AUSTRALIAN REGIONAL TOURISM LTD

Enabling Agritourism

A Guide for Farmers Planning to Diversify

Forward

This guide has been made possible by Australian Regional Tourism's National Agritourism Project, funded by an Australian Government **Building Better Regions Fund** grant. Created primarily for farmers with an interest in diversifying their farm to include a tourism business the guide is produce and destination neutral.

It is a guide that summarises the feedback and experiences of more than 200 existing farmers and Agritourism stakeholders to provide insights to those beginning the Agritourism journey. It's not a how to guide designed to guarantee success.

Each producer, farm, local council region and tourism destination is unique, but the journey from farmer to tourism operator was striking in its similarity across the country.

This guide is intended to be complementary to the wealth of small business resources available in each State and Territory and build on the catalogue of work that exists for Agritourism operators globally.

This document will be updated regularly. If you'd like to see additional content or have an amendment please email agritourism@artn.com.au or eo@regionaltourism.com.au

Acknowledgement of Country

Australian Regional Tourism acknowledges and pays respects to the Traditional Owners of Country as the sovereign people of the lands and waters on which we live, work and play.

We acknowledge Elders – past and present and their ongoing connection with Country.

(Front Cover Image) Credit: Tourism and Events Queensland

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1.0 Introduction to Agritourism

In this section you will:

- **Be introduced to the concept of Agritourism and experiences known as Agritourism**
- **Understand the benefits and challenges of Agritourism**
- **Evaluate whether Agritourism and you and your farm are a suitable match**

WHAT IS AGRITOURISM

Agritourism is a type of experiential travel which connects people to product or produce, delivered on farming land through a direct "on farm" experience.

There are four essential elements to a farm experience being labelled as Agritourism:

- Combines tourism and agriculture into product or service
- The product or service attracts members of the public to visit your farm
- Farmers diversify from agriculture into tourism, increasing farm income and/or employment
- Provides recreation, entertainment and or educational experiences related to the agriculture enterprise

Agritourism and farm tourism are not one in the same. For an experience to be known as Agritourism, the delivery must be on farm and experience inclusive of one or both of engagement with farm people and the primary product essential to the farm's origins.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF AGRITOURISM

Agritourism has its origins in income diversification and has quickly expanded to being a means for operators to share their passion for product, farming methods, land management as well as provided much needed social contact for regional and rural bound farmers.

BENEFITS

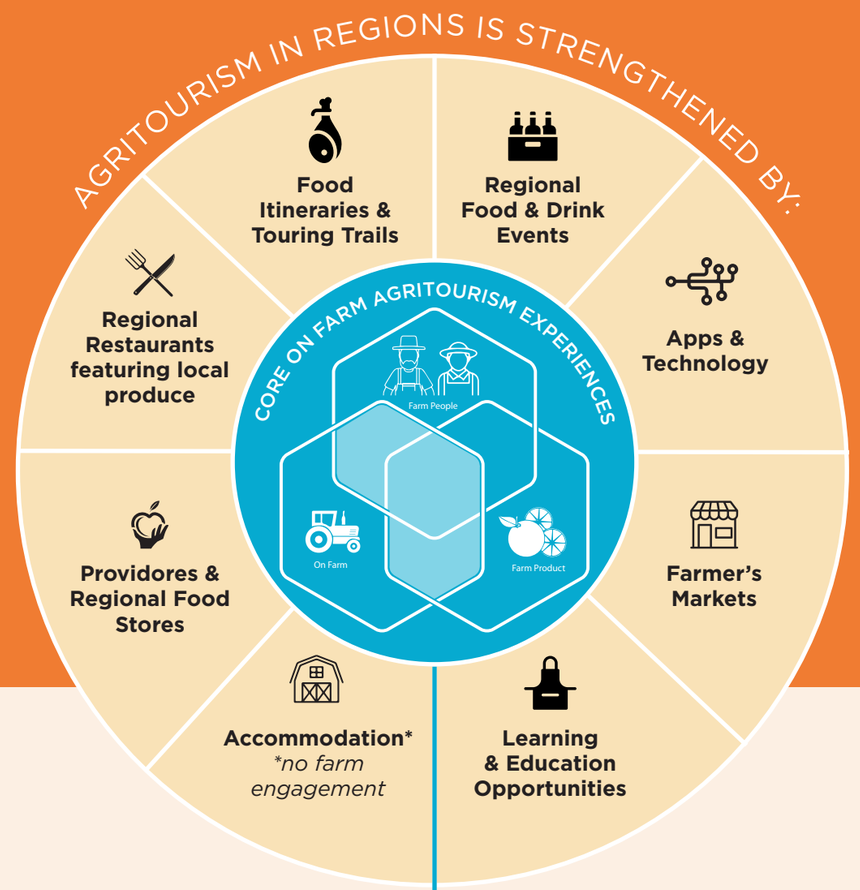
The key reasons we heard why people added a visitor experience to their farm speak to the benefits of Agritourism:

Economic: Increased farm income

- Often triggered by a natural disaster (drought, fire, flood) it's common to want to spread the income streams generated on farm. The intent is not to replace core agriculture income, but reduce the risk, often spreading cashflow into different times of year.
- Reduce distribution costs by selling more produce direct to customers which in turn allows for direct relationships, repeat customers and the development of a customer brand
- Value add to agriculture by processing on farm and supporting improved margins
- Improving infrastructure on the farm adds value to the property, adds to a sense of place also supports farmer wellbeing when things are cared for and look appealing
- Developing an Agritourism experience can replace income from other work in town or replace lost income in a redundancy or time of life change.

Agritourism is an eco system

Core Agritourism is strengthened by regional supporting services, creating an eco system of visitor experiences.



Environmental: New or evolved land management

- Be it planned (a conscious environmental journey) or acute (poor soil health, natural disaster) it's common for a journey into Agritourism to also align with changing land management practices. Improving soil health, reducing carbon emissions, revegetating with native species and taking a regenerative approach are all elements of the journey to Agritourism with the benefit being a more sustainable future farm.

Social & Community: Strengthened connections with people, local and new

- Employment opportunities for spouses and future generations seeking to stay or return to the farm
- Tourists bring a range of social contact that counters isolation and supports wellbeing. Being in tourism can be socially and personally very rewarding
- Strengthens engagement with different members of your local communities as tourism representatives, Traditional Owners and farmers might normally rarely mix. This can lead to new and interesting collaborations, friendships, employment opportunities for the community and attract new and interesting people to your region to live
- Reinforces how valuable your lifestyle and what you do is to society and
- Helps you share your story with non-farmers to improve their understanding of produce, farming methods and farm life.

