



Getting Started in AGRITOURISM

By Monika Roth and Jim Ochterski

A Cooperative Extension guide on to how to begin, what visitors expect, customer relations, income streams, liability, marketing and other useful resources



Cornell University
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Cover photos, scenes from Tompkins County Farm City Day events, from top left: petting alpacas (Angel Tree Farm, 2008); musicians (Sweyolaken Farm, 2010); spinner (Angel Tree Farm, 2008); Sharon Garland sheepdog demonstration (Lew-Lin Farm, 2007); hayride (2012); dairy barn (Sweyolaken Farm, 2010); hayride (Sweyolaken Farm, 2010). All photos by Sandy Repp.

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Jim Ochterski

Monika Roth

Cornell Cooperative Extension

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1. Getting Started with Agritourism

Introduction

There is a great deal of interest in agritourism as a niche tourism sector for farms. People are looking for an authentic farm experience that might link them to their past or that teaches them something new. Visitors also want relief from the stress of everyday life to experience a seemingly simpler life. Farm visits offer a day in the country, where guests may pick berries, go for a hayride, sample homegrown or homemade products, see animals, and learn how farms operate.

The variety of agritourism experiences that can be offered is huge - from farm lodging or farm-based recreation such as hiking or hunting, to pumpkin patches, u-pick farms, farm festivals, wine tasting, farm restaurants, agri-entertainment like corn mazes and more. Visitors are willing to pay for these experiences as long as the price is reasonable and they find value in what is being offered.

Agritourism provides farmers with an additional income source that allows them to keep farming and increase the quality of life for their family. Some have reduced their acreage, growing fewer crops but capturing more consumer dollars.

Agritourism allows farmers to capture the dollars consumers spend on food as well as some of the money they spend on entertainment and recreation each year. In general, consumers spend 7 times as much on entertainment than food.

Agritourism is a trend that is not likely to go away soon. The growth of wine trails and the wine industry illustrates the potential. As agritourism offerings expand, the opportunities to attract visitors increase. Collaboration among farmers to organize farm trails, host farm events, and promote each other will strengthen the industry and help grow

new agritourism attractions to keep visitors coming back for more.

Agritourism – Is it Right for You?

If you are considering the development of an agritourism enterprise or want to add agritourism to your existing farm operation, the place to start is with a hard-core assessment of your abilities and goals, also consider those of your family members. Discuss your ideas, consider the options, assess your skills and time realistically, visit other farms, and most of all, develop a plan.

Start by generating a list of all the possible types of agritourism enterprises you could realistically develop at your farm. Write down pros and cons of each including how much work it will take and the cost. Narrow the list by considering which ideas you or family members get most excited about and are most doable. Also, consider what skills and time you and family members will have to devote to developing the enterprise. Think hard about what would work best given the physical resources and location of your farm.

Once the ideas seem solidified, don't assume you and your family are the best judge of what may work or not. Run the ideas past friends and acquaintances, tourism and extension staff, visitors to the area, and business representatives. Get their honest appraisal of the ideas you have generated. *Would they visit your farm to participate in activities you are considering offering?*

A key point to remember is that agritourism brings people to your farm, so **you must enjoy meeting people** and plan activities that visitors will want to participate in, all the while controlling the situation to avoid risks.

Start with a Plan

An agritourism attraction need not be something different than what you are already doing at your farm, the difference is that you are going to show the public what you do.

Authentic farming experiences appeal to visitors that want to learn about how their food is produced. Simply showcasing what you do does not involve a lot of expense and is a great way get experience hosting visitors.

Agritourism also need not be a full year commitment; you may choose to open your farm by appointment only or host an annual festival. Or you can start by planting a pumpkin crop and offering u-pick pumpkins in the fall or hosting a maple farm open house when boiling sap.

Once you have identified some doable agritourism activities that fit with your goals and your farm resources, and that you have time for, list all the tasks or steps to get started. Once done, have someone else review it with you – call upon extension or tourism staff for input, or enlist the help of a business counselor or event planner. They may identify details you might have missed.

Develop a launch date for the activity, then work backwards and list all the resources you will need and the tasks that need to be accomplished to be ready for your “launch”. Make sure publicity figures prominently into your plan as it takes a lot of promotion to get the attention you will need for launching a new enterprise.

Start-up, advertising and promotion costs may outpace your returns initially so be prepared for this. If you have low numbers at first, don’t sweat it. If you offer a high quality experience, that receives favorable responses from visitors, then you will have achieved a measure of success. Remember that word of mouth is still a common way that visitors hear about your business, so if you do it right

the first time, the next visitors will not be so hard to attract. Use of social media to create a buzz will help spread the news about your agritourism venture. Take plenty of pictures and post them to further attract attention.

Plan a soft opening – a way to get started is to plan a small activity targeted at a select group to test your ideas; for example, offer fall hayrides. Get feedback from visitors about what they liked, and what else they might like to see, do, learn or buy at your farm. This way, you grow your level of comfort with visitors and get to know their expectations plus you don’t have all the cash outlay at once. **Grow the enterprise by taking small steps, but plan with the big picture in mind.** It is important to set income goals that you would like to reach.

Cater to Visitor Interests

Another important consideration from the outset is to identify the type of the customers you hope to attract. If you know you don’t want school children at your farm, that’s ok. But you need to know who you want to attract to your farm and then develop your enterprise to cater to their interests. Once you know who you want to attract, you can be selective about promotion that reaches your target. **Each audience you hope to attract will have different interests and expectations and you will need to employ audience specific strategies to attract them.**

If you want to attract motor coach group tours to your farm, an organized tour itinerary is required. You need to plan everything from the greeting when they arrive, what they will do, see and buy, and most of all, the bathrooms. Marketing to tour groups will require a nice brochure describing your farm. Enlist the help of your county tourism professional. They know what motor coach tour operators come to the area and how to get them to stop at your farm.

Find a Niche – Packaging example

An example of attracting a niche group of visitors was the **Finger Lakes Fiber Tour** held a few years ago. Two weekends were arranged for knitters that included lodging, food, farm tours and workshops. *Where do you find knitters who will come to the Finger Lakes for such a tour?* The group organizing the package started with ads in knitting magazines and websites, and yarn stores. The weekends were both sold out.

