Farms, ranches, and vineyards across Florida are opening their gates, barn doors and fences, issuing a heartfelt invitation to sample the abundant bounty and natural beauty found in the state’s growing adventure – Agritourism.

In this manual, you will find information about agritourism and the following:

- The link between agriculture and tourism
- What is classified as agritourism in Florida and what the market potential is
- Types of agritourism
- What to consider before opening an operation
- Operator questionnaire
- Current resource assessment
- Potential collaborators and partners
- Developing business, marketing, operations and organizational, and financial plans
- Customer service advice

The information contained in this manual is presented as a resource for individuals wishing to pursue agritourism businesses. It is in no way meant to replace advice obtained from professionals such as attorneys or financial planners.
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“As the Sunshine State’s number one industry, tourism was responsible for welcoming 97.3 million visitors in 2014 and employing more than 1.4 million Floridians.” – VISIT FLORIDA

The University of Florida has published research that Florida agriculture, natural resources, and related industries provide 2 million jobs and $76.5 billion in value added impacts annually, making agriculture critical to Florida’s economy. When it comes to green acres, the state of Florida has nearly 24 million forests, croplands, and ranches – two-thirds of Florida’s total land area.

**AGRITOURISM is the MARRIAGE of FLORIDA’S TOP TWO INDUSTRIES** and the trend is quickly proving to be successful for **FARMERS AND FARM VISITORS.**

It is one of the fastest growing tourism market sectors. Governor Rick Scott made it a priority of his administration to support efforts to achieve his goal of 100 million visitors to Florida. Additionally, Florida’s leaders are invested in the growth of agritourism and have taken strides in making it a viable option for agritourism operators.
This information is encouraging for agritourism operators, because it shows that the alternatives people are seeking are attainable opportunities for farmers. It is also important to note that the agritourism market is now considered a new cash crop for farmers throughout the United States.

Visitors are planning stops at farms during their stays and are creating memories that will last a lifetime. Lena Juárez, Executive Director of the Florida Agritourism Association, has said “Agritourism, one of the state’s fast-growing new business ventures, allows small farms to survive and thrive. Florida agritourism is the ultimate field trip where Floridians and visitors to our state want to return to their rural roots and experience the joys and benefits of farm life.”

Jane Eckert, noted agritourism expert/speaker/consultant, outlined travel trends on her website that support the growth of agritourism based on information from the Travel Industry Association of America:

- Tourists are increasingly traveling by cars
- Tourists are taking shorter trips and planning at the last minute
- Travelers are looking for experiences as a part of their trips
- Families want to strengthen their relationships by being together

This information is encouraging for agritourism operators, because it shows that the alternatives people are seeking are attainable opportunities for farmers. It is also important to note that the agritourism market is now considered a new cash crop for farmers throughout the United States.
Around the world, Florida is known for its white sandy beaches, world-class theme parks and booming business centers. However, few people realize that agriculture has also been an important part of our state for more than five centuries.

In the mid-1500s, European explorers brought the finest cattle and horses to the New World. Over the next few decades, these herds grew and eventually birthed Florida’s finest industry: agriculture.

Today, agriculture is entrenched in Florida’s culture and economy. More than 47,000 farms in Florida work day in and day out to produce the food and fiber that helps feed the world. Florida farmers and ranchers produce a variety of products – nearly 300 different commodities – that your mother and doctor would be proud for you to eat.

These farms are also a driving force for our economy. Florida agriculture is the state’s second largest industry, just behind tourism, and generates more than $120 billion in annual economic impact and supports more than 2 million jobs for Floridians.

As Florida’s Commissioner of Agriculture, a fifth generation Floridian and citrus grower and cattle rancher, I know agriculture’s invaluable contributions to Florida’s culture and economy firsthand. I also know that further connecting our state’s main economic engines – agriculture and tourism – is a win-win situation.

The growth and success of agritourism in Florida is not only good for our economy, but it also celebrates the people, and families and the businesses that have made up Florida agriculture for the past 500 years.

Adam H. Putnam, Commissioner of Agriculture
Since 2007, the Florida Legislature has recognized the importance of and the need for changes to the statutes that would allow farmers to open up their farms to visitors while still being able to protect the public from negligence.

In the past, concerns about liability prevented farmers from diversifying into the agritourism sector. With statutory revisions over the past few years, state leaders have shown their commitment to making Florida a friendly environment for agritourism operators. The statutes also define what agritourism is in Florida, and this covers a broad spectrum of activities.

570.85 Agritourism. —  
(1) It is the intent of the Legislature to promote agritourism as a way to support bona fide agricultural production by providing a secondary stream of revenue and by educating the general public about the agricultural industry. It is also the intent of the Legislature to eliminate duplication of regulatory authority over agritourism as expressed in this section. Except as otherwise provided for in this section, and notwithstanding any other provision of law, a local government may not adopt or enforce a local ordinance, regulation, rule, or policy that prohibits, restricts, regulates, or otherwise limits an agritourism activity on land classified as agricultural land under s. 193.461. This subsection does not limit the powers and duties of a local government to address substantial offsite impacts of agritourism activities or an emergency as provided in chapter 252.
(2) The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services may provide marketing advice, technical expertise, promotional support, and product development related to agritourism to assist the following in their agritourism initiatives: Enterprise Florida, Inc.; convention and visitor bureaus; tourist development councils; economic development organizations; and local governments. In carrying out this responsibility, the department shall focus its agritourism efforts on rural and urban communities.


Note.—Former s. 570.96.

570.86 Definitions.—As used in ss. 570.85-570.89, the term:
(1) “Agritourism activity” means any agricultural related activity consistent with a bona fide farm, livestock operation, or ranch or in a working forest which allows members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment, or educational purposes, to view or enjoy activities, including farming, ranching, historical, cultural, civic, ceremonial, training and exhibition, or harvest-your-own activities and attractions. An agritourism activity does not include the construction of new or additional structures or facilities intended primarily to house, shelter, transport, or otherwise accommodate members of the general public. An activity is an agritourism activity regardless of whether the participant paid to participate in the activity.
(2) “Agritourism operator” means a person who is engaged in the business of providing one or more agritourism activities, whether for compensation or not for compensation.
(3) “Farm” means the land, buildings, support facilities, machinery, and other appurtenances used in the production of farm or aquaculture products, including land used to display plants, animals, farm products, or farm equipment to the public.
(4) “Farm operation” has the same meaning as in s. 823.14.
(5) “Inherent risks of agritourism activity” means those dangers or conditions that are an integral part of an agritourism activity including certain hazards, such as surface and subsurface conditions; natural conditions of land, vegetation, and waters; the behavior of wild or domestic animals; and the ordinary dangers of structures or equipment ordinarily used in farming and ranching operations. The term also includes the potential of a participant to act in a negligent manner that may contribute to the injury of the participant or others, including failing to follow the instructions given by the agritourism operator or failing to exercise reasonable caution while engaging in the agritourism activity.

History.—s. 1, ch. 2007-244; s. 17, ch. 2012-83; s. 2, ch. 2013-179; s.
570.87 Agritourism participation impact on land classification.—
(1) In order to promote and perpetuate agriculture throughout the state, farm operations are encouraged to engage in agritourism. The conduct of agritourism activity on a bona fide farm or on agricultural lands classified as such pursuant to s. 193.461 does not limit, restrict, or divest the land of that classification as long as such lands classified as agricultural remain used primarily for bona fide agricultural purposes.
(2) Local governments and agricultural representatives shall meet for the purpose of discussing the benefits of agritourism to local economies and opportunities for cooperation, conflict resolution, regulatory streamlining, and incentives.
History.—s. 1, ch. 2007-244; s. 113, ch. 2014-150; s. 3, ch. 2016-14.
Note.—Former s. 570.962.

570.88 Liability.—
(1) Except as provided in subsection (2), an agritourism operator, his or her employer or employee, or the owner of the underlying land on which the agritourism occurs is not liable for injury or death of, or damage or loss to, a participant resulting from the inherent risks of agritourism activities if the notice of risk required under s. 570.89 is posted as required. Except as provided in subsection (2), a participant, or a participant's representative, may not maintain an action against or recover from an agritourism operator, his or her employer or employee, or the owner of the underlying land on which the agritourism occurs for the injury or death of, or damage or loss to, an agritourism participant resulting exclusively from any of the inherent risks of agritourism activities.
(2) In the event of the injury or death of, or damage or loss to, an agritourism participant, subsection (1) does not prevent or limit the liability of an agritourism operator or his or her employer or employee or the owner of the underlying land on which the agritourism occurs if he or she:
   (a) Commits an act or omission that constitutes gross negligence or willful or wanton disregard for the safety of the participant, and that act or omission proximately causes injury, damage, or death to the participant; or
   (b) Intentionally injures the participant.
(3) The limitation on legal liability afforded by this section to an agritourism operator or his or her employer or employee or the owner
of the underlying land on which the agritourism occurs is in addition to any limitations of legal liability otherwise provided by law.