CHALLENGES

Time: Tourism is more work and takes time to establish

- Tourism opportunities takes time to establish (infrastructure & planning permits) as well as time for the business to establish and become known as appealing to visitors
- Customer facing tourism can be demanding as it requires social, customer service and marketing skills not always needed in agricultural farming
- There is time required in compliance to new regulations and risk management protocols
- Tourism can place demands on your down time and require you to be "always on" or available when you'd rather not This can result in a loss of privacy or an intrusion into family life.

Risk: Bringing the public onto your farm involves risk

- Some types of Agritourism need licenses, new insurances and permits to operate which can be costly in both time and money
- There is regulatory and liability risk when bringing people onto your farm which is different to normal farming
- Tourists travel seasonally and tourism spend is considered discretionary
- There is a risk in any regional community that trying something new or undertaking a development will create conflict with neighbours, community, friends and family.

Top tip: consider choosing something you enjoy doing so your passion and enthusiasm is obvious to your guests.

IS AGRITOURISM RIGHT FOR YOU & ARE YOU RIGHT FOR AGRITOURISM?[1]

Being in Tourism and Agritourism means engaging with people and customers. It's worth considering this quick checklist of questions to decide if you and Agritourism are a good fit.

	yes	no
1. Do you enjoy entertaining guests or having visitors on your property on a regular basis?	☐	☐
2. Do you have the time and/or energy at your current life stage to give 100% to something new?	☐	☐
3. Do all partners in the farming operations want to do this? And have you discussed this with them?	☐	☐
4. Can you create a warm, safe, and inviting atmosphere for people visiting your property?	☐	☐
5. Do you have or have access to the skills required to run an agritourism operation (this could include digital marketing, website management, staff management, and customer service)?	☐	☐
6. Have you thought about what "success" will look like for you and your agritourism offerings?	☐	☐
7. Are you willing to work and "entertain" visitors on weekends, evenings, and holidays, when they are most often available to engage in agritourism?	☐	☐
8. Can you take the time to look at your property from an outsider's perspective and make changes so that it is more accommodating of guests?	☐	☐
9. Can you get help during likely busy times of the year from staff, family, friends, or neighbours who are able to work in your agritourism business?	☐	☐
10. Are you willing to keep detailed income and expense records for each type of product or event offered?	☐	☐
11. Are you interested in exploring new marketing techniques and resources to help you communicate your agritourism offerings?	☐	☐
12. Are you willing to work with other farmers and food producers and your regional tourism organisation to promote a cluster or set of farm-based visitor experiences?	☐	☐
13. Do you have time to diversify into Agritourism?	☐	☐
14. Is this a good fit for your family and are they supportive?	☐	☐

Top Tip: if you answered many or mostly no, perhaps consider diversifying another way or partnering with another person in Agritourism. If you answered yes to many of them, then it's worth investigating more whether Agritourism is a viable option for you, your farm and your family.

[1] *Adapted from Agritourism in New Zealand – A guide for successful operation (2018) checklist as developed by Tourism Oregan and featured on Agritourism New Zealand Network www.agritourism.nz*

IS YOUR FARM SUITABLE FOR AGRITOURISM?

You might be right for Agritourism but now it's time to consider if your farm is right too.

Here are a few of the key areas farmers use to review their property's suitability:

Location	Natural Position
• Are you easy to find for visitors who haven't been before? • Is there easy access from the road to your property? • Will traffic be an issue? • Is there enough space to do what you want to do? • Do you need to develop roads & parking on your property? • Do you have a family story to share? • Are there Traditional Owner sacred sites to consider?	• Is your property scenic and have natural views? • Is there something of interest that people would come to see (lake, beach, mountains, historic marker)? • Do you have native wildlife that's easy to experience? • Do you have agriculture land people can go onto? • Do you have farm animals people can engage with? • What's your normal weather seasonality? Is that good for visitors?
Land Use & Permits	**Existing Infrastructure**
• What's are your permitted uses? • Do you know your zoning? • Are all your titles the same? • Have others in your region diversified before? • Do you have enough power, water, sewer to have visitors to the farm? • Are there any referral bodies that don't support tourism? • Is you local council supportive of Agritourism?	• Do you have buildings that can be used? (residential/non residential) • Is the infrastructure safe and suitable for commercial use? • Are there roads or trails that people can follow to navigate around the property or can be used for activities? • Are there connections to Traditional Owners • Do you have other appealing space or assets such as camp sites, sporting facilities, old farm structures?

Credit: Destination NSW

2.0 Stakeholder engagement

In this section you will:

- **Consider who your stakeholders are**
- **Be introduced to the questions they may be asking**
- **Understand that stakeholder engagement is continuous**

KNOW YOUR STAKEHOLDERS:

Often stakeholders in a regional area are well known to you. When diversifying into tourism, it's possible too that there will be new people to consider that aren't your normal network.

Developing a stakeholder engagement map and understanding what each stakeholder's point of view might be right from the beginning is very important.

Here are some stakeholders and questions worth asking:

Stakeholder:	What to consider:
Family & Existing Staff	Do they understand the concept? Can you easily describe it? Are they on board? Do they have the skills you need in the future? What will their role be in the future? Can they contribute to the idea?
Bank/Business Advisor/Legal	Can you afford this? What's the budget? Do you need to borrow money? Have you got your financial records up to date in case you need to share? What's the legal entity for the new venture? Who's financially involved?
Insurance	Will I need different insurance to what I have now? What's the cost? What does it cover? Are there any activities that are too risky?
Your Neighbours & the Broader Community	Do they know what you're planning? Can they have input or offer advice? Are they supportive? Do they have any concerns you can iron out early to avoid objections?
Local Council	What permits do you need to build or develop? What operating permits do you need to open? Does this align to their economic development and tourism strategies? Are you connected with the councillors so they know what you're planning?
Regional Tourism Organisation	Are they aware of what you are planning? Does your business fit with their regional plans? Have you joined their membership? Have you started to upskill in tourism to know what marketing opportunities exist? Is there a touring route or visitor itinerary you can be part of?
Local and Regional Traditional Owners	Do you know who they are? Do you currently acknowledge Traditional Owners of country? Have you introduced yourself before now? Do they do cultural and heritage assessments of properties? Are there any sacred sites on your property you need to be aware of? Are there bush foods or native species of significance? Are they open to collaboration in the future?
Business Associations	Are you a member of the local chamber of commerce? Are there farm and tourism networks you should be a part of? Is it possible to access their training and new business support? Are there other businesses you could network with who have done this before?
Customers	Do customers want what you're considering? Is the product going to attract visitors to your farm and your region?

