

# Creating Successful Agritourism Activities For Your Farm



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# What is Agritourism?

Agritourism is anything you do to draw visitors to your farm for the purpose of selling them products or experiences. It can be as simple as a roadside stand to sell your produce or as elaborate as a corn maze.

Agritourism can be as simple as a roadside stand to sell your produce or as elaborate as a corn maze. As you will see throughout this workbook, agritourism is not a single activity but a wide array of products and strategies designed to attract and keep visitors on your farm. You can design your agritourism plan to include your farm's special qualities, the crops you grow or animals you raise, and the products and activities you produce.

If your idea of a perfect day is one spent in the field or in the barn with no distractions, interruptions or other people around, then perhaps agritourism is not for you. But if you enjoy interacting with the public, showing them aspects of your farm and creating retail or educational experiences that will bring them to your farm—once a season or many times a year—then you have the basic criteria for developing an agritourism plan.

This workbook will help you identify the steps you will need to take to create your agritourism plan. If you are already engaged in agritourism, it may help you refine your goals and plans. There are many resources in your community to help you realize your goals. The resources listed at the end of the workbook are a good place to turn to for help.

## Introduction

*Agritourism is not a single activity but a wide array of products and strategies designed to attract and keep visitors on your farm.*

## About CISA

Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to build a secure, local food and farming system in western Massachusetts from which all residents can benefit. CISA focuses on strengthening relationships between farmers and consumers, farm profitability, food security, environmental sustainability and preserving rural communities.

CISA is the creator of the “Be a Local Hero, Buy Locally Grown” marketing and public awareness campaign which is entering its seventh season in 2005. CISA’s slogan, “Be a Local Hero, Buy Locally Grown,” has become a household phrase through effective use of newspaper and radio advertising, direct mail, bus board signs, buttons, bumper stickers, and point of purchase materials in grocery stores and farm stands, events and public appearances. Market research indicates that the Local Hero slogan is recognized by over 80% of consumers in two of the counties CISA serves.

“Local Hero” members number over 120 farms, six farmer’s markets, 12 restaurants and nearly 50 grocery retailers. All members have access to Local Hero marketing materials (price cards, stickers, the *Farm Products Guide*, [www.buylocalfood.com](http://www.buylocalfood.com)) and gain exposure through CISA’s public awareness campaign for local farms and farm products

CISA’s efforts reach consumers beyond western Massachusetts. CISA helps other state departments of agriculture explore how they can more effectively promote their farmers and their products. CISA’s annual *Farm Products Guide* is a model that has been

replicated around the U.S. as a way to effectively reach hundreds of thousands of individuals about where they can find local farm products. CISA’s web site, [www.buylocalfood.com](http://www.buylocalfood.com), is viewed by thousands of consumers a year. CISA has developed a value-added product, the Massachusetts Heritage Wool Blanket, and works with sheep breeders statewide on this project. CISA is frequently asked to consult with groups and agencies around the U.S. on agricultural marketing and product development.

A board of directors elected to three year terms governs CISA. An average of 20 men and women serve on the CISA board with equal representation of farmers, consumers, and institutional members (including retailer business owners, faculty from local colleges and universities, community members, farmers, and others).

## CISA’s agritourism experience

CISA has also created effective and well-attended agritourism events, from local food feasts to large-scale regional farm tours. Our staff has extensive experience in event planning, publicity, marketing and evaluation. To view our current schedule of events and to see examples of the publicity materials we have created for our farm tours and festivals, visit [www.buylocalfood.com/events.html](http://www.buylocalfood.com/events.html). To consult with us about your event, call us at 413-665-7100. Event advice and consultation is free for CISA’s Local Hero members. Others may be asked to make a contribution to CISA to help us continue our work to promote local food and farming.



While agritourism is a relatively new term, agritourism activities are not. Some farms have worked to attract visitors for many years. Others are just getting started. Until recently there was no information on how area farms use agritourism to boost their bottom line.

## Chapter 1

### Learning from our study: trends in agritourism

In 2004 Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) received a Rural Business Enterprise Grant to study the scope and impact of agritourism in Franklin County, Massachusetts. The study reveals that farmers have created not only farmstands and pick-your-own operations but farm vacations, educational programming, specialty food items and more.

Franklin County ranks 45th in the U.S. for direct sales of farm products—over \$2 million per year. Tourism is the third largest industry in Massachusetts, creating over 200,000 jobs per year and generating \$11.1 billion in revenue in 2002. There are clearly opportunities for enterprising farm families to benefit from these trends!

Recent trends in both tourism activities and farm survival strategies have combined to push agritourism into the spotlight. Increasing urban and suburban development has removed many families from direct contact with farms. The desire to have ‘authentic’ experiences on real

farms is a growing trend in tourism today. More and more people are traveling by car to nearby destinations rather than traveling across the country or abroad. Busy work lives have turned weekends into the new ‘vacation’ for many families.

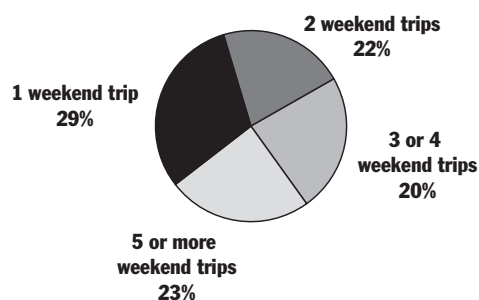
At the same time, farmers are learning that there are advantages to bringing visitors to the farm to learn about farm life and buy farm products. Agritourism can increase a farm’s revenue. It can educate people about the importance of agriculture. And it can increase demand for locally grown farm products.

Agritourism operations stand a greater chance of success if they understand these trends:

- ‘Vacations’ are compressed into weekends to accommodate busy work and school lives;
- Travelers are taking shorter trips by car from their urban/suburban homes to the countryside;

*“They don’t come to my farm for sustenance.  
They come for an experience.”*

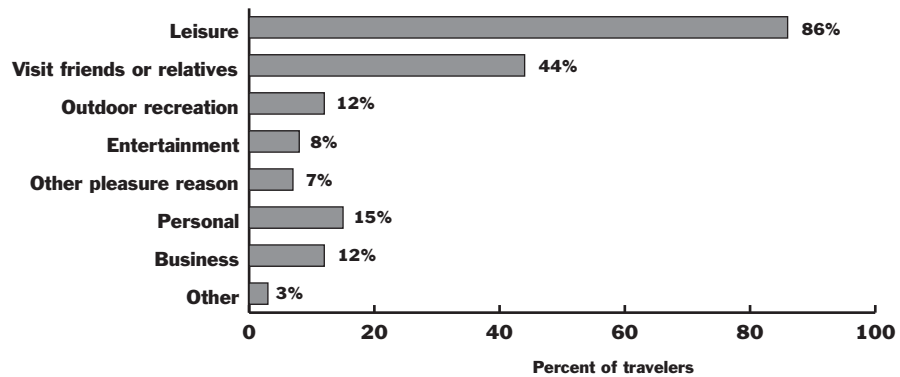
**Number of weekend leisure trips taken in the past 12 months  
(among past year leisure travelers who took a weekend trip)**



Source: Travel Industry Association of America



**Primary purpose of trip to rural area  
(among past year travelers taking a trip  
to a small town or village with the past three years)**



Source: Travel Industry Association of America

- People are looking for new experiences and the opportunity to share them as a family;
- Farm visitors are predominantly urban residents over the age of 25. Nearly half have income of over \$50,000 a year.

The primary purpose of travel to rural areas is leisure. Farmers would do well to note this trend. Creating leisure activities on the farm has potential to attract and retain visitors to rural

areas. As a result of these trends, roadside stands have become more elaborate than they were a few decades ago. Some are open year-round. Some offer more than just what's grown on the farm. Specialty foods like jams and jellies, country crafts, animals to feed and pet, workshops and demonstrations all make many farmstands a destination for activities and experiences as much as a place to buy fresh locally grown food.



There are many potentially fruitful agritourism activities. Some are tried and true and others are still new. Some involve high costs and great degrees of planning (a corn maze) and others can make use of what you might already have (pick-your-own produce).

## Chapter 2

### Identifying agritourism opportunities for your farm

Here is a brief list of agritourism options to help you start thinking about what might make sense for your farm:

#### Types of activities:

##### **For-fee recreation**

Access to water bodies, bird watching, camping, corn maze, cross country skiing, hunting and fishing, picnicking, hiking, ice skating/sledding

**Pros:** Brings visitors for longer term visits to the farm. Builds good will. Uses farmland and woodland effectively.

**Cons:** Land must be managed carefully; some activities require intricate planning and set-up time and equipment purchases.

##### **Educational activities**

Cider and wine making, cooking, fishing, food processing, horticulture, hunting, pumpkin carving, other arts and crafts.

**Pros:** People like to learn crafts and rural activities from farmers. Brings long term visitors and builds good will.

**Cons:** Time consuming; need to be well organized to build repeat business.

##### **Demonstrations**

Bread making, cooking and canning, gardening, jam and jelly making, organic food production, rural crafting, sheep and cattle herding, soap making, weaving.

**Pros:** Shows off your skills! People may buy your products after seeing how thoughtfully you make them.

**Cons:** Not as time consuming as educational activities but still requires an organized and thoughtful approach.

##### **Participant experiences**

Animal birthing, barn raising, farm vacations, farm/school for children, food tasting, grow your own plots, hay rides, pick your own fruit, flowers, vegetables and Christmas trees, rent a tree, bush, garden, crop, trail rides with overnight stays.

**Pros:** People love hands-on activities and 'playing farmer.' Opportunity for in-depth education and building community connections.

**Cons:** Be comfortable giving people access 'behind the scenes' and have the plans and insurance policies to cover your assets.

##### **Tours**

Tours of cider mills, croplands, farm and barn structures, forest sites, hydroponics operations, maple syrup production, natural areas, orchards, sawmills, specialty livestock operations (angora goats, llamas) traditional farms, wineries.

**Pros:** Generate weekend income from entrance fees. Can be scheduled (bus tours) for a more predictable work schedule and cash flow. People spend money after the tour in your farmstand/gift shop—if you are well set up!

**Cons:** You are on stage! Get ready to be a showman/woman. People want to meet a real farmer, and that's you! Time consuming; requires good infrastructure (sanitary facilities, parking). Increases labor costs.

##### **Farm and community entertainment**

Bonfires, clambakes, dancing, hay/sled/tractor rides, interactive games, music concerts, plays, socials for dining, story telling.

**Pros:** Provides fun, education and fond memories for visitors. Builds repeat business and loyalty.

**Cons:** You are throwing a big party! Planning, labor, showmanship are important.

##### **Festivals and events**

Blossom festivals, Christmas tree lighting, ethnic festivals, harvest festivals, heritage festivals, historic events, music festivals, seasonal/crop festivals, you name it festivals!

**Pros:** For a fee, you can make your property available for events and rent spaces to vendors. If putting on the event yourself you can increase visitors and sales of products.



