safe behavior.

#### Age 16-18

Prohibition of drugs and alcohol. Emphasis on acceptance of adult responsibilities. Opportunity to be role models for younger children.

An Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) representative will usually be glad to come out and advise you on specifics.

Risks incurred when the public is invited to a farm may include soil compaction, damage to orchards and crops, litter, and of course increased liability. Such costs have been estimated at \$1 to \$2 per visitor, which should be factored into fees and prices.

## Conclusion: The New Outlook

Professor Duncan Hilchey of the Cornell Sustainable Agriculture program advises American farmers:

Growers have to adopt a new outlook and switch their thinking away from production toward giving today's consumers what they want. That might include farm tours, value-added products, or even adding a petting zoo. People come out to the farm these days not so much to buy large quantities of produce, but for the immersion experience for themselves and their children. They are looking for a farm-fresh feeling—not just food.(6)

The University of California's Small Farm Center has developed an on-line agricultural tourism directory ([www.calagtour.org](http://www.calagtour.org)) to provide tourists with an easy way to "search for a farm experience." Farm proprietors interested in a listing are encouraged to contact the Center.(13) A national agri-tourism database ([www.farmstop.com](http://www.farmstop.com)) complements those developed by Illinois, Texas, and other states.

The number-one requirement for a successful agri-entertainment venture is an abundance of energy and enthusiasm. A willingness to think unconventionally may be equally important. Whatever you do, do it with a flair for showmanship. Let your creative side come out. With enough thought, ingenuity, determination, and capital, almost any farm anywhere could be adapted to agri-entertainment. Stiff-necked individualism and suspicion of change work against success in entertainment farming. A willingness to provide what the public truly wants and is willing to pay for is the way to success. Just as the railroad barons of the 19th century needed to start thinking of themselves as being in the transportation business (instead of the railroad business) in order to compete successfully in the 20th; so the farmers of the 21st century must begin thinking of themselves as being in the land management business, rather than the farming business, in order to reach their farm family goals and dreams.

### Databases

- **National:** [www.farmstop.com](http://www.farmstop.com)
- **California:** [www.calagtour.org](http://www.calagtour.org)
- **Texas Nature Tourism Database and Workbook:** <http://survey.tamu.edu/ntactivities>
- **Illinois:** [www.leisurestudies.uiuc.edu/agritourism](http://www.leisurestudies.uiuc.edu/agritourism)

## References

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- 9) Kuerstenberg, Kelly. 2003. ATMs on the farm and at the market. *The Seasonal Marketer*. January. p. 1.
- 10) Adapted from Maine Organic Farmer & Gardener (MOFGA) News. June-August 2000. p. 27.
- 11) Elias, Debra. 1996. Recreational Leases. Minnesota CRP Information Series. December. 2 p.
- 12) Delaware Cooperative Extension Service. 1988. Managing Your Farm for Lease Hunting and a Guide to Developing Hunting Leases. No. 147. DCES, Georgetown, DE.
- 13) Small Farm Center  
University of California  
One Shields Ave.  
Davis, CA 95616-8699  
530-752-8136  
530-752-7716 FAX  
sfcenter@ucdavis.edu

## Resources

### Comprehensive

USDA/NRCS. 2004. *Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism, Farming for Profit and Sustainability – Tool Kit*. 2300 p. Available at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise/resmanual.html](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise/resmanual.html).

### Agricultural tourism business development

Agri-Business Council of Oregon. 2003. *Agri-Tourism Workbook*. 110 p. [www.aglink.org](http://www.aglink.org).

Cornell University Materials

- Agritourism (Resource Packet)
- Agritourism in New York: Opportunities and Challenges in Farm-Based Recreation and Hospitality (Publication)

- Considerations for Agritourism Development (Publication)
- Farming Alternatives: A Guide to Evaluating the Feasibility of New Farm-Based Enterprises (Publication)

*May be ordered from:*

*Educational Resources Program:*  
607-255-9252

*Media Services:* 607-255-2080

*Community Food and Agriculture Program:* 607-255-9832 or 255-4413

*Farm and Ranch Recreation Handbook.*  
[uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/RanchRecr](http://uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/RanchRecr)

Hamilton, Neil. 1999. *The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing*. Drake University Press, Cedar Rapids, IA. 235 p.

New Mexico Department of Tourism. 2000. "Ag" Tourism.  
[www.nmsu.edu/~redtt/Resources/html/AgTours.html](http://www.nmsu.edu/~redtt/Resources/html/AgTours.html)

University of Minnesota. 2003. *Building a Sustainable Business: A Guide to Developing a Business Plan for Farms and Rural Businesses*. Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, St. Paul, MN.

\$14.00 plus 3.95 s/h; 411 Borlaug Hall, St. Paul, MN 55108; 1-800-909-MISA.  
Misamail@umn.edu  
Make checks payable to University of Minnesota.

USDA/AMS. 2000. *Direct Marketing Today: Challenges and Opportunities*. 58 p. [www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/DirectMar2.pdf](http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/DirectMar2.pdf).

Order publication from: [velma.lakins@usda.gov](mailto:velma.lakins@usda.gov).

### Articles of general interest

Adam, Katherine. 2002. Agritourism: Profit from your lifestyle. *Mother Earth News*. June-July. p. 18.

Jolly, Desmond. 1999. Agricultural tourism: Emerging opportunity. *Small Farm News*. Summer. p. 1, 4-5.

Jolly, Desmond, and Jeanne McCormack. 1999. Agri-tourism: A desperate last straw? *Small Farm News*. Fall. p. 2.

Lyson, Thomas. 2000. Some thoughts on civic agriculture. *Farming Alternatives* [Cornell]. p. 1, 4.

*A substantial number of smaller-scale, locally oriented, flexibly organized farms and food producers are taking root [to] fill the geographic and economic spaces passed over or ignored by large ... producers. These farms will articulate with consumer demand for locally produced and processed food. Civic agriculture is not only a source of family income for the farmer, but contributes to the social, economic, political and cultural health and vitality of the communities in which they exist.*

McCue, Susan. 1999. Successful agricultural tourism ventures. *Small Farm News*. Summer. p. 1, 6-7.

SAN. 2000. Marketing Strategies: Farmers and Ranchers Reap New Profits. *Small Farm Today*. May. p. 35-38.