There are many such niche market opportunities that can easily be targeted if you have the right offering that caters to the interests of a specific group. sold out.

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Key Ingredients for Success with Agritourism

- Evaluate your time and talents and those of family members who will help
- Make sure there is a point person to plan the enterprise
- Make sure there is an enthusiastic, energetic person involved that likes interacting with people
- Start with solid, well thought out ideas for activities you will offer
- Plan the activities thoroughly before opening
- Start small and get feedback
- Grow a little each year
- Know whom you want to attract and what they expect
- Tailor promotion to specific audiences
- Offer something to see, do and buy
- Set goals for income so you can measure progress and track costs vs returns
- Minimize all the potential risks, plan for emergencies
- Have fun!

2. Visitor Expectations for an Agritourism Destination

Having visitors at your farm and adopting a tourism orientation is likely to take your farm in directions you have probably never considered. There will be times you are “open” or “closed” and may need to enforce those hours by turning potential customers away. There will be expenses for bathroom facilities and beverage inventory for thirsty patrons. In addition to all the farm chores, there are tasks to keep the premises in top condition to stay attractive and safe.

This chapter provides a list of typical visitor expectations for almost any agritourism destination. If you know their expectations, you can formulate your plans to meet their needs.

In every county, the local Chamber of Commerce or Tourism Agency office refers visitors to local attractions. Staff at these offices are familiar with visitors that come to the county and region and can provide good advice to farmers interested in knowing more about what visitors might expect from agritourism destinations.

The people who visit your farm are generally not farmers and most have little understanding of farms in general. They may have a romantic view of farms from childhood books or media stories. It is important to meet their expectations while providing a real experience of what it is like to farm.

The “Look” of your Farm

Regardless of the type of farm, a farm that opens doors to visitors, should be tidy, safe, and project a wholesome image of farming today. Agritourism farms are often the only connection people have with agriculture so your role is as an ambassador for the industry. A positive image and message are vital for successful agritourism.

Since childhood, most non-farmers equate red barns, animals in pastures, blue overalls, and pitchforks with their idea of a farm. Many visitors will have this storybook image in mind when visiting a farm for the first time. It is important for farmers to communicate that agriculture has changed from the “Old McDonald” image. Promote your farm as a modern, business that integrates new technology with old-fashioned farming principles. Avoid projecting a cutesy image; rather, educate the visitor about the realities of modern farming. They have invested time and effort in getting to your farm and will not appreciate being misled by promotional literature that does not match the experience they will have at your farm.

Visitors generally expect:

- The farm meets the visitor’s image of a farm.
- The main farm area is clean and well-maintained.
- Parking is easy to find and adequate.
- Visitors can easily figure out where to go as a starting point for their visit.
- Staff are evident, welcoming and provide instruction to orient the visitor.
- Visitor facilities are safe and accessible for all visitors, especially small children, older adults and people with disabilities.
- The farm has sanitary public bathrooms with a toilet and sink.
- The farm accepts credit or debit cards, particularly if an ATM is not nearby.

Clean and Well-Maintained Farm Visitor Areas

A first task is to identify what areas of the farm you will make available to visitors. Focus attention on making visitor areas attractive while figuring out how best to exclude visitors from areas you do not want them to go. It is not uncommon that visitors stray on their own so clear signage or fencing may be needed.

Many visitors will expect to see farm implements and other materials around the farmyard, but farm junk and salvage equipment should be removed from the premises or stored far from visitor areas. Building exteriors should be in good condition; a newer coat of paint indicates pride and reinvestment in the farm. Children's toys and family play areas will attract young visitors, so keep family property separated to avoid confusion for visitors about where they are generally permitted to go. Livestock fencing should be intact and labeled to indicate a possible hazard if electrified.

The practical effect of maintaining a neat appearance is added labor. Responsible individuals in the farm operation should be assigned clean up duty or make a point to hold everyone responsible for their own tidiness. If this seems like a burden, remember that every visitor who turns away due to "curb un-appeal" is lost income for the farm. First impressions make a huge impact on visitors.

Parking: Easy to Find and Navigate

Farm owners and their employees generally park wherever it is suitable in the farmyard, so farms rarely have designated parking areas. Visitors, who are unfamiliar with the layout of farmyard, need clearly designated parking areas.

Standard perpendicular parking spaces are 9 feet across and 18 feet deep with 24 feet to back out. Parallel parking is generally not advisable as it takes up too much space and people struggle with it.

Parking areas do not have to be paved but white striping is helpful to orient the visitor. If visitors are elderly, or your facility has a retail store, a paved parking area provides sure footing and access.

Signs directing visitors to parking area should be posted at the farm entrance, and anywhere the farm driveway divides. If your farm has more than one driveway, use a sign to direct visitors to the proper entry. Chances are they will not figure this out for themselves at a typical farm, unless you provide good signage. One way in and out of a parking area is helpful.

Visitor parking signs are typically designed with green or black lettering on a white reflective background. Pre-printed aluminum signs are inexpensive (\$15 - 20). If you are only hosting occasional visitors, mount signs on portable stands.

Do not assume visitors will know where not to park. They may park in front of a hay barn, behind an idling tractor, in front of the equipment shed, or in the middle of a cattle laneway. Use "No Parking" signs where needed. A farm is unfamiliar territory for visitors so clear signage is also important for safety reasons.

Accessible Farm Visitor Areas

As an agritourism destination, you will be hosting visitors of all abilities. Expect some visitors in wheelchairs, with walking assistance, or strollers, as well as visitors who cannot see, hear, or speak English very well. For farm events and activities open to the public, be prepared to accommodate a wide range of visitor abilities.

Once your farm is open to the public, you should reduce barriers to access to where it is readily achievable, or "easily accomplishable and able to be carried out without much difficulty or expense" (Section 302 of the Americans with Disabilities Act). For example, door thresholds should be level, ramps should replace or augment steps, bathrooms

should have grab bars, and narrow doors should be widened to 36 inches where possible. New construction should be barrier-free; meaning any visitor with physical limitations can still access all visitor areas.

Sanitary and Accessible Restrooms

Within 2 minutes of getting out of the car, many tourists are looking for a suitable public restroom; children and older travelers in particular.