Consulting and engaging with stakeholders is not a one time thing. You will need to keep stakeholders up to date regularly as you develop your business or experience. And then, keep engaging after you launch so they can help you grow and succeed.

Top Tips: don't go it alone. Engage early and often with family, your local council and other stakeholders early. Talk with a trusted advisor to look at your idea from another point of view. Amendments to plans are likely but It's better to plan taking into account what's possible and what the views of others are in advance.

EVALUATING AGRITOURISM

1. Is the new venture or business idea I'm thinking of considered Agritourism?
2. Are my family, my farm team and me suited to Agritourism?
3. Is my farm well suited and situated to attract visitors?
4. Is what I'm doing a permitted use of my land?
5. Have I engaged with all the relevant stakeholders and the reaction has been positive?

Credit: South Australian Tourism Commission

3.0 Who are the customers for agritourism?

In this section you will:

- **Have an introduction to the key sources of Tourism visitor data in Australia**
- **Be introduced to the idea of customer segments**
- **Understand why customer insights are so important to your future experience**

There is still much work to be done to understand the future visitor for Agritourism, but we can share with you some of what's available and how to go about considering who your farm or experience appeals to.

ABOUT TOURISM VISITOR DATA

Tourism visitor statistics are published quarterly by an organisation called Tourism Research Australia (TRA) and released by TRA, Tourism Australia (National view), State and Territory Tourism entities (State view) and also by your Regional Tourism Organisation (your region's perspective).

These reports are retrospective and use two data surveys:

- The International Visitor Survey (IVS) and,
- The National Visitor Survey (NVS) which is focused on domestic tourist behaviour.

Like in the National Agritourism Strategy Framework many businesses are using visitor information from the year end December 2019 as the last true comparison year due to the impact of COVID-19 border closures on visitor data for 2020 and 2021.

The TRA data is publicly available via www.tra.gov.au .

Data is produced for tourism regions which are different to local government boundaries. A quick online search will reveal the tourism region your property or visitor experience is located within and who the right person is to speak with.

Understanding the profile of visitor your region already attracts will help you understand whether your visitor experience will appeal to existing visitors or whether you and your region will need to appeal to someone new.

Your State or Territory Tourism Organisation is also a valuable source of customer information for tourism. Some already have information about Agritourism customers - check their website.

INTERNATIONAL & DOMESTIC TOURISM:

Visitors two your farm will fall into two broad categories:

- International visitors: anyone who has travelled to Australia from overseas and plans to return home. Also known as "Inbound" international visitors represent our tourism exports. They buy tourism overseas, but consume it in Australia on arrival.
- Domestic visitors: anyone resident in Australia that travels away from home to consume an experience. Domestic visitors can be local, intra-state (from within the state where your experience is) or interstate (from other state of Australia other than your own). When you first open, your visitors will largely be domestic.

AN OVERVIEW OF CUSTOMER SEGMENTATION:

Customer segments are collections of potential customers with similar characteristics who are grouped together to make it easier to target them with messaging and media. Apart from wineries, Agritourism mostly appeals to domestic Australian travellers, but this may change over time.

More work is needed into the future to define exactly who the target segments for Agritourism are, but currently Agritourism is known to appeal to an audience who is:

- Interested in quality food and drink, and keen to understand the source and stories of producers
- Combining Agritourism with a range of other experiences into an appealing itinerary
- Adventurous and travelling with people they want to reconnect with and want to share experience with as they travel
- Seeking to be more conscious and want authentic experiences that are different or unique from the every day.

Agritourism is most commonly aligned with food and drink which then provides a gateway for exploring and sharing other topics including sustainability, farming and craft origins, farm life and how farming is modernising into the future.

You may have heard terms like "baby boomers", "grey nomads" and "family explorers". Each Australian State and Territory has their own customer segments to describe visitors to your region.

Top Tips:

For more information to help find out who your customers are:

- Look online for International and Domestic Visitor Survey research for your region and State
- Contact your Regional Tourism Organisation or Visitor Centre in your closest town to understand more about the types of visitors that come to your area already
- Speak with other busy B&Bs and food businesses in the region to see who their customers are
- Contact tour companies you see in your region
- Contact your Neighbours and other farmers who are already operating Agritourism experiences

4.0 An Introduction to Tourism

In this section you will:

- **Be introduced to the concept of tourism as part of the visitor economy**
- **Understand the structure of the industry**
- **Consider the options for tourism distribution for future consideration**

Tourism is now often referred to as the Visitor Economy. The Visitor Economy is made up of anyone who provides or promotes services to Australia's domestic and international visitors[2]. Those visitors include leisure and business travellers, events travellers, those visiting friends and relatives, students and people travelling on working holiday visas.

The visitor economy encompasses the direct and indirect impact of these visitors travelling and spending in cities and towns across Australia.

Due to the impacts of COVID-19 and border closures due to the resultant pandemic, the Tourism Industry uses 2019 as its most recent fully viable operable year of reference. To put the Australian Visitor Economy in 2019 into context:

- The Visitor Economy earned over $39.6 billion[3] in exports making it Australia's fourth largest export earner behind iron ore, coal and natural gas and ahead of the beef, petroleum and wool industries
- The total value was $138 billion[4] in visitor expenditure, which grew 80% in 10 years
- The visitor economy accounted for 686,000 jobs[5], Australia's 8th largest employer supporting one in twenty Australians
- One in 8 Australian businesses was sustained by the Visitor Economy
- 48% or $66B[6] of all visitor spend in 2019 was in regions

The visitor economy includes industries such as food services, retail, accommodation, aviation, education & training, transport and culture, arts and recreation. Many, if not all of these are present in your region.

Tourism & the Visitor Economy, like every industry, has a network of businesses, distribution and industry bodies that represent it. Tourism is represented Federally by a Tourism Minister whose portfolio includes having remittance over Austrade and Tourism Australia.

Tourism Australia is responsible for growing the demand for Australia as a visitor destination with the international markets. Given Australia's size and limited budgets relative to the rest of the world.