### **Entertainment Farming and Agri-Tourism**

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**NCAT Agriculture Specialist**

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<http://www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/entertainment.html>  
PDF  
<http://www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/entertn.pdf>

## Appendix A

### Checklist of Agri-tourism Development Considerations\*

#### Agri-tourism businesses

- Personal evaluation
- Market evaluation
- Project feasibility evaluation
- Financial evaluation
- Business plan development
- Marketing plan development
- Insurance needs
- Regulations and permits

#### Farm festivals

- Planning committee
- Festival mission
- Location of festival
- Licenses and permits
- Attractions, entertainment, food
- Budget strategy
- Promotional campaign
- Insurance needs
- Management considerations
- Public safety plan
- Evaluation

#### Farmers' markets

- Market coordinator
- Planning meetings
- Advisory committee
- Organizational structure
- Visitor market groups
- Location of market
- Vendor fees
- Promotional campaign
- Insurance needs
- Appearance of market
- Customer amenities
- Vendor support and policies
- Coupon programs
- Evaluation

#### Regional agri-tourism planning

- Region identification
- Community involvement
- Concerns about development
- Visitor market groups
- Planning sessions
- Goals and objectives
- Resource and attraction inventory
- Theme
- Action plan
- Promotional plan
- Evaluation

\* from: Kuehn, Diane et al. 1998. *Considerations for Agri-tourism Development*. p. 1.

**Appendix B: Some Successful Entertainment Farming Enterprises and Techniques (farm recreation and hospitality businesses)**

Wineries with Friday happy hours	Educational tours	Historical re-creations
Arts & crafts demonstrations	Farm schools	Living history farms
Farm stores	K-12 schools	Heirloom plants and animals
Roadside stands	Outdoor Schools	Civil War plantations
Processing demonstrations	Challenge Schools	Log buildings
Cider pressing	Movement-based retreat centers	Maple sugaring
Antique villages	Native American villages	Sheep shearing
Herb walks	Frontier villages	Wool processing
Workshops	Collections of old farm machinery	Sorghum milling
Festivals	Miniature villages	Apple butter making
Cooking demos	Farm theme playgrounds for children	Fee fishing/hunting
Pick-your-own	Fantasylands	Farm vacations
Pumpkin patches	Gift shops	Bed and breakfasts
Rent-an-apple tree	Antiques	Farm tours
Moonlight activities	Crafts	Horseback riding
Pageants	Crafts demonstrations	Crosscountry skiing
Speakers	Food sales	Camping
Regional themes	Lunch counters	Hayrides
Mazes	Cold drinks	Sleigh rides
Crop art	Restaurants	Rest areas for snowmobilers or cross-country skiers
Pancake breakfasts during sugaring season	Pizza farms	Themes (apple town, etc.)
Bad weather accommodations	Native prairies preservation	Picnic grounds
Tastings	August "Dog Days" – 50% off dogwoods if customer brings picture of family dog, etc.	Shady spots for travelers to rest
Buffalo	Campgrounds	Hieroglyphics, rock art
Dude ranches	Indian mounds, earthworks art	Hunting lodges

# Targeting School Groups for Agritainment Enterprises:

## Summary of a Schoolteacher Survey in Tennessee



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## Foreword

A significant number of value-added projects evaluated and analyzed by the *Agricultural Development Center* (ADC) have been agritainment enterprises. Critical to the overall success of these enterprises has been a reliance on a significant amount of sales to groups — particularly school groups. In many cases, agritainment enterprises must rely on hosting groups during the week to break-even on their fixed and operating costs. Also, most agritainment enterprises do not have the luxury of being “build it and they will come” successes overnight. Rather, a significant amount of planning, marketing and promotion is required to develop short-term and long-term successful enterprises.

To effectively and efficiently plan agritainment enterprises that target elementary school groups, a survey of elementary schoolteachers was conducted by the ADC in 1999. The survey was developed, administered, evaluated and summarized under the leadership of the ADC’s marketing specialist, Dr. Kent Wolfe. Results of the survey have been the source of numerous presentations, fact sheets and project reports. However, prior to their use in an official publication, Dr. Wolfe accepted a position outside of The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture. However, due to the valuable information obtained by Dr. Wolfe’s work in the survey, his results are used as the basis of this publication.

Appreciation and credit are extended to Dr. Wolfe for his leadership, analysis and contributions to the survey and to this publication. Appreciation is also extended to Dr. Kim Jensen, Mrs. Wanda Russell, Dr.

George Smith and Mr. Stanley Trout who served on the peer review and editing committee for this publication.

While the information in this document is based on survey data obtained from elementary schoolteachers and is intended for the specific use by those involved with or considering agritainment enterprises, it should be used as a companion to Extension publication “**Considering an Agritainment Enterprise in Tennessee**,” PB 1648.

It should be noted that this publication is intended to serve as a summary of the results obtained in the survey. Interpretation and application of the information should be done with caution and should serve as a guide rather than a recommendation of action.

Rob Holland  
*Agricultural Development Center*

# Targeting School Groups for Agritainment Enterprises: A Summary of Schoolteacher Survey in Tennessee

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## Introduction

The past few years have witnessed an increased interest in agritainment activities (agritourism and entertainment farming) on Tennessee farms. Animal petting pens, pumpkin patches, hay-bale and corn mazes, farm tours and farm festivals have become almost commonplace across the state. Other agritainment activities such as children's camps, corporate events and cabin rentals are also being implemented. These and other agritainment activities have created new uses for many farm resources and have contributed to additional sources of farm revenue.

Often begun as educational and awareness programs, many agritainment activities have been developed from small-scale, hobby-type activities into full-time, primary farm enterprises. When done as a hobby, it is often difficult to cover all costs and realize a positive net return. Therefore, many agritainment enterprises are being developed as recognizable entities of the total farm operation. With this distinction comes the commitment of many farm resources, including a significant amount of managerial time and farm labor and a significant investment in marketing and promotion.

The primary focus of all marketing and promotion activities must be aimed at attracting visitors to the farm . . . and the more people the better. The primary audiences for agritainment activities are often separated into two classifications: families with children and groups. Groups are often targeted during weekdays, while families are targeted on weekends and holidays. Many different types of groups and several different methods for marketing agritainment activities to them exist. Groups include school groups, senior citizen groups, church groups, civic groups, daycare groups, children and youth groups

and tour groups, just to name a few. Marketing methods may include brochures, print, radio, Internet, television, signs, sponsorships, use of a logo and positive word-of-mouth comments and referrals.

The effectiveness of different promotion tactics often varies with particular groups targeted. Therefore, understanding a particular target group can be extremely helpful in planning and developing a promotional strategy. Because school groups are considered a good target audience for agritainment activities, obtaining a good understanding of their preferences, constraints and opinions can be helpful to farm families considering or enhancing an agritainment enterprise.

School groups are often considered good target audiences for agritainment activities for a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons are:

- most school classes take field trips
- farm and agritainment activities can easily relate to educational curriculums
- school classes are accustomed to planning and taking field trips and have an infrastructure to do so
- individually or collectively, school classes tend to represent large numbers of individuals (i.e., average classes may have 20 students, an average grade level may have 100 students, an average school may have 600 students and an entire county system may have thousands of students)
- school groups normally have a specific point of contact (teacher) who understands the group's constraints and provides leadership for arrangements

Many successful agritainment enterprises rely on school groups for a bulk of

their business. Especially during October, school buses flock to pumpkin patches around the state, sometimes unloading more than 200 students each hour. At a per-person fee of up to \$6.00, agritainment enterprises can generate substantial revenues. However, there are often many challenges to developing a thriving, multi-thousand-dollar enterprise. First, you must get the people to the farm. Then, they must have an enjoyable experience. And finally, they must be convinced that they will have an equally pleasing, new experience if they return the next week, the next month or the next year. Each of these areas requires a great deal of work.