Directing visitors to a farm restroom tucked into a back corner of the barn, or to a bathroom in the farm house, is generally not a good idea. As visitor numbers grow, a permanent restroom may be needed though this can be expensive.

Visitor restrooms at your farm must be clean, uncluttered, bright, fully-supplied, and easily accessible. Visitors often expect separate facilities for men and women, but will accept a unisex restroom. They prefer to find the restroom easily, without having to ask where it is or if it is locked. Since this is often the first room they will visit, they will be judging your hospitality immediately. Even though it is a farm, visitor restrooms must sparkle.

For special events or seasonal needs, portable toilets are acceptable if they are cleaned and maintained regularly and there is a handwashing station.

Credit Card and Cash Access Services

Many tourists will expect your farm retail operation to accept major credit cards for farm product sales, admission and activity fees. For these travelers, it is a matter of convenience. For the farm, it usually leads to much greater sales. Plan on building credit card fees into the prices you charge, or set a minimum for credit card use (such as \$10 minimum).

These days, mobile credit card processing is an easy way to get started. Generally, all that is needed to accept a credit card purchase is a compatible mobile device (smart phone or tablet), and a payment processing account with a merchant.

If a credit card terminal is not in your plans, make it easy for customers to use other payment methods, like cash and checks. Figure out where the nearest ATM machines are and post these locations. If someone writes a check, make sure it is clear to whom the check should be written by posting a small sign at the checkout with the farm name and any other instructions. (e.g. Make checks payable to "Willow Valley Farm" and include a phone number).

Checklist:

- Farm visitor areas and entrances are clearly marked
- Junk and salvage equipment is out-of-sight
- Visitor comfort facilities are cleaned regularly and stocked
- Promotional material projects an accurate image of the farm
- Visitors can easily determine restricted areas of the farm
- Hours, days, or season of operation is indicated at the entrance
- Farm accepts credit cards or makes cash/check commerce easy
- Parking areas are clearly marked and safe for visitors
- Barriers for people with disabilities are minimized

3. Customer Relations

Farms are in the farming business, but agritourism is a people business. Your new job as an agritourism destination is to host visitors who will also be customers. The idea is to have them so engaged in your farm that they will gladly hand over money for the experience. This chapter describes ways to make the visitor experience as enjoyable as possible.

Visitor Service

Each day your agritourism enterprise is open, follow a set of standard practices, to make sure you are ready for visitors.

Before opening:

- Make sure entrance and parking signs are in place and easy to spot
- Put up an open sign or flag
- Sweep visitor areas
- Empty trash containers
- Check inventory of refreshments and sales items (if applicable)
- Refresh displays (if applicable)
- Clean restroom, check supplies (if applicable)
- Make sure you have ample literature on hand that is needed for farm exploration, such as PYO maps or what to see on the farm and how to best experience it

During open hours:

- Stick to opening and closing times you have posted
- Greet every customer with a smile and hello. Welcome them using the farm's name.
- Staff should wear name tags or apparel to make it clear who is part of the farm.
- Let each customer know you can answer questions about the farm and visitor activities. Customers will usually wait for instructions, so don't miss an opportunity to market your farms attractions. Explain..."today that we have...xyz...going" to entice them to partake.

- Ask questions that inform your marketing strategy – "Is this your first visit, how did you hear about our farm, where are you from? "
- Pay attention to overheard comments from visitors. Phrases like "well, we finally found it" hint at the need for better signs.

Hours of Operation

Even though your farm is a dawn to dusk operation most times, your agritourism entity will need defined hours and days of operation. Some farms select just one weekend each year to host visitors, for an open house or farm festival. Others may have seasonal hours of operation. Hours should be listed prominently on your farm sign, even if you are only open for the season. "See you next season, provides a reminder for visitors to come back".

Visitors appreciate regular business hours, such as "12 Noon - 8 PM, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday" mostly because is easier to remember. Avoid changing your hours of operation frequently or posting hours that vary greatly from day-to-day, which can confuse even dedicated regular customers.

Visitors have become accustomed to seeing a conspicuous sign or flags in front of wineries and ice cream stands to indicate they are open. It can be tough to determine whether an agritourism destination is open just by looking at the farm from the road, so use OPEN signs or flags to give a strong visual cue that you are open for business.

Handling Difficult Customers and Naive Questions

People who visit farms are doing so in part because they want to learn more. What they do know has come from the evening news, children's storybooks, movies, and distant memories from family farms they visited years ago. Since their knowledge is limited, they may ask odd questions about things that seem obvious to you.

Each customer is a living and breathing marketing opportunity for your agritourism operation, so it is important to show respect and empathy for their point of view, no matter how naive their question. Restate their question to start, and then give them a brief answer. Every question is a chance to educate the consumer about agriculture and learn about current farming practices...what it takes to grow a crop, raise livestock, and operate a viable farm.

Here are some examples:

A visitor at a dairy farm asks about white bags in the fields.

Farmer: "We harvest corn and store it in the form of chopped silage in bags to conserve nutrients in the grain that cows eat. Silage bags replaced upright silos you may have seen on farms in the past."

At a u-pick apple orchard, a customer asks about picking apples, for making pie.

Farmer: "Here is a list of our apple varieties and whether they are good for baking, sauce, or fresh eating. You will find we have many options, but my favorite at this time of year is...xyz."

Near a young goat pen, a parent tells their child, the hornless goats are females, not realizing both sexes had been debudded.

Farmer: "It is actually hard to tell which are boys and which are girls. We want them to be safe around each other, so we prevent the horns from growing on both the boys and the girls."

It is possible that you will be faced with very challenging questions about animal welfare, the use of chemicals on crops, animal medications, and other touchy topics. If someone with an extreme point of view visits your farm, you must realize you will not change their mind. They have a lot of emotion in their point of view, are not likely to compromise. If you find yourself confronted with an extreme point of view on an issue related to your farm, one of the only decent things you can do is to act conciliatory.

Here is an example:

A visitor to a dairy farm open house confronts the herd manager about tail docking. "You should be ashamed for the pain and mutilation you are causing these animals! I am going to call for a humane officer to investigate your farm!"

Herd manager: "I understand your point of view since I am around these animals all the time. Tail docking is not illegal and helps to keep our milk supply clean and safe. Your point is well taken, I have thought about this quite a bit myself. In fact, I oversee the process to make sure it is done as well as possible for cow comfort."