[2] *Austrade.gov.au – About the Visitor Economy*
[3] *Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Australian National Accounts: Tourism Satellite Account 2018-19 financial year (ABS 2019)*
[4] *Tourism Research Australia (TRA), National Visitor Survey and International Visitor Survey as at 31 December 2020*
[5] *TRA analysis of ABS Labour Force Survey as at December 2019*
[6] *Tourism Research Australia (TRA), Tourism Businesses in Australia, 2018-19 financial year*

Tourism Australia focuses its international marketing on 15 priority overseas markets:

1. **China**
2. **New Zealand**
3. **United Kingdom**
4. **United States**
5. **Canada**
6. **Germany**
7. **France**
8. **Italy**
9. **Singapore**
10. **Hong Kong**
11. **India**
12. **Malaysia**
13. **Indonesia**
14. **South Korea**
15. **Japan**

Tourism Australia periodically launches campaigns in these markets to stimulate interest and generate inquiries from travellers. In between they continue social media, online content, public relations activity and digital marketing to maintain a general level of interest and demand.

Most tourism operators don't work directly with Tourism Australia, aligning instead with their State or Territory and Regional Tourism organisation. For more information Tourism Australia's role and working with their networks overseas, search online for "working with Tourism Australia" and visit their website.

State or Territory Tourism Organisations have responsibility for strategic planning, inter and intra state marketing of the state and its destinations and work cooperatively with Tourism Australia to promote the States overseas. States work cooperatively with a range of other tourism representative agencies and councils to support destination development, aligned to the State's tourism strategy.

Regional Tourism Organisations are your main local tourism stakeholders, defining and representing your region's virtues to visitors through marketing and supporting existing and new operators to grow and develop the experiences available to visitors.

Other representative bodies you may consider engaging with include:

- The Tourism Industry Council (TIC) in your State: a membership organisation that delivers business support services, training and professional development, networking, events and government advocacy all focused on tourism and the visitor economy.
- Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC): a membership organisation which represents the inbound tourism industry sector, they connect tourism product operators with international distribution and advocate to government for support for industry to grow international visitations. You only need to consider and connect with ATEC if and when you need to become export tourism ready.

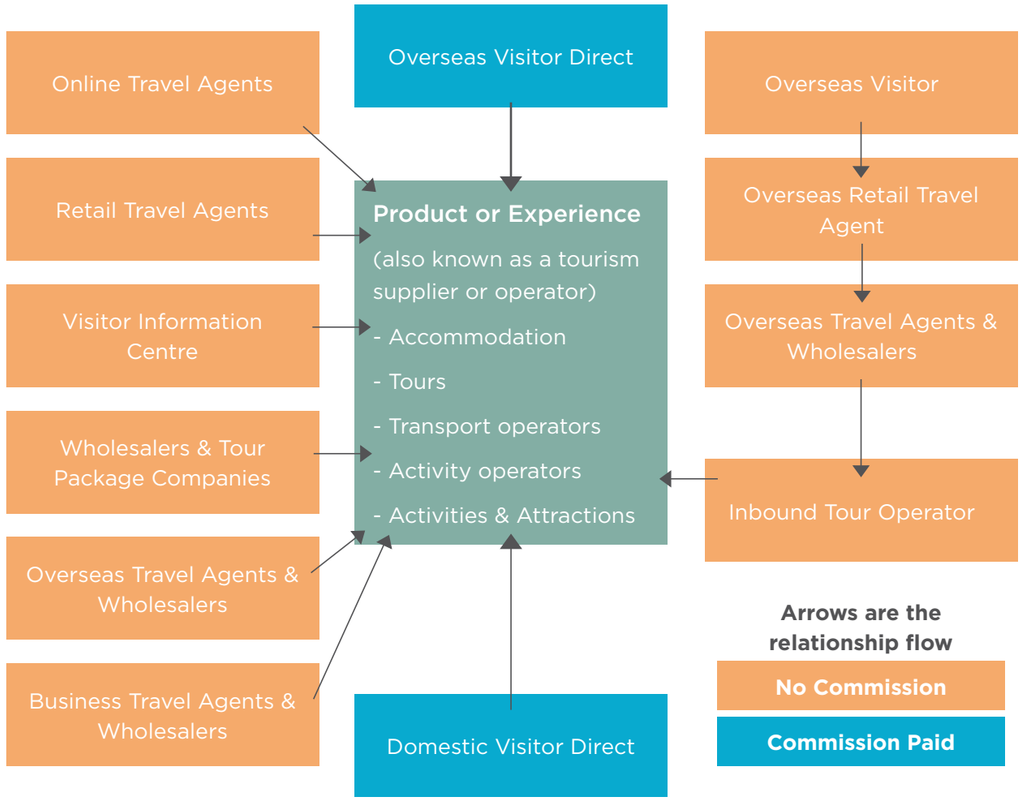
Deciding to welcome international visitors can be consciously planned or just happen as international visitors find you. To learn more about inbound tourism and growing this market search online for "tourism export toolkit Tourism Australia" and download the free introductory guide.

DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS IN TOURISM

Distribution or channels to market, just like in the agriculture sector range from working with one or several major partners through to visitors booking directly or walking up to your farm gate. And, like in agriculture, those channels charge a distribution fee. In tourism that fee is known as commission.

Direct bookings attract no commission as you are handling the booking yourselves with your own team. Bookings made through a travel agent, wholesaler or other distribution partner are sold at a "net rate" which is the rate less the commission negotiated for selling. Generally, the more links on the distribution network, the higher the commission.

Here is a high level diagram of the tourism distribution eco system in Australia:



Working with distribution channels (domestic and international) requires time, resourcing and the right pricing structure. Seek business advice and talk with others who are already working within these networks to help make sure you maintain your margins as you grow.

Credit: Frances Andrijich

Top Tips:

For more information to help find out who your customers are:

- Tourism is a large industry, just like agriculture. Seek out people to help you learn as you go
- Distribution in tourism can be overwhelming. Ask for help and advice from more experienced operators

5.0 The development planning journey

In this section you will:

- **Be introduced to the idea of the Farmer to Agritourism Journey**
- **Understand that your local council planning permit process can take time**
- **Consider the planning areas that your local council can support you with**
- **Hear the insights of farmers who have been on the journey want you to know**

The Farmer to Agritourism Journey

Recent engagement with nearly 200 stakeholders has informed the Farmer to Agritourism Journey.

Almost all farmers interviewed needed to submit a permit application to either their Local or State Government and the preparation (Step 3), actual submission (step 4) and the process of a decision being advised (Step 5) combined to take between 3 and 36 months, the longest phase of the journey.

CONSULTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Many farmers were unaware of the planning permit process, having not engaged with council in this way previously. Here are some areas that you may need to engage with your council or State government on:

- **Planning permits for construction and building works** there may be other referral authorities – a term used to describe other entities such as Indigenous Traditional owners, Culture and Heritage authorities, water catchment managers, National Parks or Crown land managers, Environmental Protection Authority, local and state road authorities for traffic management
- **Food safety regulation** if you are considering a commercial kitchen, running a café, cooking for guests or catering for events then you may need both a registered kitchen and staff who have food safety handling training
- **License and permits for a tourism business** beyond building, you may need permits to operate. That includes a liquor licence if you plan to serve alcohol
- **Taxi licence** if you plan to drive your guests to and from their accommodation in town you may need a taxi licence and your vehicle registered as a tour vehicle. This is through your state taxi directorate.
- **On site processing or butchering** Specific to artisan producers keen to offer the paddock to plate experience with animal continuity, mobile and on farm butchering is a specific are of regulation that requires council engagement

KEY AGRITOURISM OPERATOR INSIGHTS INTO PLANNING PERMITS:

Insights from existing Agritourism operators from their own journeys include:

- Seek advice early about what your land is zone for and what tourism activities are permitted uses. This doesn't preclude you from applying but may help you prioritise one type of Agritourism over another
- Planning permits often require expert advice and reports, which in regional areas are not always easy to access. Consultants charge for travel time, and can need guidance and support from farmers and councils around local interpretation of planning codes
- When budgeting and planning, speak with other local farmers and tourism developers to understand the cost of consultants and how long your council normally takes to help set your expectations and timelines
- Consider your launch plan well before your launch. Many farmers left thinking about marketing until their building project was finished, meaning in their first 6 – 12 months they were underwhelmed with demand
- Local, State and National Tourism enablement and infrastructure grants become available from time to time. Consider applying and be aware what they can be used for. Not all grants cover the planning stages, but some do
- Traffic management is of particular concern for local councils. Road and civil maintenance is a large portion of local council budgets so their teams will be particularly conscious of projects that cause spikes in traffic, the potential for high risk accident black spots or more rapid wear and tear on roads
- Amendments to plans are normal and shouldn't be seen as a negative compromise. Consulting and engaging early with all stakeholders, but particularly your local council will save time, money and angst. Sharing and aligning your vision early with your council statutory and strategic planning teams mean everyone is on the same page from the outset

- A rejected planning application can be appealed to your State's civil administrative authority. A successful application may also be appealed by objectors to your project seeking the decision to be overturned
- Start small and keep it lean, but it is good to have a vision. Because your business is on your farm, investing is adding value to your property, but it's only saleable if you sell the farm. For most operators there was no exit plan – the purpose of the diversification was to sustain the farm, not build value in an asset for future sale.

Top Tips:

- Identify an Agritourism experience you admire and contact them about their start up experience
- Look for someone locally that's been through your council planning process and ask them to share their experience
- Identify what's possible now on your land
- Articulate the vision of what you want to do and why, but be prepared to adjust your plans along the way

Credit: Tourism and Events Queensland

6.0 From good product to a great experience

In this section you will:

- **Understand the basics of delivering a tourism product**
- **Learn that there is a difference between a product and an experience**
- **Establish whether you are creating tourism products or experiences**

TOURISM IS A SERVICE BUSINESS

Diversifying from primary production into tourism requires a stocktake of the skill sets you have in your business. Many farmers farm and sell their produce for a small number of wholesale customers, often the same ones year after year.

Customer service in tourism is a fundamental element of business success. Good and great customer service can be the difference between visitors to your farm having an "ok" experience and leaving as raving fans. In fact if your customers like what you do and enjoy their visit, they will become your marketing team for you. Customer advocacy is one of the lowest cost marketing channels available!

Just like tourism has evolved to being known as the "visitor economy", attracting guests and visitors to your farm now encompasses what's called the whole "visitor experience". From finding their way to your property to first impressions and signage all the basics layer up in your visitor's minds to make an impression of your farm.

Your Regional Tourism Organisation or Tourism Industry Council will have more definitive guides to "starting out in tourism". Reach out to a business that is considered best practice for mentoring and advice.

The feedback from existing operators and organisations who contributed to this project offered these areas of consideration:

- **Live the Journey of your Guest:** start at their hotel or BnB and go through the experience of finding your farm, no distractions. Is the signage clear, what instructions do they need to find your farm? Are the turn offs easy to find? Are you in Google Maps as a business listing? What are your first impressions when you arrive through your gates? Is it obvious where to go? Am I frightened off by fierce dogs? Do you need to fence off areas that are unsafe to visitors?
- **Accessibility:** are your farm and your experiences accessible to all? Consider visitors with mobility, hearing or sight challenges. Many people find ramps easier than stairs, even if they have no visible requirements. Designing for universal access in the beginning benefits more than just those with obvious needs.
- **Sanitation:** from handwashing to toilets, good sanitation facilities are essential for a commercial operation. Visitors who are not familiar with farms are even more conscious of good hygiene when transitioning from outdoors with animals to indoors with food.
- **Permits:** make sure you have the licences you need to operate be it accommodation, food service business, liquor licences and more, and they are displayed if required. If using family as staff, they need to have the right training and also be of correct age for the role (eg: serving alcohol).
- **Are you Open for Business?** as a producer, you may not be open every day. That's OK. Just make sure it's clear what days you are open and how customers can easily find that out. Most importantly, stick to them. Do people need to pre book? Can they do that online or via other channels such as the visitor centre in town? Are you set up to take payments online – is the WIFI on the farm good enough for that?
- **Join a list:** if people have had a good time and come all the way to see you, they will likely tell some friends, come back again or even buy online and have produce delivered to their door. Collect their details, thank them for coming and remind them of what a great time they had.

UNDERSTANDING VISITOR EXPECTATIONS:

Taking the journey of your experience through the eyes of your visitors provides vital insights into what their expectations might be. Unless you talk to people before you start your experience, you will only really know once you open and start getting feedback from people whether you are meeting and exceeding their expectations or missing the mark completely.

Your Regional Tourism Organisation and Tourism Industry Council, as well as local Chambers of Commerce offer training and upskilling in customer service and understanding the visitor experience. Training that's designed for hospitality and retail are a great place to start and apply to tourism equally as those sectors.