Attracting visitors to the farm initially requires development of a high-quality enterprise and high-quality marketing/promotion plan. Keys to insuring a quality experience include a well-planned and well-executed agenda from arrival to depar-

ture, a safe environment and a good value. To ensure repeat visits, customers must realize that their next visit will be equally pleasing, yet different enough to decrease chances of repetition or boredom.

Keep in mind that different groups have different expectations. That is, the expectations and requirements of a senior citizen group will differ from those of a kindergarten class. So, targeting different groups may require different promotion methods. Because elementary school classes can be such a vital target market for agritainment activities, a survey of elementary school-teachers in a six-county area was conducted by the *Agricultural Development Center* in the spring of 1999 to identify the needs, expectations and desires of school groups. This publication is devoted to summarizing the results of the school-teacher survey.

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## The Survey Sample

The survey targeted public schoolteachers in kindergarten through fifth grade. A one-time, mail survey was used. A total of 1,202 surveys were mailed to 95 public elementary schools in a six-county area around Knoxville, Tennessee. The six counties included in the study were Hamblen, Grainger, Cocke, Jefferson, Sevier and Knox. Elementary schools were identified and a packet of surveys, accompanied by a cover letter that explained the importance and purpose of the study, was mailed to the school's secretary. Inside the survey package was a memo asking the secretary to place a questionnaire in each elementary teacher's school mailbox. The elementary schoolteachers were asked to complete the postage-paid questionnaire and return it to the *Agricultural Development Center*. A total of 201 questionnaires

were returned for a response rate of 16.7 percent. Table 1 summarizes the return rate by grade level. The return rate was not uniform, with some counties having a higher return rate than others.

Kindergarten	33%
First	21%
Second	13%
Third	13%
Fourth	12%
Fifth	8%

## Market Potential

Elementary schoolteachers indicated a strong interest in farm field trips. When asked how likely they would be to take a farm field trip, 63 percent of the teachers said they would be very likely, while a total of 90 percent were very likely and somewhat likely to do so. Table 2 presents the likelihood of teachers by grade level to take a farm field trip.

A number of different field trip opportunities are available to schoolteachers and their students. Therefore, determining the

number of field trips that various grade levels take over the course of a year is very important in assessing the level of competition for an agritainment enterprise. On average, it appears as though elementary classes take between three and four field trips each school year. On average, kindergarten students take four field trips per year. Table 3 presents the average number of field trips taken by each grade level. The average number of field trips taken each year did not vary substantially by grade or by county.

**Table 2. Likelihood of Teachers to Take a Farm Field Trip**

Likelihood	Grade Level						
	Kindergarten	First Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade	Fourth Grade	Fifth Grade	Average*
Very Likely	82%	62%	71%	52%	29%	33%	63%
Somewhat Likely	17%	35%	14%	35%	48%	33%	28%
Somewhat Unlikely	2%	0%	0%	9%	10%	17%	4%
Very Unlikely	0%	3%	14%	4%	14%	17%	6%

**Table 3. Average Number of Field Trips Taken by Grade Level**

Kindergarten	4.0
First	3.5
Second	3.2
Third	3.3
Fourth	3.8
Fifth	3.5

Because school field trips are often planned on an individual class or grade-level basis, it can be important to have some information about the number of students and adults to expect from each class. Knowing the class size will help determine the amount of labor that will be needed for a particular group. According to the survey, the average size kindergarten through fifth grade class is 22 students and five adults. Table 4 presents the average number of students and adults per class by grade level.

\*In tables that present data by grade level and average, the average column/row presents straight averages across all grade levels, not weighted averages and therefore should be interpreted with caution.

<b>Table 4. Average Number of Students and Adults Per Class by Grade Level</b>		
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Number of Adults</b>
Kindergarten	22.5	5.5
First	18.2	5.2
Second	23.5	5.3
Third	19.1	4.1
Fourth	23.1	4.8
Fifth	32.8	5.6
<b>Average</b>	<b>22.4</b>	<b>5.2</b>

In addition to competing with other field trip opportunities, an agritainment enterprise should only be targeted to those school groups within a reasonable distance of the farm. A reasonable distance may be determined in minutes or miles. Table 5

presents the maximum distance (in miles and minutes) that teachers indicated they would travel for a field trip. According to these results, agritainment enterprises should be targeted to schools within 35 miles and 45 minutes of the farm.

<b>Table 5. Maximum Distance and Time That Teachers Will Travel for a Field Trip</b>							
<b>Distance</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>						
	<b>Kindergarten</b>	<b>First Grade</b>	<b>Second Grade</b>	<b>Third Grade</b>	<b>Fourth Grade</b>	<b>Fifth Grade</b>	<b>Average</b>
Miles	30.4	37.7	35.4	31.1	38.1	41.4	34.7
Minutes	42.0	50.6	45.9	43.5	47.0	57.7	46.3

## **Price Determination**

Getting an idea of how much school groups will pay for an agritainment farming experience can be difficult. One method might be to evaluate the prices they normally pay for field trip activities. Obtaining an understanding of the cost limits teachers use in planning their field trips provides useful information in setting the per-student field trip price. The field trip's price must be high enough to cover

associated costs, yet not so high that it discourages participation. According to the survey, teachers do indeed have cost limits for their field trips. Exceeding these limitations could exclude an agritainment enterprise from a teacher's consideration as a potential field trip. The survey found that the upper limit for field trip costs was about \$6.80 per student. This figure is an average of all grade levels and may vary

according to the nature of a field trip and the associated activities. Table 6 presents the average upper cost limit for field trips by grade level.

<b>Table 6. Average Upper Cost Limit for Field Trips by Grade Level</b>	
Kindergarten	\$6.93
First	\$6.03
Second	\$6.44
Third	\$7.73
Fourth	\$6.16
Fifth	\$8.03
<b>Average</b>	<b>\$6.79</b>

Knowing the upper price limit is helpful, but it does not mean that an agritainment enterprise can succeed at that price. The important thing to remember about pricing is that the customers must perceive the experience to be a good value compared to the price. However, it is important to remember that just because teachers

consider \$6 to \$7 as the upper cost level, they still expect a quality field trip. The upper price level allows the agritainment operator to work backwards and see what products and service can be provided at various prices.