It will take time and practice to become a good people-person. If that is not your forte, find a family member or employee who is trained as the point of contact for telling visitors about your farming practices.

On the whole, customers will be polite, receptive, and interested in your farm. Nonetheless, there are some that will create challenging moments in your day. With good service as a priority, along with instructional signs and a friendly approach, you will build positive visitor relations that result in repeat visitors.

REMEMBER you only have one time to make a good FIRST impression!

4. Income Sources in Agritourism

Agritourism is being promoted as a way to generate additional income for the farm, and there are many ways to generate sales.

This chapter describes possible income sources that are catering to tourists. An agritourism business plan is the best way to show how the income streams and the new expenses balance to provide a new source of profit.

Income sources in Agritourism

1. Admission fee
2. Tour fee
3. Sales of fresh farm product to an expanded customer base
4. Sales of processed farm product
5. Craft / souvenir sales
6. Activity fee
7. Class / skill-building fee
8. Tasting fee
9. Facility rental
10. Show fee
11. Farm lodging
12. Food service

Admission Fee

An admission fee can be charged for events and activities, or to tour special areas of a farm. A general admission fee is usually used in place of other fees like tour or activity fees.

Many agritourism destinations host events during the growing season. For example, a maple producer may host a festival at the start of the season or a sheep farmer may host a wool shearing or spinning event. A portion of the revenue for special events comes from admission fees.

Tourists are accustomed to paying to participate in events, particularly when there is something unique featured that they would not normally get to see or experience.

Admission fees for agritourism range widely, depending on the uniqueness and

extent of the experience – from \$1 to \$40. The admission fee can be scaled where adults pay the standard fee (e.g. \$5.00), students and seniors are discounted (e.g. \$4.00), and youth are discounted additionally (e.g. \$3.00 ages 5-12). A standard admission may have a bonus amount for additional features (e.g. \$2.00 extra for an extended vineyard tour). Customers appreciate a maximum family fee or other group discounts.

One strategy for leveraging other income from the admission fee is to offer a corresponding discount on farm products purchased. For example, a \$5.00 admission fee to “Dairy Day” on a dairy farm can entitle the visitor to \$3.00 off any product made by the farm, such as cheese. The farm would retain the \$2.00 difference and earn more from the retail sale, and the customer would feel like they gained value from the admission fee.

Tour Fee

A tour fee provides the visitor access to the services of a knowledgeable guide or at least a guide for self-directed tours. A tourist paying this fee desires information about and access to farm areas restricted to other visitors. Like the admission fee, the tour fee is usually scaled to different audiences and group sizes.

Self-guided tours are generally free, however, group tours often involve significant staff time to prepare and host. Fees may vary with the group. School groups may be charged per child or a flat fee per class. Group tours for adults or families can also be based on the size of the group. Motorcoach tour operators will often negotiate a fee that they build into their package and pay a lump sum.

Sale of Fresh Farm Products

One of the main reasons for having visitors come to a farm is to sell them fresh farm products at retail prices. U-pick farms offer a good value to customers who pay less than retail to pick

fresh fruits or vegetables, based on volume or weight. With greater interest nationally in local food sources, there is ample opportunity to invite visitors to buy directly at the farm.

An agritourism enterprise at your farm should expand the customer base beyond local residents. For example, a maple producer might have stagnant sales of syrup and is looking to boost the number of bottles sold. An agritourism activity like an open house during sap season, a woods walk, or a class about maple candy making can expand the customer base, since there is an additional attraction to the farm. In most cases with direct marketing, more customers mean more sales.

Sales of Processed Farm Product

Many farms have expanded into sale of value-added items. Processed products made from farm produce (jellies, pickled products, dried fruit, sauces) are attractive to visitors since they can be transported with less concern about spoilage and they make good souvenirs or gifts. Sale of these products is enhanced when visitors see or learn how they are made and get to taste a sample.

Craft/Souvenir Sales

In addition to farm product sales, farm owners can capitalize on the sale of souvenirs like t-shirts, ornaments, crafts, and rural antiques. Some agritourism destinations have gift shops which require inventory management. A challenge is to make sure the gifts do not become a distraction from the farm, which is the main purpose of agritourism.

Activity Fee

Why do some farms have corn mazes? The answer has little to do with boosting crop sales. A corn maze is a proven way to collect activity fees from farm visitors.

Following are examples of activity fees:

- \$1 for crackers to feed the goats
- \$2 for hay wagon ride

- \$15 for a dozen worms, a fishing pole and tackle for an afternoon of farm pond fishing
- \$15 for an archery course circuit
- \$20 for a short horse riding session
- \$4 for a trip through the corn maze

Class/Skill-Building Fee

Educational tourism opportunities are on the rise because tourists prefer to stay active and mentally engaged, even on vacation. Nearby residents and neighbors will also take advantage of classes a farm might host. There are many types of classes a farm might offer.

Here is a sampling:

- Horse farm offers a clinic on how to a horse
- Grain farm has a bread-baking class
- Fruit farm shows visitors how to make jam, jelly or fruit syrups
- Grape farm hosts a wine making class for beginners
- Small dairy farm hosts a cheese making class
- Herb grower hosts a class to make herb containers or dry culinary herbs
- Vegetable farmer offers a cooking from the garden class

The point of hosting a class on the farm is to charge a fee for the experience and expertise. It is good to relate the class back to the farm for additional sales income.

Tasting Fee

Farms that grow a wide variety of edible products might consider having a fee-based tasting experience. An orchard might offer samples of historical apple varieties. Since these varieties are uncommon, the visitor is often willing to pay for the opportunity.

In the apple example, the orchardist could host a weekend tasting at various points in the season. Guests would pay \$2 - 5 each to taste an array of fruit varieties they have never experienced before. Other farm products suitable for tastings

include cheese, herbs and edible flowers, melons, heirloom tomatoes, berries, and farm processed products.

If sampling products, it is important that the tasting area is clean, wiped down regularly, and that knives and other serving utensils are washed in hot water. Health Department regulations may require that foods for tasting be prepared in a licensed kitchen and that perishable items are refrigerated.

