



Farm Tour and Agritourism Guide

Written and compiled by ASAP staff with expertise from Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, NCDA&CS, and the Regional Farm Tour Learning Community.

Agritourism is a way of sharing your farm story with the community. Opening your farm to visitors offers the opportunity to engage people in the discussion of local food production and the importance of family farms in our region, as well as diversify your farm marketing and income. This guide is designed to help you determine if agritourism is a good fit for your farm operation, as well as offer resources and strategies to ensure it is a good experience for you and your farm visitors.

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Getting Started: Is Agritourism Right for My Farm?

Welcoming visitors to your farm is only a good opportunity if it is a right fit for your farm and operation. Here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- ❖ Do I enjoy interacting with the public?
- ❖ What are my goals and expectations for opening my farm to visitors?
- ❖ What is my timeline for achieving these goals?
- ❖ What resources, skills, and facilities does my farm have to get started?
- ❖ What resources do we need to develop?
- ❖ What costs we are willing to incur in getting started?

Evaluating Your Time and Resources to Determine if Your Effort is Worth the Gain

Create a timeline with specific tasks leading up to the tour/event to give yourself a realistic look at the time and resources involved. Here are questions to consider:

- What will you gain in exchange for your time (on-farm sales that day, new customers, etc.)?
- Are there specific people you would like to invite to your farm (potential buyers, friends, church members, neighbors, local club members, etc.)?
- Does your insurance cover visitors to your farm? There are risks in opening your farm to the public. Do you have the time and resources to ensure, evaluate, and mitigate those risks?
- How will you balance other weekend duties such as selling at the farmers market, daily farm chores, or off-farm work? Will you need to hire or recruit others to help?
- Are there other ways to generate revenue the day of the tour in addition to selling your farm products?
- How can you engage with visitors to build long term relationships and expand your customer base? How will you share your farm/family story? Do you have materials for visitors to take home (i.e. rack cards, brochures, a list of where to find your farm products, stickers, farm apparel, coupons or promotions of farm offerings and events)?



Benefits of Agritourism and Farm Tours

Why other Appalachian Grown Farms participate:

- ❖ Increase exposure for the farm and business
- ❖ Raise awareness of what is produced locally and promoting what is "local"
- ❖ Expose more people to local food and farms
- ❖ Market products and other farm offerings like special events, festivals, and lodging
- ❖ Reach new customers and turn occasional customers into farm "fans"
- ❖ Provide an education and outreach opportunity to the public
- ❖ Sell product
- ❖ Drive traffic to the farm and increase customer base
- ❖ Connect with the local community

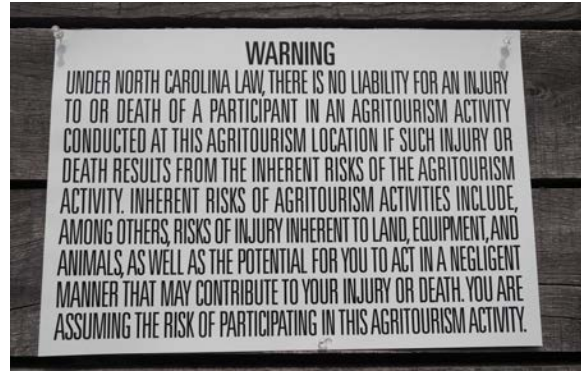
Managing Risk and Reducing Hazards on Your Farm

- Brainstorm and survey potential hazards on your farm. Invite a friend or neighbor to walk your property to help identify risks and hazards you may have overlooked.
- Identify and minimize potential hazards, using signage and flagging to close off areas or structures on your farm.
- Move animals that may be dangerous, or scared of visitors, to areas closed off to the public.
- Create an emergency plan and make sure cell phones or radios are on hand throughout the tour. Have a first aid kit on site and ensure all staff and volunteers know the emergency plan. If you do not have cell service make certain all staff and volunteers know where the closest phones are.
- Have a rain plan. Where will people go if it suddenly starts raining? Will you have 'rainy day' activities? Will these activities require materials not normally on your farm?
- Make a list of rules specific to your farm and share them with staff and volunteers to cover with visitors. Rules can be framed in a positive way, but be certain to reiterate those important to safety (don't stand behind the donkey, pick up the rooster, climb on the tractor, etc.).
- Do you have the insurance coverage needed to protect you and your visitors? Talk with your insurance agent about what your policy



covers and what supplemental coverage you might need depending on your operation and planned activities. If your agent has not been to your farm in a while, invite him/her out to see what you have been doing, and how your activities/tours will flow. Each year review your insurance policy and tell your agent what agritourism ventures you are planning and implementing. The more they know, the better they are able to protect you.

- ❑ The North Carolina Limited Liability Law was designed to protect farms by making tour goers and farm visitors aware of the inherent risks and hazards of agritourism activities on your farm through posted and visible warning signs. This statute has specific guidelines to follow and does not protect you from liability if you are negligent or fail to take steps to remove hazards on your property. This law is not a substitution for insurance, but hopefully a tool for reducing unwarranted litigation. Plan ahead and consider getting professional and legal expertise to assess your farm's individual risks and insurance needs. For a full explanation of the Limited Liability Law and how to use and obtain liability warning signs go to <http://www.ncagr.gov/markets/agritourism/laws.htm>.