A simple scenario was tested among schoolteachers to determine their willingness to pay for a fictitious farm field trip. The scenario describes an agritainment enterprise where students could take a hayride across the farm to a pumpkin patch and then pick their own pumpkin. Other activities described in the fictitious field trip included allowing the children to paint their pumpkins and to hear a Halloween story. A picnic area was also provided in the scenario, but the class was responsible for bringing their own food. The facilities would also include a limited play area. Teachers were asked if they would pay \$3, \$5 or \$6 for the aforementioned field trip. The results of the teachers' willingness to pay different prices for the described agritainment field trip are presented in table 7 by grade level.

<b>Table 7. Teachers' Willingness to Pay for the Described Agritainment Field Trip</b> (figures represent the percent of teachers in a particular grade level who were willing to pay the specified price per person for the described field trip)			
<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Per Person Price Level</b>		
	<b>\$3.00</b>	<b>\$4.00</b>	<b>\$6.00</b>
Kindergarten	95%	39%	10%
First	100%	34%	6%
Second	100%	58%	29%
Third	92%	38%	9%
Fourth	96%	65%	5%
Fifth	78%	23%	8%
<b>Average</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>10%</b>

The willingness to pay for the example field trip decreases significantly with each price increase. Nearly all of the teachers were willing to pay \$3, only a third of the teachers were willing to pay \$4 and less than one in 10 teachers were willing to pay \$6 for the fictitious farm field trip. This

simple scenario reveals the price sensitivity of the teachers surveyed. Therefore, once an agritainment enterprise is in operation, it will be important to obtain feedback about the value of the enterprise and the price charged.

## Scheduling School Field Trips

Understanding when most school field trips are taken not only helps an agritainment enterprise better plan to host school groups, but it can help identify times when other groups should be targeted. There is, however, a difference in the time teachers **plan** a field trip and the time they actually **take** a field trip. Teachers tend to plan their field trips before the school year begins or at the beginning of the school year. However, some teachers indicate that they plan field trips through-

out the school year. Understanding when teachers plan their field trips can also help an agritainment entrepreneur schedule the timing of promotions. Similarly, understanding when teachers take field trips can help determine when school-related activities should be featured at the farm. Table 8 presents the percentage of teachers we plan their field trips at various times of the year, while Table 9 shows the percentage of teachers who take field trips at various times of the year.

When Planned	Grade Level						
	Kindergarten	First Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade	Fourth Grade	Fifth Grade	Average
Beginning of school year	49%	40%	46%	41%	35%	30%	43%
Throughout school year	20%	24%	39%	35%	12%	20%	23%
Before school year	11%	16%	8%	12%	35%	50%	18%
Beginning of year and January	7%	8%	8%	6%	0%	0%	6%
Fall / spring	2%	4%	0%	0%	6%	0%	3%
A month in advance	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%

When Taken	Grade Level						
	Kindergarten	First Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade	Fourth Grade	Fifth Grade	Average
Fall & Spring	25%	25%	67%	67%	60%	17%	36%
Fall, Winter, Spring	6%	0%	11%	33%	0%	33%	9%
September, October, May	0%	19%	0%	0%	20%	0%	7%
October, April, May	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7%
Depends on availability	0%	13%	11%	0%	0%	0%	6%
October, February, March	13%	0%	0%	0%	0%	17%	5%
December & Spring	13%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	5%

## Important Field Trip Components

The best way to sell a product is to offer a product that people want. This holds true for farm agritainment enterprises. Whether teachers plan field trips by curriculum, grade level or mere availability can influence both the theme of an agritainment enterprise and the promotion tactics used to attract school groups. According to the survey, elementary schoolteachers are very interested in scheduling field trips related to the materials they are teaching and that are educational and informative. The teachers overwhelmingly indicated that an educational trip related to their curriculum is very important in their field trip selection criteria. Table 10 presents the percentage of teachers, by grade level, who use certain criteria when selecting field trips.

Given these results, it is obvious that elementary teachers prefer to select field trips that relate to a teaching curriculum. Therefore, it should be worthwhile for an

agritainment enterprise to gain a better understanding of what elementary school children learn about. A general understanding of the topics they cover in science and other related subjects may provide additional ideas that could be incorporated into a farm field trip. By incorporating educational activities in the agritainment enterprise so the students are actually learning about topics related to their classroom curriculum, an agritainment business may increase the likelihood of attracting school groups.

In addition to curriculum, elementary schoolteachers consider interactive or hands-on experiences to be very important in selecting field trips. Table 11 presents several factors and how important teachers of each grade level feel they are in selecting a field trip.

Again, this information is valuable in that it provides direction to the type of activities

<b>Table 10. Percent of Teachers Who Use Various Criteria to Select Field Trips</b> (figures represent the percent of teachers in a particular grade level who use certain criteria in selecting a field trip)			
<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Selection Criteria<sup>1</sup></b>		
	<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Availability/Interest</b>
Kindergarten	59%	35%	0%
First	55%	36%	9%
Second	63%	25%	13%
Third	67%	17%	0%
Fourth	17%	0%	33%
Fifth	50%	0%	50%
Total	55%	26%	10%

<b>Table 11. Important Factors in Selecting A Field Trip</b> (the percentage of teachers within each grade level who indicated a particular factor was important)							
<b>Factors</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>						
	<b>Kindergarten</b>	<b>First Grade</b>	<b>Second Grade</b>	<b>Third Grade</b>	<b>Fourth Grade</b>	<b>Fifth Grade</b>	<b>Average</b>
Curriculum/class studies	57%	61%	61%	59%	38%	33%	52%
Hands-on, interactive	45%	32%	50%	14%	38%	27%	37%
Fun, enjoyable, interesting, exciting	20%	24%	27%	18%	29%	33%	23%
Educational, informative	17%	19%	14%	9%	43%	54%	21%
Age-level appropriate	27%	16%	9%	9%	0%	7%	16%
Unique, new experience	15%	5%	9%	9%	5%	0%	9%
Cost	3%	11%	9%	5%	10%	13%	7%
Distance, location	3%	5%	5%	9%	5%	13%	6%
Safety, organized	5%	0%	4%	9%	4%	13%	5%
Cultural	0%	3%	9%	4%	4%	7%	3%
Facilities	3%	0%	0%	4%	9%	0%	3%
Activities	5%	3%	5%	0%	0%	0%	3%

<sup>1</sup> Those who select field trips based on “curriculum” likely prefer that field trips relate to a subject, topic, lesson or educational curriculum being studied. Those who select field trips based on “grade level” likely are required to take the same field trip as other classes in their grade level or are restricted from taking a field trip that another grade level takes. Those who select field trips based on “availability/interest” likely prefer trips that fit their schedule and interest.

the farm should offer and how to promote them to school groups. For example, a curriculum activity at the agritainment enterprise could include planting a seed in a small container. This would provide each child with an opportunity to plant a seed at the farm with instructions on how to care for and nurture the plant at home or in the classroom. This ties into agriculture, as well as into the spring theme of rebirth and growth. By including hands-on activities for students, the agritainment enterprise becomes an extension of the in-class curriculum.