*"We are always testing new recipes for our poultry products in our farm store. These new products keep our customers interested and bring them back."*

**Cons:** Remember Yasgur's Farm in Woodstock? If successful you will have hundreds of people on your farm, with all the expected wear and tear, as well as some unexpected events. Be prepared—good planning is essential!

### **Alternative crops and value-added products**

Alternative livestock products (goat or sheep meat/cheese/milk/soap), baitfish, bison/elk/deer, building wood products, firewood, flowers, herbs, game animals, gift shops, hay, horse boarding, jams and jellies and other preserved foods, nursery products, roadside markets.

**Pros:** You can develop niche products and services that no one else has. You get publicity opportunities for being unique and new. Adding alternative or value-added products increases income potential.

**Cons:** Increased marketing and startup costs; need to develop the expertise in your unique area; less infrastructure for more unusual products (slaughter services located farther away, no nearby community of experts).

### **Alternative marketing**

Pick your own, rent a tree/bush/crop, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), direct marketing, Internet sales, farmers markets, roadside sales, direct selling to schools and restaurants.

**Pros:** Can increase farm income and build community connections.

**Cons:** Time and labor consuming; some require specialized or technical skills that you need to learn or locate.

All of these activities have many more pros and cons than can be listed above. Let's take one in particular and explore it a bit further.

## **Value-added product development**

Value-added products—like jams and jellies mentioned above—have become a popular addition to many farm operations. They deserve special mention here because their popularity makes them attractive to many farmers, yet they have limitations that need to be acknowledged.

Many farmers start out making value-added products as a way to use up produce that did not sell at farmers market or their stand. It is pretty simple to make a few cases of jam from strawberries that would otherwise go to waste. Customers who don't put up preserves appreciate the ability to buy fresh and preserved foods from farmers. Jams and jellies have a homespun quality that makes them attractive to customers and their sales can increase farm income.

But the specialty food and value-added business is highly competitive. Many farms already make their own preserves and many more food entrepreneurs create home made looking products that are marketed all over the country. Here are some important considerations for value-added products:

- Does the world need another strawberry jam?
- What makes your jam special or unique?
- Have you researched what your customers want?
- Are you going to be selling only off the farm or do you want to get into stores?
- Do stores want your product?
- Do you have the proper permits to make preserves in your own kitchen?
- If not, can you afford to rent space at a food processing center or other certified kitchen?
- Some 'co-packers' will make preserves for farms and put the farm on the label. Is it authentic if it is your label but not your produce in the jar?

As you will see later, any agritourism activity will be more likely to succeed if you have thoroughly explored the idea and assessed your farm and family's interest and abilities.





Planning, persistence and patience are essential to a successful agritourism enterprise. You are considering creating activities and an infrastructure that are time consuming and costly. Before you get started, be sure to spend time planning and thinking about how this idea will fit into your farm's goals and operations.

## Chapter 3

### Assess what you have

- What is your farm's philosophy? What are its goals and objectives?
- How does your agritourism idea fit in to your farm's philosophy and activities?
- Do your family, employees and neighbors support your agritourism ideas?
- What are your personal goals? Will this new activity support or erode them?
- What are your farm's current capabilities? Will this new activity complement them or stretch them?

Agritourism activities are most successful when they fit the farm—and the farmer. Just as your farm may be too small or poorly located for a high-traffic agritourism business, your farm work may suffer if your agritourism business forces you to interact with lots of customers. Be sure to balance the farm's production needs with your agritourism idea.

Creating agritourism activities for your farm also creates new roles and responsibilities for you, your family and employees. You are no longer just growing and selling crops. You are entering the world of tourism and entertainment and need to deal with personnel management, record keeping, marketing, maintenance, food service, janitorial services and more!

Make sure you know what lies ahead before embarking on this journey. Use this chart to understand the costs and benefits of agritourism:

#### **Benefits of agritourism activities**

- Provides potential income.
- Builds physical infrastructure that has value.
- Helps you take advantage of underused buildings, land and talents.
- Allows you to be your own boss.
- Allows you to work your own hours.
- Gives you creative expression.
- Is personally rewarding.
- Creates new opportunities for spouse, children and family members.

- Maintains family interest and attention on the farm
- Allows you to meet visitors from all walks of life.
- Gives you the chance to educate people about rural living, nature and the agriculture industry which can lead to improved local policies.
- Promotes farming in your community.
- Allows you to create a sustainable local business.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Costs of agritourism activities**

- Provides a low financial return, at least at first.
- Interferes with farming operations.
- It's hard work! Adds workload to family members.
- Demands your full and constant attention and interferes with family time and activities.
- Steals your privacy—people are always around.
- Requires that you are always “on”—upbeat and available.
- Involves risk and liability—you hold total responsibility.
- Can create staffing problems and increase your paperwork.

#### **So why do it?**

At this point if you are thinking that agritourism is a lot of work, you're right! You may be asking, “What's in it for my farm?”

Bill and Norma Coli operate Blue Heron Farm in Charlemont, Massachusetts. In addition to running a certified organic maple sugaring operation, growing blueberries and haying, and breeding and selling Boer goats and Norwegian Fjord horses, the Coli's have been offering family-oriented vacation rentals in four free-standing cottages on the farm for the last 17 years.

“The vacation rental element of our farm has really helped. It's part of our sustainability and has improved our cash flow. It's absolutely worth it,” says Bill. Although farm work is not required, many of their guests, especially children, enjoy trying their hand at milking a goat, grooming horses, picking up bales of hay and leading animals to and from pasture.

*“Vacation rental ... of our farm has really helped. It's part of our sustainability and has improved our cash flow. It's absolutely worth it.”*

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from “Agritourism and Nature Tourism in California,” by the University of California Small Farm Center, 2002.

Running a farm as diversified as Blue Heron requires good planning and help. Interruptions might be a challenge, but Bill and Norma have worked out a system for gracefully integrating their guests into life on the farm.

Clear expectations, delivered in a friendly way, help make this balance work. Just as guests would not want anyone mowing around their cottage while they are resting, Bill and Norma want to make sure that their “guest farmhands” get to help when the farmers are ready for them. Bill puts written guidelines in each cottage to

help guests understand the rhythms of life on the farm, and he makes sure to call ahead before doing any noisy work near the guest cottages. As a result, “We’ve met some really wonderful people who appreciate the farm and are considerate of our needs and privacy.”

“Most of our guests come for face time—they want to meet Bill and Norma,” says Bill. This special kind of vacation means a lot to some of their families. Many of their guests are return visitors, some for as many as eight years.

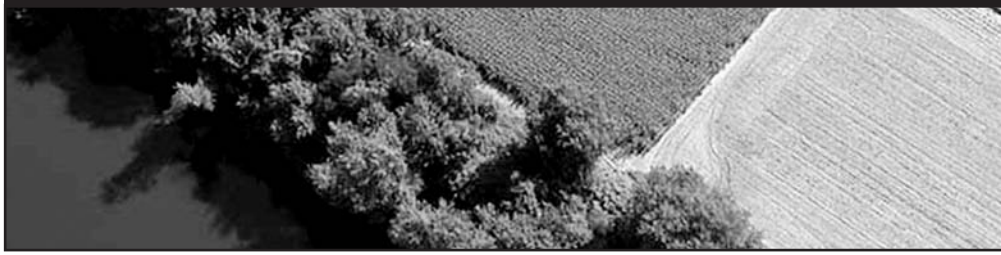
## Surveys

This series of short surveys will help you figure out you and your family’s values and resources for your potential agritourism business. You can complete them together or complete them individually and compare your answers.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. What are your values?

#### Values

	Least Important	Not So Important	More Important	Most Important
Spending time with the family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Embracing spirituality or church	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enjoying my peace and privacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participating in the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Building a stronger local community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keeping the land in the family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintaining our heritage/homestead	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restoring the farm or ranch	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Protecting the resource base	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enjoying our natural environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Displaying our land stewardship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Making land available for our kids and grandkids	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leaving a legacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Continuing the family business	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensuring economic stability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Producing food for others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing the highest quality product	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing the most affordable product	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Growing unique crops or animals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sharing lessons learned with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teaching others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Continuing my education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## The land

### Legal description:

How much land do I own or have access to? List the acreage amount, location, and proximity. List property that is deeded, leased, private, state-owned, and federally owned.

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### Land use:

How do I want to use my land? Farms with wooded areas can be ideal for mushroom production or hunting. Operations with open areas might be good sites for fairs, festivals, and plays. Those with fallow fields might provide income from hunting. And those with pasture might be used to graze alternative livestock. List your land's current use including hayfields, rangelands, croplands, and feed grounds.

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### Land features:

What does my land look like? Land that is unique or beautiful can provide income opportunities from hiking, horseback riding, nature tours, and photography and art tours. List your land's features including its elevation; topography; geologic features like caves and glacial features; and natural places like woodlands, meadows, wetlands, and water bodies. Bear in mind that farm ponds can provide young people a chance to learn how to fish, leading to fishing in the wild.

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### Soil type:

What are the characteristics of my soil? What is it best suited for?

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### Water bodies:

What streams, lakes, rivers, and ponds will attract tourists? Land with water can be used for such activities as fishing, duck hunting, water sports like canoeing, bird watching, and photography.

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## 2. What are your physical resources?

Land location plays an important role in the success of your enterprise. In the worksheet below, consider your operation's physical resources.

## 2. continued ...

What are your physical resources?

### **The climate**

How will weather patterns affect the activities I provide? What is the growing season? Will I need to irrigate?

Temperature: monthly average and variation

Rainfall: monthly average and variation

Snow: ground cover periods and accumulation depth

### **Farmstead features**

What buildings, fences, corrals and working facilities, equipment, roads and paths are on my land? Perhaps your home is well-suited to lodgers or your barn is ideal for conferences and banquets.

### **Historical resources**

What special historical or cultural buildings and features exist on my property or nearby?

### **Additional attractions**

What other resources do I have on my land that might attract tourists? Consider livestock, fishing areas, vistas, and proximity to natural or created points of interest, for example.

### **The local infrastructure**

What local infrastructure exists? Consider roads, local transportation systems, nearby lodging and dining, for instance.

### **Evaluate**

What agritourism activities make best use of your land, climate and infrastructure without overusing them?



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What are my startup costs?

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Do I have access to loans or other sources of capital?

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What will my agritourism activities cost to initiate?

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### Evaluate

What can I do to reduce the need for financing? Or is my idea so potentially profitable but high cost that financing should be considered?

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### 3. What are your financial resources?

You will need financial resources for business start-up and upkeep. While some alternative enterprises have high start-up costs, others require little up-front investment.

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### Staff: family and hired

Do they have special talents or abilities?

Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes

Do they have time to deal with the public?

Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes

Are they willing to deal with the public?

Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes

Are they friendly with the public?

Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes

### Management team

Are they committed to working with me to make a successful venture?

Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes

### 4. Rate your human resources.

What about the people with whom visitors might have contact—staff, neighbors, local community businesses, agencies, and residents? Will they strengthen your business or impede its success? Rate your human resources critically.



**4. continued ...**  
Rate your human  
resources.

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**Neighbors**

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Are there any conflicts?

Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes

Will they allow bordering access?

Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes

Will they support recreation options?

Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes

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**Local law enforcement**

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Do they support my proposal? ☐ Yes ☐ No Notes

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**Game wardens and biologists**

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Do they support my proposal? ☐ Yes ☐ No Notes

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**Government officials and regulators: local, state, federal**

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Do they support my proposal? ☐ Yes ☐ No Notes

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**Economic development staff: local, county, regional, state**

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Do they support my proposal? ☐ Yes ☐ No Notes

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**Business and tourism associations?**

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Do they support my proposal? ☐ Yes ☐ No Notes

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**Other local businesses**

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Do they understand and support my proposal?

Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes

Would they be interested in collaborating with me?

Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes
Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Notes

Some of the people above represent hurdles to my success, how can I work to change them or limit their impact on my business?

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**Evaluate**

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Who is a clear asset? What do I need to do to keep them? Who presents a hurdle to success? How can I work with them to change or limit their impact on my business?

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**Landowner and manager strengths and goals**

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What intangible assets do I have to help create a farm recreation operation? For example: interpersonal skills; marketing ability; knowledge about specific topics like livestock management, gardening, local history; special skills like horseback riding, furniture making, and cooking.

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**Family strengths and resources**

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What “intangibles” can family members bring to this enterprise?

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**Neighbor and community resources**

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What talents, skills, and interests might local residents add?

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**Farm personality**

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What is the personality of my farm? Is it serene, vibrant, laid back, or interactive? This information can help you choose suitable events and to design them appropriately.

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**Farm activities**

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What current farm activities might appeal to the public? Remember that what you consider routine might be unusual and interesting to the non-farming public. Be creative!

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**Evaluate**

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What are my strongest assets? What assets do I need that I don't have? How will I get them?

---

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**5. What are your management assets?**

Successful businesses have good operational and management skills. In the form below, consider your perspectives, assets, and weaknesses.



## 6. What are your personal skills?

Take a look at yourself. What can you do? Fill out the following worksheet to assess your own skills.

Answer **No, Somewhat, Yes**, for the following questions.

Do I like meeting and working with all types of people?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Do I like to entertain and serve strangers?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Am I patient, persistent, and sensitive to the needs of travelers?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Am I willing to work long hours in sometimes difficult situations?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Do I have the physical stamina and vigor to properly serve my customers?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Can I manage my enterprise while conserving the land?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Do I know the natural history of my area?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Do I have in-depth outdoor skills?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Am I a self-starter?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Am I willing to take responsibility?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Am I organized?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Do I have experience with budgeting?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Do I have experience with planning?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Do I have experience with managing people?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Do I have experience with communicating?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Do I have experience with presenting my ideas to many people?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Do I have experience with selling?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat
Do I have experience with keeping financial records?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat

### Evaluate

Do my current skills and experiences increase my chances of success in my chosen agritourism activity? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Somewhat

If not, how will I build or acquire them?

---

---

## 7. What are your visitors' needs?

To the right are some of the needs you will want to consider for your farm.

Do they exist already? Are they in good condition? Do they need to be constructed?  
Where will they be constructed?

Public access	<hr/>
Public parking areas	<hr/>
Walkways	<hr/>
Washrooms	<hr/>
Drinking water	<hr/>

### Evaluate

What will it cost to get my farm up to snuff? How will that affect the profitability of my proposed activity?

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

8. What ideas do you have for agritourism activities on your farm?







You've met with your family and employees. You've completed the questionnaires included in Chapter 3 and best of all you have some new ideas for agritourism on your farm that you are *excited* about exploring further. Where do you go from here? It's time to draft a business plan.

## Chapter 4

### Develop a business plan

#### A business plan ...

is not a final report. It is a dynamic, ongoing process. Like a tractor, it is a tool. Pieces wear out and are replaced; implements are added as needs change and an overhaul is occasionally required.<sup>3</sup>

Writing a business plan seems intimidating. It will definitely take time. But you know most of the information you need to complete one. You just may not have written it down before. Your business plan is a good way to review your farm's development, state your goals and look ahead to future success. It's a great off season project, and it is essential to the success of your agritourism venture.

A business plan will help you clarify your thinking and, if done thoroughly, will give you a valuable document to present to farm credit agencies and banks to obtain the financing you might need to implement your agritourism activities.

Here are the key parts of a business plan, followed by a short example of how a farmer might complete one. This outline will familiarize you with a basic business plan. If you want help writing one consult your local community college, Community Development Corporation or the Small Business Administration. These organizations offer low cost or free help for small businesses like farms.

#### Summary

- While this section comes first, write it last.
- It describes your farm, your history, skills and expertise, what you bring to the business and why you have chosen this business.
- Describe your products and customers.
- Identify the trends in your business sector.
- Be enthusiastic, complete and concise.

#### Mission statement

This is your chance to state the core purpose of your farm, your values and your goals. The mission statement should be clear and concise—around 50 words.

#### Agritourism concept

This one page section describes your agritourism idea, the products or services it will offer, the target audience you want to reach, and how it fits with other agritourism operations in the area (the ones you complement and the ones you compete with).

#### Goals and objectives

Goals are the plans you want to achieve in the next 3–5 years. Objectives are the steps you must take in the short term to meet your goals. Goals are what you want to accomplish, objectives are how you will accomplish them.

After you finalize your goals and objectives, create a list of detailed action steps for each one. Identify who is responsible for them, what they need to get them done and when they will be done.

#### Management needs

This section addresses:

- How you will run your business.
- Who is your management team.
- What is your legal structure.
- What insurance coverage do you need.
- What regulatory agencies you will work with and how you will meet their requirements.

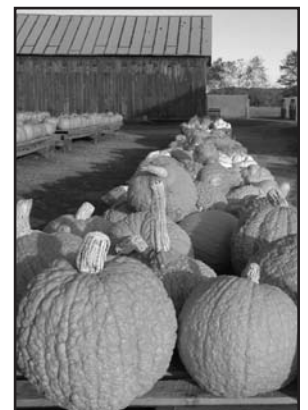
#### Marketing plan

Here is where you identify what your marketing strategy is and how you will carry it out.

First you identify your market area, your target market and your competition. Then you set your marketing budget and determine what marketing methods you will use to spread the word about your agritourism operation:

- Are you going to rely on word-of-mouth or are you going to purchase advertising?
- What will your farm signs look like? Will you have a brochure or web site?
- How will you distribute the brochures or promote the site?

*“Taking a business planning course definitely helped us sort out our ideas and dreams for our farm.”*



<sup>3</sup> Adapted from “Agritourism and Nature Tourism in California,” by the University of California Small Farm Center, 2002.



- What other marketing methods might you use (print, radio, TV, etc.)?

*We will go into greater detail on marketing your agritourism operation in Chapter 5.*

### Operational plan

Well-run agritourism operations have specific and detailed operational plans. Just as you would not host a dinner party for 50 without a lot of planning, you should not expect to host a bus of 50 tourists on your farm without being totally prepared. Your operational plan should describe:

- **Location** Where will the activities happen on your farm? What kind of buildings and amenities are needed for the activities to be successful?
- **Production** What activities will you offer? What hours will they be available?
- **Personnel** Who will be responsible for supervising the activities? What skills do they need to have? Are they from your family or will they be employees? If employees, what training do you need to offer, when do you need to hire them and what will their pay/benefits be?
- **Inventory** What materials do you need on hand for your activities? Do you have a gift shop to direct visitors to after their activities are complete?
- **Suppliers** Who will supply you with the materials you need? Identify several suppliers and have backup plans to protect you from supplier mistakes.

- **Legal environment** Describe legal issues such as zoning requirements, licensing, health and safety regulations, environmental regulations, special permits, insurance coverage, trademarks and copyrights.

*Legal considerations will be covered in more detail in Chapter 6.*

### Financial plan

A good financial plan helps you identify potential losses and increase your opportunity to make money. It is not (usually) easy or fun to create, but it is very important. You may have documents like this for your farm already. If that is the case, then this section will be a lot easier to write, as you will be simply adding your agritourism activities to your existing spreadsheets. A basic financial plan includes:

- Twelve month profit and loss projections with assumptions
- A balance sheet which identifies assets, liabilities and net worth
- Cash flow projections including sales projections and assumptions
- Start-up expenses and requirements
- 3–5 year projections

### Conclusion

Here is where you make your closing statement about your business and why it will succeed!

## Brown's Bountiful Acres: A Business Plan

*Here is a short example of a partly written agritourism-based business plan. We don't have the space to give you all the details but this sketch will give you a better idea of how these sometimes overwhelming documents are created. Brown's Bountiful Acres is a composite of actual farms from western Massachusetts.*

### Summary

Brown's Bountiful Acres is a fourth generation family farm growing high quality vegetables and small fruits for retail sales at the farm and at select markets in the Central City region. Doug Brown and his daughter Sarah run the farm. Both are graduates of the State Agriculture College where they studied sustainable vegetable and fruit production. Doug's wife Ellen has a degree in early childhood education and directs the farm's family and school agritourism programs.

Brown's customers are seekers of fresh, locally grown produce and include the many families and individuals that patronize their farmstand and market stalls. Several notable chefs from Central City feature Brown's produce on their menus.

Brown's Bountiful Acres seeks to capitalize on its high traffic location, ready proximity to Central City and the growing desire of families for on-farm experiences with several agritourism ventures: PYO patches, seasonal farm festivals and school group activities on the farm. Families will learn where their food comes from through a series of experiences, from planting, cultivating and harvesting produce to picking our berries; from our celebratory seasonal festivals to in-depth school trips that cover all aspects of farm life, botany, animal husbandry and more.

Our agritourism ventures will increase public awareness of our farm, raise sales of products at the farm and engage the community with our farm through on-farm experiences. We will

become a leader in the farm community through our future-oriented approach to agriculture and agritourism.

### Mission Statement

Brown's Bountiful Acres will provide families and children with a safe place to learn where food comes from. We will provide family-centered seasonal on-farm activities and invite local schools to use the farm. We will maintain our reputation as a productive vegetable and fruit grower by marketing our produce on the farm and at select local farmers markets.

### Agritourism Concept

Brown's Bountiful Acres is a 50-acre mixed vegetable and berry farm located 20 miles north of Central City. We use sustainable agriculture practices and have protected our farmland through the state Farmland Preservation Program. We operate the farm as a sole proprietorship with help from family members, paid staff and interns from the local agricultural college.

We grow a wide variety of vegetables and small fruit, starting with greenhouse greens and asparagus in the spring, strawberries and peas in early summer, and a myriad of other vegetables and fruit all summer long, followed by pumpkins, gourds and ornamentals, and specialty potatoes in the fall. We maintain a small flock of free-range hens for egg sales and educational purposes. We have a small flock of sheep for fiber demonstrations.