Facility/Grounds Rental

Another way a farm can earn money from visitors is by renting out the farm setting. Empty barns can be used for dances, classes, country weddings, family reunions, birthday parties, church activities, meetings, picnic shelters, banquets, and other special events. Rental rates range from a few hundred dollars to thousands per day, depending on location and services provided.

Cleanliness is one of the most important aspects of renting barns and farm grounds for non-farm use. Visitors seek a barn atmosphere, minus dust, odors, farm noises, mud, and other such distractions. The building must be structurally sound, and should have in-house restrooms for large crowds.

Show Fee

Another way farms earn income from visitors is charging a show fee. Common in equine competitions, show fees reimburse a farm for expenses to conduct a show or competition, plus provide a small profit. The show fee amount varies, depending on the sophistication of the show, expense of equipment and materials provided by the farm, and going rates in similar venues.

Craft vendors, food concessions, or other related farm sector vendors and groups add variety and interest at a farm festival. By inviting outside groups, the farm has less set up involved. And it is normal to charge a booth fee for vendors to provide a revenue source.

For large events, sponsors can also be identified and approached to make a contribution to help cover event costs.

Farm Lodging

On-farm lodging may be provided in a tent, cabin, in the farm house, or in any structure inspected and approved for overnight occupancy. Regardless of the type of lodging, bathroom facilities with showers are generally expected.

Overnight lodging requires that someone be available for reservations, greeting guests, cooking breakfasts, showing off the farm, and clean-up. If you are a very busy farmer and generally have a hard time keeping up with chores, then you will need to hire someone to handle the hospitality end of things. The cost of hosting guests relative to returns should be evaluated carefully.

Food Service

Farm visitors like to eat, especially if you expect them to stay for any length of time. Food sales might be an informal snack (farm products like apples or cider, baked goods) or part of a planned café-style meal (sandwiches, grilled food, etc.). Some agritourism destinations operate full-service restaurants.

Like lodging, there are significant expenses related to facilities, inventory, equipment, and labor, but sales should net a modest income to augment other sources of income for your agritourism entity.

Culinary tourism is a popular attraction for foodie tourists. Cooking demonstrations and classes, coupled with a farm tour, dinner and farm lodging, provides a high value experience for a foodie tourist. Attention to detail is required but the result can be delicious.

5. Agritourism Liability and Questions to Clarify With Your Insurer

Scenario

You open your farm to visitors. One enthusiastic teenager climbs onto an old tractor for an action photo. The seat of the tractor gives way suddenly spilling him backward onto the rusted 3-point hitch and he is hurt. Another visitor calls an ambulance to the farm promptly, and proper medical treatment begins. What now? This accident could mean thousands of dollars in expenses and trouble for your farm if you are found liable for the injury.

Managing risks to prevent incidents at agritourism operations is a very important consideration. Although scenarios like the one described above are scary to think about, they should not prevent you from meeting your farm goals as a tourism destination.

Liability insurance exists to help you mitigate losses in the event of a mishap on the farm. An agritourism operation may require a separate policy or a rider on your existing farm policy. You may also structure your agritourism operation as a separate business entity, thus shielding farm and personal assets from agritourism business losses.

Remember that liability is different than a lawsuit. You can still have a lawsuit filed against you if someone is seeking a legal remedy to a specific problem. Liability is a determination of who is responsible.

In New York State, a person on your property is a trespasser (no legal authority or permission), a licensee (permission to enter, but not paying), or an invitee (they are compensating you for use). Agritourism guests who are paying for their experience on your farm are invitees. You are obligated to exercise the highest duty of care toward paying customers. Inspect your property for

hidden dangers, keep the property in reasonable safe repair, anticipate foreseeable dangers and take actions to prevent potentially harmful situations. For example, concealed barbed-wire fences, chemical storage rooms, deteriorating barn flooring, or inadequate fencing around aggressive farm animals all pose known or foreseeable hazards to someone who is compensating you for use of your property. A barrier or sign warning to restrict access to dangerous areas could have help prevent a problem.

You have many options and approaches to make sure the visitor areas on your farm are reasonably safe. The first is to designate a defined farm visitor area with signage. Use directional signs that clearly show a visitor entrance, visitor parking, and other public areas. All other zones of the farm should show a conspicuous warning against unauthorized entry, using terms like "Staff Only" and "No Visitor Entry."

Once the visitor area is designated, inspect the roadway, check fencing, evaluate pedestrian areas, and look for possible access to possible hazards like ponds and farm equipment. To the extent possible, remove anything in the vicinity that could pose a danger to non-farmers and visiting children, who will not inherently know what is hazardous and what is not. Explain to visitors that it is very important that they remain in visitor areas on working farms. U-pick operations have a much larger area to consider, but visitor areas are still restricted to designated fields and orchards.

Talking to Your Insurer

Insurer involvement in your agritourism plans should begin when your planning starts. They should never be "the last to know." Insurers will explain what is and is not allowed under your current policy.

Additional terms of insurance can be specified in a rider, which can be used to amend your coverage to supplement your basic farm and home policy. You may need a completely separate insurance policy to cover the agritourism activities.

Start the conversation by asking the following questions:

- As an insurer, do you understand the proposed agritourism plans?
- To what extent does this policy cover product liability, premise liability, operations, and contracts?
- Are farm employees covered under this policy?
- Would guests have to sign anything special to be covered under this policy, or would a waiver form be necessary?
- Should groups be required to show evidence of insurance?
- Is a property inspection necessary as part of the terms of the policy? If so, what might be inspected?
- What coverage levels would you recommend for liability (product, premises, operations, personal, and contracts)?

Separating the Agritourism Entity from the Farm

An agritourism operation on your farm is probably not covered by your existing farm liability insurance policies. Whether and how to minimize the exposure of the farm assets to new liability you may face with an agritourism enterprise will involve conversations with your insurance carrier, an attorney, and possibly business structure filing fees. The decision should be deliberate and with your full understanding as a farm operator.

One way to manage risk in agritourism is to set up the enterprise as a Limited Liability Company (LLC). This business structure means that contractual obligations and liabilities are incurred by the LLC, not by the farm or family. For example, moneys owed to someone who successfully wins a lawsuit against the

agritourism operation extend only to the business assets as part of the LLC.

