



Direct Marketing Strategies

Culinary Agritourism

Family farms have a long tradition of offering a taste of farm life to travelers. From cider pressing and seasonal farm stands to harvest festivals and pumpkin patches, farms offer a range of unique experiences. In recent years a new field has emerged called “culinary agritourism.” **Culinary agritourism** is a traveler’s authentic interaction with farmers, growers, and chefs that lead to the discovery of geographically distinctive food and drink.

As with other forms of farm tourism, culinary agritourism is designed to attract customers to your farm by offering products and a range of services. Tapping into people’s interest in “farm life” and “real food,” culinary agritourism focuses on celebrating the local terroir and traditions, artisan techniques, and varieties or breeds rarely seen today. The possible activities are endless: classes on cheese-making, beverage and food pairings and tastings, cooking seasonally, guided harvesting, food preservation, artisanal butchery, seed-saving classes, wild foraging farm stays and clam digging. Farm dinners celebrating local chefs and foods are especially popular.

Such events can support other local farm and food businesses through pairings or even local musicians who can play as a feature or background to a tasting or dinner. People will leave having learned or experienced something that they will take home and talk about to friends and family. They will also have deepened their relationship with the farm and a culinary sense of place.

While “foodies” may seem like the most obvious customer base, be creative in your outreach. Children, teenagers, families, clubs or civic groups, seniors, and eco-tourists are all candidates for field trips to your farm. Regardless of your target market, advertise well. Be sure to highlight your activities on your website and notify your local chamber of commerce, tourism office, visitors’ center, economic development group, and “events calendars” in the local paper or promotional materials. Good signage to draw people to your farm is also important.

Before you begin a culinary agritourism venture, check with your appropriate local government agencies to find out what is required. There may be city and county permits (e.g., event, temporary food service establishment, camping), land use and building codes that apply to your location. Be sure to start researching this early in the planning process as it may take time and add significant expense to the business startup cost. Also, be sure to find out what insurance you have and what might be needed to protect your business. Other specific planning tips include using one of the online event or ticket services such as Brown Paper Tickets and getting non-refundable deposits for classes. Be sure to budget and, if possible, charge for your prep time as well as the time dedicated to the actual class, tour or event.

Benefits of Culinary Agritourism

- Leverages existing assets to diversify farm revenue and generate income in your slow season.
- You set the prices and choose the number of people to allow in activities.

- Creates a compelling and convenient opportunity to sell or promote other products once people are on your farm.
- You can build a loyal customer base that appreciates your uniqueness and grows your business.

Challenges of Culinary Agritourism

- It can be stressful dealing with the public on your farm, especially if there are logistical problems.
- Creating, planning, and managing an event or program requires a significant amount of time.
- Additional insurance and permits may be required.
- Once you open up your farm to the public, you have to be prepared for visitors' critiques and photos of their experience becoming public and potentially being posted online.

If having visitors on your farm is not a good fit, consider partnering with a business, restaurant, coffee shop, winery or brewery that can feature your farm products. B&B's and restaurants may feature your farm –fresh eggs, local jams, jellies, and syrups, local milk or butter and meats. Breweries may feature locally grown pub fare such as home fries and grass-fed burgers. Wineries may feature cheeses. Partnerships with chefs for classes on your farm or at their restaurant or with other businesses that have bigger marketing budgets can be really productive. For example, the Shelburne Inn hosts a Wild Mushroom Celebration Dinner in Seaview featuring wild harvested mushrooms, Pike Brewing Co. beer pairings, and locally grown cranberries and vegetables.

Additional Resources

- Drake Agricultural Law Center's "The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing," Chapter Ten: Insurance and Liability at www.directmarketersforum.org/chapter-ten-insurance-and-liability.
- "Taking the First Step: Farm and Ranch Alternative Enterprise and Agritourism Resource Evaluation Guide": <ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/Economics/AltEnterprise/FirstSteps.pdf>
- The "Farm Stay Manual" www.misa.umn.edu/Publications/FarmstayManual/index.htm
- Travel Oregon: <http://industry.traveloregon.com/industry-resources/product-development/culinary-and-agri-tourism-development/>
- University of Arizona: "Direct Farm Marketing and Tourism Handbook": www.ag.arizona.edu/arec/pubs/dmkt/dmkt.html
- University of California Small Farm Program: www.sfp.ucdavis.edu/agritourism
- University of Nebraska's "Marketing AgriTourism Online" at <http://eship.unl.edu/agritourism>
- Washington State Tourism: www.experiencewa.com
- WSDA's "Savor Washington" webpage offers fifteen unique "Culinary AgriTourism Itineraries" in Washington State: www.agr.wa.gov/marketing/smallfarm/savorwa.aspx

Recommended Fact Sheets

1. Networks for Washington State Farms
7. Insurance
9. Direct Marketing in Washington State

For further information, to provide comments, or suggest a resource to add to this fact sheet, please email smallfarms@agr.wa.gov or call (360) 902-2888.