



Cash in on Agritourism

Explore three ways to start your agritourism business and take advantage of this booming area of entrepreneurship.

By Barbara Berst Adams

“Wow! What a great first season.” Chris Pinto, owner of Blue Harvest Farms, put those words on the website of his new 7-acre, agritourism, u-pick blueberry farm in Covington, La.

He hadn’t initially planned to pursue any form of agritourism; he was going to sell his berries commercially once they hit full production.

But before the plants reached maturity, Pinto found they already produced many luscious berries and realized he had to do something with them.

Pinto contacted his friends and family members and invited them to harvest the fruit. They picked about 4,000 pounds at \$10 per gallon from the young field. The kids and adults, alike, had so much fun, they convinced him to reform the commercial blueberry field into a u-pick farm.

U-pick farms are one of the oldest forms of agritourism, but this industry comes in other forms as well, such as farm tours and property rental for weddings.

And public demand for agritourism continues to grow.

According to Purdue University, agritourism is the fastest-growing tourism-industry segment in the United States.

The thought of ongoing crowds can be unnerving, however, to the farmer who purposely chose the peaceful rural life. It’s one thing to chase the goats out of the strawberry patch, but explaining to people why they can’t park on the hayfield is something else entirely.

You don’t have to permanently open the floodgates to visitors right away. Instead, you can start small and gain experience to see if agritourism is a good fit for your farm—while adding a little income.

First invite small groups to the farm on a one-time basis. Even if you already know you like the idea of working with people, you’ll gain enormous insight and confidence by starting out this way. Once you’re broken in, you’ll have a better understanding of how you’ll want to expand and can move forward with experience under your belt.

Think out of the box when choosing agritourism activities, especially at this critical but flexible test stage.

There’s nothing wrong with the usual corn mazes and hay rides.

But do you, as a farmer, grow or feed corn? How about hay? If those are your farm’s crops or something actually used on your farm, they would be authentic expansions that reflect your farm. If not, they can become overdone stereotypes that don’t reflect what you really produce or the breadth of what sustainable small farms have to offer.

The lavender farmer might be better off offering walking field tours, and the heirloom vegetable grower might score better hosting a food-preserving workshop.

Greenbank Farm, a CSA and vineyard in the Pacific Northwest, hosts an annual poetry festival on the farm. A poetry society arranges the event with readings, workshops and, of course, opportunities to purchase the farm’s products.

If you, as a farmer, are also a poetry fan, antique addict or experienced quilter, you may want to rent out the farm porch for a summer-afternoon poetry-writing workshop, hold a single three-hour quilting demonstration in the living room, or convert part of the barn to an antique museum and try a once-a-year, fee-based open house.

So go ahead and start small, start slow, and start unique. The following three ways to gently break into agritourism can help you see choices for building your agritourism muscle, and eventually generate revenue in a fashion that reflects what your farm is all about.



Page 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5

About the Author: Barbara Berst Adams is hostess of the Center for the Micro Eco-Farming Movement at www.microecofarming.com and author of *Micro Eco-Farming: Prospering From Backyard to Small Acreage in Partnership with the Earth* (New World Publishing, 2005) and *The New Agritourism: Hosting Community and Tourists on Your Farm* (New World Publishing, 2008).