

AGRITOURISM

Definitions of agricultural tourism—or agritourism— vary slightly across the nation, but they typically share the basic tenets of allowing or encouraging farmers to pursue agriculturally related activities on their lands to generate additional income. According to the American Farm Bureau Federation: “Agritourism refers to an enterprise at a working farm, ranch or agricultural plant conducted for the enjoyment of visitors that generates income for the owner. Agricultural tourism refers to the act of visiting a working farm or any horticultural or agricultural operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation that also adds to the economic viability of the site.”

The Centre County Comprehensive Plan defines agritourism as: “any activity that takes place on a working farm that can be experienced by visitors for a profit to the farmer.”



The Michigan Agricultural Tourism Advisory Commission emphasizes that “the farm must be actively producing agricultural products for purchase and sale” to ensure the proposed activities are supporting farms and farmers.

Examples of agritourism vary by municipality, but may include: farmers markets, farm-stays, farm visits, roadside markets or stands, U-Pick operations, community supported agriculture, farm museums, corn mazes, cider mills, pumpkin patches, petting farms, on-farm retail such as dairies, creameries, woolen goods, flowers, herbs and spices stores, maple syrup farms, wineries, Christmas tree farms, on-farm bakeries, and on-farm restaurants or cafes.

Benefits of Agritourism

- Preserve agricultural land
- Promote or sustain farm heritage
- Protect the farm for future generations
- Capitalize on a hobby or interest
- Provide employment for themselves or family
- To provide a community service
- Educate customers / visitors about farming

WHY IS AGRITOURISM IMPORTANT?

Agritourism can help keep lands in active agriculture and sustain farmers by generating additional income. Preserving agricultural lands and active agricultural production is important to economies from the local, regional, and state to the national level. Agriculture is the number one industry in Pennsylvania, generating a \$50 billion impact on our state economy and providing one of every seven jobs.

According to the American Farmland Trust, the most recent data, covering the 25-year period between 1982 and 2007, reveals that more than 23 million acres of America’s agricultural land were lost to development—an area the size of Indiana. Pennsylvania lost 728,700 acres of agricultural land to development during that period.



REGULATING AGRITOURISM

The **Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Code** specifically addresses the need for growth in agricultural operations stating as a purpose:

“To ensure that municipalities enact zoning ordinances that facilitate the present and future economic viability of existing agricultural operations in this Commonwealth and do not prevent the owner or operator’s need to change or expand their operations in the future in order to remain viable.”

While agritourism can serve as an important economic tool for the agricultural community, these types of uses should supplement, not replace, primary agricultural production. In addition, the potential impacts from these activities on neighboring property owners and their agricultural operations should be minimized.

Municipalities regulate agritourism to varying degrees. For example, in Lancaster County, PA some agricultural enterprises are permitted by right, while others are permitted by special exception or as a conditional use. Other municipalities have created agricultural tourism overlays to restrict activities to specific areas with additional rules and regulations. In all instances it is important that these enterprises are subordinate to the primary farming operation.



Examples of Issues to Consider

- ◆ Allowed uses
- ◆ Minimum lot sizes
- ◆ Traffic / trip generation
- ◆ Parking
- ◆ Noise
- ◆ Lighting
- ◆ Sanitary facilities
- ◆ Signage
- ◆ Hours of Operation

“Pennsylvania leads the nation in farmland preservation, with more than 3,500 farms and 400,000 acres preserved. Since 1988, the Commonwealth, counties and municipalities have invested more than \$1 billion to support this effort.”

— PA Department of Agriculture

Sources: Growing Greener, PA Department of Agriculture, PA Farmland Preservation Association, Center for Rural PA, Michigan Agricultural Tourism Advisory Commission, Lancaster County Planning Department

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