Some Considerations:

- **Plan to measure your visitor feedback:** there are plenty of ways, but the easiest is just asking them whether they enjoyed their experience and if not why not, and if yes, what did they enjoy
- **Social sharing:** ask people to share and post online if they had a good time. Social media users expect you to respond, particularly if they provide feedback online
- **Talking to people:** actively listening to the visitors you have and what they say while with you is a great way to get immediate feedback that informs your guest expectations.

FROM TOURISM PRODUCT TO TOURISM EXPERIENCE

When it comes to travel and tourism, you may have heard people saying that travellers are changing from buying "things" to seeking "experiences". This means they are seeking to understand and experience "why" you do something, not just what you do.

An example? A visitor can buy your produce in a store in town. Why come to your farm? They want the authentic story of you and your connection with place. They want to experience the environment your produce was grown in, get a sense of you or your staff as farmers and feel your purpose in life. They think your farm life is amazing and want to revel in the simplicity of your day to day. And, most importantly, they want to take a little bit of all that on board themselves and be changed by the experience.

Beyond a product transaction, experiences connect emotionally with people and leave a lasting impression.

Key elements of an experience over a product include:

- A compelling and well crafted, yet authentic story
- An appreciation for the simple
- Participation – people love to get hands on , not just listen
- What's the one thing your visitors will share with others – sometimes called the "Instagram moment", it's the moment you want to be famous for.

Together this forms an experience.

There are some great tourism resources available online that help you define your visitor experience. There are also coaches and consultants that specialise in experience design. Talk with your Regional Tourism Organisation and remember to try out other people's tourism offerings to see what other people are doing.

Many farmers expressed challenges in regional areas relating to consistency of experience delivery and also found it challenging to scale their business beyond themselves as the main story sharer.

Experiences can be supported and enhanced by technology. Story telling videos can help scale tours and when filmed well can be emotive and convey your passion. Virtual reality can share an experience year round that might only be available for a short season.

Also, remember that humans have five senses. Imagine your visitor experience heightened for all five. Also, consider what your experience is like if one of those is impaired.

Top Tips:

- First impressions count – seek out someone to visit your farm with fresh eyes and live the journey of your guest
- Customer Service is an acquired skill that can be trained. Your visitor's expectations from urban areas may be different to what you consider great, so take advantage of available training
- Great guest experiences leave your visitors with an emotional connection, often feeling changed for what you have shared
- Your day to day is exceptional to other people: Farm life might be your normal but the simple everyday provides genuine wonder and delight for others.

Credit: Tourism and Events Queensland

7.0 Marketing, launching & growing

In this section you will:

- **Understand the basics of marketing**
- **Consider what marketing skills you may need in your business**
- **Where to find resources to dive more deeply into marketing**

After the planning process with local council, marketing was the area farmers felt least prepared for on their Agritourism journey. As referenced in the previous section, as a producer, farmers often have a small number of customers and marketing consists of negotiating a wholesale contract for bulk produce.

Marketing is the combination of tactics designed to bring people to your farm. As a discipline, marketing is classically referenced as having "5 P's":

Promotion – the techniques used to promote you and experiences to visitors, designed to end up in them visiting on farm

Product – in this case, both your farm produce and also the way you package it as an experience for visitors

Price – what you charge for what people are experiencing. As outlined in section 3.0 Introduction to Tourism, tourism works largely on a commission model and that commission needs to be included in your price.

Place – also known as distribution, includes the channels you use for customers to book or buy your products and experiences. As outlined in section 4.0 Introduction to Tourism, there are many distribution channels in tourism designed to help you reach different customers.

Positioning – relates to how you want your customers to perceive your farm and experiences. Are you appealing to a luxury traveller, families, or perhaps want to be seen as universally appealing with a focus on sustainability. Your positioning impacts the way you tell your story, your brochures and collateral, your website and also your experience delivery and pricing.

DEVELOPING A MARKETING PLAN

If you haven't developed a marketing plan for your farm before, developing one for your Agritourism business will be a first. Marketing is a lot of common sense, and just like your business, keeping it simple to start with and focussing on your authentic story is always best. If you find it really overwhelming, consider getting some help or choosing a template to work from.

The resources available through Small Business Australia (www.smallbusinessaustralia.org) are well worth investigating. And the Small Business Commission in each state has a range of business resources available to support you as you grow.

If there are three elements of an effective marketing plan has it's these:

- Set realistic objectives that you can measure: Often your marketing objectives in a small business are the same as your business targets: attracting visitors, tour bookings or sales targets.
- Include a budget and an action plan: Most small businesses have small marketing budgets. Very small. It's likely your first expenses will include having someone design your logo, some signage and a website.
- Clear responsibility for tasks: now, to be fair in the beginning it might be all you, but that will change over time as your business grows. If marketing is not your cup of tea, check if one of your team has some skills or a small local company could help getting started.

DEVELOPING YOUR PRODUCT:

Your agriculture product and tourism products and experiences are not the same thing. As discussed in section 6.0, there is an evolution from the product you grow to delivering a great experience.

Agritourism requires a connection between the visitor experience and what it is that you produce on your farm, so as you design and develop your tourism experience look for opportunities to share and showcase what you do with visitors.

Tourism experiences include farm shops, tours, classes, farm stays, farm to fork cafés and restaurants, converted sheds used for weddings and events, pick you own produce and behind the scenes experiences.

Consider how these are being packaged up for sale to customers and how your customers will buy them.

PRICING YOUR PRODUCTS

Setting the right price means taking into account the inputs and your time and determining the right price for the product you've created. Consider how many visitors you are prepared to welcome to your farm, whether you would prefer fewer visitors at a higher price and don't forget to value your time.

Visitor estimates multiplied by your pricing gives you an income estimate. It's important to work through this to understand whether these are realistic and you can recover your costs or make a profit, depending on your goal.

Talk with your accountant or other operators to help work through a pricing model but it's worth considering:

- The inputs to produce the product
- Your time/staff time
- Commission
- A profit margin

Go online and see what other people locally or across Australia are charging for similar experiences. This is called benchmarking and is a vital part of developing your product or experience.

Tourism industry councils in most states run "starting out in tourism" workshops, which includes an introduction to pricing your product. Their courses are open to members and non members and make a great place to start.

Tours are priced per person. Accommodation is priced on a per room per night basis, usually for two people per room. It's not uncommon to charge for each extra person. Breakfast, lunch or dinner are charged extra, but can be packaged into a rate. Serving food you have prepared on site to guests that they pay for requires food premises registration.

