

Adding Agritourism to Your Farm in Oregon

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A guide directs a tour group at the Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm in Woodburn. Educational tours provide visitors with valuable information about Oregon agriculture.

Credit: Audrey Comerford, © Oregon State University

Agritourism can help improve your farm's name recognition and expand your customer base. This publication will help you understand the personal and legal implications of opening up your Oregon farm for direct sales and events. Follow the steps below to decide if agritourism may be right for you and your farm business.

Adding on-farm sales and activities is one way to diversify your farm or ranch operation. These activities, generally referred to as agritourism, bring farmers and members of the public together, usually on farmland. As agritourism strengthens the connection between farming, farmland and the public, it can help market, promote and sell your farm products. Agritourism can potentially lead to loyal, repeat customers.

Categories of agritourism activities include:

- Direct sales (farm stands, U-cut, U-pick)
- Education (classes, workshops, tours)
- Entertainment (open farm days, harvest festivals)
- Hospitality (private events, farm-to-table dinners, overnight stays)

- Outdoor recreation (photography, hiking)

Benefits of agritourism

The benefits of agritourism vary depending on your farm business's scale, location and products. Agritourism:

- Engages directly with customers to promote the sale of your farm product.
- May allow you to charge a higher price for your farm products.
- Improves farm viability by adding revenue.
- May provide income during the off-season.
- May allow you to employ an additional family or community member on the farm.
- May aid in farm succession.
- Builds relationships with the community.
- Educates the public about farming.

Challenges of agritourism

While there are many potential benefits to agritourism, there are also challenges. First, you must be a person who wants to host the public on your farm. If you do not want to be the face of your operation and interact with the public, you will need to find a team member who does.

There is an inherent loss of privacy with agritourism, and not all visitors will be respectful. Some guests will wander around, looking for the perfect photograph. They may harvest crops they should not and stray from designated public spaces. If you are not comfortable with the loss of some privacy, you will want to carefully consider which types of agritourism you offer.

Depending on the agritourism activity, you may need to:

- Review land use laws and obtain permits.
- Improve infrastructure.
- Install signage for wayfinding and restricted areas.
- Purchase additional insurance coverage.
- Manage liability risk for you and your business.
- Implement safety plans for your customers.
- Market your activities.

Legal requirements

Before starting agritourism, study Oregon's land use laws. Determine allowable uses in resource zones and obtain needed permits. Contact your county planning department to find out the zoning for your property.

Overall, agritourism is a strategy for selling your farm or ranch products and cannot take the place of production farming. Any activities you do must be "incidental and subordinate" to your farming operation.

Certain activities are considered an outright farm use, such as U-pick or direct sales of your produce ([ORS 215.203](https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_215.203) (https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_215.203)). These activities do not need special permits because they are already allowed under Oregon law. Other activities such as festivals, on-farm lodging or permanent farm stands open to the

public require permits. In Oregon, county planning departments issue these permits. Talk with your county planning department to find out what you can legally do on your farm. Before meeting with the planning department, determine the zoning of your property, the parcel size and what agricultural crops you have available to sell. You should be able to explain how agritourism will help your farm business viability.

Evaluate infrastructure, such as buildings, to determine if it can be used for your agritourism operation. Whether existing or new construction, structures open to the public must meet commercial standards and be approved by the county building department. Some facilities may also require accessible bathrooms and parking. Some agritourism operations have mobile restrooms and wash stations, especially those that are only open seasonally. In some cases, structures that do not require entry or use certain temporary coverings may be your best options.

Infrastructure includes roadway approaches, driveways and parking areas. Consider that visitor entry points to your farm cannot impact other private or public property.



Depending on their use, structures such as farm stands must be built in compliance with county building codes.

Credit: Melissa Fery, © Oregon State University

Methods of reducing risk

Managing risk on your farm includes prioritizing the physical safety of your guests. Since many visitors know little about working farms, they may not be aware of potential hazards. For example, uneven ground should be made level, holes should be filled in, and hoses or irrigation lines should be removed from walkways to reduce tripping hazards. Equipment and farm implements should be kept out of the public's reach or line of sight.

Signage can be an inexpensive and effective way to help prevent visitors from injury. If you plan to open your fields for U-pick, consider posting a safety sign where tools are kept with information on safe handling.