In addition to providing a hands-on field trip experience that is related to a classroom curriculum, the trip must be enjoyable for the children. You may have the best educational material and picturesque setting, but if the children do not enjoy the field trip, teachers may not return. The purpose of the field trip is to provide children with a fun, new venue for learning. If the activities and experience are not fun, children will lose interest and divert their attention to other non-related activities like talking, playing and getting out of control.

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## Marketing Agritainment Enterprises to Schoolteachers

Understanding why teachers have not participated in farm field trips in the past could be helpful in evaluating the competition and targeting promotions to school groups. Nearly one third of the elementary schoolteachers interviewed in the ADC's survey did not take a farm field trip during the previous year because they were unaware of any such enterprises. This is surprising because a number of farm-tour opportunities are located within 30 miles of the six-county area in which the teachers were surveyed. Therefore, schoolteachers appear largely unaware of available farm-tour and agritainment enterprises.

Another reason teachers indicated they did not take a farm field trip was that "other grades take that trip." This reason may imply that in some schools, field trips may only be taken on a grade-level basis (various grades cannot take the same field trip). This is not necessarily negative, but it may mean that an agritainment enterprise must stress that a variety of age-appropriate activities will be offered at the farm. That is, the enterprise may feature hand-milking a cow for fifth-graders, a corn maze

for third-graders and a pumpkin patch and hayride for first-graders. By offering a variety of "activities" or different field trip alternatives, each focused on different grade levels, a farm enterprise may be able to overcome the obstacle of attracting only one grade level. Table 12 presents the percentage of teachers in each grade level who did not take a farm field trip in the previous year for the selected reasons.

Given the large percentage of teachers who were unaware of farm field trip opportunities, it is essential that the agritainment enterprises be aggressively marketed and promoted to schoolteachers. Apparently, the most effective marketing and promotional media is word of mouth. Nearly eight of 10 teachers indicated they learned about field trip opportunities via word of mouth. This may mean that teachers who have a satisfactory experience at an agritainment enterprise will be the best form of advertisement and promotion to other teachers. Therefore, efforts should be focused on not only getting groups to the farm, but on making sure they have a great experience while there.

Word-of-mouth advertising can impact a business both positively and negatively, depending on an individual's experience. If a teacher, student and/or parent visits a farm and has a less-than-satisfactory experience, they will pass this information on to others. Table 13 presents the percentage of teachers who learn about field trip opportunities by a variety of methods.

Following word-of-mouth, brochures and flyers were the methods mentioned

most often. Therefore, creating an attractive and informative agritainment brochure/flyer should be included in an enterprise's overall marketing and promotion plan. More than four of 10 teachers indicated they learn about field trip opportunities via brochures and flyers. About two-thirds of teachers indicated the best way to inform them of field trip opportunities is to mail them something. In addition to mailing information, it may be a good idea to distribute brochures/flyers in person

<b>Table 12. Percentage of Teachers Who Did Not Take A Farm Field Trip for Selected Reasons</b>							
<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>						
	<b>Kindergarten</b>	<b>First Grade</b>	<b>Second Grade</b>	<b>Third Grade</b>	<b>Fourth Grade</b>	<b>Fifth Grade</b>	<b>Average</b>
Not aware of any	31%	30%	40%	29%	47%	43%	36%
Another grade takes that trip	15%	17%	30%	29%	41%	21%	25%
Went somewhere else	19%	30%	5%	5%	0%	0%	12%
Trips planned prior to learning of farm trip	15%	13%	10%	10%	6%	7%	11%
Does not fit curriculum	4%	0%	5%	0%	6%	7%	4%
Money, cost	4%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	2%

<b>Table 13. Percentage of Teachers Who Learn About Field Trips by Selected Methods</b>							
<b>Methods</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>						
	<b>Kindergarten</b>	<b>First Grade</b>	<b>Second Grade</b>	<b>Third Grade</b>	<b>Fourth Grade</b>	<b>Fifth Grade</b>	<b>Average</b>
Word-of-mouth	91%	74%	96%	71%	77%	54%	81%
Brochures/flyers	36%	37%	48%	35%	75%	31%	42%
Mail	34%	45%	36%	52%	23%	50%	39%
Newspaper	8%	8%	18%	5%	9%	7%	9%
Bulletins	7%	10%	5%	10%	5%	7%	7%
Mass media	0%	3%	5%	5%	5%	7%	3%

at schools at the beginning of the school year. Schools generally have teacher in-service training days prior the opening of the school year. This could be a great time to provide teachers with information about an agritainment enterprise. In addition,

brochures and flyers should be handed out at the farm and circulated in the community. This will increase exposure of the business and may reach teachers and parents who did not received the information somewhere else.

## Activities and Facilities Needed

In addition to a quality experience that relates to a classroom curriculum, teachers tend to have certain expectations of general field trip activities and facilities. Among these, restrooms, eating area and learning centers are very important. While

a play area was the least important feature, it was desired by almost half of the teachers in the survey. Table 14 presents the percentage of teachers who believe certain activities/facilities are a necessary part of a field trip.

Activity/Facility	Grade Level						Total
	Kindergarten	First Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade	Fourth Grade	Fifth Grade	
Restrooms	95%	97%	100%	100%	92%	87%	96%
Eating area	82%	89%	79%	76%	83%	80%	82%
Learning centers	76%	87%	100%	83%	75%	73%	81%
Play area	48%	60%	47%	38%	41%	50%	48%

## Conclusions

Substantial market potential exists for agritainment enterprises in Tennessee. School groups are often considered one of the primary target markets for farm tours and field trips. However, to compete with the many other field trip opportunities available to school groups, agritainment enterprises must understand the preferences, constraints and needs of teachers.

On average, elementary classes take about 22 students and five adults on each field trip and tend to pay less than \$7 per person. On average, teachers prefer to drive less than 35 miles and less than 45 minutes to a field trip destination.

Most teachers plan their field trips either at the beginning of the school year or before the school year starts. Most field

trips are taken in the spring and fall. Most teachers prefer to select field trips that have a relation to their class curriculum. In addition, many field trips are selected because of grade level constraints, hands-on/interactive components and the level of fun and enjoyment. Teachers also indicate that restroom facilities, an eating area and learning centers are necessary for school field trips.

In general, elementary schoolteachers are interested in farm field trips. However, many teachers are simply not aware of such opportunities. Sometimes, teachers are not able to take a certain field trip because another grade-level already takes that type of trip. This may imply that some schools do not allow the same field trip to be taken by different grades. However, stressing a variety of age-appropriate activities may enhance an agritainment enterprise's chances of attracting more than one grade from a single school. As is

the case for many local value-added businesses, word-of-mouth advertising is the most frequent way teachers learn about field trips. It is important to remember that providing a high-quality, good-value agritainment experience is the best way to influence word-of-mouth advertisements. In addition, one of the best ways to heighten awareness about agritainment activities by schoolteachers is through brochures and flyers.