Note.—Former s. 570.963.

570.89 Posting and notification.—
(1)(a) Each agritourism operator shall post and maintain signs that contain the notice of inherent risk specified in subsection (2). A sign shall be placed in a clearly visible location at the entrance to the agritourism location and at the site of the agritourism activity. The notice of inherent risk must consist of a sign in black letters, with each letter a minimum of 1 inch in height, with sufficient color contrast to be clearly visible.

(b) Each written contract entered into by an agritourism operator for the provision of professional services, instruction, or the rental of equipment to a participant, regardless of whether the contract involves agritourism activities on or off the location or at the site of the agritourism activity, must contain in clearly readable print the notice of inherent risk specified in subsection (2).

(2) The sign and contract required under subsection (1) must contain the following notice of inherent risk:

WARNING
Under Florida law, an agritourism operator is not liable for injury or death of, or damage or loss to, a participant in an agritourism activity conducted at this agritourism location if such injury, death, damage, or loss results from the inherent risks of the agritourism activity. Inherent risks of agritourism activities include, among others, risks of injury inherent to land, equipment, and animals, as well as the potential for you to act in a negligent manner that may contribute to your injury, death, damage, or loss. You are assuming the risk of participating in this agritourism activity.

(3) Failure to comply with this section prevents an agritourism operator, his or her employer or employee, or the owner of the underlying land on which the agritourism occurs from invoking the privileges of immunity provided by this section.

History.—s. 4, ch. 2013-179; s. 130, ch. 2014-17; s. 115, ch. 2014-150.
Note.—Former s. 570.964.

Agritourism operators may purchase signage that is compliant with the law from the Florida Agritourism Association’s website at www.visitfloridafarms.com.
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FLORIDA AGRITOURISM LAW

- Defines agritourism activities
- Provides guidelines for liability protections
- Addresses the posting of liability signage (with required language and sign specifications*)
- Prevents local governments from prohibiting, restricting, or limiting agritourism activities on land that has been classified as agricultural by a property appraiser
If you become an agritourism operator, you are self-employed. You have to get it done. There are many organizations out there to assist you in researching, prepping, getting started and opening and maintaining your business, but you have to get it all done. If you think you are a self-starter, then you are well on your way to being up for this!

Questions to Ask Before Starting

Are you willing to devote the hours it takes to operate this type of business on top of your current responsibilities and commitments? Most of your guests will want to come to your business outside of those classic 9:00 am to 5:00 pm hours. Family time is in the late afternoon, evenings, weekends and holidays. Are you willing to be open to the public during those times?

Do you have business partners? Do you have employees who you will trust with your guests? Are your family or friends interested in helping with the business? Who will issue tickets, take money, help in the shop or on the farm? Who will guide the visitors throughout the operation?

Can you work with the public? Do you enjoy working with people? Do you have the patience to work with all kinds of individuals? Will your family members and employees enjoy working with the public? Will you mind inviting visitors onto your property and in some cases into your home? Is privacy a concern for you?
Do you love your “agritainment” option? Sharing your love of what you do with your visitors will shine through and offer up a great and memorable experience.

When you invite the public to your operation, it will involve the assistance of more than one or two folks. Make sure you are prepared to be staffed with capable and knowledgeable employees or family members. What do you think your customers will want to participate in, observe, or learn about at your operation? Again, starting with one unique and special experience will allow you to be successful and get to know your customers. Ask them what they are interested in. It is critical to offer an experience that is quality, fun, entertaining, educational, and safe.

Research your options carefully. There are many ways to determine what might work for you. You can contact your cooperative extension office for your county; you can talk with your county’s convention and visitor’s bureau; you can look to what other states and businesses in those states are doing via the Internet. Some states have very successful agritourism programs, and taking some time to browse their information, success stories and look for ideas will be well worth it.

These states have some excellent programs: Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Iowa. In addition, you can ask established agritourism operators - your peers - in your region about their thoughts and experiences.

In order to know what is successful, what the current trends are, how tourism in your area is working, and other information pertinent to your agritourism operation, you will need to get involved with those in the “know.”

Become a member of your business community. Join organizations that advocate for your business such as the Florida Agritourism Association (www.visitfloridafarms.com) and your local chamber of commerce. There will be opportunities such as networking sessions, educational, finances, and discussions about your community’s business climate from which you will directly benefit. Through these organizations and activities, you will be able to maintain your expertise, form partnerships for support, and learn from others.
Get a plan. Develop a business plan that creates your plan of action for your operation that sets measurable goals and objectives. It should be realistic and effective. Write a marketing plan that helps you tell your business’s story.

Ask yourself these questions. When it comes to working with the public, knowing yourself, your family, and employees is an important aspect of an agritourism business. Visitors are customers. Is your agritourism operation safe for guests? Does your agritourism operation look welcoming to guests? Are you motivated to keep your premises clean and organized at all times? Do you understand the importance of maintaining your operation for both appearance and safety reasons? If you answered “yes” to these questions, then you are up for this!

**Things to Consider**

- Florida’s mild climate provides opportunities for year-round agritourism options
- Florida is a destination for international visitors
- Florida agriculture is big, with more than nine million acres utilized for agriculture, according to the Florida Agricultural Statistics Service
- Agritourism activities are affordable
- Many people are removed from the rural experience, so agritourism provides an opportunity to participate in farm activities and outdoor experiences
- There is an increased interest in the local food movement
What do you have? What can you offer? Who can help?

It is up to you to decide just what type of agribusiness that you can offer to visitors. To assist you in this decision, you should assess your resources to determine what you have to offer that is unique, fun and educational. Your land is a great place to start - knowing your land and its capabilities are important aspects of assessing your resources.

Your land must be classified as agricultural as stated in Chapter 193, Florida Statutes

How much land is available for an agritourism business?

What types of land features are present? Are there springs or caves? Does your land have a lake, ponds, streams, or other water features? Do you have swampland or marshes? Is the topography comprised of rolling hills or flat land? Would it be considered scenic?

Do you plan to utilize agricultural land that is in use portions of the year? If so, is the land easily used?

Is the soil the type that is appropriate to use during the time when you plan to host your agritourism operation?

What do you visualize for the use of this land?
Is the location of your proposed business easily accessible?

How are your access roads?

Are you located close to other attractions or nearby towns/cities?

Are there buildings available on the land that could be used for your business? Are they modern, historic, ramshackle?

The Florida climate is another important resource that you should think about.

Will it be too hot? Too windy? Too wet? What about hurricane season? You have a fairly good idea of Florida’s weather patterns, and how they will impact your agritourism business.

Wildlife is something else to consider. Sometimes, you have to make arrangements not to run into those pesky alligators or snakes.

Can the wildlife found on your land be hunted or fished?

Does wildlife on the land pose a threat to visitors? If so, what can you do to prevent dangerous encounters?

Would you consider the wildlife to be of interest to birdwatchers or wildlife watchers?

Are there other tourism resources nearby that could be an additional attraction to your agritourism operation?

Restaurants

Lodging establishments

Gas stations

Other attractions like Florida springs or rivers, parks, theme parks, shopping areas, zoos, museums, or beach venues?
Take an inventory of your current infrastructure. For example, do you have existing farm buildings that can be utilized or updated for agritourism activities. Keep in mind that Florida Statute 570.86 states “An agritourism activity does not include the construction of new or additional structures or facilities intended primarily to house, shelter, transport, or otherwise accommodate members of the general public.”

Parking
Restroom facilities and other plumbed facilities
Are you Americans With Disabilities (ADA) compliant? Is it necessary for your operation to be in compliance?
Shelter
Picnic area

With all of this in mind, what can you offer that complements your assessed resources and plays into your local community? What will attract visitors and help you build your agritourism business?

What is available within your community to help you get your agritourism business up, running, and successful? There are many government resources in place to help. (See the Important Agritourism Industry Resources section for more information.)
Agritourism is booming, and you may be considering giving it a try on your own farm. Before you do, prepare yourself to be profitable by taking the time to write a detailed business plan that considers how you will lay the groundwork for and then achieve success.

Selling the Farm Experience

Part education, part entertainment, agritourism farms account for nearly three quarters of a billion dollars in annual ag sales in the United States (USDA Ag Census, 2012). The general public, maybe now more than ever, is curious about what happens on a farm, and agritourism operations give them a taste with farm tours, farm stays, animal petting zoos, harvest festivals, corn mazes, and other fun experiences.

Don’t feel like you need to start from scratch with an agritourism operation - in fact, it’s better not to. Using the farm resources you already have will increase your chances of profitability and diversify your risk. These resources aren’t just crops and space. Also consider labor, equipment, and the sale of your own farm products to visitors as potential resources available to your agritourism activities.
Planning for Success

Agritourism is a very, very different way to earn money on your farm if you’re used to traditional methods. Selling an entertainment experience requires you to have a customer-focused attitude and a talent for marketing. Just how different operating an agritourism enterprise can be should give you pause as a producer - at least a pause that lasts long enough to create a detailed business plan.