Setting up Your Farm

Signage - Set out directional signs at major intersections or critical turns, as well as locations where road signs or directions are unclear, to make it easier for visitors to find your farm .

Parking - Many farms depend on pasture or other grassy areas for parking, but it is good to have a backup plan in case of excessive rain. Use signs, volunteers, or flagging to indicate parking spaces and places to easily turn around.

Welcome table - Set up a weatherproof and visible welcome station to greet visitors when they first arrive. Orient your welcome station volunteers or staff in advance with what to communicate and where to direct visitors to go.



Restrooms and handwashing - Make signs to clearly indicate where appropriate restrooms and/or hand-washing facilities are.

Product sales - If you are selling items, arrange them in a visible, well-marked, and attractive display so that guests can see and sample your products. Have plenty of information available

about your growing practices, the story of your farm, and where customers can find your product after the tour.

Activities - Offer hands on activities for farm visitors, either as part of the tour, something to do while they wait, or as another income stream for your farm. Activities can be as simple as product sampling or animals to pet, or more elaborate undertakings such as a make-your-own bouquet station or a crop maze.

Staffing and Volunteers

Enlist help - Farms and visitors will have a better experience and on farm sales will be improved, if the farm is well staffed with knowledgeable people. Consider using volunteers or staff to manage: parking, a welcome table, product sampling, activities, sales table, music, station hosts and demonstrations. Make sure everyone is well-trained for their role and knows how to direct questions (parking, accessible areas, hand washing, product sales, etc.) appropriately. If interns or volunteers will assist in leading tours be sure they are equipped with information and stories to share with visitors. If possible, have a pre-tour rehearsal or join in on other tours to pick up tips and frequently asked questions.



Thank your volunteers! These are folks who have given a whole day to show their support of local food and your farm, so be sure to show your appreciation for their time. Volunteers are not only supportive the day of an event, but can be a farm supporter and customer throughout the year.

Marketing your Events and Tours

You are putting time, energy, and resources into welcoming visitors to your farm, make sure you get the word out. Marketing and promotions involve an investment of time and/or money, but here are a few low cost ideas:

- ❑ Cross-promote with your farmer's markets and retail outlets - Add posters, tour guides or other marketing materials to your farmers market or retail displays. Ask area businesses that carry your products to display materials and include the event in newsletters, website, or social media. This also offers the business a way to promote their support of local food and farms.

- ❑ Strengthen connections with your customers - It is easier to increase sales to an existing customer than find new ones. Communicate with your customers about your upcoming events through e-newsletters or handouts distributed in CSA boxes, at farmer's markets, or at any of your retail outlets. Don't forget to invite your wholesale customers to join as well.
- ❑ Tell your story - Local media is often looking for content and community interest stories. Share photos, event details, and a short description of the event with your local newspaper. Be sure to communicate what the "story" is, i.e. "historic farm now open to the public," "celebrate summer with u-pick berries," or "come meet the next generation of farmers". Invite local news, radio or other media to attend and give them ample notice.
- ❑ Distribute marketing materials - Create "save the date" cards or fliers to distribute to friends and customers. Include a picture and/or a coupon (free item or % off on farm sales) to encourage them to hold on to the card and follow through on the visit.
- ❑ Post promotional signage - Put directional signs along your road and nearby high traffic areas. Include event date(s) and times(s) to deter visitors from showing up when you are not open, but also to catch interested folks driving by.
- ❑ Market events on web and social media - Share event information on your website, social media sites (Facebook, instagram, twitter) and on your community event calendars. Post teaser photos and snippets of what people can see and do on your farm.



Leading Tours

What should your tour include? When planning a tour consider why people go on farm tours. Most visitors want to know the story of your farm, learn more about growing practices and products and connect with local agriculture. In addition to planning what to show them on the farm, think about what makes your farm unique. What farm history, growing tips and knowledge, or funny stories could you incorporate? Remember that folks are visiting to learn about your farm, but also about you. While some farmers don't like to talk about themselves, the story of who you are and why you are farming is just as critical as what you grow.

Determine how you would like guests to tour your farm. Will you lead tours or will guests explore on their own? What points of interest on the farm do you want to highlight? Where will the tour pause to allow people to catch up or catch their breath? Be mindful of group size. Everyone on the tour should be able to hear you and see what you are talking about. If groups tend to be more than 20 people consider breaking them into small groups and offering stations for them to rotate through.

Consider a long and short tour option. Tours should aim to be no longer than 30 minutes. There may be some visitors that are not physically able to participate in long or steep walks. What options could be created to engage these customers?

Plan interactive activities. In addition to hearing your stories, visitors also want to engage with your farm and create their own stories. Offering taste tests, cooking demos, art activities, hiking, farm tasks, u-pick, or demonstrations (milking, harvesting, cheese production, wool processing, etc.) builds a personal connection to your farm.



