Agritourism is the business of establishing farms as travel destinations for educational and recreational purposes. Driven by consumer interest, farm businesses are incorporating a wide range of innovative activities including on-farm direct marketing, entertainment, farm accommodations, outdoor recreation, and educational programming. These activities can also help improve the understanding between farmers and non-farm neighbors and promote appreciation of agriculture within the community. Since agritourism may represent an entirely new element of a farm’s business model and may include new products or enterprises that require hospitality and service, agritourism operators will need new approaches to marketing.

Developing an updated marketing plan that includes the activities needed to address agritourism opportunities requires you to consider and evaluate several factors, including:

**PRODUCT | PRICING | PLACE | PROMOTION**

**PRODUCT: POSITIONING YOUR FARM AND RANCH FOR AGRITOURISM ACTIVITIES**

**REVIEW** what you can offer: include a set of enterprises, experiences and events that are well suited to your current operation and interests.

- Carefully consider how much customer interaction and new investments you can make or want to make.

- For example, you can choose to either have a roadside stand to sell fruit, a pick-your-own operation where visitors will spend more time or a cider-making class where visitors may spend a half day learning a new skill. Each of these choices requires a different set of facilities, skills and staff, and will attract different types of visitors.

- Make sure that you “tell your story” effectively to your visitors. Your identity is part of the product that you are offering. Visitors are interested in your production practices and how your farm or ranch is unique.

**ASSESS** demand: How much interest do you perceive for the type of agritourism site you want to be? This may require discussions with tourism professionals in your area or state, secondary research on similar sites in other locations and using existing research from academic, industry and government partners.
**REALIZE** two agritourism businesses in different parts of the country face different market conditions.

- For example, visitors place a much higher value on entertainment and event style agritourism (e.g. wine tours, farm dinners, etc.) in Central California than they do for the same activity in the Northern Plains.
- In our research on the Western US, we found agritourists in the Southwest and Central Rocky Mountain States are less price sensitive than those who visit the Northern Plains and Central California.
- In terms of activities, frequent agritourism travelers are less price sensitive when participating in outdoor recreation agritourism.

**CONSIDER** adjusting your prices to match differences you might expect among your visitors.

- If there are peak times when you expect many visitors, you can charge more at those times, and that strategy may even help even the flow of visitors at busy times.
  - For example, fall weekends are busy times for corn mazes, so set prices relatively higher and offer steep discounts for weekdays (as a cost effective alternative).
- Also, you can always lower prices with discounts, so set prices high enough to meet your revenue goals, and then, use promotional discounts to drive the type of business you want.
  - For example, if you want to promote youth education, you can offer steep discounts to class tours.
  - Or, if your mission is to support Veterans, you can offer a discount to current or former military personnel.

**PLACE: HOW YOUR REGION AND LOCATION WITHIN YOUR AREA INFLUENCE YOUR MARKET**

**EXPLORE** the spending patterns of visitors in your area or visit similar experiences.

- Much of this information can be compiled from online searches of fee schedules from similar operations in your area, or in an entirely different part of the country.
  - A listing of state-based agritourism networks is available at: [https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/agritourism/agritourism-checklists](https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/agritourism/agritourism-checklists)
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**DIFFERENTIATE** according to your visitors’ place of origin. You have visitors in your backyard (nearby towns) and from far away, and they may have different expectations and pay different prices.

- Our research found higher revenues for those sites near high income cities, so do not overlook visitors you can recruit from your urban neighbors, and find ways to strengthen linkages to those markets (those selling direct in urban food markets have a great advantage here).
- Travelers in the area for vacations or business may have time to fill and be looking for other recreational opportunities.
  - Do you know what types of traffic come to your area?
  - Are you near scenic byways, historical sites or other attractions that bring visitors through your area? Do you have a means to gain their business?
PROMOTION: RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IS KEY AND FREE!

PROMOTE through relationships with those who already have the eyes and ears of your visitors. At one level, you can use public relations, news stories and host free events to gain the attention of media and local leaders in your area who can give referrals.

- For those far away who may not know about you, explore ways to gain their attention while visiting nearby cities, state parks, forests and beaches.
  » Perhaps develop partnerships with your local visitor’s center, hotel staff or staff at nearby attractions.

- At another level, use social media to drive traffic. Word of mouth marketing is key and the visitors you have may be happy to share pictures and stories from their visit.
  » Make it easy for them to do so with photo opportunities or staged “picture sites”, provide free postcards they can send to friends back home, or suggest online platforms to share their photos with friends.

RESOURCES FOR EVALUATING DEMAND AND MARKET PLANNING FOR AGRITOURISM

Developing a Marketing Plan

1. Agritourism in Focus: A Guide for Tennessee Farmers
   a. Marketing

2. Promotional Resources
   a. MarketMaker-listing across 20 states, including agritourism sites
   b. Farm Stay USA-comprehensive listing of U.S. Farm Stay Association
   c. Ag Marketing Resources Center-listing of US-wide networks
   d. The website calagtour.org includes a search for agritourism sites in California

3. Developing your Farm Experience-Farm Stay USA Business Guide (only accessible to members of Farm Stay USA), includes multiple resources, including the Farm Stay Checklist and Feasibility Worksheet
   a. Farm Stay Checklist – Useful planning even for those not offering accommodations
   b. Feasibility Worksheet-Early Sections help you Frame your Plan

4. Marketing Strategies for Agritourism Operations

Understanding How your Market is Defined by your Region and Location

How to Cater your Agritourism Enterprise to Travelers: Exploring Differences in Traveler Demand in the Western U.S.

Mapping the Western U.S. Agritourism Industry: How do Travel Patterns Vary by Location?

Agritourism in Colorado: A Closer Look at Regional Trends

Worksheets

1. Potential Agritourism Enterprises
2. Family Business Partner Assessment
3. Community Resource Worksheet
4. Farm Ranch Work Calendar
5. Example Task Analysis
6. Risk Identification Exercise
7. Risk Assessment and Management
8. Sample Inspection and Repair Checklists
9. The Servicescape
10. Strategic Marketing Plan

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