Talk with your council as this can be complex and requires ongoing compliance.

Some farms charge an entry fee allowing

guests access to certain public areas.

PROMOTION

Promoting your farm and experiences are designed to raise awareness with your audience and draw people to visit. Effective promotional activities are ones where the promotional cost of attracting a visitor is within your goal range.

The types of activities can include:

Online channels: your website, other websites, Google adwords, Youtube, social media channels, optimising content online (also known as search engine optimisation) and email marketing to your own database of visitors and supporters. Review sites have become increasingly popular as a place people go to find information.

Offline channels: farm based, local and regional signage, brochures and maps, print advertising, radio/tv advertising and events (consumer & trade).

Aim to have consistent branding and descriptions across all channels so your target audience learn to recognise you and clearly identify your products and experiences.

Your website will be your primary reference point for most visitors. Consider whether people will be able to book your experiences online with a credit card gateway or even purchase products to have delivered to home. Even if you undertake other promotional activity it's often your website used as a call to action where visitors go to find out more.

Encourage visitors to post reviews as it supports your website rankings and also reaches a bigger audience – think of it like online word of mouth.

The Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) is Australia's national tourism product database and a listing is free. Setting up your listing in the ATDW can feed listings on hundreds of websites including that of your regional and State tourism organisation and Tourism Australia's sites worldwide (www.atdw.com.au).

Most Agritourism businesses focus on no and low cost marketing channels such as their websites, social channels and producing their own marketing assets and content such as photos, videos and stories. Working with others can also be a low cost marketing channel that amplifies your promotional activities.

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

Collaboration marketing helps you reach and engage new audiences, form partnerships working together with other brands and businesses. According to Collaborsaurus website founder Jessica Rufus, brand collaborations are up to twenty five times less expensive than digital advertising[7].

Regional agritourism lends itself to collaborations. Often a region's expertise is it's strength with many farmers producing the same crops. It's not uncommon then, to find multiple agritourism operators co located and regional clustering that showcases agricultural expertise.

Collaborating is both a tactic and a mindset. Being open to working together regionally with others who may be considered a competitor in the interests of the greater .good takes maturity and openness.

Collaborations bring many benefits including:

[7] *As cited on www.collabosaurus.com*

Credit: Tourism Australia

- Business efficiencies including reduced marketing costs, speed to market, opening days, distribution and growth
- Cross marketing to broader customer bases (marketing collectives, brand collaborations)
- Category growth that supports your business growth (promoting a region rather than you business)
- Collective marketing (eg touring trails)
- Greater share of voice in government lobbying and advocacy
- Shared data, research and insights which may normally beyond an individual business
- Greater media coverage when a region hosts journalist rather than individual farms.

Who should you collaborate with?

- Regional Tourism organisations (RTOs)
- Media outlets, bloggers, journalists and PR agencies
- Your state's Tourism Industry Council
- Members of your local Chamber of Commerce
- Brands and products who align to your values and business philosophy
- Traditional Owners.

Product collaborations are becoming more common. These are where two partners come together to release a complete new product such as a new flavour, new fragrance or produce from a new method.

Agritourism operators often form new partnerships with other non competing producers. For example accommodation suppliers showcasing hand wash suppliers, coffee, milk, muesli and alcohol products all with the goal of giving exposure to the broader regional capability.

COLLABORATING WITH FIRST NATIONS AUSTRALIANS:

The symbiotic relationship Indigenous people have with the land is encapsulated in the sayings "Caring for Country" and "look after Country and Country will look after you." While often considered as the land and sea management practices and outcomes, more recently, it's being acknowledged that including the stories and customs as well help support identity, health and cultural life. Caring for Country is as much the emotional and physical wellbeing of people as it is the practices of looking after the land[8].

Indigenous involvement in formal Agritourism is immature, but growing.

From engagement with farmers to support new land management practices through to encouraging Indigenous Agritourism Experiences, there are many synergies between Agritourism and a Caring for Country approach.

Indigenous Australians are the original custodians of Australian lands. Many Traditional Owner communities still hold extensive knowledge of land management practices, traditional flora and fauna and benefits of bush foods and bush medicines.

There are many ways for farmers to engage with Traditional Owners with the journey different for each farmer:

[8] *Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population & Communities & Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2011, The Benefits of Caring for Country* https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/research_pub/benefits-cfc_0_2.pdf

- Know who your Traditional Owners are and whose land your farm was traditionally
- Connect with your Traditional Owners
- Understand more about Caring for Country
- Acknowledge Traditional Owners and provide guests with interpretive information and tours
- Collaborate to develop new products and experiences
- New Agritourism experiences and businesses with different business models.

And there are many ways for Traditional Owners to engage with Agritourism:

- Sharing knowledge of the land, flora and fauna and local stories
- Using Agritourism to share Culture
- Showcasing traditional bushfoods and bush medicines
- New products and new product collaborations
- New Agritourism experiences, enterprises and social business models.

PLACE (DISTRIBUTION/CHANNELS)

Tourism Distribution, as outlined in Section 4.0 can be varied and complex. Direct distribution is the preferred channel for most operators as it's commission free, but it does mean more of your own marketing to generate demand.

Distribution through channel partners costs a little more in commission but normally means you are doing less marketing of your own. Consider your optimal distribution mix and which partners you need to get there.

Talk with your regional tourism organisation to understand what options are available to you. They can put you in touch with other Agritourism operators who use distribution channels to share their experiences. Other channels also include"

Tour Groups and Tour Operators: firstly, consider your product. Are you appropriate and do you have access for large groups or is your farm only appropriate for smaller, private touring companies. Coach groups can provide regular steady business booked well in advance, can be international or domestic and range from youth and school education groups through to coach groups of older people who may have mobility and access needs.

Online Travel Agents (OTAs): mostly focused on accommodation, there are OTAs for activities, tours and experiences as well. Examples include booking.com and Airbnb. OTAs work well as part of a distribution mix and as they are global can result in international visitors.

Inbound Tour Operators (ITOs) and Destination Management Companies (DMCs): when you decide you are ready for international visitors, these specialist travel agents have partnerships with wholesalers and travel agencies all over the world. Usually located in Australia they package full itineraries including products like yours and made working with the international markets easier.

