

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Agritourism



Chapter Overview

As you begin to explore the opportunities that may exist for agritourism on your farming operation, it is important to understand the concepts, background and trends surrounding the agritourism industry. To help you develop this understanding, this chapter will

- Define agritourism
- Discuss potential target markets for agritourism enterprises
- Describe the history of agritourism
- Discuss agritourism in the United States and in Tennessee

What Is Agritourism?

Agritourism — also called agritainment, agricultural tourism, agrotourism or farm tourism — has several definitions. In 2003, members of the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative steering committee defined agritourism as

An activity, enterprise or business that combines primary elements and characteristics of Tennessee agriculture and tourism and provides an experience for visitors that stimulates economic activity and impacts both farm and community income.

The committee also included the following list of enterprises that usually meet the definition:

- Agriculture-related museums
- Agriculture-related festivals and fairs
- Century Farms
- Corn-maze enterprises
- Farmers markets
- On-farm tours
- On-farm retail markets
- On-farm vacations
- On-farm festivals and fairs
- On-farm petting zoos
- On-farm fee-fishing
- On-farm horseback riding
- On-farm bed and breakfasts
- Pick-your-own farms
- Wineries

Although other definitions exist as well, most definitions of agritourism have a common theme that combines elements of the tourism industry with elements of the agriculture industry. This common theme involves bringing members of

the public to farms. The ultimate goal of an agritourism enterprise is often to increase farm income by providing education and/or recreation to consumers.

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Agritourism Target Audiences

Many types of consumers are potential target audiences (or markets) for agritourism enterprises. The types of consumers vary as widely as the types of activities that may be offered at an operation. Target audiences for agritourism operators, in very general terms, may include but are not limited to

- School teachers/school groups
- Youth civic and church groups
- Adult civic and church groups
- Garden clubs
- Business leaders
- Birthday-party planners
- Brides and grooms-to-be
- Married couples
- Local families with children
- Families on vacation
- Business travelers
- Fair and festival goers
- Teenagers
- History buffs
- Wine connoisseurs
- Hunters
- Wildlife watchers
- Landscape and wildlife photographers
- Outdoor enthusiasts (hikers, bikers, boaters, rafters, etc.)
- Equine enthusiasts
- Travel/tour firm

Each target audience may be looking for something different at an agritourism enterprise. One may be looking for an educational program while another may be looking for a relaxing or romantic getaway. Still other target audiences may be looking for recreational activities, entertainment, an event location (for business or organizational meetings, family reunions, birthday parties, weddings, receptions or other events), an authentic farm experience or a source of direct-from-the-farm products.



History of Agritourism

Agritourism has been around for a lot longer than one might think. The history of agritourism is discussed in the following excerpt from a University of Tennessee Extension publication, *Considering an Agritainment Enterprise in Tennessee?*¹

Agritainment (agritourism and entertainment farming enterprises) has an extensive history in the United States. Farm-related recreation and tourism can be traced back to the late 1800s, when families visited farming relatives in an attempt to escape from the city's summer heat. Visiting the country became even more popular with the widespread use of the automobile in the 1920s. Rural recreation gained interest again in the 1930s and 1940s by folks seeking an escape from the stresses of the Great Depression and World War II. These demands for rural recreation led to widespread interest in horseback riding, farm petting zoos and farm nostalgia during the 1960s and 1970s. Farm vacations, bed and breakfasts, and commercial farm tours were popularized in the 1980s and 1990s.

The demand for a slower-paced farm experience, once supplied by rural family members, seems to be somewhat difficult to satisfy today because of the four- and five-generation gap between farm and non-farm citizens.

¹Holland, Rob and Kent Wolfe. *Considering an Agritainment Enterprise in Tennessee?* University of Tennessee Extension publication PB1648. Available online at <http://www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/pbfiles/pb1648.pdf>. Accessed March 10, 2005.

Agritourism Today

Today, agritourism continues to be an opportunity to increase income for some farmers and agribusinesses around the nation. Some producer organizations, state and federal government agencies, university Extension programs, state tourism offices, professional consultants and the media are recognizing agritourism as an industry and devoting resources to address it.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that more than 62 million people age 16 years and older visited farms during a one-year period in 2000 and 2001.² This does not count the numerous children and youth under 16 years of age who visited farms during this time period. One estimate suggests approximately 20 million children under the age of 16 also visited farms during the year, making the total number of visitors to farms approximately 82 million.³

The USDA also investigated the reasons people made trips to farms. Responses included “enjoy rural scenery,” “learning where food comes from,” “visit family or friends,” “watch or participate in farm activities,” “purchase agricultural products,” “pick fruit or produce,” “hunt or fish,” or “spend a night.” Responses are summarized in the table below. The reason most often given, by a total of 53 million respondents, was to “enjoy rural scenery.” “Learning where food comes from” and “visit family or friends” received the next highest numbers of responses with 44 million and 40 million respectively.

