



## EMERGING AGRICULTURAL MARKETS TEAM

UW COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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“Many people today are interested in visiting a working farm...”

# Farming and Tourism

The \$11.8 billion that tourists spend in Wisconsin and the \$16.8 billion that agriculture contributes to the state’s economy combine to create a potent economic force. This mix of tourism and agriculture presents a business opportunity you can tap into through your farm enterprise.

Many people today are interested in visiting a working farm and having an “on-farm” experience. As a result, a growing number of farmers have chosen to add elements of tourism to their operations. Some common examples of agricultural tourism include corn mazes, hay rides and pick-your-own operations. Some farms have opened restaurants, bakeries and food production enterprises, and some cater to sports enthusiasts with hiking and skiing trails. Still others host fishing ponds or petting zoos. You can find examples of

farm bed and breakfasts as well. These ideas barely scratch the surface, but they give you a sense of what is possible.

Like all businesses that involve regular contact with customers, before considering farm tourism, it is important to ask yourself whether you want to work with customers. Also, do

you want to deal with hiring, training and supervising employees who will be essential for running a successful farm tourism enterprise? If the answer to both questions is yes, the sky is the limit when it comes to ways of combining farming and tourism.

## Give tourists a memorable experience

When deciding which agricultural tourism enterprise might work best for you, keep in mind that tourists are looking for a memorable experience—one they will recommend to their friends and family and that will make them want to visit you again.

Let’s say you offer hay rides every hour—but nothing else. If the ride ends in 30 minutes and there’s nothing else for a family to do, the on-farm experience might be disappointing. However, if visitors can spend an hour or two trying to find their way out of a cornfield maze, take a half-hour hay ride and visit the farm store where they can buy fresh apple cider and other farm products, the experience will most likely be much more satisfying.

## Offer a variety of activities

The more options you give tourists, the more money they will be likely to leave with you! Offering activities for a fee as well as having products they can take home with them, or possibly prepared foods they can purchase while participating in activities, will not only help your bottom line but increase the quality of the experience for visitors. A study done by the North Central Regional Extension Service found that after meals and lodging, tourists spend most of their “tourist dollar” on clothing, crafts and *local food products*.

When developing a plan to encourage tourists to your property, it is important to consider who your customers are and where they will come from. Studies show that “locals” tend not to come to your property to take advantage of your offer-



ings. In Wisconsin, we have many good tourism examples where we already know that the majority of customers come from the states directly to the south or west. The location of your farm, as well as the tourism enterprise itself, will both be factors in determining where you might expect your customers to come from.

## Resources

The Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association (WATA) is a resource for individuals in Wisconsin who are thinking of getting involved in the agricultural tourism industry. Joining WATA will give you access to educational, marketing and networking opportunities that are especially important for individuals just getting started. For more information on WATA, visit the organization's website at [www.visitdairyland.com](http://www.visitdairyland.com), send an email to [info@visitdairyland.com](mailto:info@visitdairyland.com) or phone 920-478-3852.

Other online resources on agricultural tourism that can help get you started:

*Entertainment Farming and Agritourism*  
ATTRA-National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service  
[www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/entertn.pdf](http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/entertn.pdf)  
1-800-346-9140

*Taking the First Step: Farm and Ranch Alternative Enterprise and Agritourism Resource Evaluation Guide*, NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service)  
[www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise/FirstSteps.pdf](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise/FirstSteps.pdf)

## Attracting tourists to the farm—two examples

### Example 1

Sammy Smith is offering a petting zoo and pick-your-own operation along with hay rides on his 180-acre farm. Sammy has also opened up the 30 acres of woods on his property and put in some trails. Sammy does not live close to any major cities, but his farm is located close to an interstate highway. He may put in a bed-and-breakfast in the future, but right now he has enough to keep himself and his family, as well as the seasonal help he employs. There aren't any hotels, motels or bed-and-breakfasts close by. He has realized that his "customer" lives within a couple of hours (or less) drive from his farm. He specifically targets families with children. He has also done some target marketing to environmental groups and nature centers in the area and is offering fall tours to local schools.



### Example 2

Christine Camper is opening both a bed-and-breakfast (four rooms) and restaurant on her farm that was at one time a hog and grain operation. She is currently grazing beef and sheep and has a two-acre vegetable patch from which she was selling produce at a local farmers' market, but she's now planning on using those vegetables for the restaurant. She is hoping the pond and woods on her property, as well as the close proximity to federal forest lands, will draw customers.

Christine has also talked to some of the local merchants in the nearby town about working together to promote tourism in the area. She is considering opening up her land for hunting, but hasn't made a final decision on that yet. Christine has determined that her target customer will be couples looking for either weekend getaways or summer vacations. She hopes that during hunting season in the fall, hunters coming from either out-of-state or from other parts of the state will be interested in her accommodations as well. She plans on marketing to the large cities in Wisconsin in addition to Chicago and Minneapolis-St. Paul. She plans on doing some local promotion of her restaurant.

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