Before you stick your toe in the water to try out agritourism, take some time to think not only about short-term operational planning, but also about what strategic planning that lays out where your agritourism business will go, how it will get there, and what resources will be required. An ideal business plan will be detailed enough that others can read it and understand what you intend to do, how financial results will be achieved (and what those results are), and the steps you will take to help your enterprise grow and prosper.

Writing a business plan requires you to envision and establish clear goals. Goals are not the same as potential opportunities or grand ideas. Concentrate on SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Rewarding, and Timed. Also address what can go wrong and how to avoid, correct, or mitigate problems that can be anticipated.

It’s also important that a business plan for diversification into agritourism is still a farm business plan, meaning that the agritourism components of your plan have to harmonize and not interfere with your existing operation. For example, if spring planting is the busiest time of the year, then it would be best to make sure the labor, equipment, and cash flow resources needed for that are not also scheduled for an agritourism event.

Using Words and Numbers

A business plan must use descriptive language to tell the story of what the agritourism enterprise will do, and it must also tell the same story in numbers. The story in numbers means budgets, forecasts, key financial performance indicators that will be tracked,
and spreadsheets showing “what if” analyses (such as what if the weather is bad on festival day, what if labor costs rise due to bigger crowds, what if advertising expense is doubled). Using both words and numbers to describe the business means that your plan can be understood by more people. When your partners, spouse, advisors, investors, or lenders can clearly read your plan, they can better understand how deeply your plan addresses business performance in a variety of situations.

Although you can hire a professional consultant to write a business plan, you as business owner have to take the ultimate responsibility to develop and implement the plan. The Small Business Administration or regional business development centers may be helpful in assuring that you’ve covered plenty of realistic scenarios. Advisors such as cooperative extension staff and agricultural lenders such as Farm Credit loan officers are familiar with the unique characteristics of farm businesses and can also provide valuable input. (See the Important Agritourism Industry Resources section for more information.)

**Considering a Loan**

A part of making a business plan may be securing a loan for your agritourism venture. Once you have a good idea of the scope and scale of the agritourism business you are considering, you can decide if you need to find a financial partner for a loan. That decision should be evident from the budgets and cash flow projections in your business plan. For example, if you are going to operate a corn maze in the fall, you will need to know how much it costs to plant the corn, map the maze, install fencing, set up parking, designate admissions areas, and if you’re going to have farm fresh foods on hand to sell to the crowds. If the cost of all those preparations takes more money than you have, you should consider seeking a loan. You can learn more about financing your operation by contacting your local Farm Credit officer.

Borrowing money should be considered only if you have a plan in advance that shows how you will be able to pay the money back. Getting a lender to invest in your agritourism idea will require you to show how much you will achieve in sales, minus your costs, equaling a net profit from which you can repay the loan.
Forecasting Costs and Profits

It’s important to know your start-up cost and break-even point when starting any agritourism business, but these numbers become even more crucial when you’re asking for a loan. A start-up cost is the amount of money invested in the project before it begins to show any income from sales. A monthly cash flow spreadsheet will show the total start-up costs, when those costs will incur, when income from sales will begin, and when a loan can be paid back. You can also use a monthly cash flow projection to schedule project milestones, such as a task list for when corn should be planted or advertising should be purchased.

Knowing your break-even point means you’ve projected what you’ll have to achieve to ensure you don’t lose money. To find your break-even point for the corn maze, for example, you’ll need to be able to forecast what it will cost to provide the corn maze experience, how many paying customers you can attract to your maze, and how much they will each pay you. If it costs you $10,000 to create the corn maze, grow it, obtain liability insurance for it, advertise it, and have staff to sell tickets for $10, then to meet your break-even point you would need 1,000 customers ($10 per ticket X 1,000 tickets = $10,000). Potential lenders will want to know these figures to grant you financing, and you’ll want to know them to determine at what point you can begin to make a profit.

Agritourism can be a fun and interesting way for almost any size of farm to earn more profits, but that success starts with careful planning. Gather and analyze the specifics of your business, and create a strong business plan that explains those in detail. Laying this kind of groundwork right away will help you as you start into agritourism and also as you grow your operation in the future.

By Gary Matteson

VP, Young, Beginning, Small Farmer Programs and Outreach, The Farm Credit Council
There are many ways agricultural landowners benefit from adding an agritourism operation to their existing business.

- Additional income
- Increase revenue without increasing acreage
- Supplemental income can be used for today’s and future needs
- Sole income is not reliant on farming operations, it is varied and can become more predictable income for the operation
- Agritourism provides opportunities for more of the family to become involved in the operation
- Agritourism offers additional marketing and sales channels for products
- Grow the agricultural side of your business while offering your products to the public through emerging trends like the farm-to-table movement
- Become a public advocate regarding the importance of farming and agriculture
By opening your farm up to the public, you are providing an invaluable educational experience! Farm visitors can reap the benefits of the business that you sow. Some of the information your visitors will take away from the farm:

- Learn where food comes from
- Become aware of the farm-to-table movement that is sweeping the country
- Learn about healthful and nutritious food options
- Understand that agricultural resources need to be managed or food will become scarce
- Gain an understanding of farming and agricultural life
- Learn about Florida’s history through agriculture
- Participate in a new experience - an out-of-doors agricultural adventure
There are so many different types of agritourism operations in which you can become involved. You can provide several different activities at one venue. These experiences should be awesome for the guest. It is important for you to remember that in keeping with the reputation of the visitor experience to the Sunshine State, your operation should be a first-class adventure that is safe, fun, educational, and exciting.

From overnight stays and recreational activities or tours to retail sales, meeting services and educational activities, the only limit to your agritourism adventure is your imagination, and what is prevented by state law. Here are some ideas for your agritourism activity.

**Overnight Lodging***

- Bed and Breakfasts
- Ranch-style lodging
- Farm house stays
- RV sites/camp sites
- Camps
- Equine shipping layovers with stalls and/or paddocks

*See the Lodging at your Agritourism Business section for more information about opening a lodging establishment in the state of Florida.*
Retail Sales of local produce or farm products sold on the farm. Some of these foods are also known as cottage foods in Florida.

- Baked goods/breads
- Jellies/jams/honey
- Boiled peanuts
- Produce – uncut
- Product – cut*
- Nuts or nut products
- Wine*
- Salsas*
- Juices*
- Plants
- Pick your own fruit or vegetables
- Rent-a-tree, bush or garden
- Flowers
- Rent-a-hen
- Cheese

Recreational Activities or Tours

- Fishing/fishing leases
- Hunting/hunting leases
- Citrus grove tours
- Alligator farming
- Equitourism
- Barn tours
- Horseback riding
- Vineyards/wineries
- Shooting skeet
- Cattle-related activities such as drives, roping, etc.
- Crop harvesting
- Pick your own citrus, melons, berries, beans, etc.
- Archery
- Hiking/walking
- Stargazing
- Rock climbing
- Farm equipment demonstrations
- Wagon/hay rides
- Wildlife watching/bird watching
- Air-boat tours
- Butterfly farms
- Agricultural photo shoots
- Plantation tours
- Beekeeping
- A rural life step back into time
- Dude ranch/ranch fun

Meeting planning/other hospitality services

- Picnics
- Bonfires
- Weddings
- Receptions
- Company retreats
- Family reunions
- Church groups
- Mystery dining
- Catering for events held on your farm/ranch
**Holidays/seasonal events**

- Cut your own Christmas tree
- Christmas with Santa on the farm
- Valentine’s Day specials
- Spring planting events
- Easter egg hunts
- Runs and other sporting events
- Music festivals
- Arts and crafts festivals
- Crop maze
- Haunted hay rides/haunted house
- Other harvest-time activities

**Educational Activities**

- Organized tours for schools, churches, seniors, families
- Agricultural programs that teach attendees how to grow produce and herbs, care for livestock, beekeeping, create butterfly gardens, caring for poultry
- Nature education programs showcasing wildlife, flora, and fauna
- Agricultural demonstrations such as horseshoeing, juice production, milk production
- Workshops such as horse training, arts and crafts

Be certain that whatever you decide to do, make it the best possible, make it something you can be proud of, and make it an activity that folks will want to return to year after year. Listen to your guests. If they are asking for something in addition to what you are offering, consider whether it is a “good fit.” If so, add that too!

*Some food products cannot be sold to the public unless properly licensed as a processing facility. Licensure of this nature demands more regulatory oversight. See the Licensing and Business Resources section for more information.*
There are several types of consumers that would be interested in your agritourism operation. Each target audience may be looking for something different at an agritourism operation. One may be looking for an educational program while another may be looking for a relaxing or romantic getaway. Still other target audiences may be looking for recreational activities, entertainment, an event location (for business or organizational meetings, family reunions, birthday parties, weddings, receptions or other events), an authentic farm experience or a source of direct-from-the-farm products.