To maximize returns, agritainment enterprises should host as many groups as their resources will support. That is, a plan should be considered that allows numerous groups to be at the farm at the same time. According to the study, the average amount of time that classes stay at a field trip location is two hours. Without sacrificing safety or quality, an agritainment enterprise should be able to host several groups and numerous individuals in a day.

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Agricultural Extension Service

# Nature-Based Tourism & Agritourism Trends: Unlimited Opportunities

James A. Maetzold, National Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism Leader, USDA/NRCS, Washington, DC

If you own and operate an agritourism or alternative enterprise or have visited an agritourism farm or purchased products directly from a farmer, you are supporting your local farmer.

## Introduction

Rural tourism has been increasing rapidly over the last two decades. Many factors have contributed to this trend. Briefly, people are taking more and shorter trips, doing more traveling by car, combining business travel with vacations, looking for new experiences, adding diversity to their experiences, traveling as a family, and looking to "get back to their roots." In most cases, one family member has a grandparent who grew up on a farm/ ranch or in a rural community. These are the "roots" tourists want to visit.

I have five take-home points I would like you to learn from my presentation: (1) What are alternative enterprises and agritourism? (2) tourism trends and projections, (3) income-producing ideas, (4) available resource material, and (5) tourism ideas for Oklahoma. My goal is to get you to think outside the box about your farm/ranch and rural community. How can you use your natural and human resources differently for income-producing opportunities? Or, as George DeVault of the Rodale Institute says, "Get small and get in."

## What are Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism?

1. An "alternative enterprise" is marketing what you produce differently, adding value to the product you produce or adding a new enterprise. It is also using your natural or other resources differently or using the same resource in multiple ways.

2. Agritourism is an alternative enterprise where you invite the public onto your farm or ranch. It can also be defined as "a set of activities that occur when people link travel with the products, services, and experiences of agriculture." The product itself can be an "experience."
3. Agritainment is the fun side of agritourism and includes mazes, petting farms, pumpkin picking, haunted houses, horseback riding, and the like.
4. Agrieducation is teaching your visitors about agricultural production, how food and fiber are produced, rural values, and quality of life. It is building support for agriculture through educational experiences. I have no data to prove this point! But I firmly believe that farmers and ranchers like you teach more people about agriculture than any other form of education in the United States. When they visit your farm, you have children's undivided attention for twenty minutes to an hour to teach them about their food and how farmers and ranchers produce it. At the same time you teach, you also provide an experience about cultural and heritage tourism, two of the fastest-growing tourism niches.
5. Nature-based tourism ranges from hunting and fishing (consumptive tourism) to bird watching, flower/tree/rock identification, hiking, rock climbing, or just being with nature (nonconsumptive tourism), and
6. Avitourism or bird watching is the fastest growing nature-based tourism activity in the nation.

## Twenty-First-Century Agriculture-Consumer

### About James Maetzold

"I was born and raised on a small grains and livestock farm in North Dakota. I have been a Federal employee for over 39 years. I began my career in the US Army followed by two years as county extension agent in North Dakota. Following graduate school in agricultural economics at North Dakota State University and University of California, Davis, I have worked in Washington, D.C., since 1969. I have had the opportunity to work for the Economic Research Service, Farmers Cooperative Service, Farmers Home Administration, Executive Office of the President, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service for the last 22 years. I worked on the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act for 17 years and as the National Alternative

Enterprises and Agritourism Leader for the past 5 years."

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## Industry Structure

Today's agricultural production, marketing, and distribution system can be described as an hourglass. We have more than two million farmers/ranchers producing the nation's food who sell to a few firms that add value through processing, packaging, and transporting, like the neck of the hourglass, and then sell it to the 290 million domestic and foreign consumers. These firms incur the costs, risks, and management, add value, and store and transport these products before they are sold.

With alternative enterprises, the farmers "add value" to their own products and realize a larger income by performing marketing activities and incurring the risks by processing, packaging, storing, transporting, and selling directly to the consumer. The farmer becomes a competitor with agribusiness firms for a larger share of the consumer's dollar.

In 1913, farmers received 46 percent of the consumer's dollar compared to less than 20 percent today. This occurred because many small farmers carried out the marketing at the local level such as delivering milk, manning the butcher and bake shop, and selling "in-season produce," or consumers visited farms to buy directly from the farmer/rancher. In 1950, farmers received 50 to 80 percent of the consumer's dollar spent on fruits and vegetables. Today, the figure is less than 30 percent.

A farmer or rancher entrepreneur who diversifies into value-added agriculture or agritourism has several market opportunities. These can be categorized as: food (processing, packaging, branding, specialty markets, farmers' markets), roots (heritage and culture), agrieducation (schools, retreats, conferences), experiences (farm stays, ranch stays, B&Bs pick-your-own), agritainment (petting farm, mazes, hayrides), and nature-based adventure (horseback riding, rock climbing, hunting, fishing). Most entrepreneurs develop several of these activities as alternative enterprises or as their agritourism activity grows. It is a natural fit. You have a very important and responsible job: You are developing friends for agriculture forever! It is not just for the profit! This fits nicely into the values of rural America.

## Income-Producing Opportunities for Your Farm or Ranch and Community

Agritourism or any other alternative enterprise is a different business than farming. Two major changes will occur. First, you are no longer a price-taker but a price-setter. You are not going to the elevator or livestock auction and asking, "What will you give me?" Now, you are telling the consumer how much you want for your product or service. Secondly, you are now in the people business. You are working directly with the consumer in a relationship just as important if not more important than the product

you are selling. Someone in your family must enjoy working with people to succeed at agritourism or other alternative enterprises. You are marketing directly to the consumer. You are producing memories, adventure, experiences, and friendships.

Thinking about the "customer" is probably more important than thinking about "production" in this scenario.

When you think about your customer, you must think about how you operate your business. When are you going to be open? How many people will you hire? What type of facility will you need? How small can you be to start? These are just a few of the questions you will need to answer when developing an agritourism or other alternative enterprise.