To set up an LLC in New York State, you will need to prepare, sign and file your Articles of Organization with the Department of State. You are not required to have a lawyer involved, but since it is a binding legal matter, you should take advantage of professional legal assistance. Make sure an LLC provides the appropriate tax management strategy; the LLC will need a taxpayer identification number. The LLC may also need a Certificate of Authority to collect sales tax on taxable items, and licenses to engage in some business practices.

You do not have to set up a separate LLC to engage in agritourism. Check with your insurance carrier about the best way to meet your goals from income diversity and risk management.

In summary, try not to let fears of possible incidents hamper your agritourism plans. Manage the risk by controlling visitor access to the whole farm, working with your insurer, and having adequate liability insurance in place as a backup.

Checklist

- Agritourism plans are focused on one area of the farm, a visitor area
- Site has been inspected for possible hazards
- Hazards have been removed or fixed
- Warnings and restrictions are posted clearly
- Farm has the appropriate insurance coverage for agritourism activities planned
- Farm has the appropriate business structure in place to manage risk to the family and farm

6. Marketing Your Agritourism Enterprise

If you don't plan how you will market your agritourism enterprise, it's like throwing a party without sending invitations. A multi-pronged marketing plan will be needed to attract both local customers and tourists.

Marketing needs to be part of the process of planning the enterprise. It is important to consider your target market – the kinds of people or groups you want to attract to your farm operation – right from the get-go. Your target market will impact the look of your farm and the activities and services you offer. For example, if you plan to be a pick-your-own farm, the layout of the farm fields is important. If you want to develop a farm bed and breakfast, the clientele you are targeting may want a home-stay experience, but that does not mean they want to be exposed to your personal clutter; everything should be clean, neat, and in top-notch condition. School groups or scouts may be less concerned with clean and tidy, but they will want a fun and interactive experience. Each target group has different expectations that you need to consider in planning your operation and for marketing it. To reach the specific target market you hope to attract involves being strategic with your marketing efforts.

Most agritourism enterprises are located in rural areas, where customers are few and far between. To be successful at attracting visitors, an agritourism enterprise must become a destination - a place where regional visitors will intentionally visit. Becoming a destination farm does not happen overnight, but it will NOT happen without marketing. A part of marketing never to be overlooked is what the visitors who come to your farm will say. If they had a good experience, they will be raving about it to friends and family. And likewise, they will also rave about a bad experience. So, before opening doors to the public, make sure you have an experience that is going to create a positive "buzz". If you are not

ready for prime time, invite selected groups to visit. Start with a group that is familiar and who will be honest. Ask them what they find interesting about your farm operation and what could be improved. Then make improvements and delve into your marketing plan.

Agritourism Marketing Milestones

1. Identify your target audiences. For each group, list the places and ways you can reach them. For example, if youth are a major target audience for your farm – where can you find youth? Contact school district offices to get permission to promote school tours. Search the internet for local homeschool networks. Scout groups, sports teams, school clubs, local camps, church youth groups and 4-H clubs are other ways to connect to youth. Marketing to youth also links you to young parents or grandparents who are a great visitor group to target. They love to take kids to a place that offers an educational and entertaining family outing. A colorful promotional brochure and cover letter mailed to groups is a good way to start, and a follow-up phone call can personalize the approach.

Adult groups may be harder to target but by thinking about what you have to offer and who will find it appealing, you narrow the field. For example, winery tourists are generally couples or groups of friends. These folks are interested in learning, tasting, and culinary connections. A cheese shop focusing on wine and cheese pairing enhances the wine visitor experience. A farm tour and café can provide a respite from wine tasting. Farms can also offer recreational opportunities to groups of cyclists, hikers, or hunters. These audiences can be identified via clubs, through magazine ads, or sportsmen's clubs.

Each farm attraction has an appeal to a specific target group. Analyze the potential on your farm for creating an audience specific attraction and then market it correctly by reaching the audience through medium with which they are most likely to engage.

2. Define your target area for promotion. A farm agritourism experience provides an excellent opportunity for day-trippers so start by focusing media outreach in communities within one hour's drive of the farm. Target major population centers. Start with a weekend open house to test the draw from communities within your target.

Typical distances visitors travel

- Farm stand – 1 to 10 miles
- Farm store - 10 to 20 miles
- Farmers market – 2 to 10 miles small markets; 60 large markets
- PYO – 20 – 60 miles
- Destination farms – 200 miles

3. Websites/Social Media. These days, a farm intending to attract visitors cannot be without a website and facebook page. Younger tourists are totally plugged into finding things to do via the internet. A farm website should be linked on your county tourism website and other such places where visitors will look for information about what to do in an area. Social media such as facebook helps to create a buzz by sharing images and stories about the farm, and through visitors who share their experiences with friends. Rating services like Trip Advisor and others further bolster the visitor awareness of your farm. More than ever, it is hugely important to offer a top notch experience from the moment customers arrive till they leave to ensure a positive buzz!

4. Free Promotion including press releases and calendar announcements. Don't pay for advertising if you can get free coverage. Farm stories can be written to address many media angles. For example, send an announcement about your "new" agritourism enterprise to business editors. Human interest stories might include your child's egg business or vegetable garden. Become the media expert on weather's effect on crops - call area TV stations and invite them to your farm to see the apple crop, the giant pumpkins, etc. Contact food editors to let them know what's in season and encourage them to feature recipes for those products. Farm events can be listed in event calendars found in papers, on the radio, TV, internet listings, etc. One story in the paper or a short radio or TV segment is worth thousands in advertising dollars. Don't be shy about cultivating a relationship with the media in your area.
5. Advertise selectively to get your name out. Advertising can be expensive so be selective with how you spend your money. For example, if you are a new nursery business, many papers have a spring gardening issue to advertise in. A farm market might place an ad on a cooking page and highlight what is fresh from the farm. Many papers publish summer supplements that list things to do in the region. List your farm agritourism destination in these papers because both locals and visitors pick them up.
6. Contact your Community Chamber of Commerce or County Tourism Agency. This is a valuable connection that you should make as soon as you start formulating your agritourism plans. Your local tourism professional can tell you about the kinds of visitors that come to the area, share ideas for marketing, advise you on how to develop your visitor experience so that you meet their expectations. They will also include your farm in county tourism brochures, on websites, and market your destination to travel

writers, hook you up with motorcoach tours and promote your farm at travel trade shows. Agritourism combined with eco-tourism, edu-tourism or culinary tourism is hot so make the tourism office your first stop for promotional assistance. Regional tourism agencies are another resource that offer similar services to members.

