



## Necessary personal skills for dealing with

# AGRI-TOURISM VISITORS

A review of regional attractions, local environment, your farm resources, and careful budgeting may indicate engaging in agri-tourism activities could add to the farm family income.

Taking an extra close look at the farm's human resources is very important before making final decisions. Unlike most traditional ranch and farm production, the agri-tourism "production" involves direct personal contact with visitors/customers. Even if much can be learned about proper ways of interaction, every person – the farmer, family members, and possible employees – should possess those basic personal qualities and attitudes that can make a good host, instructor, guide, sales person, or provider of services. Everybody must be willing to learn and to hone their skills to provide the service, guidance, and support, which farm visitors appreciate.

Dealing explicitly with the human-relation aspects

in the planning process will substantially increase the chances of making an agri-tourism project a success.

Customers will visit a farm or ranch for a special experience. If you have ever had a good time on a vacation or while visiting someone else's farm, you may have an idea of what it takes to provide good attractions for your guests.

Direct your attention to the best ways of making visitors/customers feel welcome and comfortable. You want them to return as well as to tell others about your operation. Remember – one of your best promotion tools is word of mouth.

### Orientation of family and other staff members

Adequate training of staff – be it the farmer, members of his or her family, or employees – who will be occupied with the agri-tourism activities is an essential component in ensuring a high level of customer satisfaction.

Staff must be knowledgeable about the operation and its services and products as well as the amenities available in the local area. Familiarity with area attractions, local



restaurants, and accommodations is mandatory. Also, staff should be easily identified by their dress and nametags.

The staff should be able to answer questions tourists most frequently ask about the community and the surrounding area. Here are some typical questions:

- Are there any museums or historical sites in the community?
- What kinds of lodging accommodations are available?
- Can you recommend a good place to eat?
- Are there any local activities or special events occurring in the coming days?
- Where can I have my vehicle serviced?

- Where will I find tourist information?
- Where are the local parks, and what are their recreational activities?
- Are guided local tours available?
- Where are the local retail stores located?
- What is it like living in this community?

### Welcoming visitors

Welcome each customer with enthusiasm and a smile. For example, say "Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. Welcome to \_\_\_\_\_." Ask how you can assist them. Say, "How may I help you? May I direct you to \_\_\_\_\_?" Be pleasant, courteous, and sincere.

Explain what your facility offers, for example, "The

produce stand featuring our own \_\_\_\_ is here, the tour meets over there, and the bathrooms are around the corner.” Always have time for your customers.

### Retail sales

Be sure to post prices for products and services easily visible to customers. Use simple per-item or per-pound charges. If selling by weight, make sure to state the return check policy. Vary product quantities and sizes. Indicate whether you provide recipes, recommendations for preserving the product for long drives, and whether you ship your products.

Educate your customers. Assist them in selecting the best product for their needs, and explain what qualities are more desirable for different purposes. Answer questions about how the product was grown and processed. Explain what makes your product better or different than others on the market.

Place smaller sale items on higher shelves making these items more difficult to reach/shoplift. Popular items should be placed in constant view of the cashier.

### Recipes and handouts

Check with a commodity board for recipes and handouts. Some commodity boards also have promotion posters to add to a display. Work with a local chef to develop and offer recipes for the commodity being sold or promoted. Search the Web for recipes.

### U-Pick

U-Pick operations need signs designating which area of the field is available to pick, how to pick without damaging plants, and where to walk between the plants to cause as little damage as possible.

You may want to post a sign about over-picking that says, “Only pick what you intend to buy; however, if you discover you picked a little extra, please bring the extra produce to us. Please do not throw it on the ground.”

### Customer mailing list

Consider using a guest book so visitors can add their names and postal and e-mail addresses to a mailing list. The mailing list can later be used to send a newsletter or reminder notices.

### Monitoring customer behavior

Organize your store, facility or U-Pick operation so there is only one entrance and one exit to monitor. For a U-Pick, this may mean temporary fencing or ropes around the field with the entrance/exit near the parking area. Eliminate the opportunity for customers to walk directly from the picking area to their cars.

If you suspect a customer has shoplifted, immediately contact local authorities and

provide the vehicle license number, make, model, and a description of the person. **Do not** try to stop the person yourself. This only upsets you and the customer and may result in an argument – or worse – in front of other customers.

To reduce the risk of vehicle theft or break in, employee parking should be separate and away from the public parking area.

### Dealing with customer concerns

Visitors are sometimes in search of empathy and a solution to their own problems. If they have complaints or concerns, listen to their problems or frustrations without interruption. Ease the situation by remaining calm and attempting to completely understand the problem. Calmly ask questions to ensure everyone understands the situation. Suggest several options, and give the visitor the courtesy of making his or her own decision.

### Reference

This section is based on the work of Desmond

Jolly, cooperative extension agricultural economist and director, UC Small Farm Program, a program of the University of California, Davis, and Denise Skidmore, member of the University of California’s Ag and Nature Tourism Workgroup. See [www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/agritourism/factsheet2\\_p.html](http://www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/agritourism/factsheet2_p.html).

Recommended reading: Michigan State University Extension Bulletin E-2064, 1987.

*Russ Tronstad is a professor and extension economist in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University of Arizona and can be reached at (520) 621-2425 or [tronstad@ag.arizona.edu](mailto:tronstad@ag.arizona.edu). Trent Teegerstrom is an associate specialist in the department and can be reached at (520) 621-6245 or [tteegers@ag.arizona.edu](mailto:tteegers@ag.arizona.edu). Prunell Charley is a former member of Arizona Cooperative Extension and an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation.*