These farm or ranch income-producing opportunities may be put into fourteen groups:

1. **Farm Markets and Specialty Products**—These markets provide an excellent opportunity to sell all types of value-added products from food to crafts, depending upon the rules of the farmers' market. Specialty product markets exist everywhere. The Internet has made this a more easily accessible market. Also, many farmers are now marketing to restaurants, schools, and nursing homes. Many state government and local communities support this type of activity. If they don't, help them get started!
2. **Product Processing**—These products include maple syrup, wood products, dairy products, and wine production, to name a few. They can become an education activity as well as resulting in product sales. The ideas are almost limitless as to what you can do with product processing and packaging. Customers like to shop, so you need to provide them with the opportunity to take something home for themselves or for friends.
3. **Fairs, Festivals, and Special Events**—Farms hold festivals as well as communities. People just need something to rally around. These festivals range from food and crafts to nature, flowers, art, heritage, and cultural themes. Farmers have found festivals to be a very profitable way to attract customers. Many economic development or chamber of commerce groups will sponsor these events. Plan your activities around these festivals or hold your own.
4. **Horses and Other Farm Animals**—This can range from petting farms to the training of horses or raising buffalo. These enterprises can be educational, produce food, fiber, and fun, or develop skilled horsemen. Exotic animals often attract many visitors. Many entrepreneurs raise llamas, sheep, and other fiber-producing animals. They market the fiber in both the finished and unfinished form and sell the meat and

in some cases milk to local customers. Some dairy goat producers deliver milk more than three hundred miles. Others have raised ostrich and emus. The changing diversity of the American population has led to the development of many niche markets for goats, sheep, and other livestock products.

5. **Unique Dining Experiences**—Opportunities exist for farms and ranches to serve food to the public. You may have a special location and setting with a view, provide plays, or other entertainment, develop a catering service, or have a dining/fun experience on the farm with great country cooking. People are looking for a new experience, and dining on the farm is a "new experience." Dining is the number-one tourist activity!
6. **Wildlife and Fish**—This includes fish production, bird watching, hunting, and fishing. You can raise several different species and release the game birds for hunting or manage your land for improved game habitat. You can offer guided or unguided hunts.
7. **Nature-based Recreation**—Opportunities exist on farms and ranches to market natural resources as nature-based recreation for a fee. These include hiking, biking, walking, snowmobiling, all-terrain vehicles, swimming, canoeing, float trips, boating, picnicking, water-skiing, paintballing, and other outdoor team sports. Water-based activities are a very popular form of outdoor recreation.
8. **Floriculture**—The raising and marketing of flowers at farmers' markets, community supported agriculture groups, and other markets have increased rapidly in the past decade. Fresh flowers on the table have a high priority in most of our homes today. In addition, one can raise bedding plants for the wholesale and retail markets as well as wildflowers and herbs. There are many niche markets for floriculture products. It is surprising how much people will pay for fresh cut flowers.
9. **Education**—Education can become a part of almost every agritourism and alternative enterprise. Education may even be the focus of the enterprise. Either approach provides for many income-producing opportunities on the farm and ranch. Public and private education systems are looking for ways to broaden students' educational experiences. Most schools are open to an invitation to visit your farm once you explain your education program. Be sure to have different programs for the various age groups, from preschool to senior citizens.
10. **Heritage and Culture**—This is one of the fastest-growing tourism activities. American and foreign visitors are very interested in the history of the United States. Since most people come from an agricultural ancestry, they want to learn more about what their great grandparents or grandparents did for a living. This is a great opportunity to sell the rural "quality of life." Agriculture has a tremendous heritage and culture that can also be marketed to tourists by people staying and/or working on the farm or ranch. The more original the better, including the antiques, claim cabins, homesteads, and the like.
11. **Arts and Crafts**—Tourists' second-favorite activity is shopping. Local arts and crafts have always been in demand by domestic and foreign tourists. This includes food items and other value-added food products produced on the farm. Quality products are needed to attract and keep tourists coming back. There are several regions in the United States where journeyed crafters live and market their products. They have succeeded in establishing high-quality products and experiences for the customer.
12. **Farm/Ranch Stays**—There are three types of stays: vacation (visitors are looking for rest and relaxation), working vacation (visitors participate in the farm/ranch daily chores and work), and dude ranches/farms (visitors are specially treated by staff members, who do all the necessary preparation for the activities during their stay).
13. **Tours and Touring**—These enterprises are generally tied to activities involving a group of farms/ranches or community festivals or events. Tourists travel to see foliage or blossoms or farm harvest activities such as maple syrup, cheese, or ice cream processing or events such as threshing bees or fall harvest activities. Either a group of farmers or a community/county sponsors such events. It is a time to open your enterprise to the public.
14. **Pick, Cut, Gather or Grow Your Own**—Farmers have been selling the pick-your-own fruits and vegetables events for decades, and some have been renting land to people who want to grow their own. A relatively new enterprise is rent-a-tree, cow, or bush.
 

Here the farmer still maintains complete control in the production management aspects and the customer pays the farmer for these services. For example, you can rent/lease an apple tree to a customer. You still prune, spray, and perform the functions involved in production. The customer is invited to watch the pruning, see the apple blossoms, and watch other production practices. When the apples are ready to pick, the customer can bring friends and pick whatever quantity they want from the tree they rented. The farmer then harvests the remainder for himself.

This type of program allows the farmer to get the customer to visit his farm several times a season, providing opportunities for sales of other value-added items and development of a loyal relationship.

We have just identified several agritourism and alternative enterprises possible on your farm or ranch. I suggest talking these ideas over with neighbors, your local extension agent, or other entrepreneurs. This is a difficult time for most farmers/ranchers; they are concerned their neighbor will do the same thing if they talk to them about their ideas. This should not be a concern because research has proven that the more tourist attractions there are in an area, the more people will come. Customers recognize they have an opportunity to pick and choose. Don't be afraid of getting your neighbor involved in an alternative enterprise a little bit different than yours. This is where teamwork really pays off.

As you start to develop your business, you will need to consider the type of customer you want to attract or serve. For example, do you want to lease your place to hunters who guide themselves and hunt whatever game is in season for about \$1,500 per week, raise and release game, or manage your game so there are more trophy animals available and provide guided hunts for \$12,000 per week? These decisions need to be made when you are developing your business and marketing plan.

Some people get very nervous as they think about these new and different enterprises. You need to look at it the same as you do new farm and ranch production practices: Read about them, attend seminars, talk to peers, read research reports, and discuss with technical staff. Finally, try to test your new business by selling your services or products to family, friends, church groups, and other civic groups. Don't make a big investment immediately. Build and learn.

The NRCS has a put together a publication (see resource list) describing seventeen success stories. The stories tell you how people started and built their business, the mistakes they made, and how they took advantage of things that went right.

### **Tips for Staying on Track and Getting Started**

#### ***(Recommended for a one to two-year period)***

#### **1. Assess your resources–**

- Look at the notes you have made in considering alternative enterprises and use them to make a more in-depth assessment of the resources available to you and your family.

#### **2. Get informed–**

- Attend seminars, workshops, trade shows, and schools.
- Purchase books, videos, newsletters, magazines,

and other publications.

- Go to the library and do some research. Use the Internet to get the most up-to-date information. If you don't have an Internet connection at home, one should be available to you at the library.
- Look through the resources listed in the NRCS "Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism: Farming for Profit and Sustainability" tool kit available at your area Resource Conservation & Development Office.