7. Build your marketing brand and image. This includes: developing a logo and unifying marketing theme that captures your standards and what you have to offer. Make sure your logo and the image you create in marketing materials, matches the reality of what you have to offer at your farm.
8. Marketing materials. A colorful, eye-catching rack card that can be placed in tourism offices and other tourism outlets is a good investment. The card should include your logo, key information about what people can experience, photos that convey what they will find, plus a map, directions, hours, contact information including a link to your website. A rack card can be inexpensive to produce and is a good value for getting the word out about your business.
9. Other free outlets to list your farm: Some state departments of agriculture have listings of farm markets and agritourism destinations. Check their websites and see if there is an opportunity to have your farm listed.

Contact your county Cooperative Extension office as they often get calls from groups or individuals who want to visit farms. They may also publish listings of you-pick farms, farm markets, and agritourism destinations, and may be looking for a farm where they can host educational events. Also, extension staff can help you with business planning and marketing ideas for your agritourism enterprise. Additionally, they may be able to provide you with media listings so you don't have to create your own list.

10. Participate in community events. There may be a fee to set up a table at a community festival or other such event, but it can provide great exposure especially for a newer enterprise. A booth can promote your business, feature your products through samples and sales, and you can interact directly with many people to let them know about your farm.
11. Signage is an important investment. A sign with the farm name, hours, days and season of operation is a communication tool for all that pass by. A permanent year-round sign with your season of operation provides a constant reminder to come when you are open. A seasonal or temporary sign is not as effective. Check the signage ordinance in your community for placement and size limitations. In addition to a sign at the farm, it is a good idea to place a sign on the main roads leading to the farm. Placement may be an issue and you should find out what the rules are. Your State Department of Transportation may have an agricultural signage program for posting Tourist Oriented Directional (TOD) signs in rural areas.
12. Putting it all together in a plan. While it takes effort to do marketing, it will pay off. The strategies you will use to promote your farm should be organized into a marketing plan that includes: who your target market is, where and how you will reach them, your promotion and advertising plan, and a list of the connections you need to make to get your name out. Plan the whole year in winter prior to the next season. Generate the ideas for press releases, write the stories, do the outreach to get yourself listed in county brochures because if you wait till the growing season, you will have missed the deadlines and won't have the time to invest in promotion. Planning your promotion should be a fun and creative exercise that will be rewarded if you take the time to do it in advance.

7. ARE YOU READY TO HOST VISITORS AT YOUR FARM?

Agritourism Enterprise Checklist

SECTION 1: PERSONAL ASSESSMENT			
Business Experience	Yes	No	Improve
I am motivated to take on a new enterprise			
I have managed a business before			
I have a business plan for my current enterprise			
I keep good production and finance records			
I am willing to take risks			
Other experiences and qualities:			
Personal Qualities	Yes	No	Improve
I am a good planner/organizer			
I have creative ideas			
I have a high level of energy and enthusiasm			
I enjoy doing new things			
I follow through on what I start			
I enjoy interacting with a variety of people			
I like to show people my farming operation			
I don't mind people wandering around my farm			
Other personal qualities that apply to this venture:			
Skills	Yes	No	Improve
Business planning			
Art/Design			
Advertising/public relations			
Media experience: writing/website/radio/TV			
Teaching			
Crafts (list):			
Other skills you have that will come in handy:			

Time Assessment			
How much free time do you have per week? _____ Hours/week			
Time you will devote to this new venture? _____ Hours/week			
Family or Friends to Support Development of your New Venture			
Are the members of your family or friends supportive of this new venture? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure (If so, it's time to talk!)			
Family Roles & Skills			
Who	Roles	Skills/Qualities	Available Time (Hrs/wk)
1)			
2)			
3)			
4)			

SECTION 2: EXPERIENCE HOSTING VISITORS	
Visitor Profile	
Description of Visitor e.g., women's clubs, 40-50 years old, middle income	What Do You Offer Them?

Where Do Visitors Come From?		
%		List Communities
	Within 10 miles	
	Within 10–20 miles	
	20–50 miles	
	50–100 miles	
	100 miles +	
Total Individual Visitors/Year: _____ Total Groups Hosted/Year: _____		

SECTION 3: FARM FACILITIES			
FIRST IMPRESSIONS	Yes	No	Improve
Finding the Farm			
Road signs at key intersections direct visitors to the farm?			
Upon Arrival			
Is there a well placed farm sign?			
Is it easy to find the driveway entrance?			
Is there good visibility to enter and exit safely?			
Is there a logical one-way traffic flow?			
Farm Image			
Favorable first impression upon approaching the farm?			
Has the farm atmosphere been preserved?			
Parking			
Is it easy to figure out where to park?			
Is there signage directing you to parking areas?			
Are there barriers defining the parking area?			
Is it easy to park once you find the parking area?			
Are parking spaces marked?			
Is there adequate space to pull in/out?			
Condition of Farm Lanes and Parking Lots			

Relatively smooth?			
Free of potholes?			
Free of mud?			
Gravel to keep down dust?			
Paved for ease of walking?			
Landscaping			
Mowed lawn areas			
Nicely landscaped grounds			
Attractive flower beds and containers			
Outdoor Displays			
Are displays blocked from view by cars or other objects?			
Is interesting or antique farm equipment used?			
Are there places to sit – picnic tables/pavilion/benches?			
Is there a designated children's area?			
Are there signs with instructions/information?			
Outdoor Hazards			
Are there junk piles?			
Have tripping hazards been eliminated?			
Is farm equipment out of harms way?			
Are farm chemicals locked up out of site?			
Are fuel tanks, pumps locked up?			
Are manure pits fenced?			
Are ponds fenced?			
Are pasture/paddocks fenced?			
Are electric fences marked?			
Livestock facilities			
Is there double fencing to keep people away from animals?			
Are manure levels in barns and paddocks under control?			
Booties or footbaths provided for sanitation/disease prevention?			
Is there soap/water, antiseptic hand lotion/wipes for visitors?			
Signage to instruct people how to behave around animals?			
Is public access to animal paddocks/barns limited?			
BUILDINGS	Building 1	Building 2	Building 3
Current use or potential use. Describe each building and its condition.			
Handicap access			