In Florida, we may have additional target markets comprised of seniors’ groups, “lunch and learn” programs, university-driven adult learning groups, and even entrepreneurial seminars sponsored by educational officials.

- Teachers and schools/educational organizations
- Youth civic and church groups
- Adult civic and church groups
- Garden clubs
- Business leaders
- Birthday/party planners
- Brides and grooms-to-be
- Married couples
- Local families with children
- Families on vacation
- Business travelers
- Fair and festival goers
- Teenagers
- History buffs
- Wine connoisseurs
- Hunters
- Wildlife watchers
- Landscape and wildlife photographers
- Outdoor enthusiasts (hikers, bikers, boaters, rafters, etc.)
- Equine enthusiasts
- Travel/tour firm
Hugh McPherson of Maize Quest Fun Park in Pennsylvania shared his observations about what makes a successful agritourism operation at the 2013 Great Lake EXPO. His remarks on his “Five Core Pillars for Success” make sense for every agritourism operator who wants to provide high-quality agritainment.

A “fun park” component that offers games and activities for a broad range of ages and incomes, with at least one new offering each year

A market for selling items related to the business for all incomes

Food for the visitors to eat while visiting

A courtyard for people to rest while visiting to extend their stay

A seasonal focus that leads to an easy marketing and giveaway campaign

He suggests that operators plan or revise their businesses around these concepts and that agritourism businesses conduct an inventory of all attractions. After the inventory is complete, he suggests asking following questions:

For what age group is each attraction designed?

What age group might be underserved at your business?

What is the budget per attraction?
The exercise of asking these questions will give the business owner perspective on what should be added or retooled. Diane L. Smith of the Michigan State University Extension compiled this information and she summarized McPherson’s exercise. “McPherson emphasized that this approach is found to be more successful and less time-consuming than trying to offer something every season to make your place a year-round destination. By working smarter through implementing the five core pillars of an agritourism operation, he believes businesses will find that they have a greater financial gain at the end of the year.”

This is certainly something to consider as you plan your agritourism business, making sure to carefully plan out your expansion of options and changes to different aspects of your agritourism operation. Additionally, be certain that you are successful with every component before you add another.
Welcoming hospitality and superior customer service are the foundation to any great tourism experience.

When operating an agritourism business, you must provide a quality experience for your visitors. As the Sunshine State, Florida is known for its warm hospitality and exceptional customer service. The operation of a tourism venture is about attracting first-time visitors to your destination. It is also about providing an experience that will not only have them returning year after year, but will see them bringing their friends and family when they return. Hospitality and customer service are a big part of your attraction. This begins from the first telephone call and continues until a visitor pulls out of the driveway. In some cases, it may not even end there; with social media accessibility, customers may also experience hospitality after they leave your business. It is critical that all individuals who are in contact with the public are pleasant, knowledgeable, and professional.

The first time a potential visitor has contact with your business may be when they call to find out more about the operation. While many folks will browse a web page, they may also call to seek more information. The person designated to answer the phone should announce the business name and his or her name immediately. Information should be provided to the callers clearly and professionally. If it is necessary to place a caller on hold or transfer the call to someone else who is more knowledgeable, advise the caller of your upcoming action and perform it carefully and correctly. If messages are left on the operation’s voice mail, return them quickly and remember to check voice mail throughout the day.
Your web page is a critical component of your overall operation. By addressing points not to miss when heading out to your agritourism business, you are already providing excellent customer service. Be sure to include your exact address and provide directions. Make a note if GPS directions are confusing or inaccurate. If you have several farm entrances, make sure that you clarify which one is for agritourists as opposed to which one is used for vendors and employees. Your phone number must be a part of the website information, too.

Before your guests come to your property, make sure that they understand what steps they can take to optimize their farm experience. Prepare visitors for their adventure by providing information about appropriate attire and accessories that might be useful. Some examples may be closed-toed shoes, hats, or sunscreen. If additional accessories are needed in order to enjoy the adventure, perhaps consider providing them to guests, such as umbrellas or rain ponchos. Prior to enjoying the adventure, be sure to talk about safety, rules, and regulations. Make sure that you can deliver on any promises that you or your employees make about the farm visit experience.

What will you or your employees say to visitors upon arrival to your agritourism adventure? How will they be greeted? It is a great idea to provide all employees with a short script of the points not to miss when greeting folks who have just arrived at your business. Be certain to include the name of your operation and other pertinent information in a concise and welcoming manner. Remember, body language does matter. Employees should greet visitors with a smile and a welcoming stance. Remember, we live and work in the Sunshine State!

Employees should be easily recognizable by anyone visiting your business. Uniforms and name tags can really help with this effort. Employees should be prepared to take the initiative to ensure that all guests are enjoying their agritourism adventure. By formally recognizing an employee’s excellent customer service, the employee will feel empowered to make every guest’s experience as enjoyable as possible.

Be mindful of the culture and traditions of visitors from other countries when possible. If you become aware that a large group from another country that speaks a different language is planning to visit your agritourism operation, you may want to consider offering a translator to assist in giving information and instruction to guests. Once your guests are on the property, it is helpful to provide a local directory of services, food and lodging, attractions, emergency contact information, churches and other places of worship, and similar information. You may want to offer materials from your local convention and visitors’ bureau that includes the information noted above as well as a map.
Providing a take-away gift from the agritourism experience is a nice touch. These days, it is so easy to take a photo of guests enjoying the adventure. You can print it and give it to visitors before leaving. Also, be certain that you have contact information such as business cards and brochures available to guests before departing so that the experience can be easily be shared with friends!

Signage is important to the customer service experience. Drive-by signage offers a short description of the business. Directional signage on the property is also vital. Be certain to point out restroom facilities, picnic areas, the gift shop location, the ticket office, and other landmarks at your business. Agritourism liability signage must be posted in compliance with the law as well if you want to maintain your exemption from liability.

As your guests leave your operation, think about how their adventure went. Was it fun? Was it educational? Was it memorable? If the answer is yes, then congratulations!

Make sure that your webpage and social media accounts are kept current and provide information about seasonal or unexpected changes in real time.

Utilize social media in following up with visitors who make comments or critiques about your business. It may not be possible to satisfy every customer, but by responding to issues quickly and professionally, you will have done your best to correct the situation.

Remember that from the initial phone call or website view to post-visit follow up, there are opportunities to shine and promote your business to visitors and potential visitors.

Empower your employees to make decisions that provide great customer service.
A business plan is a tool to help you manage your business. It is constantly evolving and should be a reference that you look to frequently. It identifies your strengths and weaknesses and allows you to constantly improve the plan for success. It also incorporates all of the hopes, dreams and realities of operating a business into one place. The business plan will house the goals and objectives for your business and will help you keep track of your successes and those ventures not as successful.

Typically, a business plan is comprised of an executive summary, a description of your business, a market and competition analysis, an operational and management plan, a marketing plan, a financial plan, goals and objectives, and a risk management plan with a description of potential issues. A business plan is almost always a necessary and key component in expressing to lenders of capital what they may be lending money for or investing in.

An executive summary is best written after completion of the body of the business plan. It will summarize your business plan without going into specific detail about each activity or plan. It is an overview of your proposed agritourism business. While it shouldn’t be lengthy, it should express general information about the business.

Your business description will provide additional information about your planned business. It will briefly outline the activities and offerings, the market, the competition, the goals and objectives/milestones, and the mission of the business. Include why the proposed business is unique and why you believe it could be successful. The structure of the business (i.e. how it is described legally) can be incorporated at this point. If you have an existing business, also include a description in this section.

The marketing plan will assist you in determining the methods that you will use to reach out to potential visitors. You should be able to easily describe your product to target guests, and why it should not be missed. There are several questions to ask in this process.
Is the location an attraction in itself? Is it rural or located closely to other attractions and amenities? Will people want to visit your agritourism operation because of the location?

What is the price of your agritourism adventure or your pricing strategy? Is your pricing easily affordable, or is it a lifestyle adventure that is not accessible for the general public? Is the price in line with similar activities offered within the industry in your region? Is your pricing justifiable by both the adventure experienced and the cost of doing business?

How will you be paid for the agritourism adventure? Will you accept credit cards? Can you pre-purchase the experience via the Internet? If you offer retail sales at your operation, will someone be available to manage that aspect of the business?

There are many options that you can access to promote your agritourism business. Currently, the most important marketing tool that you can develop to promote your business is building a useful, descriptive, and updated website.

Additional promotional tools available to business owners include:

- Traditional free advertising or publicity
- Traditional paid advertising or publicity
- Partnership/promotion with local convention and visitors’ bureau
- Social media
  - Social networking – Facebook, LinkedIn
  - Photo sharing – Instagram
  - Social bookmarking – Pinterest
  - Video sharing – YouTube, Vimeo, Snapchat, Vine
  - Blogging/Micro-blogging – WordPress, Tumblr, Twitter
- Partner with the Florida Agritourism Association, your advocate and marketing resource - www.visitfloridafarms.com
DEVELOPING A BUSINESS PLAN FOR YOUR AGRITOURISM ADVENTURE

Partner with promotional governmental agencies like VISIT FLORIDA

Promotion with natural partners such as the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Holiday promotions

Newsletters/magazines/trade journals

Gift certificates

Email programs

Word-of-mouth

Trade shows

Local sports clubs, etc.

