

# Agritainment: A Viable Option for Florida Producers<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Agritainment (an industry comprised of agritourism and farm entertainment) is designed to provide urbanites with recreational hands-on rural experiences and farmers with additional farm income (Holland and Wolfe 2000a; Lazarus 1998). There are many types of agritainment. Before farmers venture into agritainment, they should first identify specific agritainment opportunities, what it will cost to be successful, and the pros and cons of this type of business venture.

## Agritainment Opportunities

Producing a distinctive overall product is fundamental to the success of an agritainment business. Although agritainment ventures have traditionally included horseback riding, U-pick fields, and bed-and-breakfast operations, many farmers are becoming much more resourceful and creative (Holland and Wolfe 2000a, 2000b). Agritainment ideas include farm tours, mazes, festivals, hay rides, nature trails, farm museums, farm zoos, pumpkin patches, craft shops, camping, corporate picnics, and school field trips.



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## Pros and Cons of an Agritainment Business Venture

As with any business venture there are pros and cons to evaluate before committing resources. There are four main “pros” for operating an agritainment business from an already established farm: promoting products of the farm, increasing sales, promoting the industry, and creating employment opportunities. The biggest “cons” identified by current owners of agritainment businesses are dealing with visitors and the problems associated with liability insurance, labor, marketing, theft, and poor location (Hilchey 1993).

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There are also other agritainment issues to consider that have their own pros and cons (e.g., risk management and government regulations for zoning, health, food service, zoo permits, and farm animal exhibit registration). It is suggested that “hold harmless agreements” (signed by onsite vendors to release farmers from liability in the event of an accident) and “participant waivers” (usually signed by parents of minors to release farmers from any responsibility for injury to their children) be implemented to reduce some of the farmer’s risk from lawsuits.

Finally, perhaps the most important consideration is acquiring enough liability insurance in the event something occurs and a visitor sues the farm. The literature suggests that a minimum policy of \$1 million should be purchased on any visitor operation (Holland and Wolfe 2000a). However, the decisions do not end once an agritainment business is up and running.

## Marketing Tips

Once the agritainment business has been established, a marketing strategy will need to be developed for the purpose of eliciting enough visitors to (at minimum) cover the fixed expenses. Because there are already a variety of available materials on how to develop a marketing strategy, our focus will be placed on marketing issues specific to agritainment.

In 1992, Cornell University conducted an informal telephone survey of operations identifying themselves as “farm tours.” Of the farms surveyed, half of the operations hosted less than 1,500 visitors a year, 28 percent had 1,500 to 5,000 visitors a year, and 22 percent had more than 7,000 visitors a year. Of these total visitors, 61 percent were school children on field trips, with the remainder being individuals or families (Hilchey 1993). This study would suggest that it would be beneficial for an agritainment business to target surrounding schools, promoting their business as a potential field trip.

To market an agritainment opportunity as a field trip, the target market logically becomes teachers. An Extension specialist at the University of Tennessee conducted a one-time mail survey of school teachers of kindergarten through fifth grade. The results of the survey are worth keeping in mind when initially evaluating the potential success of an agritainment business. On average, most elementary classes take between three to four field trips each year. When asked how likely teachers would be to take a farm field trip, 63 percent responded very likely and 28 percent somewhat likely. Of course there are many factors that teachers consider when

choosing field trips. Teachers in this study usually planned field trips before or at the beginning of the school year. Therefore marketing needs to occur before this occurs. On average, teachers in the study were only willing to travel a maximum of 35 miles, or 45 minutes, to a field trip destination. This means if your farm is an hour’s drive away from the nearest school, it is unlikely that your services will be considered for a field trip. The survey also found that the maximum field trip cost per student was \$6.80. Teachers also valued interactive or hands-on experiences that relate to a teaching curriculum. When developing a marketing strategy toward teachers, keep in mind that the teachers surveyed were unaware of the many agritainment opportunities available to them. This study suggests that this was due in part to the lack of word-of-mouth marketing, which happens to be the number-one way teachers learn of possible field trips (Holland and Wolfe 2000b).

## Conclusions

This document focused on agritainment as a means of supplementing traditional farm income. Several types of agritainment operations were outlined as well as common characteristics among successful operations. The pros and cons identified coupled with the marketing tips provide farmers with a foundation to determine if agritainment is a viable option for their farm.

## References

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