Our farm is well known throughout the area for sales of quality fruits and vegetables due to our highly visible farm stand and presence at several busy farmers' markets. Our location on a main road gives our site good visibility. We will maintain some of our roadside acreage as a learning site for families and children about farming, including planting, cultivating projects and demonstrations as well as pick-your-own fruits and vegetables. We will host seasonal farm festivals to celebrate the changing of the seasons and harvests.

### Goals and Objectives:

---

**GOAL #1:** To increase family visits to our farm through creation of pick-your-own patches.

---

#### Expected outcomes:

This goal will be met when we have successfully

This peek at Brown's Bountiful Acres business plan should reassure you that it is not impossible to start writing your own business plan. Remember that local community colleges, Community Development Corporations, the Small Business Administration and consultants are often available to help you if you feel overwhelmed. But the best business plans are written by the business owner—you alone truly understand how your business operates and its potential.

planted and cultivated a one-acre roadside pick-your-own strawberry patch that is well received and profitable.

### Objectives:

1. Prepare soil for strawberry cultivation in the summer of the year preceding our patch opening to the public.
2. Plant and mulch berry plants.
3. Develop marketing plan for promoting berry patch.
4. Identify and locate equipment and supplies needed for PYO operations.
5. Create signage for patch.
6. Hire and train staff and family to assist pickers.
7. Implement marketing plan and open patch for picking!

---

**GOAL #2:** Increase family visits to the farm through the creation of 3 seasonal farm festivals.

---

#### Expected outcomes:

This goal will be met when we have successfully planned and implemented three seasonal festivals this year

### Objectives:

1. Identify the three seasonal festivals and the products/activities they will highlight.
2. Scope out competition from other farms and other regional events to be sure there is room for us in the mix.
3. Create programming and activities for each festival that attract families—demonstrations, games, crafts, harvesting activities.
4. Identify infrastructure needs for each festival— toilet and handwashing facilities, parking, shade, shelter, barns.
5. Develop marketing plan for promoting each festival.
6. Identify and locate equipment and supplies needed for festivals.
7. Create signage for each festival.
8. Hire and train staff and family to run events and activities.
9. Implement marketing plan and host the festivals!



Our Goals  
and Objectives

Write your own goals and objectives

Give it a try. Work with members of your family and establish three to five measurable goals and their expected outcomes, objectives, and action steps.

Enterprise Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mission Statement: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

GOAL #1: *to be done by* \_\_\_\_\_

Expected Outcomes  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The goal will be satisfied when:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Objectives (How)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Detailed Action Steps (Who, What, When)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

GOAL #2: *to be done by* \_\_\_\_\_

Expected Outcomes  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The goal will be satisfied when:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Objectives (How)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Detailed Action Steps (Who, What, When)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

GOAL #3: *to be done by* \_\_\_\_\_

Expected Outcomes  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The goal will be satisfied when:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Objectives (How)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Detailed Action Steps (Who, What, When)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*"If the circus is coming to town and you paint a sign saying, 'Circus is coming to Fairgrounds Sunday,' that's advertising. If you put the sign on the back of an elephant and walk him through town, that's promotion. If the elephant walks through the Mayor's flower bed, that's publicity. If you can get the Mayor to laugh about it, that's public relations. And, if you planned the whole thing, that's marketing!"*

—Author unknown

## Chapter 5

### Marketing your agritourism enterprise

#### What is marketing?

Marketing is often misunderstood as paid advertising. While buying ads is certainly part of a marketing plan, it should not be the only thing you do to raise awareness about your farm.

Marketing is a range of strategies and techniques designed to raise awareness of your farm and get more people to visit and purchase your products and services. Once you understand the broadness of marketing you will see how you are already marketing your business and recognize new ways that you can spread the word about your farm.

A marketing plan is like a road map. It shows you where you are and what you need to do to get where you want to go. "Creating a marketing plan does not guarantee success; it only reduces the chance of failure."<sup>4</sup>

The next sections will help you develop a better understanding of the agritourism industry, your role in it, and how you can increase awareness of and visitations to your farm.

#### Understanding the agritourism industry and trends

Chapter 1 gave a good overview of the agritourism industry and what the potential is for agritourism operations on farms. Review it again to familiarize yourself with the information.

#### What do visitors want when they come to your farm?

The most successful agritourism farms are based on quality, authentic experiences, not simply sales of products. A quality on-farm experience can be as simple as feeding grain to some goats or picking berries or as elaborate as an English tea, summertime bonfire, or all-day festival. If your visitors have an enjoyable experience they are more likely to spend money at your farm and come back for more!

Keep it real. Families that are compressing their vacation time into weekends and who are traveling

by car are looking for authentic people and experiences. They want to meet the farmer. They see farmers as honest hardworking people. They might be envious of your farm and land and be completely ignorant of how hard you and your family work to keep it. Make sure your interactions are friendly and accommodating. Be yourself—your best version of yourself!

#### A look at the competition

Competition comes in many forms. It can be another agritourism farm near you, another popular tourist attraction that is not farm related—it can even be the TV and the Internet! Rather than throw up your hands in frustration, think about what competitors offer and what they can't.

Before you spend a dollar marketing your farm, think about the ways you might be able to collaborate with a nearby competitor. Compare your enterprise with theirs and figure out what you can do to gain an advantage. Ask yourself these questions:

- What activities can people do in our region?
- Do they compete with me or complement me?
- Would my potential customers want to do these activities?
- What makes me different from others?
- Are there ways to collaborate with nearby 'competitors' to increase our business?

#### What's so special about me?

Your farm, its history and your family are unique. There are many good stories about you and your farm. But if you don't spend the time to tell them, no one will ever know. People see farmers as interesting, hardworking people. Farmers also have the image of being reticent and soft spoken. That's fine—to a point. If you are going to welcome people to your farm you not only have to be open for business, you need to be comfortable sharing what is special about your farm with your customers.



*"Most of our guests come for face time—they want to meet Bill and Norma."*

<sup>4</sup> Kentucky Agri-Tourism Working Group, Issue White Paper: *Establishment of an Agri-tourism Industry in Kentucky*





## **Know your product and services**

If you were selling nuts and bolts you would easily understand your products and what people would walk away with when they left your store, and what feeling they would have after their purchase. They'd have a little bag of hardware, and they would feel satisfied and prepared to fix or build something with your product.

But what are you selling if you are offering farm tours, hayrides, canning lessons and sheep shearing demonstrations? You are selling experiences. With experiences, sometimes all the customer takes away is their memories of what they did on your farm. How your customer feels after the experience is key to keeping them satisfied and getting them to come back. Do they remember your polite and helpful staff? The wonderful stories you told of growing up on your family farm? The look of delight on their child's face when your goats nibbled some grain right out of their hand?

## **Understand your features and benefits**

Understanding the features of your farm—and the benefits they give to consumers—will make this easy. Here are some examples from Brown's Bountiful Acres:

### **Feature: Rural location**

#### **Customer Benefits:**

- Rest and relaxation
- Free from hustle and bustle of city life
- Clean air
- Unspoiled natural beauty

### **Feature: Only 20 miles from Central City**

#### **Customer Benefits:**

- Right in your own backyard
- Great for a family day trip
- An oasis

### **Feature: Pick your own produce**

#### **Customer Benefits:**

- The freshest produce
- Fun family activity
- Great flavor
- Reminiscent of childhood

Take some time to sketch out the products and services and features and benefits of your business to gain a better understanding of what you have to offer customers. These will become the basis for your marketing strategy.

## **Your marketing strategy**

Build it and they will come ... Local farm products and experiences sell themselves, right? Wrong!

Getting your farm ready for business is of course essential. But don't stop there. You know what makes your farm unique and what great experiences people will have when they visit. Now you can form the key messages you need for a public relations and advertising program.

## **Your identity and message**

Start with your family and employees. Brainstorm messages that attract attention, keep people's interest, build desire and call to action. Most of all make them positive. You may find that you can easily do this yourselves. You can also hire a marketing consultant to work with you. Before hiring someone, check references. Ask their customers if they are easy to work with, receptive to feedback and complete their work in a timely manner. Professional help can be great if it meets your needs and reflects your business. If you get a message or image back from a consultant that just does not feel right to you, speak up! You will have to live with it for a long time.

This message should then be reflected in all that you do: your business card, logo, farm signs, web site, printed materials and advertising.

Here's an example:

***Brown's Bountiful Acres: an oasis of fresh produce and family fun just minutes from Central City.***

### **What does this say about Brown's Bountiful Acres?**

- The name—bountiful—suggests that you won't be disappointed by skimpy harvests or a half-full stand when you arrive.
- Oasis—peaceful, calm, a refuge for relaxation.
- Fresh produce—your family will take home the best tasting, freshest, most nutritious food.
- Minutes from Central City—close to home but removed from the hustle and bustle of city life.

You can see from this example how the features and benefits of Brown's Bountiful Acres are reflected in their marketing message.

## **Consistency**

Your message is your guiding star for all your marketing and public relations work. It should not be the only thing you say—who wants to sound like a robot?—but it should be carefully

woven into all you do. A good graphic designer can create a logo that reflects your message. You can also use it as a tag line on all your printed and web materials. Wear it proudly and often!

### **Have a good spokesperson**

A consistent message needs a consistent messenger. Farmers might feel intimidated by speaking to the public or the press. The key to conveying your message effectively is to be authentic. Be who you are.

If you are a soft spoken person by nature, don't turn into a used car salesman when conveying your message. People will sense the disconnect. Just be who you are and articulate your message. As mentioned before, people appreciate farmers and farming culture. Your delivery should be direct and honest.

Sometimes the hardest time farmers have delivering their positive message is when they are being asked about a problem on the farm or in the farming community. Let's say that bad weather is threatening to reduce the strawberry crop this season. Farmer Brown gets a call from a local reporter looking to write a story about how the weather is affecting local farms. Farmer Brown should not spend a lot of time dwelling on how he might lose half his crop, he might cancel his Berry Fest and he doesn't know if he can hang on for another year. That may all be true, and it may be a poignant human interest story, but it won't necessarily bring customers to the farm. And the news will already focus on the negative aspects of the story—why add to that?

Here's another approach. Farmer Brown can acknowledge that the weather has been challenging, but he can say "We'll have berries—but they will be even more special and in demand this year because of the weather. Our customers should call ahead find out when we are picking so they can be sure to get some fresh berries this year." This more positive message shows that the farm is going to have berries (it is still bountiful despite the weather) and that customers should be sure to stay in touch so they can get their fresh, nutritious berries before they are gone. This is an effective call to action.

### **Marketing tools**

You will spend a lot of time preparing to launch your agritourism business. Be sure to give yourself plenty of time—three to twelve months—to develop your marketing tools and materials. Think backwards. A group of families have just arrived by bus to take your farm tour, pick berries and learn how to make jam. What marketing tools did

you need to get them to this point? A web site, advertisement in the regional tourism handbook (due in the middle of winter), print and radio ads, etc. All require planning and lead time.