Promotional materials and opportunities
  Website
  Brochures
  Business cards
  Fliers
  Billboards
  Road, entry, and directional signage
  Press kit

It is ideal to utilize promotional techniques that will engage your potential customers in order to grow your client and friend base. Marketing your agritourism business can be demanding, but it can also be a lot of fun. Be creative. Collaborate. Get to know your peers and work together to bring the business to your area.
Directional Signage Opportunities for Agritourism Marketing

By Lena Juárez

Executive Director, FATA

In 2014, the Florida Agritourism Association (FATA), acting as advocate for the agritourism industry, was instrumental in assisting agritourism operators in gaining directional signage clarification. One of the most frequent requests we encounter is a desire to have an increased opportunity for signage.

We know many of you are located in rural areas and sometimes have a challenging time with state and local regulations that don’t permit you to obtain adequate directional signage to your location.

FATA worked closely with the Florida Department of Transportation to better understand current signage opportunities as well to create new opportunities through statutory change. Here is a synopsis of signage opportunities that are potentially available to your operation:

Tourist Oriented Directional Signage (TODS) – TODS are standard-design white on blue service guide signs for use on rural roads. Signs have one or more panels that provide the business name and directional information. This program has been available since 2007 and has been a sign program for intersections on rural and conventional state, county, or municipal roads in rural counties identified by criteria and population in Chapter 288.0656, Florida Statutes. However, the law was changed during the 2014 legislative session to include rural areas in all Florida counties.

The program applies to intersections on rural and conventional state, county or municipal roads. This is a very exciting new signage opportunity for many of your businesses. However, your local county must decide to implement the program, as it is voluntary by counties and not mandatory. A county or local government that issues permits for a TODS program is responsible for sign construction, maintenance, and program operation for roads on the state highway system and may establish permit fees sufficient to offset associated costs.

TOD signs may not be placed within the right-of-way of limited access facilities; within the right-of-way of a limited access facility interchange,
regardless of jurisdiction or local road classification; on conventional roads in urban areas; or at interchanges on freeways or expressways.

FATA wants to work with you and your local county officials to get the TODS program established in every Florida county. Contact us if you want to help spearhead efforts in your county to have the TODS program implemented.

Temporary Harvest Season Signs – Seasonal signage is now permitted. Signs can measure up to 32 square feet but may only list the name, distance and/or direction of a farm operation. Signs must be erected at a road junction within the state highway system. Such signs may be erected during harvest season, not to exceed four months. Harvest signs may not be located in the right-of-way. The farmer must either own the property where the sign is placed or have permission from the property owner. This type of signage is ideal for u-pick operations.

**Signage on Farm Property**

The following types of signage are exempt from state statute signage regulations and are permitted at agritourism operation locations.

Signs erected on the premises of an establishment, which consist primarily of the name of the establishment or which identify the principal or accessory merchandise, services, activities, or entertainment sold, produced, manufactured, or furnished on the premises of the establishment. (If a sign located on the premises of an establishment consists principally of brand name or trade name advertising and the merchandise or service is only incidental to the principal activity, or if the owner of the establishment receives rental income from the sign, then the sign is not exempt.)

Signs erected, used, or maintained on a farm by the owner or lessee of such farm and relating solely to farm produce, merchandise, service, or entertainment sold, produced, manufactured, or furnished on the farm.
Florida Interstate Logo Signs

Did you know that your business may already be eligible to participate in the Florida Interstate Logo Program? Your agritourism operation may qualify as an attraction under Florida law. To participate in this program, your operation:

- Must be open at least five days per week, 52 weeks per year
- Must be located within 15 miles of the interchange
- Have family-oriented entertainment or cultural, recreational, scientific, or historical activities
- Must be recognized as a bona fide attraction

Ideally, you would offer some type of ongoing activity, such as a tour or other active participation by the public, at your operation that is specifically designed to entertain or educate. Fees for signage are determined by a population formula based on the location of the interstate exit and currently range between $700 and $1,245 annually. A $50 discount applies in Rural Areas of Critical Economic Concern, which will also be based on where the sign is located. There may be some limitations on availability of spaces at some exits throughout the state. You can learn more about the signage opportunities specifically for Interstate Logos at www.floridainterstatelogos.com or by calling toll free at 1-888-608-0833.

Outdoor advertising and billboards are great ways to advertise your business. If you own property along a state or county road, you may be eligible to place a billboard on your property. The billboard could be utilized to advertise your agritourism operation. The rules for placing a billboard on your property are complex and best understood by working directly with Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Office of Outdoor Advertising and Logo Office of Right of Way.

For more information about these signage opportunities for your operation, contact the Florida Department of Transportation Outdoor Advertising and Logo Office of Right of Way at 850-414-4600. Additional information and links with the specific rules established by the agency pursuant to Chapter 479, Florida Statutes, may be found in the Important Agritourism Industry Resources section.

By Lena Juárez

Executive Director, FATA
**Market Analysis**

Market analysis of your competition will provide insight as you research the market and competition of your business. It will evaluate the market and background of the business/industry climate; review supporting data; review competitors, both for threats and successes; examine the demographics of residents and visitors; and will assist in identifying target markets. The analysis will also describe the local and state regulations that apply to the creation and operation of the business.

Many resources and organizations share the same interests. Local chambers of commerce, VISIT FLORIDA, convention and visitors’ bureaus, and trade associations (e.g. FATA, Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association, and Florida Attractions Association) can provide information about your target market.

The market and competition analysis you conduct will help in understanding the market, the niche where your business fits, and the resources available to promote your agritourism venture.

The operational and management plan will incorporate the day-to-day details of managing the business. It will identify the tasks needed to operate the business and how to complete them successfully. This plan should provide position descriptions and a general task analysis for each employee and information about critical personnel. It should include an employee handbook, hiring, firing and other pertinent personnel management issues, and security, licensing and/or permitting can be detailed in this plan as well.

**The following is a detailed listing of additional topics that may be covered in an operational and management plan.**

- Renovations, if needed
- Location - zoning, accessibility, etc.
- Supplies needed to operate the business
- Technology needed to operate business
- Food safety animal health issues, if applicable
Financial Plan

The financial plan for your agritourism business is the keystone to your success. It should outline what your business can afford to do, how and why this is possible, and if the business is feasible. Your financial plan will help you determine if it is worth your while to operate your business. The financial plan is a must if you plan to borrow money to establish the business.

Typically, a financial plan is comprised of statements that note the status of the accounts, cash flow, and the income of the business. It is recommended that a professional assist you in preparing this information. You may not need a loan to get your business up and running, but developing a financial statement is still a very important component in understanding your proposed and/or established business.

The financial plan will assist you in assessing your start-up costs for your agritourism operation. From determining the price of operational expenses, to personnel costs and one-time investments, to projected revenue, the financial plan can be a tool to help you break down the cost of doing business. It can assist you in establishing forecasts and milestones. This goes hand-in-hand with your goals and objectives.

The goals and objectives for your proposed agritourism business are the stepping stones you need to determine the success of your business. Your goals are broad statements describing where you want to go with your business. The objectives are the details of getting to your goal. There may be several objectives related to each goal. Objectives are precise and number generated.
For example, if your goal is to generate revenue with land laying fallow, your objectives could be:

- Hold two festivals per year that offer an agricultural/rural “flea market” environment
- Grow vendor numbers for each event year over year by five percent
- Grow general public attendance at each event year over year by 10 percent
- Provide offerings from agritourism business to support goal

In another example, if your goal is to increase revenue from beekeeping, your objectives may include:

- Host 15 educational opportunities on premise with at least 100 attendees in total
- Sell at least $100 worth of honey at each event
- Write a monthly blog about the ins and outs of beekeeping, with a goal of reaching 1,000 people per year

To sum it up, the goals and objectives that you establish are the roadmap that you will use to establish and promote your agritourism operation. Goals and objectives should be a serious undertaking; they will determine what you are doing to achieve business success.

Compliance and Risk Management

There are risks associated with any business. It is necessary for you to develop a risk management plan to assist you when and if your business faces a hardship.

Conducting a risk assessment for activities at your business is a great starting place for your plan. Evaluate what you do - or what you will do - and the risks involved. Note those risks and be certain to describe them when talking with your insurance company so that all aspects of
the operation are covered. Correct and appropriate insurance coverage should be a big component of your risk management plan.

