

Targeting School Groups for Agritainment Enterprises:

Summary of a Schoolteacher
Survey in Tennessee



Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Survey Sample

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

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

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

Market Potential

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Price Determination

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scheduling School Field Trips

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

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

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

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

Important Field Trip Components

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

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

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

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

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

Table 10. Percent of Teachers Who Use Various Criteria to Select Field Trips (figures represent the percent of teachers in a particular grade level who use certain criteria in selecting a field trip)			
Grade Level	Selection Criteria¹		
	Curriculum	Grade Level	Availability/Interest
Kindergarten	59%	35%	0%
First	55%	36%	9%
Second	63%	25%	13%
Third	67%	17%	0%
Fourth	17%	0%	33%
Fifth	50%	0%	50%
Total	55%	26%	10%

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

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

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

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

Marketing Agritainment Enterprises to Schoolteachers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Activities and Facilities Needed

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

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

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

Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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