If you are unsure of potential risks on your property, look at your farm from the customer's perspective. Invite someone new to your farm for a walk-through. From the moment they drive onto your property to the time they get back in their car, evaluate all aspects of their experience. As you do so, consider the various ways people might injure themselves. See the checklists available through [Integrating Safety into Agritourism \(https://safeagritourism.org/\)](https://safeagritourism.org/).

In Oregon, one way to reduce your liability is to use the limited liability protection statutes to transfer some risk to the visitor or customer. The Oregon Agritourism Inherent Risk Law ([ORS 30.671 to 30.677](https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_30.671)) (https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_30.671) expands liability protections for all agritourism activities as defined by statute. To take advantage of this protection, you must follow the conditions and signage requirements provided in the law. The law does not offer protection, nor can you transfer the risk costs associated with your negligence. It also does not take the place of liability insurance. See more information on the Oregon Agritourism Limited Liability Signs in "Resources."



Oregon Agritourism Limited Liability Signs warn visitors about inherent risks on these types of operations.

Credit: Audrey Comerford, © Oregon State University

Maintaining good relationships with your neighbors is a critical risk-management strategy. Most conflict arises from people upset about extra traffic or noise, for example. Support positive relationships by having an initial

conversation with your neighbors about what you are planning, followed by regular check-ins. Invite them out to see what you are doing, offer them free attendance at an event or give them a farm product. Friendliness and generosity can go a long way in building relationships — before there is extra traffic on the roads and on your farm.

Marketing your business

Agritourism means that you will be marketing in new ways. Instead of only marketing products, you may be offering an experience that draws people to visit your farm. Ideally, more on-farm visitors will lead to an increase in sales. Telling the story of your farm and personalizing your branding are ways to align with customers and their values. What makes the experience at your farm different? By answering questions like this, you can begin to pinpoint your target customer base.

With so many other jobs on your farm, developing marketing materials might take a back seat. However, visibility to potential customers is an important use of time. Your website is the most reliable way to make sure your customers can find you and the information they are looking for. Social media is a great way to engage customers, but it should not replace your farm website.

You will need to determine how much time you can dedicate to marketing and the best way for customers to interact with you. You may also consider marketing tools like a farm newsletter, social media, Google Business Profile, brochures and cooperative marketing efforts like farm trails or loops. See “Resources” for examples.



Connections with other businesses and cross-promotion can also be good marketing. Take brochures or printed information to other farms, downtown businesses or wineries in the area. Seek opportunities to partner on events or promote at their locations. Other business owners are usually grateful to learn about reliable venues they can recommend to their visitors. And don't forget, word of mouth is always a powerful marketing tool.

Food trails and other partnerships help cross-promote farms and other local businesses.

Credit: Audrey Comerford, © Oregon State University

Customer service and hospitality

Since you are opening your farm to visitors, customer service must be part of your business plan. Building positive experiences and relationships is important for attracting and keeping customers.

Before customers even get to your property, how will they find information about you? An up-to-date digital footprint with hours and crop availability is important. This also extends to phone calls and voice messages. If customers are looking for information about your agritourism activities, they should be able to find it easily.

You will also need to manage visitors' expectations. For example, a potential customer may read that your farm sells dahlias, but your website or social media page has neglected to say that dahlias are two weeks behind this season. If the person drives to your farm and finds out that the dahlias aren't ready, they will be disappointed and may never visit again. Keep online sites up-to-date to help manage expectations.



Welcoming signage sets the tone as visitors enter your property. People have a better experience when they know where to park, where they should visit first and how to get there.

Along with signage, focus on curb appeal. Some simple tasks that enhance the visual appearance of your property include:

- Keeping the public areas clear of any large weeds.
- Providing trash and recycle cans to keep the area litter-free.
- Keeping the entrance and informational signs clean and readable.
- Keeping extra materials and equipment picked up and stored out of sight.
- Adding landscaping to entrances or public areas.

Install welcome signs and parking instructions to improve visitors' experience.