Let's review some of the basic marketing tools and what they offer. Whatever you select, be sure they are the most effective tools available for your customers. If Brown's Bountiful Acres customers are in Central City, it should not be tempted to advertise in a publication that is not distributed in that market area. Likewise, don't choose the tools that you like and avoid the ones that make you uncomfortable. If a Central City is served by only one TV station, it may make sense to do a TV spot even if you are not comfortable being on camera. And once you determine what is most likely to be effective, stick with it! Changing venues and messages leads to customer confusion.

#### **Business cards and brochures**

These basic items should be on any farm's to-do list. They are relatively inexpensive and when done well can be effective. They should be in your truck, on your desk, in your stand. Don't be afraid to hand them out like candy!

#### **Posters and flyers**

Also inexpensive. They can be general posters about the farm or specific posters for events. They can be very effective in your hometown, as most businesses will let you hang one in their window to advertise your festival.

#### **Postcards**

For only a few hundred dollars you can have full-color (both sides) postcards made to send to your mailing list and distribute to the Chamber of Commerce and throughout your community. They are effective, relatively inexpensive and end up on a lot of refrigerators! To cut costs you can get them photocopied onto cardstock at your local copy shop. But if you are doing more than 300–500 cards, it becomes more affordable to do full-color printing. Our preferred vendor is [www.getsetprinting.com](http://www.getsetprinting.com).

#### **Signs**

Good signage is key not only to helping visitors find you but getting visitors in the first place. Post signs so that they are easily visible in both directions from the road. Participate in state farm sign programs to get travelers off the main road and toward your farm. Be sure to follow local ordinances regarding sign size and placement. If you don't have a sign yet, once you post one you will have more than one new customer say "I've been driving by here for years and I had no idea you were here!"



**Radio tip:**  
*Radio personalities love food. If you secure an on-air interview to promote your farm's corn festival, bring some of the dishes you will be serving there. It is great radio when a host is going on about how good your farm's produce is and how people really ought to get down there to taste it for themselves!*



### Sampling of product

Consumers love tastes! Sampling your products at your farm stand or in a local store usually leads to increased sales. Don't worry that they might have purchased the product anyway or that sampling is a waste of time. It is an inexpensive way to build good will and hand out your business card and brochures. It is only a waste of time if you stand there quietly handing out samples and don't engage with the customer.

### Donations to a local charity event

Donations are like tastings on a larger scale. Be sure to talk to your tax advisor on the deductibility of your donation, if that is a concern for you, and make sure that the charity you are donating to has given you ample opportunity to get visibility and materials at the event. At minimum you should be allowed to distribute your brochure to attendees. You might even be able to have a table to hand out more information and possibly sell product.

### Web sites

Do you need one? In most cases the answer is: Yes. The era of the travel agent is rapidly ending. More and more travel plans are made by people using the Internet. You can't rely on a few key people to let travelers know about your farm—you have to do it yourself.

A farm only needs a good, simple web site that is nicely laid out and full of great images. It should fit the theme of your business and should use the same logo that is on your card and brochure. Keep the site updated and make sure your contact information is current.

The biggest challenge for any small business thinking of a web site is trying to decide if they will do it themselves or hire help. Doing it yourself seems like a good idea ... until you get started. Unless you are very comfortable using complex computer software building a web site will be very time consuming and frustrating. If you decide to hire a consultant do research on the sites they have done and talk to some of their clients. Some questions to ask are:

- Does the designer get work done on time?
- Do they stick to their quoted budget?
- Will they set a site up so the client can update it themselves?
- Are they easy to reach and quick to respond to questions or problems?

If you have a good idea of what you want your web site to do you will have an easier time hiring help. Here are some more tips on creating a successful web site:

- **Define your goals.** What do you want the web site to do for your business? Wanting to bring people to the farm and sell online are two very different goals and require different functions and approaches to work well on the web.
- **Think like a consumer.** What would someone who wants to learn more about your farm need to know? Make sure your basic contact info is on the home page and every other page. Keep navigation simple. Use attractive photos or images that do not take a long time to load.
- **Spend appropriately.** You would not expect the cheapest and most inexperienced mechanic to do a good job fixing your tractor, but you might be tempted to go for the rock bottom price on a web site. Why? College students or your niece or nephew may be inexpensive but your web site will be as important to your business as any other piece of equipment. Do your best to find the person with the right experience and the best price for your web site creation.
- **Get it in writing.** Have a clear understanding and a written agreement with whoever you hire. Set deadlines and prices in advance.
- **Get the word out.** You can have a great web site that no one knows about. Once your site is up and running, get its address onto everything you print—business cards, brochures, letterhead, bags, t-shirts, etc. And make sure your email address is from your domain, not from a free site like Yahoo! or Juno. Many small business owners overlook this important detail. If you are paying to host a web site you have at least 10 free email accounts that come with it. Giving out your email address is marketing. Your email needs to be farmerbrown@brownsbountifulacres, not farmerbrown@juno.com.

Want to learn more? There are countless good books on creating effective web sites. Consult your local library or small business center for more information.

*For a nice example of a farming web site, visit [www.warmcolorsapiary.com](http://www.warmcolorsapiary.com).*

### Public relations and publicity

The media can be a great asset and offer good exposure for your business. Good relationships with local media outlets can result in regular features on your farm. For example, TV weathercasters often look for interesting locations for remote broadcasts. If they come to your farm and find it attractive and welcoming they may come back several times a season.

Building a relationship with the media requires preparation and consideration. If you contact the

media be prepared to be interviewed and asked questions. Be sure that when you contact them you have something newsworthy to say! They have limited time and do not like finding out that there is really no story and you are just fishing for free publicity.

Your story can fall under any of these 'angles':

- **Public impact.** You just bought adjacent land to expand your farmstand.
- **Interesting information or oddity.** One of your ewes had quadruplet lambs.
- **Useful advice or consumer protection.** You are holding a free canning workshop to help area residents preserve food.
- **Controversy or conflict.** You have problems with ATV riders trespassing and tearing up your nature trails.
- **Celebrity.** You just won a national recipe contest for one of your pie recipes!
- **Human interest.** Your daughter is traveling to Latin America to work on a livestock project with Heifer International.
- **Timeliness.** It's harvest season on your farm and you are holding several events to celebrate.
- **Localizing national trends or stories.** Your new corn maze is the first in the region and part of a growing national agritourism trend.

### Press releases

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You 'pitch' your story through a press release. The press release has evolved over the last few years from the staid and predictable 'Five Ws'—who, what, where, when and why—to a more dynamic and descriptive format. Press releases are still expected to have the Five Ws, but they must be surrounded by seductive text that grabs the readers' attention and draws them in.

There are two reasons for this trend. One is that the media, just like the rest of us, is getting jaded and they need to be hooked by a good story. They don't want to spend the time to read between the lines to find one. The other is that newspapers and other media, especially in small communities, have very limited staff these days and can't always spend the time to write a story. If you send them a well written and descriptive release they often print it without any edits!

Here are two short sections of press releases from CISA's Strawberry Festival to illustrate this point.

### The Old School Approach

#### Strawberry Festival June 26–27

CISA announces their third annual Strawberry Festival at the Deerfield Inn. Celebrate strawberry season with strawberry food and fun and games. Admission is free.

### The Modern Approach

#### Local Hero Strawberry Festival—the valley's best berry blast!

Two days of strawberry growing, picking, cooking and eating

Nothing says summer like sweet, juicy strawberries. Kids and adults alike love the fresh, aromatic flavor of these ruby red locally grown jewels. Celebrate all that the strawberry has to offer at CISA's Third Annual Local Hero Strawberry Festival on June 26 and 27, at the Deerfield Inn, rain or shine. Enjoy sweet and savory berry dishes, cooking demonstrations, family fun and games. Admission for all activities is free.

Both versions contain the Five Ws. But which one do you think sounds more enticing to your customers?

### Press relations

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If you've written a good press release you should be hearing from the media soon. Now you are going to be building up your press relations: giving interviews, providing follow up information and thanking the reporter for their coverage.

**Interviews.** When you are being interviewed treat the experience as a conversation between you and a friend. Use conversational language rather than jargon. Give a specific answer when asked a specific question. Be careful about using slang or jokes. While they may have made perfect sense in the context of a conversation, they often look odd in print.

After the interview is over be sure to tell the interviewer that you are available for follow-up questions and give them a reliable telephone number and time they can reach you. Provide your company brochure and business card. Ask the reporter to visit your web site and suggest that they include it in the story.

Don't ask to see a story ahead of time. Rather, ask if they can quote back to you what you said so that you can be sure you were clear. Use this request sparingly; a reporter is not going to read back the entire 15 minute interview to you!

*“Every time  
the local  
station  
does a  
weather  
forecast  
from my  
orchard,  
we have  
a huge  
weekend.”*





*"CISA has been able to get good photos from our events in local papers by creating special 'photo opportunity' press releases. These are faxed out the day before the event and include the detailed schedule for the day with good 'photo opps' highlighted. This allows photo editors to schedule coverage for our event and to know in advance when the good shots can be taken. They are very busy on weekends covering many events in the community. They appreciate that we are organized and that we are helping them to make the most use of their limited resources."*

- **Following up.** If you are contacted for follow up information, respond promptly. Reporters are on deadlines and many times they need the information right away.
- **After the story.** Don't be disappointed if the story differs from what you expected. Even a positive story may contain one or two negative points. Be sure to thank the reporter for covering you! They appreciate praise as they often get criticism for 'blowing' a story or quote from people they interview.
- **Build the relationship.** Be sure to keep an accurate list of press contacts, especially those that have given you good coverage before. You will have an easier time working with someone you already know and they will do a better job with the story because they know you. Rather than offering exclusives, give all your regular press contacts a heads up when you know you will be sending them a release. Be aware of staggering deadlines. A weekly paper needs more lead time and they don't like to be seen as following the dailies. You might want to consider giving them the release in advance so they have time to get it into their schedule.

If you do this well, you will develop a good relationship with a local reporter and they may seek you out rather than waiting for your press release!

### **Paid advertising**

Press releases and articles are all part of free promotions. Advertising, however, is paid for. And because you pay for it, you expect results. However, many small business owners don't use paid advertising effectively and therefore think it does not work. Here are some tips on how to use paid advertising to increase your farm's visibility and visitations.

- **Timing.** Be sure that your advertising is ready to go before your season starts. Your competitors are going to be advertising their farm at the beginning of the season and you should too. Hastily created ads often lack punch or clarity and don't do a very good job at attracting customers.
- **Frequency.** Paid advertising is expensive, especially if you place one ad at a time. However, most media will give you better per ad rates the longer you advertise with them. It costs more overall but your ad needs to be seen many more times than once to be effective. One time ads rarely have much of an impact. This is especially true for radio, where repetition is key.
- **Visibility.** Consider running smaller ads more often to get both greater frequency and visibility. You can have two smaller ads in two papers

for the price of one larger ad. Bigger is not always better.

