Best Management Practices in Agritourism

Best Management Practices for an agritourism business include: 1) providing an authentic farm or ranch experience, 2) providing an educational experience, 3) providing excellent customer service, 4) providing adequate public facilities, 5) maintaining a safe and accessible environment, 6) creating good community relations, and 7) planning for your financial future.

When starting an agritourism business or assessing your existing operation, consult the available resources (see backside) and consider the following best management practices:

- **Authentic Farm or Ranch Experience**
  An agritourism business can be defined as any person, farm, or corporation actively engaged in the operation, management, or promotion of an agriculturally-related tourism business open to the public. This business provides visitors with an educational experience aside from one that is solely commercial. It is important to keep in mind that your farm/ranch is often the “face of farming and ranching” in your community, region, or state. A product you offer to visitors may be the experience of farm or ranch living. It is also important to understand what aspects of agriculture your local associations (agricultural, tourism, and marketing) emphasize in your region so that you can develop your own niche in coordination with other farms and attractions nearby.

- **Educational Experience**
  Farms and ranches can offer an agriculturally-oriented educational experience suitable for different ages. Food and fiber production, land stewardship, and history of agriculture are common topics that visitors enjoy learning about. Another way to diversify your operation and educate guests maybe on-property recreational activities (e.g., fishing, hunting, trail riding, cross-country skiing, or hiking).

- **Customer Service**
  This should be an integral part of your business planning. Training your staff to interact with customers in an appropriate way will ensure a safe and high quality experience for customers. It also ensures these customers will return and tell other potential customers about your business.

- **Adequate Public Facilities**
  Your farm/ranch needs to have sufficient capacity (staff and infrastructure) to provide basic services such as parking, transportation, signage, customer assistance, education, and roads. In order to maintain a safe and customer friendly business, provision of services and facilities like restrooms becomes necessary.

- **Safe and Accessible Environment**
  You should ensure that your property and facilities are maintained and in compliance with zoning, health, food safety, and environmental regulations. It is useful as well to create a risk management plan for your farm/ranch. In addition, depending on your type of business, consider compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which mandates equal customer access to certain facilities (entrances, exits, and bathrooms).

- **Community Relations**
  To create good community relations, it is important to regularly provide opportunities for organized groups and individuals in your community to visit your property (e.g., schools and business associations).

- **Planning for your Financial Future**
  Regularly review your business plan and appropriately add value (price) to all farm/ranch services, products, and experiences in order to provide for the long-term sustainability of your business.
The following is a listing of available resources related to best management practices in agritourism:

### State Resources
Your State’s: Department or Agency of Agriculture, State Agritourism Organization, Department of Marketing or Tourism, University Cooperative Extension Service, and directories from the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils (http://www.rcdnet.org/), and Natural Resources Conservation Service (http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/)

### Authentic Experience
National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations

### On-Farm/Ranch Education
Agriculture in the Classroom
http://www.agclassroom.org

Farm-Based Education Association
http://www.farmbasededucation.org

### Customer Service
Agritourism in Focus a Guide for Tennessee Farmers
Chapter on ‘Customer Service’

University of California Small Farm Program
On-farm Customer Relations
http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/agritourism/factsheets/factsheet2

### Financial Planning
Recreation Finance program
This program prints out reports of gross income, net income, visitation, cash flow and overhead.
http://naturetourismfinance.tamu.edu/

Agri-Business Council of Oregon: Agritourism Workbook
Section on Financial Considerations and Business Plan
http://www.aglink.org/agbook/agritourism_workbook.php

Small Business Development Center
http://www.sba.gov/content/small-business-development-centers-sbdcs

### Health and Safety Guidelines
National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (NIOSH)
http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/agriculture/
Toll-Free: 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)
TTY: (888) 232-6348

NIOSH Agricultural Research Centers
http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/agctrhom.html

National Safety Council
Farm safety & workplace fact sheets
(scroll down for Agricultural Safety)
http://www.nsc.org/news_resources/Resources/Pages/SafetyHealthFactSheets.aspx
800-621-7615

The National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety
Under Resources
http://www.marshfieldclinic.org/nfmc/

Food Safety for Agritourism, University of Vermont Extension
http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism/?Page=agfoodsafety.html

Farm Animals & Visitors Public Health & Safety Tips for Animal/People Interaction” Vermont Department of Health
http://www.healthvermont.net/family/animals/formanimals.pdf

### Accessibility
Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act
800-514-0301 (voice)
800-514-0383 (TTY)
http://www.ada.gov

Agri-Business Council of Oregon: Agri-Tourism Workbook
Section on Barriers and Access Considerations
http://www.aglink.org/agbook/agritourism_workbook.php