Florida’s agritourism law provides for limitation on legal liability from the inherent risks for the landowner, agritourism operator, and employees if a notice of risk is posted on the land. This limitation must be posted and maintained in signs located at the entrance to the agritourism location and at the site of the agritourism activity. The sign must be comprised of the following language:

**WARNING**
Under Florida law, an agritourism operator is not liable for injury or death of, or damage or loss to, a participant in an agritourism activity conducted at this agritourism location if such injury, death, damage, or loss results from the inherent risks of the agritourism activity. Inherent risks of agritourism activities include, among others, risks of injury inherent to land, equipment, and animals, as well as the potential for you to act in a negligent manner that may contribute to your injury, death, damage, or loss. You are assuming the risk of participating in this agritourism activity.

Agritourism activity operators may purchase a sign that is compliant with the law from the Florida Agritourism Association at the FATA website, www.visitfloridafarms.com.

Reading the rules, regulations and safety precautions to visitors when they arrive at your agritourism destination is not just a customer service issue; it is also important for all visitors to hear or read this information as part of your risk management plan. Be certain that every visitor to your operation is aware of this information. It might be a good practice to read this to visitors, and then have them sign a statement acknowledging the rules, regulations and safety precautions. When entertaining guests at your business, be certain to uphold rules, regulations and safety precautions at all times.

While you are protected from liability if your agritourism signage is posted, it is not a bad idea to have guests sign a participant release and an assumption of risk form when coming onto your premise. This document is best written by legal counsel. This is just one more bit of “insurance” to protect you and your business from any trouble should the worst occur.
Part of any risk management plan, is a safety plan. This is a strategy that should be followed if there is an emergency at your agritourism business. It should be comprised of established guidelines, contact information, and a site map. All employees should have access to the safety plan and should be trained in the use of the safety plan prior to opening the business and as often as needed thereafter to ensure proficiency. Depending on the size of your operation, you may want to consider hosting an event for emergency management officials at your farm. This will allow them the opportunity to see the activities you provide, where they need to enter your farm, how to navigate on property to reach visitors and employees in emergency situations, and will give them a chance to assess potential risk factors before an emergency occurs.

Incident reporting is part of a risk management plan. You should have a form available to document any incidents that occur at the agritourism business. Maintaining the incident reporting form with the safety plan is a good policy. The incident reporting form should describe the incident itself, who was involved, contact information for those involved, and actions taken to correct the incident. All incidents should be addressed by management and steps should be taken to ensure an incident of the same type does not occur again.

An animal health strategy should be part of a risk management plan if applicable. Animals should be in good health, and certified by an animal health professional as often as necessary as required by law. In addition, contact information should be available to all employees should something appear to be wrong with the animals.

If you are serving alcohol, responsible vendor training can be an important part of protecting your business, and there are resources to assist in providing this for owners and employees. The Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) provides information at www.myfloridalicense.com/dbpr/abt/index.html. The Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association (FRLA) has an online alcohol compliance training program; more information can be found at www.frla.org.

A sound risk management plan can be a great mitigating factor should trouble arise. Build a solid plan and adhere to it.
Need Some Help Writing That Business Plan or Starting Your Agritourism Business?

There are many excellent sources available to assist you in writing your business plan and to get your business up and running.

**Florida Department of State Division of Corporations** – assists and registers businesses. [www.sunbiz.org/index.html](http://www.sunbiz.org/index.html)

**The SCORE Foundation** is a free service offering business advice, information about how to write a simple and useful business plan, and offers mentoring opportunities. [www.SCORE.org 1-800-634-0245](http://www.SCORE.org 1-800-634-0245)

**The Small Business Administration** can assist in business development. There are offices located throughout the state. [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)

**Florida Small Business Development Center** – assists small businesses. [http://floridasbdc.org](http://floridasbdc.org)

**Enterprise Florida** - provides industry, business climate, and jobs information. [www.enterpriseflorida.com](http://www.enterpriseflorida.com)

There is no doubt that retail sales of products at your agritourism business will boost your revenue. There are many options to consider when determining if retail sales fits your operation. Do you want to offer snack food and drinks to guests? If so, would you utilize prepackaged products and refreshments, or would you be interested in food packaged or prepared on-site and a fountain drink machine? What about vending machines?

Food and Refreshment Sales

Choosing how you plan to offer snack foods and refreshments to customers will determine if there are additional mandatory licensing and training requirements. If you provide food prepared on premise of your agritourism operation other than cottage foods as defined below, you will be required to have a food manager on duty during times of food preparation, and your employees working with food must be trained in food handling practices. It might be easier for you to serve prepackaged snacks and prepackaged refreshments at no charge.

Both the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation oversee different types of food service operations. There are exemptions from licensure depending on the types of foods/beverages provided and service parameters.

Commercially prepackaged food, not potentially hazardous, not time- or temperature-controlled, shelf space does not exceed 12 linear feet, and no other food is sold

Food service is limited to ice, beverages, popcorn, or prepackaged items that need no other preparation or additions
Always make sure that if you need to secure licenses and permits that you do so before providing food items to customers. For more information and further clarification, visit http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Food-Safety and www.myfloridalicense.com/dbpr/hr.

The Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) also regulates vending machines, public food service establishments (restaurants), and catering services.

If you opt to provide prepackaged convenience snack food and refreshments in vending machines, make sure that you contact your county and city government to determine if they require licensure. For foods that must be maintained under refrigeration or kept frozen, it is likely that the machine will require a state food service license from DBPR.

**Cottage Foods**

You may decide that you want to sell homemade foods to guests. These are known as cottage foods. Cottage foods are those food items that can be prepared in an unlicensed home kitchen and sold to the general public.

Cottage food operations are not regulated for food safety by any governmental agency and the annual gross sales are limited to $50,000 annually. These food items must be made in a residential kitchen and stored in a single family residence. Residence is defined by law to mean a primary residence that is occupied by an individual who operates a cottage food operation and that contains a single kitchen with appliances designed for common residential usage. The residence may only contain one stove or oven, which may be a double oven designed for non-commercial use.

**Cottage Foods include but are not limited to:**

- Loaf breads, rolls, biscuits
- Cakes, pastries, and cookies
- Candies and confections
- Honey
- Fruit pies
- Jams, jellies, and preserves (fruit is best)
- Dried fruits
- Dry herbs, seasonings, and mixtures
- Homemade pasta
- Cereals, trail mixes, and granola
- Coated or uncoated nuts
- Vinegar and flavored vinegars
- Popcorn, popcorn balls
Foods that do not fall under this law and therefore cannot be sold as cottage foods are:

- Any Potentially Hazardous Food or TCS food*
- Fresh or dried meat or meat products, including jerky
- Canned fruits, vegetables, salsas, etc.
- Fish or shellfish products
- Canned, pickled products such as corn relish, pickles, sauerkraut
- Beverages
- Raw seed sprouts
- Baked goods that require temperature control
- Milk and dairy products including all cheeses and yogurt
- Cut fresh fruits and/or vegetables or juices made from fresh fruits or vegetables
- Ice and/or ice products
- Barbeque sauces, ketchups and/or mustards
- Focaccia-style breads with vegetables and/or cheeses
- Pet foods/treats (For information about these, contact the FDACS Feed Inspection Program)

*Potentially Hazardous Food is a food that requires time/temperature control for safety (TCS) to limit pathogenic microorganism growth or toxin formation; an animal food that is raw or heat-treated; a plant food that is heat treated or consists of raw seed sprouts, cut melons, cut leafy greens, cut tomatoes or mixtures of cut tomatoes that are not modified in a way so that they are unable to support pathogenic microorganism growth or toxin formation; or garlic-in-oil mixtures that are not modified in a way so that they are unable to support pathogenic microorganism growth or toxin formation.

The following are locations that are not acceptable for processing cottage foods: permitted facilities (licensed by FDACS, DBPR or the Department of Health), garages, sheds, barns or other outbuildings.
Cottage foods can only be sold to the consumer from:

- The cottage food operation (primary residence)
- Farmers’ markets
- Flea markets
- Roadside stands
- The Internet (you may sell and accept payment for cottage foods over the Internet, as long as the cottage foods are delivered in person directly to the consumer or to a specific event venue.)

Cottage foods cannot be sold via:

- Wholesale (no restaurants or grocery stores)
- Mail order
- Consignment

Cottage foods are required to be labeled in accordance with the law. Labeling must include:

- Name and physical address of the Cottage Food operation. (A post office box is unacceptable.)
- Name of the Cottage Food product (All capital letters or upper/lower case are both acceptable.)
- The ingredients of the Cottage Food product, in descending order of predominance by weight. If you use a prepared item in your recipe, you must list the sub-ingredients as well. For example: soy sauce is not acceptable, soy sauce (wheat, soybeans, salt) would be acceptable
- The net weight or net volume of the Cottage Food product (must also include the metric equivalent - conversion charts are available online)
- Allergen labeling as specified in federal labeling requirements
- Cottage foods must also include the following statement on the label, printed with 10-point type minimum:

  **MADE IN A COTTAGE FOOD OPERATION THAT IS NOT SUBJECT TO FLORIDA’S FOOD SAFETY REGULATIONS.**
Allergen labeling for cottage foods is specific. All cottage food products must be labeled in accordance with the United States Code of Federal Regulations Title 21, Part 101. As a cottage food operator, you must identify if any of your ingredients are made from one of the following food groups: eggs, milk, wheat, peanuts, soybeans, fish, and tree nuts. In the sample label provided above possible allergens are identified as “Contains: wheat, eggs, milk, soy and walnuts.” This labeling allows consumers to avoid food which may be harmful to them.