- **Consistency.** Your ads should be visually consistent with your logo, your web site and with each other. You want people to catch your ad out of the corner of their eye and recognize it as your farm's ad. It builds familiarity and awareness.
- **Adaptability.** Make sure that you create an ad that has both consistent design elements and the ability to highlight the different crops or activities you are offering. Try to avoid ads where it lists your farm name and the various crops you have over the season—no matter whether it is June or October. You want to have people recognize your ad but also see that the strawberry picking ad is a little different from the pumpkin festival ad. A strong farm logo helps establish identity but gives you the ability to adapt your ads to suit your needs over the season.
- **Creativity.** Have fun and be creative! Making your ad a little off beat or an odd size can get you noticed. Just be sure your nifty idea does not obscure your farm's image and the information you need in the ad.

### **Benefits and drawbacks of paid advertising venues**

#### **Print**

**Benefits:** People who read the local paper are interested in what is going on in their community.

Your ad has clear directions on how to find your farm and people can save it. You can have the ad placed in the relevant section of the paper (food, weekend, etc) to find the kind of reader you want.

**Drawbacks:** People toss the paper out every day; short shelf life.

Studies say that newspaper readership is dropping.

#### **Radio**

**Benefits:** A great venue for storytelling about your farm.

A good radio ad creates a positive image of your farm.

Catchy ads are remembered long after they are gone.

Radio reaches a large mass market.

On-air appearances come with ad contracts and add value to your investment.



*Drawbacks:* Repetition is key—people tune out radio ads at first.

Your ad needs to be compelling to break through ad clutter

### **Public radio underwriting**

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*Benefits:* Listeners appreciate your support for their station.

Public radio listeners tend to be affluent and educated.

*Drawbacks:* With only 11 words or so, you have very little opportunity to say anything about your business or event. Be sure to get your web address included!

### **TV**

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*Benefits:* In some rural markets, local TV stations have a captive audience that is far larger than print and radio combined.

Good visuals can show viewers how beautiful your farm is or how fun your festival looks.

*Drawbacks:* Self-produced ads can be hokey.

If you are not comfortable being on camera, this may not be the venue for you.

Ads can be produced without showing the farmer, but studies show that consumers want to connect a real person to their food.

### **Small publications (yearbooks, community theater playbills, etc)**

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*Benefits:* The audience appreciates your support of their community effort or cause.

These publications reach community minded readers.

*Drawbacks:* The ads are seen once and then never again. View these ads as donations rather than advertising.

### **Quarterly papers**

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*Benefits:* Specialty local publications on topics like healthy living or family activities can be a good venue for farm businesses.

A longer shelf life than daily papers.

*Drawbacks:* It is unclear how well read these papers are.

### **Farm guides**

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*Benefits:* These publications are dedicated to highlighting farming and all the positive attributes farming brings to the community.

They have long shelf life—consumers use them all season long to locate farm products and activities.

Usually a bargain—worth more than it costs.

*Drawbacks:* If they are not done well they can be static or difficult to read.

If inserted into local papers they run the risk of getting tossed with the local chain store circulars.

## **They're here! What do we do now?**

### **Greeting the customer**

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A good greeting by a well-organized and easily identifiable staff (wearing farm t-shirts and/or hats) is important in making your customers feel welcome. Some of your first time visitors may have gotten lost on the way and may feel frustrated. A friendly greeting tells the customer they are in the right place and puts them at ease.

### **Dealing with customer questions**

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Sometimes customers ask questions that have obvious answers, or that seem stupid to you. They are not really asking for an answer, they are giving you permission to talk to them. Rather than sounding frustrated or annoyed at the fiftieth time you are asked, "Is this fresh picked?" use the question as an opportunity to tell the customer what makes your farm special. "At our farm we get up before dawn to pick our produce. The cool morning temperatures mean the produce is going to be at its freshest and last much longer than something trucked in from far away."

Make sure that employees know the history of your farm and are able to explain your ideology and practices including safety measures. If you or an employee doesn't know the answer, say you will get it for them and be sure to follow through later that day with a phone call or email.

### **Create a sales-oriented environment**

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Visitors that are comfortable stay longer and spend more. Think of what makes you comfortable when you visit a farm or business. At a minimum provide:

- Clean toilets
- Fresh drinking water
- Shady spots for parents and children to sit
- A safe play area for children with farm-themed toys
- Clear and easy to navigate parking





*It takes  
3–4 times  
the effort to  
gain a new  
customer  
as it does  
to keep one  
you already  
have.*

## **Here are some suggestions for PYO farms and farmstands:**

### **PYO operations**

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- Post road signs that lead to your farm and clearly state your hours.
- Provide containers of varying sizes.
- Offer already-picked crops.
- Hire enough staff to answer questions, speed checkouts and carry customer purchases to cars.
- Make sure all staff are easily identifiable with farm t-shirts and/or hats.
- Develop a mailing list and web site and use them to announce upcoming crops or give out recipes.

### **Farmstands**

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- Post easy-to-see prices.
- Provide a choice of bulk and pre-bagged products.
- Place baskets and bags in a convenient place so customers can easily get them.
- Hire enough staff to answer questions, speed checkouts and carry customer purchases to cars.
- Make sure all staff are easily identifiable with farm t-shirts and/or hats.
- Use suggestive merchandising—placing complimentary products side-by-side.
- Offer gift baskets, gift wrapping, boxing and shipping.
- Develop a mailing list and web site and use them to announce upcoming crops or give out recipes<sup>3</sup>.

### **Building repeat customers**

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If your farm is well organized and well run and customers feel welcome and appreciated, you will get repeat business. But consider other techniques to get customers to come back. Incentive programs have potential. Some PYO farms offer “frequent picker” cards. You get the pounds you picked marked down each time you come and after you have picked the correct amount, you get a good discount on further picking. Offering different activities over the season (picking, festivals, workshops, demos) can keep people interested in your farm and what you do.

## **Evaluating your efforts**

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How will you know if all this is working?

Hopefully you will be too busy to have to think about this! But even successful operations benefit from customer feedback and tracking. Here are a few tools to consider:

- **A customer survey and raffle prize.** Consider creating a short survey (see example in the resources section at the end of the publication) that customers can fill out to win a monthly or weekly prize. The prize should be easy for you to ship. A gift certificate is great because it gets them to come back to your business! Make sure to state that the survey has to be filled out completely for customers to qualify to win. You need their contact information. And if you have an email newsletter, be sure to require that they give an email address and permission for you to send them info about the farm. You want to get both information on the usefulness of your advertising and the ability to market to them directly—they are your best audience!
- **Coupons.** Insert coupons into an ad or mailing and code them so you know where they came from. Track customer response. Understand that a 1% return rate is considered good (that’s only 50 coupons if your local paper has a circulation of 5,000) Be sure to post a clear expiration date on them! You don’t want to have to honor a three year old coupon because you forgot to have it expire.
- **Discounts.** Tell people in your radio ad to mention it for a special discount. Note the response. This allows you to track effectiveness and sales from year to year.
- **Collecting comments.** Train yourself and your staff to jot down offhand comments overheard by customers. Both positive and critical comments can help you adjust your business to be more welcoming to customers.

## Community relations

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Being a good neighbor starts with the property owners and residents that are near your farm but it should not end with them. Here are some tips on making your farm a valued member of the community and region:

- **Good neighbor relations.** Sometimes neighbors don't understand what it means to live near a farm. Invite them for a visit or to a special neighborhood open house. Give them your phone number. Invite the neighborhood children to see a newly born animal. Explain why you work all hours of the day and night and what the dust and noise is about. Think before you spread! Don't put manure down on a Friday afternoon before a holiday weekend. Help neighbors dig out of snowfalls.
- **Collaborations.** Think of the local businesses that sell products that might do well at your stand. Use good signage to point out the local products. Ask them to do the same for you.
- **Participate in the business community.** Educate other business owners about your farm. Join the Chamber of Commerce and get active in the business community. They are working hard to build the local economy and attract tourists. Your farm provides scenic value and agritourism opportunities. Spend time on community improvement projects to make your town look good.
- **Spend money locally.** You want people to spend dollars locally on your farm. You should

do the same. When you spend money at home and tell local businesses you are doing so, they remember you and will refer people to you. Recirculating dollars in the community is good for everyone. If you think you can save money driving 20 miles to the nearest MegaLoMart think of the costs of that trip: \$.38/mile for vehicle maintenance. The amount of fuel you use at today's prices. At least minimum wage for you and any other farm members who are not on the farm working during this trip. If you spend \$50 just to get there and back, are you still saving money?

- **Work with a 'buy local' campaign.** Many regions throughout the U.S. and Canada have 'buy local' campaigns for regional farming products. They are run by farming organizations, cooperative extension agencies, municipal or regional governments or non-profit organizations. If you are in the business of selling directly to the public or are creating an agritourism business contact these organizations to see what they have to offer. They work to raise awareness and sales of local farm products in their regions through print and radio advertising, comprehensive web sites or printed farm products guides, creating farm and food festivals and other public relations efforts. Some offer training and technical assistance or marketing advice. Membership is usually reasonable and participating makes it easier to network with other farming businesses and gives you visibility in the buy local campaign.

*“CISA’s Local Hero campaign has put more money in the hands of local farmers through educating the public about the importance of buying local farm products.”*

—Local woodlot owner and sawmill operator



*“The help and success of the ‘Be a Local Hero, Buy Locally Grown’ campaign has been invaluable. I could never have afforded this exposure without CISA’s help and their ongoing campaign to encourage people to buy local products.”*

—Local blueberry farmer

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#### **Protecting your marketing budget**

Marketing takes time and money. You should expect your marketing efforts to use 10–15% of your expenses. That’s significant. But why do so many people cut marketing budgets at the first sign of trouble? Because they aren’t sure it’s working.

There’s an old saying: “50% of your marketing budget is wasted. You just never know which 50%.” While it sounds clever and is partly true, if you have spent the time to develop good public and community relations and get customer feedback, you probably know what is working and what needs adjustment.

The most important thing to remember is: don’t cut your marketing budget at the first sign of trouble! If you are in the business of attracting people to your farm then you need to keep advertising and promoting—and even consider increasing your marketing efforts—if you are not sure they are working. That sounds like a crazy idea but people have short memories. If they are used to seeing and hearing your ads and then they don’t, they will forget you. Be consistent, persistent and positive. A business that has made a sincere effort to be a part of the community and offers a good product or service will have a greater chance of success than one that hasn’t.

Have you ever heard the phrase, “It is better to apologize than ask permission?” Well, this is *not* one of those times! If you are considering inviting the public onto your farm then you need to be prepared to address the various, though sometimes frustrating, entities that regulate what you do. If you don’t and something goes wrong you will be facing not only costly fines but a publicity nightmare and potential lawsuits.

