Agribusiness and Agritourism
Rural Economic Development & Tourism Summit
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- Agritourism as a generator of visitors to augment income
- Who can be part of your alliance and a resource in developing agritourism?
- Challenges of agritourism
- Promotions. Getting the word out
- Grant funding opportunities

Opportunity in Agritourism
Not only in the United States, but also internationally, agritourism is becoming a popular method of marketing your agricultural products to the public, particularly urban residents who have little or no knowledge of how crops are grown or how products are produced.

Many agricultural businesses have found agritourism to be a convenient and viable manner to augment income and assist the tourism industry in their area.

The faces of agritourism are as varied as your imagination and run a wide array of specialty areas. Of course, there are farm tours of what might typically come to mind such as a dairy farm, cattle operation, producing eggs, etc. Here are a few examples of just how imaginative other examples are:

- Butterfly Farms
- Corn Mazes
- Christmas tree farming
- Vineyards and wine making
- Cherry Blossom festivals
- Horseback riding
- Pumpkin farms and hay wagon rides
- Watermelon seed spitting competitions
- Blueberry picking and other u-pick operations
- Meals served in barns on a certain day(s) of the week featuring products produced on the farm and old-fashioned home cooking.
- Softball Crab farming
- Clam farming
- Aquaculture
- Hydroponics
- Bat farming

Alliances and resources
Resources are just about everywhere to be found. In addition to some of the obvious allies and resources, the internet is full of the names and contacts for organizations that specialize in providing “how to information” on the implementation of an Agritourism operation. To name just a few of your resources:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture
Challenges you’ll need to overcome
There is an old adage about “the little things that will bite you.” You’ll need to have your eyes wide-open if you seriously pursue the opportunities presented by the Agritourism business.

Some of the issues will include liability insurance, local zoning regulations, are the neighbors supportive, health department guidelines if you’re dealing with food and/or meals. What about public restrooms that are ADA compliant.

Who is going to be the guide when an individual or a couple of people in a car show up for a tour of your operation. Are you able to drop everything and give the visitors your undivided attention, even if there are only a couple of visitors, so they’ll go away satisfied with the experience?

Many Agritourism businesses primarily focus on pre-arranged group visits by visitors who are part of a tour bus package. That typically results in groups of 25 to 55 visitors at one time. Although this is usually much more practical for an Agritourism operation, there are other factors to consider. What is the quality of your road access for a tour bus? Are there tree limbs that will scrape and damage the bus? Can the bus get through the gate opening. Is there a concrete pad for the bus to park on? What about being able to turn around?

Again, you’ll need advice and assistance to make sure you don’t run into obstacles that cost you unexpected money and headaches as you explore Agritourism.

Promoting your Agritourism business
Alright, you’ve done all the things needed to produce a quality Agritourism busy and you’re ready to start greeting visitors and counting the new income you expect to produce, now how do people find out about you? Typically, an Agritourism business does not have the financial resources to purchase advertising, particularly in the urban markets which will be a strong target audience for you.

The two most effective methods for spreading the word about your business will be VISIT FLORIDA and their many marketing programs, along with your local Convention and Visitors Bureau or Tourist Development Council. They already have contacts, the know-how and resources to assist in publicizing and promoting your Agritourism.

Your local CVB/TDC will also be able to assist you with an extremely effective and valuable marketing tool which is press familiarization tours (FAMS) in which several journalists visit your area with the concept of them returning home and writing about the new and exciting things to see and do in your area, including your Agritourism business.
Another added promotional opportunity is your local newspaper. In the early stages it’s good to inform your area residents of your Agritourism business and to utilize word-of-mouth as a marketing resource. In addition, today, many newspapers are parts of larger groups of newspaper and it isn’t uncommon to have one newspaper publish a story and then it’s picked up by other papers in the group. Also, make sure to have available some high quality photographs of your operation.

Be conscious of “branding” and create a clever hook to identify your business. Many times professional organizations in which you have membership can also be a resource in terms of monthly newsletters. They can also occasionally identify associations that may provide funding assistance.

Great examples of this include branding of Wisconsin with cheese and much of the marketing is funding by the state’s dairy organization. Washington State has great partnerships with apples and cherries. All of us are familiar with California and its branding with vineyards and wines, raisins and almonds.

**Show me the money**
In addition to the agencies identified earlier, many of which can provide funding, technical support and marketing, there are several specific funding and marketing programs offered by VISIT FLORIDA in which you can partner with your local CVB/TDC to seek grant funding assistance. In addition, the Florida Tourist Development State Resource Guide also points you to potential funding sources.

Among the VISIT FLORIDA grants and marketing programs are six of special mention for rural areas:

- **Nature and Heritage Education Grant**: Funding of up to $2,000 with no match required. This could help fund an area workshop on Agritourism and to hire a consultant to speak.
- **Nature and Heritage Marketing Grant**: Funding of up to $5,000 with a 50% match for a wide array of marketing and promotion projects.
- **Nature and Heritage Image Grant**: Funding of up to $5,000 and a 50% grant to hire a photographer or videographer to create a film library or a video.
- **Matching Advertising Grant**: Funding of up to $2,500 with a $2,500 match to create a brochure or buy paid advertising in a magazine or newspaper.
- **Small Partner Marketing Grant**: This is a new grant with funding of up to $5,000, requiring a 100% match, for marketing projects.
- **Small Partner Co-op Advertising Program**: Allows small partners to purchase advertising in approximately 15 publications at costs that are typically 75% less than what is normally charged.