Reason for Trip	Number of Responses* (millions)	Percent of Respondents
Enjoy rural scenery	53	86
Learning where food comes from	44	71
Visit family or friends	40	63
Watch/participate in farm activities	41	64
Purchase agricultural products	27	39
Pick fruit or produce	27	43
To hunt and fish	16	27
Spend a night	19	8
*Sum of “important” and “somewhat important” responses.		

The study found that farm visitors traveled an average distance of 80 miles, and responses ranged from zero to 1,000 miles. Farm visitors reportedly spent an average of \$45 on the trip, including gas and other travel expenses, with trip costs ranging from zero to \$450.

Among farm visitors and rural sightseers responding to the survey, the average respondent is described as being in the early 40s with a median family size of three. The average family income is approximately \$50,000. The average respondent has at least some college education with approximately one-third of respondents having at least a bachelor’s degree. They typically work a 40-hour week.

A survey of Tennessee agritourism enterprises was conducted in the fall of 2003 as part of the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative. Results from the study are available in UT Extension publication PB1747, *A Snapshot of Tennessee Agritourism*. The following is a reprint of the publication’s Executive Summary.

A total of 210 existing agritourism enterprises were successfully contacted in the fall of 2003 to participate in a survey by the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative. The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics of the agritourism industry in Tennessee and to identify issues and obstacles faced by agritourism enterprises that may be addressed through research, teaching and outreach.

Approximately 80 percent of enterprises offer visitors more than one attraction, and 60 percent of enterprises are open only seasonally. The operators identified advertising, marketing and promotions as the most important factors of success for their enterprises.

Additional information was learned about typical agritourism

²USDA Forest Service, Interagency National Survey Consortium. *National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NRSE)*. 2000-2003. Visit www.srs.fs.fed.us/trends for more information.

³Maetzold, Jim. National Alternative Enterprise and Agritourism Leader, USDA/NRCS. Personal Correspondence. March 9, 2005.

enterprise customers. Survey respondents reported that 85 percent of total visitors to their enterprises were from in state. Half of visitors were reported as being one-time visitors to enterprises. Ten percent of total visitors in 2002 were part of organized group visits. Half of the visitors in groups were part of school groups, and another 15 percent of visitors in groups were part of travel or tour groups.

Agritourism has a significant impact on Tennessee's economy. Respondents accounted for approximately 3.5 million visitors in 2002. Customers spent up to \$400 per visit at agritourism enterprises in 2002 with 30 percent of enterprises earning between \$1 and \$10 per visitor. Annual gross sales for enterprises in 2002 ranged from \$0 to more than \$1 million. Enterprises accounted for a significant number of full- and part-time jobs both year-round and seasonally. Approximately 63 percent of respondents had plans to expand their operation in the next three years.

The inventory also provided information on the issues and obstacles faced by agritourism operators and identified topics in need of research, education and outreach. Survey respondents reported that they have the most difficulty on average in 'promoting their enterprises' and 'finding and hiring qualified employees.' They also experience 'some difficulty' with 'liability insurance,' 'identifying markets,' 'signage,' 'preparing business plan' and 'financing issues.' Approximately one-third of enterprise operators identified 'advertising, marketing and promotions' issues as being an area where service is needed. Approximately 11 percent of respondents reported that 'money and funding' was needed. The relatively large number of respondents who did not know answers to several key benchmark evaluation measures also indicated a need for education and outreach.

Chapter Review

Understanding the basics of the agritourism industry will help you begin to explore the opportunities that may exist for your operation. Some key points to remember are as follows:

- Agritourism has several definitions, but most combine elements of the tourism industry with elements of the agricultural industry by bringing consumers to farms.
- The ultimate goal of an agritourism enterprise is often to increase farm income by filling customer needs for education and recreation.
- Many different target audiences (or markets) exist for agritourism enterprises. Different audiences have various reasons for seeking out an agritourism operation.
- The concept of agritourism dates back to the late 1800s and continues to evolve today.

Additional Resources

Annual Economic Impact Reports from the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development are available online at <http://www.state.tn.us/tourdev/reports>.

The **USDA Forest Service, Recreation, Wilderness, Urban Forest, and Demographic Trends Research Group** has information available online at <http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/trends/>.

The results of the **2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation-Tennessee** are available online at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/01fhw/fhw01-tn.pdf>.

The **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service** provides information about the agritourism industry, including success stories, on their Web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/ress/altenterprise/index.html>.

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