To obtain additional information on labeling, visit www.fda.gov.

Finally, FDACS may investigate any complaint received for a cottage food operation. If your operation is the subject of a complaint, you must allow a FDACS employee or officer in your cottage food operation to conduct an inspection. The employee or officer will determine compliance with applicable laws, rules and regulations. If you refuse to allow a FDACS employee or officer to inspect your cottage food operation, the FDACS may take disciplinary action, which may include a fine of up to $5,000.
Sale of Alcoholic Beverages

The sale of alcoholic beverages in Florida is regulated by the state. If you are interested in potentially offering this type of beverage service to guests, then you must contact the DBPR Division of Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco (ABT). Some of the division’s most frequently asked questions are listed below.

Question: What kind of license do I need to sell alcoholic beverages?

Answer: If you wish to sell beer or wine, you can purchase a consumption on premises license or a package license. There are no restrictions on the number of licenses issued to sell beer and wine. If you wish to sell liquor, a quota license must be obtained. These are limited in number throughout the state, based on county population. To view the various types of alcoholic beverages and tobacco licenses available, as well as applicable fees, visit www.myfloridalicense.com/dbpr/abt/rules_statutes/license_types.pdf and www.myfloridalicense.com/dbpr/abt/documents/fee_chart.pdf.

Question: How can I obtain a license to sell alcoholic beverages?

Answer: There are several methods to obtain a license to sell alcoholic beverages. Each method includes the completion of a license application form, which may be obtained from the division. Application forms, and additional information on completing an application form, may be requested from any division licensing office. The application form may be picked up at one of the offices, mailed directly to you, or found on the Internet at www.myfloridalicense.com/dbpr/abt/forms/index_licensing.html or on the department’s main page at www.myfloridalicense.com/dbpr/index.html. You may select the “APPLY FOR/UPDATE LICENSES” option, which will take you to a page where you can select the general license category and see a checklist of requirements, which will include access to the application form. Once completed, the application may be mailed or hand-delivered to your local ABT licensing office, sent by either regular or overnight mail to the Tallahassee central licensing office, or you can make an appointment with one of the division licensing staff.
Question: How long does it take to obtain an alcoholic beverage license?

Answer: Processing time for a license can vary depending upon the complexity of the type of license being purchased. Filing a complete and accurate application can decrease the processing time. The division is required to process a completed application within 90 days of receipt and acceptance.

Question: Where do I go to apply for a license?

Answer: There are several ways to file an application to obtain an alcoholic beverage or tobacco license. The application may be mailed or hand-delivered to the local division office, sent by regular or overnight mail to the central licensing office, or by making an appointment with ABT licensing personnel.

A list of district office locations and phone numbers may be found at www.myfloridalicense.com/dbpr/abt/district_offices/licensing.html.

If you are planning to provide alcoholic beverages to guests, then a recommended program as part of this type of beverage service is a responsible vendor training program, also known as alcohol compliance training. This program is voluntary, but it provides some mitigation should an incident occur involving individuals who’ve been served alcohol by your operation. The Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association offers training; more information can be found at www.regcomplianceusa.com/. 
If you are thinking about adding lodging to your agritourism business, it will be licensed and inspected by the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Division of Hotels and Restaurants.

A public lodging establishment is defined by Section 509.013, Florida Statutes:

(4)(a) “Public lodging establishment” includes a transient public lodging establishment as defined in subparagraph 1. and a nontransient public lodging establishment as defined in subparagraph 2.

1. “Transient public lodging establishment” means any unit, group of units, dwelling, building, or group of buildings within a single complex of buildings which is rented to guests more than three times in a calendar year for periods of less than 30 days or 1 calendar month, whichever is less, or which is advertised or held out to the public as a place regularly rented to guests.

2. “Nontransient public lodging establishment” means any unit, group of units, dwelling, building, or group of buildings within a single complex of buildings which is rented to guests for periods of at least 30 days or 1 calendar month, whichever is less, or which is advertised or held out to the public as a place regularly rented to guests for periods of at least 30 days or 1 calendar month.

License classifications of public lodging establishments, and the definitions therefor, are set out in s. 509.242. For the purpose of licensure, the term does not include condominium common elements as defined in s. 718.103.
(b) The following are excluded from the definitions in paragraph (a):
1. Any dormitory or other living or sleeping facility maintained by a public or private school, college, or university for the use of students, faculty, or visitors.

2. Any facility certified or licensed and regulated by the Agency for Health Care Administration or the Department of Children and Families or other similar place regulated under s. 381.0072.

3. Any place renting four rental units or less, unless the rental units are advertised or held out to the public to be places that are regularly rented to transients.

4. Any unit or group of units in a condominium, cooperative, or timeshare plan and any individually or collectively owned one-family, two-family, three-family, or four-family dwelling house or dwelling unit that is rented for periods of at least 30 days or 1 calendar month, whichever is less, and that is not advertised or held out to the public as a place regularly rented for periods of less than 1 calendar month, provided that no more than four rental units within a single complex of buildings are available for rent.

5. Any migrant labor camp or residential migrant housing permitted by the Department of Health under ss. 381.008-381.00895.

6. Any establishment inspected by the Department of Health and regulated by chapter 513.

7. Any nonprofit organization that operates a facility providing housing only to patients, patients’ families, and patients’ caregivers and not to the general public.

8. Any apartment building inspected by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development or other entity acting on the department’s behalf that is designated primarily as housing for persons at least 62 years of age. The division may require the operator of the apartment building to attest in writing that such building meets the criteria provided in this subparagraph. The division may adopt rules to implement this requirement.

9. Any roominghouse, boardinghouse, or other living or sleeping facility that may not be classified as a hotel, motel, timeshare project, vacation rental, nontransient apartment, bed and breakfast inn, or transient apartment under s. 509.242.
The statute continues to define what constitutes transient and nontransient occupancy as follows:

(12) “Transient occupancy” means occupancy when it is the intention of the parties that the occupancy will be temporary. There is a rebuttable presumption that, when the dwelling unit occupied is not the sole residence of the guest, the occupancy is transient.

(13) “Transient” means a guest in transient occupancy.

(14) “Nontransient establishment” means any public lodging establishment that is rented or leased to guests by an operator whose intention is that the dwelling unit occupied will be the sole residence of the guest.

(15) “Nontransient occupancy” means occupancy when it is the intention of the parties that the occupancy will not be temporary. There is a rebuttable presumption that, when the dwelling unit occupied is the sole residence of the guest, the occupancy is nontransient.

(16) “Nontransient” means a guest in nontransient occupancy.

For more information about lodging licensing requirements, or opening a bed and breakfast or another type of lodging establishment, visit www.myfloridalicense.com.
Florida Agritourism Association - www.visitfloridafarms.com

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services - www.FreshFromFlorida.com


Division of Marketing and Development - www.FreshFromFlorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Marketing-and-Development


VISIT FLORIDA - www.visitflorida.org

Online Sunshine – Florida Legislature – www.leg.state.fl.us

Florida Agritourism Law
www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2016/570.85
www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2016/570.86
www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2016/570.87
www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2016/570.88
www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2016/570.89

Agricultural Marketing Resource Center - www.agmrc.org/commodities/products/agritourism/

Farm Credit – www.farmcreditflorida.com

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University - www.famu.edu

Florida Cooperative Extension Network – http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/about

Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation – www.myfloridalicense.com/dbpr

Florida Department of Economic Opportunity - www.floridajobs.org

Florida Department of Revenue – www.dor.myflorida.com/dor

Florida Department of Transportation
• www.flrules.org/gateway/chapterhome.asp?chapter=14-10
• www.dot.state.fl.us/rightofway/OutdoorAdvertising.shtm
• www.dot.state.fl.us/rightofway/LogoSignProgram.shtm


Florida Film Commission - www.filminflorida.com

Florida Motorcoach Association - http://floridamotorcoach.org

Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association - www.frla.org

Florida Sports Foundation - www.flasports.com

Florida State Golf Association - www.fsga.org

Florida State Parks - www.dep.state.fl.us/parks

Florida State University – www.fsu.edu

Florida Tax Watch - www.floridataxwatch.org

National Agricultural Law Center - http://nationalaglawcenter.org

National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety - https://www.marshfieldresearch.org/nccrahs
• Agritourism Safety - http://safeagritourism.org
• Safety Checklists - http://safeagritourism.org/checklists
Natural North Florida - www.naturalnorthflorida.com/index.cfm

Ohio State University - https://u.osu.edu/agritourismready

Small Business Administration - www.sba.gov

Starting a Business in Florida - www.myflorida.com/taxonomy/business/starting%20a%20business%20in%20Florida

• USDA Rural Development - www.rurdev.usda.gov/FLHome.html
• Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education - www.sare.org

University of Central Florida - http://hospitality.ucf.edu

University of Florida – www.ufl.edu
• Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) – http://ifas.ufl.edu
• Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises - http://smallfarms.ifas.ufl.edu/environment_and_recreation/tourism/ifas.ufl.edu

Further Reading for Agritourism Business Planning


The Florida Agritourism Association was founded in 2013 by a group of dedicated volunteers who are passionate about creating awareness of and opportunities for Florida agritourism operators.