## Chapter 6

### Legal considerations for agritourism ventures

Legal considerations fall into two broad categories: getting permits and following regulations.<sup>6</sup> Below we highlight some of the ways you will need to engage with local, state and federal officials about your farm’s agritourism activities. But first, a few words about regulators.

#### Dealing with regulators and inspectors

As a farmer you are used to being your own boss, setting your own hours and making your own plans. But even a ‘closed’ farm that never invites the public on site has dealt with a regulator from a public agency. So you are likely familiar with paperwork, regulations and bureaucracy.

Agritourism activities can create competing concerns. You are concerned with being able to do what you want to do to ensure the future of your farm. Inspectors and regulators are concerned with protecting the health and safety of the public, the community and the environment. Show them that you share their concerns through respectful communication and adherence to rules and regulations. This makes it more likely that you will gain the permission you need to do what you want to do.

Sometimes regulators can be brusque or confrontational. This is not the time to dig in your heels or try to skirt relevant rules and regulations! If you work with your inspectors you may gain a friend and ally. If you work around them you may gain a powerful enemy.

Give yourself a lot of time to deal with regulators. Many agencies are slow to render decisions or permits. Sometimes you need to appear before a town board to get permission and they need to post the agenda 30 days in advance. Arriving on their doorstep a week or two before you want to get started will not get you off on the right foot, especially if you try to push them to make a decision when they have procedures that need to be followed.

Sometimes regulations and regulators can be confusing. You may not get a clear answer at first, especially if you are the first person in your town or region to do what you are proposing. Be sure to ask plenty of questions and get copies of relevant policies for your files. If you can’t get a clear answer, keep asking to speak with other people until you find out who can give you the answer you want and who is authorized to give you permission.

Remember, regulations were written by lawyers, not people like you or me, and they can be very confusing. As always, be polite! A little courtesy goes a long way when dealing with regulators who may get badgered by the public nearly every day.

#### Permitting and Regulations

Here are some of the necessary regulations, permits and licenses that agritourism businesses must follow at the federal, state, and local level. Permits and licenses may have fees, some may have to be renewed yearly, and others will require inspection. It is important to research the requirements of a specific regulation and to be aware of the time required for approval.

##### 1. Federal

#### Compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)

Any time the general public enters farm property for a specific or ongoing event visitors with special needs must be accommodated. To get answers to general and technical questions about the ADA or to order technical assistance materials call 800-514-0301 (voice) or go to [www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm).

#### Federal H-2A Temporary Foreign Worker Program

Some farmers hire temporary workers from out of the country to work on the farm. The H-2A program permits employers to apply for non-immigrant alien workers to perform seasonal or temporary work. Applications must be filed with the appropriate U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Regional

<sup>6</sup> Issues of liability and insurance will be addressed in Chapter 7, Managing Risks.



Administrator (RA), Employment and Training Administration (ETA) and local office of the State Employment Service at least 45 calendar days before the first date on which workers are needed. For more information on this program visit [www.usda.gov/agency/oce/oce/labor-affairs/h2asumm.htm](http://www.usda.gov/agency/oce/oce/labor-affairs/h2asumm.htm).

## **2. State**

### **Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR)**

This agency lists a number of regulations pertaining to general farming in the following areas:

- Fairs
- Farm products/plant industries
- Pet food and feed
- Fertilizer/lime/compost
- Seeds, plants, vegetables
- Milk
- Land use
- Pesticides

To learn more about how the MDAR inspects and regulates farm businesses visit [www.mass.gov/agr/](http://www.mass.gov/agr/).

### **Agricultural Directional Signage Program**

An agricultural directional sign is a special highway sign that directs motorists to farms that are open to the public but not located on state highways. These blue signs feature the “Massachusetts grown ... and fresher!” logo, several icons for products the farm produces, a directional arrow and the name of the farm. If your farm is not in a high visibility location, an agricultural directional sign can help increase business. The farmer pays the entire cost of the sign, which can range from \$750–\$1,000. For more information visit [www.mass.gov/agr/markets/agritourism/signs.htm](http://www.mass.gov/agr/markets/agritourism/signs.htm).

### **Agricultural exemptions for construction of buildings on farmland**

Massachusetts law states that any materials or methods of construction cannot be unreasonably regulated nor is a special permit needed when the land is used for the primary purpose of agriculture. This includes expansion or reconstruction of existing structures such as barns. However, all buildings must pass local building, plumbing and electrical inspections. Also, no construction is exempt from local regulations for signage, setback, parking, and the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act. The text of this regulation (Chapter 40A, Section 3) can be found at [www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/40a-3.htm](http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/40a-3.htm).

### **Information about licenses, permits and other business regulation**

As a Massachusetts business, you have many obligations to licensing and permitting agencies and must address matters such as:

- Professional and trade licenses
- Environmental and natural resource regulations and permits
- Miscellaneous business and consumer protection regulation
- Health and safety regulation and licensing
- Local licensing requirements
- Certificates of compliance and certificates of good standing

Visit this site to learn more about these licenses, permits and requirements: [www.massdor.com/business/licpermit.html](http://www.massdor.com/business/licpermit.html)

### **Massachusetts tax and employer obligations**

The Massachusetts Department of Revenue has put together a comprehensive online guide to state tax and employer obligations, including what you need to know about unemployment insurance and workers’ compensation. Go to [www.massdor.com/business/doingbus.htm](http://www.massdor.com/business/doingbus.htm) to learn more.

### **Watershed Regulations**

There are statutes in Massachusetts that regulate activities in and around water resources. It is important to understand these regulations if activities take place nearby or within these watersheds. Here are some resources:

*The Watershed Chief for Western Massachusetts*  
Overseeing permitting and compliance activities in their respective basins is Robert J. McCollum, 413-755-2138.

*Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act Regulations*  
Visit [www.mass.gov/dep/brp/ww/regs.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dep/brp/ww/regs.htm) to learn more about state wetlands regulations.

*Massachusetts Recreational Use Statute*  
To read the text of the laws that regulate recreational use of Massachusetts waterways, visit [www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/21-17c.htm](http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/21-17c.htm)

*Department of Environmental Protection Western Regional Service Center*

A state agency responsible for protecting human health and the environment by ensuring clean air and water, the safe management and disposal of solid and hazardous wastes, the timely cleanup of hazardous waste sites and spills, and the



preservation of wetlands and coastal resources. For more information call 413-755-2214 or visit [www.mass.gov/dep/dephome.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dep/dephome.htm).

### Public Use of Land

This legal citation attempts to explain the liability issues faced by landowners who permit the public to use their land:

**Chapter 21: Section 17C** Public use of land for recreational, conservation, scientific educational and other purposes; landowner's liability limited; exception Section 17C.

(a) Any person having an interest in land including the structures, buildings, and equipment attached to the land, including without limitation, wetlands, rivers, streams, ponds, lakes, and other bodies of water, who lawfully permits the public to use such land for recreational, conservation, scientific, educational, environmental, ecological, research, religious, or charitable purposes without imposing a charge or fee therefore, or who leases such land for said purposes to the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof or to any nonprofit corporation, trust or association, shall not be liable for personal injuries or property damage sustained by such members of the public, including without limitation a minor, while on said land in the absence of willful, wanton, or reckless conduct by such person. Such permission shall not confer upon any member of the public using said land, including without limitation a minor, the status of an invitee or licensee to whom any duty would be owed by said person.

(b) The liability of any person who imposes a charge or fee for the use of his land by the public for the purposes described in subsection (a) shall not be limited by any provision of this section. The term "person" as used in this section shall be deemed to include the person having an interest in the land, his agent, manager, or licensee and shall include without limitation,

any governmental body, agency or instrumentality, nonprofit corporation, trust or association, and any director, officer, trustee, member, employee or agent thereof. A contribution or other voluntary payment not required to be made to use such land shall not be considered a charge or fee within the meaning of this section

### Animal Activities

The Massachusetts Department of Agriculture Resources, Bureau of Animal Health has recommendations for petting zoos and fairs where contact between animals and the public may occur. Some of these activities may require licensing and/or inspection by state or federal personnel. For a complete list of requirements and recommendations contact the Bureau of Animal Health at 617-626-1795 or the USDA Animal Inspection at 703-812-6645.

## 3. County

### Building inspection

The Building Commissioner at the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) covers all towns in Franklin County except for those that appoint their own. Contact your town hall to find out who is your building inspector.

### Zoning and permitted use of farmland

Agriculture is relatively restriction free from county and local building regulations. Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40A Section 3 refers specifically to agriculture in that no zoning ordinance or bylaw can unreasonably regulate or restrict the use of materials, or methods of construction of structures, regulated by the state building code, except in the case of a special event open to the general public. In that case a special permit is required as well as portable bathroom facilities and must be handicapped assessable. All renovations and new buildings



*“The regional planning organization has played a role in helping develop open space and recreational plans for the town and such things as scenic byways. Since these include elements that focus on supporting agriculture and tourism, they help us.”*



(closed-in structures) on farms are required to pass general inspection requirements for public health, electrical, plumbing and construction.

Here are a few examples of specific activities that require permits and/or inspection:

- Bed and breakfast establishments—if there are rooms for more than five people it is considered a hotel and a permit is required.
- Cabins fall under hotel designation.
- Haunted houses.
- Retreat centers.

#### **4. Towns**

Towns are often the first place you will need to go to inquire about permission for your proposed agritourism activity. Be courteous at Town Hall and things will go a lot smoother!

Town boards or agents that issue permits and/or inspect agritourism activities are:

- Board of Health
- Planning Board
- Zoning Board of Appeals
- Building Inspector
- Health Agent

If you are confused about who to contact in your town, the Massachusetts Municipal Association's site contains links to official city and town web sites and a searchable database to locate key local government phone numbers and addresses. [www.mma.org/](http://www.mma.org/).

You may also link to Commonwealth Communities on the [www.state.ma.us/cc/](http://www.state.ma.us/cc/) web site for resources on the 351 Massachusetts cities and towns provided by state agencies and official city/town web sites.

Agritourism activities are one way to try to reduce your farm's financial risk. Agritourism activities can increase income, even out your cash flow or provide opportunities to market your farms products and services. But this reduced financial risk comes with increased risk—liability—created by having visitors on your farm.