Exterior nicely painted, in good repair			
Building interior:			
- Entrance clearly marked			
- Doorway wide enough (double door)			
- Floors are smooth, level			
- Bright, clean, well lit			
- Hazards eliminated			
- Clutter under control/out of view			

SECTION 4: RETAIL FACILITIES	Yes	No	Improve
Layout			
Can customers see over displays?			
Can customers find the checkout?			
Are displays positioned for maximum exposure?			
Do high demand items draw people into the store?			
Are impulse items located near checkout?			
Retail Display Equipment			
Similar construction/style/vintage			
Sturdy, safe, free of nails or splinters			
Attractive Displays			
Arranged well, appealing, good use of contrast and color			
Variety of sale unit sizes to meet shopper needs			
Nice packaging			
Only high quality products on display (well maintained)			
Displays changed periodically/seasonally			
Decorations			
Is there a predominant theme? Describe look:			
Is there consistency among decorations? (i.e., all antiques, all farm related, photos of farm scenes, etc.)			
Tablecloths, curtains, etc. made of complementary colors?			
Signage			
Is letter type consistent?			
Are the colors consistent?			
Use of farm logo in signage?			
Variety of signage (check all that apply):			
<input type="checkbox"/> Info signs			

<input type="checkbox"/> Product signs			
<input type="checkbox"/> Price signs			
Customer Convenience (check all that apply)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Shopping basket/carts			
<input type="checkbox"/> Credit cards			
<input type="checkbox"/> Tasting			
<input type="checkbox"/> Recipes			
<input type="checkbox"/> Bathrooms			
<input type="checkbox"/> Seating areas			
<input type="checkbox"/> Guest books			
<input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter			
<input type="checkbox"/> Ordering info			
<input type="checkbox"/> Brochure with hours			
<input type="checkbox"/> Visitor information/nearby attractions			

SECTION 5: CUSTOMER SERVICE/HOSPITALITY			
PERSONNEL	Yes	No	Improve
Appearance is neat and clean. Wearing farm shirts/name tags?			
Greet customer			
Helpful, courteous, cheerful, professional, enthusiastic			
Well informed about the farm and farm products			
Not overbearing			
Ask where are you from, how you heard about farm, etc.			
Know about things to do in area; provide suggestions/directions			
SERVICES OFFERED			
List all the things visitors can see at your farm.			
List all the things visitors can do at your farm.			
List all the things visitors could buy at your farm.			
Activities available to visitors ANYTIME they visit:			
1.			
2.			
3.			

4.					
5.					
Activities that must be PRE-ARRANGED:					
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
TOURS OFFERED			Yes	No	Needs Improvement
Are they well planned and delivered?					
Can they be tailored to groups' interests?					
Name of Tour	Time it Takes	Target Audience			
EVENTS/FESTIVALS					
Festival Name	Month Held	Purpose	How many people do you want to attend?		
LODGING OFFERINGS					
Type of Lodging (e.g., B&B, cabins, lodge, camping)	Number of rooms/beds/spaces		Price Range		
SERVICES OFFERED					
<input type="checkbox"/> Meals: __Breakfast __Lunch __Dinner <input type="checkbox"/> Farm tour <input type="checkbox"/> Hands-on farm experiences. Describe:					

SECTION 6: NATURAL AREAS INVENTORY

Are these a resource for visitors?

Ponds	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Could be developed
Woods	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Could be developed
Hiking trails	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Could be developed
Scenic views	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Could be developed
Hunting	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Could be developed
Fishing	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Could be developed
X-Country skiing	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Could be developed
Bike trails	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Could be developed

Describe what would be involved in developing these resources.

Resource	Improvements
1)	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	

OTHER NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPLORE!

8. Agricultural Tourism Publications and Web Resources

Vermont Tourism Research Center – Agritourism Resources – Fact Sheets – Opening your Farm to Visitors and Agritourism and Culinary Tourism Checklists
<http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/?Page=agritourism.html>

Agritourism, Virginia Tech, Publication Number 310-003, 2001.
Available on line at: <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/310/310-003/310-003.html>

UC DAVIS – Small Farm Center

Agritourism and Nature Tourism in California, Hillary George, Ellen Rilla, U. of California Ag & Natural Resources Publication 3484.

A Primer on Agritourism and Ecotourism Start Ups and Management, Desmond Jolly.

Both Publications can be accessed via the UC Davis Small Farm Center.

The Center has published a series of practical agritourism operation fact sheets.

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

Marketing on the Edge, A Marketing Guide for Progressive Farmers

Available from the Canadian Farm Business Management Council, <http://www.fmc-gac.com/publications/marketing-edge-marketing-guide-progressive-farmers>

North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA)

www.farmersinspired.com/-- 413-529-9100 – Charlie Touchette, Executive Director

This is the number one organization promoting Agritourism and Farmer to Consumer Direct Marketing. Annual Conferences and tours focus heavily on entertainment farms and agritourism destinations. For exposure to a world of opportunities - attend their annual conference/tour.

USDA-NRCS – Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism

http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/null/?cid=nrcs143_009750

They have a publication entitled Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism (not accessible via the web).

Jane Eckert, Eckert AgriMarketing

www.eckertagrimarketing.com

1-314-862-6288 or email EckertAgriMkting@aol.com

Jane is a sought after agritourism consultant/speaker and offers tours to agritourism destinations around the globe.

The Legal Guide for Direct Marketing, Neil Hamilton. Drake University Agricultural Law Center. <http://directmarketersforum.org/the-legal-guide-for-direct-farm-marketing/>
More of a focus on farm product direct marketing than agritourism per se.

Find these books on Amazon -

- Sell What you Sow! The Growers' Guide to Successful Produce Marketing, by Eric Gibson
- The New Agritourism, Hosting Community and Tourists on your Farm, by Barbara Berst Adams, 2008. New World Publishing, Auburn CA, www.nwpub.net

County and State Tourism Offices – be sure to contact the local tourism office our Chamber of Commerce for assistance with your agritourism enterprise. State offices often have additional resources and professional advice.

Cooperative Extension local county offices – <http://cce.cornell.edu/localoffices> – find your county office and ask for assistance from an ag business educator