As the statewide association that supports the growing agritourism market in Florida, it is our vision to create a robust organization that will both promote our members’ agritourism operations, while protecting and expanding the ability for your business to prosper, helping farmers add value to every acre.

Businesses including working farms and ranches, u-pick fruit and vegetable operations, vineyards and wineries, farms with specialty crops and products, and many other types of farms that give visitors a place to play and learn about Florida’s rich agricultural heritage can benefit from membership in FATA. If you would like to become a member or if you wish to speak with us, please feel free to contact us at any time. We are here to educate you about agritourism and answer any questions that you may have. To become a member of FATA, visit us at http://visitor.visitorflorida.com/add-a-farm/#account/join.

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University of Tennessee

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Photo Credits And Thanks
Florida Department Of Agriculture And Consumer Services
VISIT FLORIDA
Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association
Mollydempsey.Com / Trulyflorida.Com / @Trulyflorida On Instagram
The following information is from the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation website. Please review the DBPR website to ensure that you have taken all necessary steps to be in compliance before operating your business.

**Division of Hotels and Restaurants**

**Who needs a license?**

**Jurisdiction**

The State of Florida has three primary food regulatory agencies:

- The Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR)
- The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS)
- The Department of Health (DOH)

Each agency regulates a different part of the retail food service industry.
If your food service operation expands beyond the authority of your current licensing agency, you have a couple of options:

You may stop the activity that requires licensing by another regulatory agency. Example – a bar that previously served no food begins to prepare hot dogs. If the operator wants to continue to prepare hot dogs, then DBPR would become the licensing agency. If hot dog preparation is stopped, then DOH would continue to license the bar.

If you choose to continue the activity that requires a license from another agency, you must contact that agency and comply with their licensing requirements. This may require major equipment or physical plant changes.
Division of Hotels and Restaurants
Guide to Bed and Breakfast Inns

The Division of Hotels and Restaurants provides the following information as a general guide for bed and breakfast inn licensing in Florida and does not represent this to be all requirements for maintaining a license. For complete information, we recommend you refer to applicable laws and rules and our licensing website.

Bed and Breakfasts

Florida law defines a bed and breakfast as a family home structure with no more than 15 sleeping rooms that provides accommodation and meal services generally offered by a bed and breakfast. The community or hospitality industry must recognize the establishment as a bed and breakfast. The Division of Hotels and Restaurants licenses lodging establishments renting to guests on a transient (temporary) basis.

If the establishment conducts food handling or preparation beyond the scope of prepackaged food products, fresh whole fruits, cereal in individual packages, or bulk milk, juice or coffee, the facility must also meet the minimum requirements for a public food service establishment and be separately licensed for this activity.

The establishment must display all current licenses or copies of licenses in a conspicuous place on the premises.

Guest Register

Maintain a guest register showing the signature of each guest, the dates of the guest’s stay and the rate charged for the rental unit. Maintain this information in chronological order for two years and make available for inspection upon request.

Rate Notification

These requirements were repealed by Chapter 2009-195, Laws of Florida, effective October 1, 2009.
Secondary Locks

Install secondary locking devices that cannot be opened by the guest’s key on all guest room doors that open to the outside, to an adjoining room or to a hallway. Locking devices must meet standards approved by appropriate life safety agencies.

Telephone Surcharges

Telephone surcharges, if any, must be posted near each phone on a card 3” x 5” inches or larger.

Plumbing

Provide hot and cold potable water from an approved source to all fixtures. Sewage and wastewater must be disposed of in an approved manner. Provide a utility/custodial service type sink or a can wash provided with hot and cold water. It must connect to a sanitary sewer. Provide splash protection if the sink is located where splashes can contaminate nearby sanitary surfaces.

Facility Requirements

- Provide soap to guests either in individually wrapped bars or as liquid soap in a dispenser.
- Provide a minimum of two towels for each guest. Towels must be cleaned and changed between each guest or daily, whichever occurs first.
- Size mattress pads, bed sheets and blankets appropriately to the mattress or bed so that the entire sleeping area of the mattress is covered.
- Sheets and pillowcases must be in good condition, and cleaned and changed between each guest or once a week, whichever comes first.
- Bedding items, such as mattresses, comforters and pillows must be thoroughly aired, disinfected and kept clean.
Baby cribs provided to guests must meet safety standards established by the Consumer Products Safety Commission.

Keep the establishment free of vermin. Properly ventilate the establishment. Maintain a minimum temperature of 68 degrees Fahrenheit in all areas.

Provide adequate lighting in halls, entrances and stairways. Bathrooms should have lighting brightness of at least 20 foot-candles.

File a Certificate of Balcony Inspection, form DBPR HR-7020, for any building three or more stories or 17 feet in height from the lowest grade level.

**Minimum Fire Safety Requirements**

The division records readily observable fire safety items during inspections. The division reports any item that may violate fire safety requirements to the State Fire Marshal and local fire safety authorities. Please contact them to ensure your establishment meets fire safety requirements.

**General guidelines are:**

Install portable fire extinguishers in accordance with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 10.

Provide a fire alarm system in accordance with NFPA 72.

Install an automatic fire sprinkler system in accordance with NFPA 25. Exception: If all rooms open directly to the outside at ground level or lead to an exterior stairway.

One smoke alarm for the hearing impaired must be available.

Install hard-wired smoke alarms in each sleeping area.

Smoke alarms must be located no closer to the ceiling/wall juncture than four inches and no further from the ceiling/wall juncture than 12 inches.

The local authority having jurisdiction determines the installation of emergency lights and exit signs.
Establishments that exceed 16 occupants must meet the same fire safety requirements as hotels.

Transoms are prohibited.

Automatic fire suppression systems are required over cooking equipment when grease-laden vapors or smoke are produced.

**Food Service Requirements**

If a separate food service license is required, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Food Code and Chapters 61C-1 and 3, Florida Administrative Code (FAC) are the standards that apply.

If the food service operation is new, reopening after being closed over one year or being remodeled, a plan review is necessary. See our plan review website for more information.

**Food Service Plumbing Requirements**

A three-compartment sink with drainboards at each end (or the equivalent) is required to wash, rinse and sanitize equipment and utensils. A commercial dish machine may also be used. A dish machine that uses a chemical for sanitizing must be equipped with a device that indicates audibly or visually when to add more detergent and/or chemical sanitizer.

A separate sink used only for hand washing must be located in each food preparation, ware washing and food dispensing area. Handwash sinks must have hot and cold running water under pressure and be equipped with soap and sanitary hand drying devices.

**Additional Food Service Requirements**

Family style service of food is not permitted.

Refrigeration equipment must hold potentially hazardous food products at or below 41 degrees Fahrenheit.

Food manager certification is required within 30 days after employment and all food service employees must complete approved food safety training.
Requirements of Other Governmental Entities

In addition to obtaining a food or lodging license, applicants need to make sure they comply with all other federal, state, and local requirements like those listed below.

County and Municipality Requirements

Regulations vary among counties and municipalities, and requirements from both may apply to your business. Before making any significant financial commitment, such as signing a lease or construction contract, contact the separate Occupational License, Zoning, and Building authorities for your desired location. Ask each for detailed requirements on opening or transferring ownership of a food or lodging business. Contact information for these departments is in the “government” section of your local telephone book, or available on the Internet.

Sales Tax Registration Number

Obtain a Florida sales tax number or proof of exemption. Contact the Florida Department of Revenue at 1-800-352-3671 for further information.

Federal Employer Identification Number

Obtain a federal employer identification number (FEIN). Contact the U.S. Internal Revenue Service at 1-800-829-4933 for a FEIN application.

Alcoholic Beverage Application

If you intend to sell alcoholic beverages, contact your local DBPR, Division of Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco, district office for an application. If approved, a Division of Hotels and Restaurants (DHR) inspector will also perform a beverage inspection in conjunction with the opening inspection. Beverage licenses will not be issued to public food service establishments without a passed inspection and a license number assigned by the DHR. Send your completed application for a beverage license and a copy of your passed DBPR inspection form to the ABT district office in your area. Once you have received your beverage license, please provide the number and type of license to your DHR district office as soon as possible.