#### **3. Find out what other entrepreneurs are doing–**

- Talk to neighbors, friends, and strangers about their businesses.
- Visit businesses in your surrounding area and in neighboring counties and see what they are doing.

#### **4. Consult potential customers–**

- Ask your relatives, friends, and neighbors about the product(s) you are thinking of providing through your new enterprise. Are they interested?

#### **5. Research the market for your products.**

#### **6. Network–**

- Join organizations or groups for people involved in enterprises similar to the one you are interested in.
- Join the chamber of commerce, rotary, and other business and planning organizations or committees in your community.
- See if other local entrepreneurs would like to join you in your business venture or start their own agritourism or alternative enterprise.

#### **7. Get help–**

- Visit resource people in your county, region, or state. County agents, RC&D coordinators, state Extension staff, Department of Agriculture staff, state tourism directors and staff, small business development center staff, and other specialists should all be willing to answer questions and help you get started.

#### **8. Develop a business and marketing plan–**

- Various books, worksheets, and programs designed to help you develop a successful business and marketing plan are available through
  - the Internet
  - your local library
  - your local outreach program
  - your local college
  - SCORE
  - SBDC
  - your local RC&D office

#### **9. Create a financial plan–**

- Decide how you will finance your business.
- Find out about financial assistance (grants and loans) available to you.

### 10. Start small, learn from your experience, and expand the business.

In summary, there are many income-producing opportunities available on your farm and ranch. Search out the ones you are interested in pursuing and that seem of interest to the public. Then gather your information and develop a business plan and a marketing plan. There are many resources and people available to assist you.

#### WHAT DO RURAL TRAVELERS LIKE TO DO?

(Source: Travel Industry Association of America, 2001  
Rural Tourism Travel Poll)

ACTIVITY	PERCENT
Dining	70
Shopping	58
Going to Beach/River/Lake	44
Visit Historical Sites	41
Fishing/Hunting/Boating	32
Attend Festival/Fair	29
Bike Riding/Hiking	24
Attend Religious Service	23
Camping	21
Attend/Participate in Sport Event	18
Visit Winery/Working Farm/Orchard	15
Gambling/Gaming	12
Visit Native American Community	11

#### NATIONAL SURVEY ON RECREATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT: AGRICULTURE RECREATION QUESTIONS

(Preliminary, September 2002)

REASON FOR TRIP	PERCENT
Enjoy Rural Scenery	75
Pet a Farm Animal	67
Source of Information Is Family/Friend	62
Less Nonfarm Development	58
Visit Family or Friends	55
Like to See More Grazing Animals, Orchards, Vines, Woodlands	47-50
Learning Where Food Comes From	48
Watch/Participate in Farm Activities	42
More Pasture, Farmsteads, and Croplands	28-35
Pick Fruit or Produce	28

#### Opportunities for Oklahoma

- **Western theme**— Both domestic and especially foreign tourists enjoy the West, the dress, festivals, rodeos, and culture in general.
- **Heritage and culture**
  - Cowboy and ranching—On-ranch working stays, B&B, dude ranches
  - Oil industry—Most people do not understand the role of oil in Oklahoma.

-American Indians—Both domestic and foreign tourists are interested in Native American history, culture, and handmade products.

-Black history—Most people do not understand the role African-Americans had in developing Oklahoma.

- **Open spaces**—Driving, horseback, camping, bird watching, hunting, and fishing
- **Land and landscape opportunities**—Tourists love to drive, see, and photograph the landscape, especially in the West.
- **Route 66 or Chisholm Trail**—Provides a great variety of activities, and tourists look for this experience and history
- **Hunting and Fishing**—Leases, catch and release, viewing
- **Opportunities lie in the people**—The opportunity lies in you here today and with your friends at home. Just sit back and dream about what you can do. Then, make it a reality.

You have some great resources in Oklahoma. The Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&D) of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are very active in developing agritourism and other alternative enterprises. The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture has some very good programs. The Extension Service also has a good support system available to you. You will need to work closely with the tourism industry to have them promote Oklahoma agritourism. This is new to most tourism agencies, so a team effort needs to be implemented.

#### Finally, I want you to continue to THINK OUT OF THE BOX!

NRCS resource material is readily available on the website [www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise) or you may order it by contacting Jim Maetzold at (202) 720-0132 or email, [jim.maetzold@usda.gov](mailto:jim.maetzold@usda.gov)

#### The following information is available free:

- *Agritourism and Alternative Enterprises: Farming for Profit and Sustainability Resource Manual*, 2002 update.

Also available: A 175 page summary of the 3,000 page resource manual

A compact disc version of the manual. Includes websites and lists of people working in the area

- Brochure: "Alternative Enterprises for Higher Profits and Healthier Land"
- Information sheet AE-1, "Alternative Enterprises for Higher Profits, Healthier Land—General Introduction to the topic, including a list of 150 ideas for alternative enterprises
- Information sheet AE-2, "Alternative Enterprises—

- Community-Supported Agriculture"
- Information Sheet AE-3, "Alternative Enterprises—Heritage Tourism"
- Information Sheet AE-4, "Alternative Enterprises—Value-added Agriculture"
- WSSI Technical Note 1: Sustainable Agriculture
- "Taking the First Step: Agritourism and Alternative Enterprise Opportunity Identification Guide (Making the Right Decisions to Sustain Your Farm or Ranch and Natural Resources)—Draft
- Stories (17) in Agritourism and Nature-Based Tourism and Alternative Enterprises
- Press Release Drafts
- Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism Information—Talking Points, Definitions, Key Points for Speeches, Media, and Workshops.

#### **Funding Sources and Other Resource Considerations**

1. Resource Manual Chapter 16 has a number of websites for nonprofit groups and farmers
2. Rural Business Services (RBS)—multimillion—value-added grants in the 2002 farm bill
3. RBS loans and grants—B&I Guaranteed Loan Program, Intermediary Relending Program, RBEG, RBOG, VT, IL, CA examples, recreation approval is pending.

4. Farm Service Agency—Beginning Farmers Program
5. Sustainable Agriculture, Research, and Education (SARE)
6. "Using Free Money to Grow Your Agribusiness" Workshop, AZ
  - Need one-on-one to see how you can make USDA programs work for you and tips on how to use them
  - Grant-writing, proposal review, and competitiveness
7. Small Business Innovation Research Grants (CSREES)
  - Community Food Program
  - Value added
  - Federal and State Market Improvement Program
  - Initiative for future agricultural and food systems
8. Building Better Rural Places—More than fifty programs are discussed. To obtain a copy, go to [www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org) or call (800) 346-9140
9. Business planning and marketing—Such as NxLevel, Fasttrack, Chapters 12 and 15 of the Resource Manual
10. Small Business Development Centers
11. Chamber of Commerce
12. County Extension Educator
13. Convention and Visitor's Bureau
14. RC&D Coordinator
15. State Departments of—Tourism, Agriculture, and Natural Resources/Conservation