## Chapter 7

### Risk management

#### Reducing risks

Although you cannot eliminate risks, you can reduce them by

- Avoiding certain activities
- Making your operation as safe as possible
- Issuing liability waivers
- Selecting the appropriate legal structure for your business
- Buying insurance
- Learning and following good management rules about hiring, training and supervising employees

Here are some specific tips on certain kinds of liability risks and what you can do to reduce them:

#### Physical risks

- Post boundaries and safety rules
- Maintain buildings and structures and demolish unused, dilapidated outbuildings
- Provide adequate and safe parking
- Create signs that tell visitors how to interact with livestock
- Provide clean restrooms and handwashing facilities
- Store chemicals safely
- Store farm equipment and implements away from visitors
- Guard against fire and have a fire plan and fire extinguishers
- Block off bodies of water and do not allow anyone near them without someone from your staff

#### Product risks

- Follow public health and safety regulations when creating products for sale or offering samples to customers
- Understand direct-marketing regulations
- Purchase and maintain product liability insurance

#### Environmental risks

- Learn and follow local and state land use, watershed and wetland regulations
- Maintain appropriate pesticide certification

#### Legal risks

- Understand the legal constraints and regulations regarding the specific activities you want to do
- Make sure your business operates according to all applicable general business regulations
- Engage in humane animal care

#### Animal risks

- Prevent hand/mouth activities like eating, drinking and smoking and carrying toys and pacifiers in areas of animal contact
- Confine 'viewing animals' and allow only limited contact
- Choose only healthy and friendly animals for public contact
- Keep all vaccinations current, including rabies
- Keep on top of manure and fly and pest control
- Consider smaller livestock like sheep and goats for viewing; they are lighter if they step on a guest and don't have top front teeth to bite with
- Keep your dog in a kennel at all times when guests are present. Even well-behaved dogs can be unpredictable.

#### Liability and insurance

Liability simply means legal responsibility. If you own and operate an agritourism enterprise, you have the legal responsibility to create a safe environment for your visitors. In order to enjoy the financial rewards of agritourism you need to have a thoughtful approach to reducing the risks that come with inviting guests onto your property.

In addition to reducing liability risks (as seen above), adequate insurance coverage is essential for the protection of your farm, business and family. Insurance needs vary according to the activity and the degree of public participation. The highest risks are engaged when a fee is charged for an activity or a product is sold. However, free



admission or limiting activities do not eliminate risk potential. A meeting with a lawyer and/or insurance agent will help you figure out which type of policy best protects you. It will also help you identify further steps to take to reduce risk. You may already have insurance coverage for your farm. Assume that any new operation is *not covered* by your existing policy. Visit with your agent to discuss getting coverage for your agritourism activities. The best rates for liability coverage are often available through agriculture organizations or associations because they take advantage of lower group rates.

How your business is incorporated may provide additional protection from personal liability. Limited liability corporations or companies (LLC), partnerships (LLP), cooperatives, or corporations transfer personal liability to the corporation thus limiting the liability of the owner of the assets. Sole proprietorship offers no protection from liability beyond what is covered in your insurance plan.

The USDA Risk Management Agency offers 'adjusted gross revenue' insurance, called AGR-Lite, to farmers in some parts of the U.S. including all New England states.

The plan provides protection against low revenue due to unavoidable natural disasters and market fluctuations that affect income during the insurance year. Most farm-raised crops, animals, and animal products are eligible for protection.

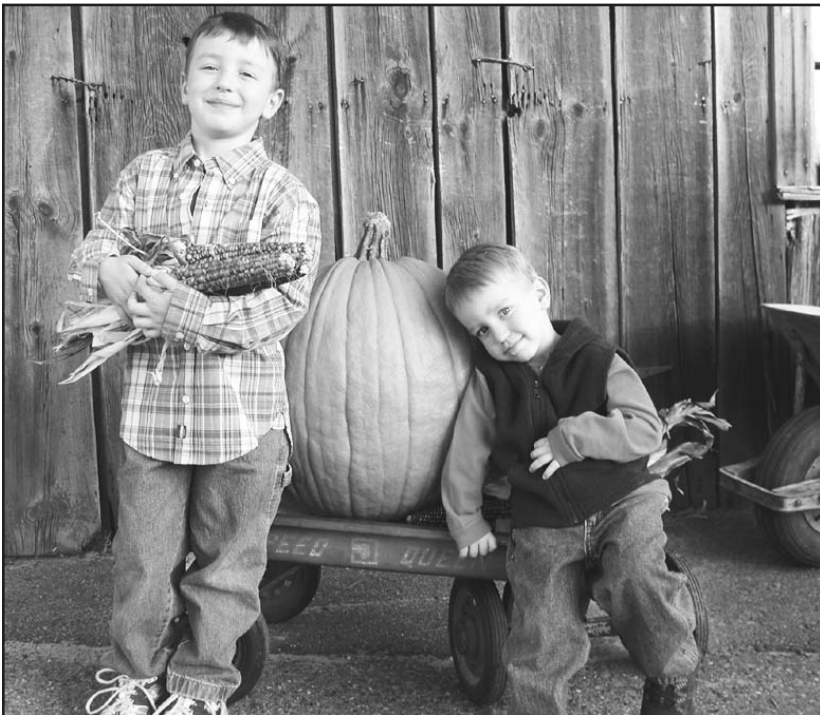
You can download and print out a fact sheet on the AGR-Lite program here: [www.rma.usda.gov/pubs/2003/PAN-1667-07.pdf](http://www.rma.usda.gov/pubs/2003/PAN-1667-07.pdf)

## Ten questions to ask your agent about your insurance coverage

In the following list, wherever the words "direct marketing" appear, add the type of enterprises that are being considered, such as beef, vegetables, fishing, hunting, recreation, education, etc.

1. Does my farm liability policy cover my direct farm marketing sales, such as at my roadside stand, or are they excluded as a "separate business" for which I need to buy a commercial policy?
2. Is there a limit to the amount or type of direct farm sales I can make and still have them considered as incidental to my farming operation?
3. Even if my farm liability policy covers my direct marketing operation are there reasons why it would be better to obtain a commercial business policy?
4. Does my farm liability policy cover any sales made off the farm such as at farmers' market or direct deliveries to stores or restaurants?
5. If my farm policy does not cover sales at the farmers' market then what type of policy should I buy for this purpose? Is product liability insurance available or necessary for what I sell?
6. As part of my direct marketing operation some customers pay to visit the farm to engage in recreation and other customers pick their own produce. Does my farm liability policy apply or do these activities present special insurance needs?
7. As part of my direct marketing business, sometimes other family members or employees make deliveries of produce to customers using farm vehicles. Does my automobile insurance cover such trips and if not what type of policy do I need?
8. When buying insurance for buildings and equipment, should I set the value at "replacement cost value" or "depreciated value"? Is there a co-insurance provision in my policy which requires me to pay part of any loss?
9. Is my policy a "claims and occurrences" policy and if so when does coverage end and what happens if I change insurers?
10. Are you a general agent working for one company or an independent agent?

Printed with permission from Neil D. Hamilton, author of *The Legal Guide to Direct Farm Marketing*, Drake University.





“Most people don’t come from rural areas so the whole experience, the starry night sky, quiet, wildlife, birds, amphibians in the pond are all new to them. Children are free to walk around. It’s a place that invites trust. The whole experience is an education to most visitors.”

## Conclusion

As you now know, agritourism can be as simple or as complicated as you want it to be. The farmer quoted above has created vacation cabins on his property and allows visitors to participate in farm life. To him, this is more than enough for a rich and rewarding experience for his guests, many of whom arrive completely unfamiliar with the night sky, life in a pond and the rhythms of farm life.

Your personal vision of agritourism on your farm is unique to your personal values, your family’s goals, the land and buildings on your farm, your location and your farming desires. Thoughtful planning is essential to turning your vision into reality. We hope that this manual has been helpful to you as you have explored your ideas.

The resources page below will lead you to further reading on agritourism. Be sure to look around your community for organizations that help small businesses with training and technical assistance. Consult with your “buy local” farming organization. They have a wealth of experience and information gleaned from your community.

As you create your agritourism business, remember to take time to not only create your facilities and programs but to evaluate them and revise them. Keep the needs of your customers in mind at all times and you will have an easier time creating a popular—and profitable—destination.



For further reading on agritourism trends and planning, consult these documents:

## Resources

Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), a regional farming organization serving the Connecticut River valley of western Massachusetts. Extensive expertise in buy local campaigns, agritourism, technical assistance for farmers and more. Publisher of a comprehensive *Farm Products Guide* and web site, [www.buylocalfood.com](http://www.buylocalfood.com). Call 413-665-7100 to learn more about CISA’s services for farmers and consulting opportunities for other organizations.

*Franklin County Agritourism Study*, by Christine Serrentino and Elizabeth Ahearn. *Field to Table*, for Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture, 2005. Call CISA at 413-665-7100 to order.

Agricultural Marketing Resource Center online guide to agritourism studies, papers, manuals and farm web sites. A great free online resource: [www.agmrc.org/agmrc/commodity/agritourism/agritourism/](http://www.agmrc.org/agmrc/commodity/agritourism/agritourism/).

*Agritourism and Nature Tourism in California: a How-to Manual for Farmers and Ranchers*, University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Small Farm Center, Davis, CA. 513-0752-8136 or [www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/docs/forsale\\_Resources.html](http://www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/docs/forsale_Resources.html).

*Considerations for Agritainment Enterprise for Georgia?* by the University of Georgia Agriculture and Applied Economics Department: [www.agecon.uga.edu/~caed/Agritainmentpdf.pdf](http://www.agecon.uga.edu/~caed/Agritainmentpdf.pdf).

*Kentucky Agri-Tourism Working Group Issue White Paper: Establishment of an Agri-tourism Industry in Kentucky*. Kentucky Department of Agriculture: [www.thinkwestkentucky.com/agritourism/agtourism\\_whitepaper.pdf](http://www.thinkwestkentucky.com/agritourism/agtourism_whitepaper.pdf).



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## Customer Survey Example

Use or modify this survey to gather information about your customers. It can help you identify what are your most effective marketing tools.

### Customer Survey

Please help us! We want to know how you heard about us. Spend a minute or two filling out this survey and we will enter you into our monthly drawing for a \$25 gift certificate to our farm! You must answer all the questions to be eligible for the drawing.

How many people are traveling with you today?

☐ 1-2    ☐ 3-5    ☐ More than 5

How far did you travel to get to our farm?

☐ under 10 miles    ☐ 10-20 miles    ☐ over 20 miles

Is this your first visit to our farm?    ☐ Yes    ☐ No

If not, when was the last time you were here and what did you come for?

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How did you first learn of our farm? Please check all that apply:

☐ Brochure    ☐ Poster or flyer    ☐ Our web site    ☐ Web search engine

☐ Newspaper ad. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Central City Gazette    ☐ Pennypincher

☐ Bulletin    ☐ Entertainment Outlook

☐ Radio commercial on    ☐ WERT    ☐ WHUT

☐ TV commercial on    ☐ Channel 6    ☐ Channel 32

☐ Other. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

What did you come here to do on the farm today?

☐ PYO berries    ☐ Farm festival    ☐ Pick up produce at farm stand    ☐ Nature trail walk

☐ Fishing derby    ☐ Other. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

What do you wish we had on our farm?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for filling out our survey! We will mail you your gift certificate if you win!

By filling out this survey you give us permission to add you to our mailing list and monthly email newsletter list so we can send you special invitations and notices of events on our farm.





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