SUMMARY MARKETING RECOMMENDATIONS:

Here are some key recommendations to consider about marketing when diversifying into Agritourism:

Develop a marketing plan:	Simple marketing plans are often the most effective: Just a calendar of activity that shows what you plan to do and when. For more detail include references to which partners you will work with, your distribution mix goals and how the prices you will set for your product.
Know your customer:	it's tempting in the beginning to be happy when anyone drives through the farm gate, but over time, you will find it easier and more enjoyable to deliver experiences to people who connect with "why" you do what you do, not just the produce.
Capture your visitor's details:	Word of mouth and repeat visitors are the most cost effective marketing, made possible by capturing people's details on a list and marketing to them afterwards.
Play to your strengths:	Agritourism operators cluster together, and your region will have strengths. Work collaboratively with other operators to develop experiences that are complementary, be open on different days and come together to celebrate key times as a collective (such as harvest festivals)
Know your region's other operators:	Normally a marketing plan considers your competitor landscape. Agritourism operators often have farms in the same region that grow similar produce – it's what your region might be known for. Consider how you differ or stand out and also how you can work together. Also, share what you've each done so you can build on what worked and avoid the same mistakes
Regional & State Tourism Organisations can help you launch:	Consult early and let them know what you are planning and they can help you contact media, feature you in new product information and include you in the itinerary of media and travel agents who visit the region.

Credit: Tourism and Events Queensland

Top tip: Plan early. Consider your marketing while you are still in the development phase. Share the anticipation of development and bring your future customers on the journey with you to launch.

8.0 Continuing to evolve

In this section you will:

- **Understand that launch is not the end**
- **Consider that continuing to evolve and grow is part of the journey**
- **Consider that evaluation of what's worked is important to iterating your experience**

Opening the gate to visitors means you are a functioning business and you have diversified into tourism. Like running your farm, your agritourism business will have many ongoing compliance and regulation requirements to keep trading. In addition, as you receive feedback from visitors and guests, the products and experiences you offer will evolve and change.

SAFETY & RISK MANAGEMENT

To operate you will need a risk management framework and plan. Consult with your business advisor, local chamber of commerce or Tourism Industry Council in your state for more information. WorkSafe or SafeWork in your State regulates workplace health and safety, just as they do for your farm business.

- **A strong safety culture** starts at the top: As the owners of the business you need to set a positive environment of compliance and do the right thing. Family are also employees and also need to be seen to comply.
- **Safety and risk assessments underpin the experiences you offer:** Guests who are participating in activities on your farm expect you to have assessed the risks and be made aware of them, making an informed choice to participate.

Some farms prefer to reduce risk and limit their offerings.

- **Risk impacts insurance:** what you can and can't get insurance for is a consideration. You will likely need separate insurance cover for your Agritourism business to your farm operation. Talk with your insurance agent to understand what the impacts are.

GROWING AND EVOLVING:

Visitor and guest feedback provide valuable insights into the visitor's experience of your farm. Feedback initially can feel personal , but see it as constructive and see the intent as being to improve what you deliver.

Involving your team in visitor feedback is important and sharing the positive as well as the constructive is great for people to hear.

Using a guest satisfaction rating such as Net Promoter Score[9] can help you stay ahead of customer sentiment and track improvement over time.

Why are you growing?

It's really important to keep returning to your original purpose for diversifying your farm as this will keep you focused on the purpose for growth.

Conventionally, tourism businesses strive for growth in visitor numbers and revenue.

Over time, they expand into welcoming international visitors and extending their product offerings to be more experiential and engaging.

As you refine your business over time continue to:

- Talk with stakeholders, neighbours, family and friends to get feedback and shasre your progress
- Network with other operators to understand their business's journey
- Seek professional advice if elements of the business are not performing as you expect.

As a farmer extending into tourism your original purpose may have been economic or social. The evaluation of success should be on your terms. Starting small may mean staying small or the first step of a bigger Agritourism journey.

Credit: Destination New South Wales

[9] *Net Promoter Score is a measure of customer experience and when implemented authentically can help predict business growth. Happy customers means a happy business. See more at www.netpromoter.com/know/*

9.0 Other resources

This guide has been informed by interviews with more than 200 stakeholders including

- Australian farmers who already welcome visitors to their farms
- Local government representatives from Economic Development, Strategy, Planning and management
- National, State and Territory tourism marketing and industry development representatives
- Farm and agritourism consultants who support farmers
- Other Australian and international stakeholders interested in a thriving agritourism sector.

TOURISM INDUSTRY LINKS:

Australian Tourism Industry Council is the national representative body for tourism and has branches in each State: https://www.qualitytourismaustralia.com/

Australian Tourism Export Council: www.atec.net.au

AGRITOURISM RESOURCES FROM AROUND THE WORLD:

Scottish Agritourism

www.scottishagritourism.co.uk

Agriturismo Italy

www.agriturismo.it

Tourism Oregon, USA Agritourism

There are some great resources and inspiring content, designed as "how to handbook" for farmers. Search "Oregon Agritourism Handbook"

Agritourism New Zealand

Another great resource designed for farmers. www.agrtourism.nz

BUSINESS PLANNING:

Search for small business resources for your state:

Small Business Commissioner in NSW has supported regulatory reform for planning to make it easier to diversify:

https://www.smallbusiness.nsw.gov.au/what-we-do/our-work/agritourism

Business Victoria has some great resources for business and marketing planning, and access to grants: https://business.vic.gov.au/

Your state's Department of Agriculture is progressed in their future agriculture strategy

https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/about/agriculture-strategy

https://nre.tas.gov.au/Documents/Growing%20Tas%20Agriculture-RDE%20for%202050.pdf

https://www.pir.sa.gov.au/regions/regional_development_strategy

11 steps to successful farm marketing

https://www.hobbyfarms.com/11-steps-to-successful-farm-marketing-2/

Washington State Direct Marketing Strategies for your Culinary and Agritourism business

https://cms.agr.wa.gov/WSDAKentico/Documents/DO/RM/RM/14_CulinaryAndAgritourism.pdf

Creating authentic and immersive experiences is key to growing regional tourism

AUSTRALIAN REGIONAL TOURISM LTD

Australian Regional Tourism Ltd (ART) was established to re-balance an increasing focus on tourism in urban capital cities. ART is the peak body that represents regional tourism practitioners and acts as a hub for collaboration, cooperation, ideas generation, knowledge sharing, networking and more. On behalf of its members, ART promotes sustainable regional development through regionally focused research, destination management planning, product development, marketing and the development of skilled human resources.

The ART Mission is to develop regional Australia through building competitive tourism.

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