Credit: Melissa Fery, © Oregon State University

Your farm team will need basic customer service training. Make sure your staff is friendly, greets customers and can answer customer questions. The people working the public-facing part of the farm should know important information about the operation such as current crop status. They should be able to suggest other places to visit in the area, like restaurants or shopping. If you hire seasonal labor, do not assume that they have this information. Walk them through customer interactions or have them shadow you or someone who represents good customer service on the farm.

Reflect on the accessibility of the areas where you plan to host visitors. Level parking areas and walkways, strategically placed sitting areas and easy-to-read instructional signs with pictures are examples of customer hospitality.

There is a lot to consider when deciding whether or not agritourism is a good fit for you and your farm business. Some next steps to learn more about offering agritourism on your farm would be:

- Look through the Oregon-specific resources available at the [OSU Extension Agricultural Tourism Project \(https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/smallfarms/agricultural-tourism\)](https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/smallfarms/agricultural-tourism).

- Take the comprehensive self-paced online course [Developing a Successful Agritourism Business in Oregon](https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/smallfarms/agricultural-tourism-online-course) (<https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/smallfarms/agricultural-tourism-online-course>)
- Contact your county planning department about any conditional use permits you may need for the agritourism activities you are interested in.
- Contact your insurance company to see if you need additional policies for your activities. (See Interview Questions for Deciding on an Insurance Agent fact sheet in "Resources.")

Resources

General

- [Oregon Agritourism Handbook](https://industry.traveloregon.com/opportunities/marketing-co-ops-toolkits/toolkits/welcome-oregon-agritourism-handbook/) (<https://industry.traveloregon.com/opportunities/marketing-co-ops-toolkits/toolkits/welcome-oregon-agritourism-handbook/>)
- University of Vermont, [A Guide to Successful Agritourism](https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/Vermont-Agritourism-Collaborative/2019_BestPracticesAgritourism-FINALDRAFT-lores.pdf) (https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/Vermont-Agritourism-Collaborative/2019_BestPracticesAgritourism-FINALDRAFT-lores.pdf)

Types of agritourism

- OSU Extension Service, [Is Starting a Farm Stand Right for You?](https://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pub/em-9274-starting-farm-stand-right-you) (<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pub/em-9274-starting-farm-stand-right-you>)
- [Adding agritourism: How to create successful tours for your farm or ranch](https://extension.oregonstate.edu/community-vitality/agritourism/adding-agritourism-how-create-successful-tours-your-farm-or-ranch) (<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/community-vitality/agritourism/adding-agritourism-how-create-successful-tours-your-farm-or-ranch>)

Legal

- [Oregon Revised Statute on Agritourism](https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_30.671) (https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_30.671)
- [Adding agritourism: Developing your plan and working with your county](https://extension.oregonstate.edu/community-vitality/agritourism/adding-agritourism-developing-your-plan-working-your-county) (<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/community-vitality/agritourism/adding-agritourism-developing-your-plan-working-your-county>)

Risk management

- [Integrating Safety into Agritourism](https://safeagritourism.org/) (<https://safeagritourism.org/>)
- [Interview Questions for Deciding on an Insurance Agent](https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sites/agscid7/files/smallfarms/factsheet10_interviewquestionsforinsuranceagent.pdf) (https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sites/agscid7/files/smallfarms/factsheet10_interviewquestionsforinsuranceagent.pdf)
- [Oregon Agritourism Limited Liability Signs](https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sites/agscid7/files/smallfarms/factsheet9_oregonlimitedliabilitysign.pdf) (https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sites/agscid7/files/smallfarms/factsheet9_oregonlimitedliabilitysign.pdf)
- [Adding agritourism: How to cultivate neighbor and farmer relations to avoid conflict](https://extension.oregonstate.edu/community-vitality/agritourism/adding-agritourism-how-cultivate-neighbor-farmer-relations-avoid) (<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/community-vitality/agritourism/adding-agritourism-how-cultivate-neighbor-farmer-relations-avoid>)

Marketing

- [Agritourism marketing resources](https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/smallfarms/agritourism-marketing) (<https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/smallfarms/agritourism-marketing>)
- [Farm trails and loops](https://traveloregon.com/things-to-do/eat-drink/farms-ranches/) (<https://traveloregon.com/things-to-do/eat-drink/farms-ranches/>)

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