Staying Connected to Your Visitors - Establishing “Farm Friends”

- ❖ Send guests home with a way to engage with your farm again – Offer an invitation to your next farm event, a coupon for your product at market, information about your CSA, or a list of places where they can find your farm products. Give them a reason to come back and support you again.
- ❖ Gather names and contact information - If one of your goals is to build your customer base, it is important to know who they are and how to connect with them again. You don't have to commit to a monthly newsletter, but do have visitors sign up to hear about future events and happenings on the farm. It is easier to promote your products and events to folks that already have a connection to your farm.
- ❖ Sample and sell products - Farm tours are a great time to share and sell products. Visitors are often disappointed if there aren't opportunities to support your farm with a purchase and take home a piece of the experience. Dedicate a staff member or knowledgeable volunteer to manage and replenish your product table/sales area, and locate it in an area visitors walk through on their way in and out. Make sure prices are well marked and there is information about where your products are available outside the tour.
- ❖ Encourage visitors to share their stories - Ask visitors to post pictures from their farm visit on social media, offer a photo contest or give out “refer a friend” coupons. This type of engagement not only builds on the experience visitors had on your farm, but encourages them to share it with their family and friends.



Additional Resources:

- ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project) www.asapconnections.org
- Growing Minds Farm to School (An ASAP Program) www.growing-minds.org
Lesson plans, activities, and ideas for engaging children in local food and agriculture.
- Fromhere www.fromhere.org - community events calendar and classifieds
- NCDA&CS Agritourism Marketing www.ncagr.gov/markets/agritourism
Includes agritourism newsletter and “Monday Marketing Messages”
- NC Agritourism Networking Association www.nc-ana.org/
- NC Agritourism Liability www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2005/Bills/House/HTML/H329v6.html

Pre-Tour Checklist

Use this checklist to assess your farm's preparedness for hosting visitors and to start planning your farm tours and agritourism activities.

Directions and Parking	Y/N	Notes:
Is there a well placed farm sign at the entrance to your farm?		
Is there good visibility/turnaround for visitors to enter/exit safely?		
Is it easy to figure out where to park (i.e. signage, barriers, volunteers)? Is there adequate parking free of potholes and mud? If it rains, will people get stuck? Will you need parking attendees?		
Facilities	Y/N	Notes:
Are walking paths and roads in good condition (relatively smooth, no tripping hazards)?		
Are there signs with instructions/rules/safety information? Do you have agritourism liability signs posted?		
Is your farm senior or low mobility friendly? Are there places to sit?		
Do you have a bathroom facility open to the public?		
Visitor Experience	Y/N	Notes:
Do you have a designated registration spot/welcome area to greet visitors? Is the sign-in table in a flat, shaded spot near the entrance?		
Is there shelter for visitors in case of rain or a sudden thunderstorm?		
Is there an activity to engage visitors while they wait for a tour (i.e. product samples, one self-guided aspect of the farm, handouts)?		
Marketing	Y/N	Notes:
Do you have a sign-up sheet for visitors to give you their information (newsletters, email lists, future events)?		
Do you have products to sell or samples to offer? Are they attractively displayed? Are prices visible?		
Do you have materials to distribute about your farm's history/practices and how to connect with you or find your products after the tour (business card, rack card, handouts, coupons)?		
Have you done pre-tour promotion to invite people to your farm and the farm tour?		

Conducting Tours	Y/N	Notes:
Have you prepared a short presentation that highlights the main aspects of your farm?		
Can your presentation be tailored to your audience (i.e. children, non-farmers, large groups)?		
Does your tour last thirty minutes (allowing for extra time for rest, travel, and questions) and does it show off your farm's unique qualities?		
Are there interactive activities on your tour (i.e. tastings, demonstrations, hands-on activities)?		
Do you have a self-guided tour option? A printed map with information about your farm?		
Safety and Risk Management	Y/N	Notes:
Do you have a list of "rules" specific to your farm? If so, what is the plan for communicating them to volunteers and visitors?		
Have all possible hazards been removed, flagged, or roped off? (i.e. junk piles, farm equipment, old barns, fuel containers, steep slopes, poison ivy, ponds)		
Does your farm have animals? Will visitors interact with them? If so, do you have hand or foot washing facilities available to prevent disease transmission?		
Are electric fences marked or turned off during tour hours?		
Is your farm family-friendly and kid safe? Do kids need to be tightly supervised or kept out of certain areas?		
Do you have an emergency plan? Do farm staff/volunteers have cell phones or radios to communicate during open hours/tours?		
Is all fire and safety equipment in operational condition?		
Are all buildings in safe condition? Is public access to barns, paddocks, storage, workshops limited for safe management?		
Staffing	Y/N	Notes:
Do you have a staffing plan? Consider the staffing you will need for the different experiences you are offering such as tours, demonstrations, product tables/farm store, kids activity area.		
Will you need volunteers? How will you recruit volunteers? (Family, neighbors, local schools/universities, community groups?)		