

Decision Making for New Agritourism Activities

What activities worked for you? For others? How do you decide if it will work for your farm?

Decision making for new agritourism activities at the farm are complex. Many farms adopt new activities based on seeing the activity at another farm or venue. While lots of planning goes into the activity, few farms have a comprehensive process they use in developing new activities. The categories below were developed based on reviews of agritourism farms in Ohio to use in selecting new activities. The attached chat will help guide a discussion with the farm team about new activities. Much more detail will be needed as the discussion and approval process evolves.

Enhances My Farm Brand – The farm's brand is its biggest asset. The brand defines the farm, sets customer expectations and keeps people returning year after year for activities and events. The brand is part of the farm's story. The brand says who the farm is, how they operate and how they treat customers. Reviewing each new activity as a part of the farm's brand helps ensure the farm stays true to its self. Use the mission statement to guide the discussion about how the activity fits within the brand and specific aspects of the farm.

Fits My Target Market – Every farm should have a defined target market. It helps focus marketing, customer service and safety. Teenagers, pre-teen and toddlers have very different wants and needs with it comes to agritourism experience. Keeping mom and dad or grandma and grandpa engaged during visits to the farm is more important the younger the target customer. How can you keep everyone enjoying the experience is important. . Discuss how the target market will engage with the activity.

Safety and Insurance Considerations – Begin by researching best practices for the event (if they exist), and think through scenarios of customer use. Review the idea with your insurance company to see what questions or suggestions they might have. Utilize the website safeagritourism.org provides detailed information to plan for new activities and best practices for many common activities on farms in the US. The website includes walkthroughs of activities, safety checklists, and many resources to assist. In addition to using this information for new activities, agritourism farms should utilize this website for reassessing current activities on their farms.

Labor, Expertise and Cost to Build/Install – While farmers love to build things themselves, this is not always the best choice. Some insurance companies require manufacturer's specifications and use requirements. Some activities may fall under Ohio Department of Rides inspections and other items such as bridges may fall under county jurisdiction. Make decisions on which parts of the activity can be built versus what should be purchased. Purchasing decisions should pay special attention to quality of products and life expectancy.

Labor to Operate – Some activities look profitable because of long lines or popularity. Understanding the initial costs to operate the activity may shed some light on the actual profitability. Does the number of staff needed or the skills of the staff needed change the potential of the activity to fit the farm? Some activities may not require staffing, but add to the farm in other ways.

Income or Benefit to the Farm – A positive bottom line says it all. Will the activity make money, or will it be a loss leader? Sometimes the activity is a profit center. Other times the activity may encourage customers to stay longer, adding sales in areas of food, value added products and more. However, more time on the farm adds to parking issues. Figuring the cost and benefit of activity and making the decision early on how it benefits the farm helps the team understand the reason for having the activity. Put through is an industry term relating to the amount of people an attraction can handle in a specific period of time. Determining the put through for each activity is the only way to know the true income of an activity and the best way to operate the activity for maximum experience and profitability.



Activity Idea	Enhances my farm brand	Fits my target market	Safety and Insurance considerations	Labor, expertise and \$ to build/install	Labor to operate	Income or benefit to the Farm	Other
Example: Barrel Train	Yes. We will design the cars to be ears of corn.	Yes. Fits the toddler market we are focused on.	Cars could tip. Area needs to be flat and fenced. Drive must be over 18. Need to compare build v. buy.	Fenced in area: \$2,300 with drainage and fence. Lawn tractor: \$3,000 12 car train: \$8,355	Two staff members, \$26/hr total	10 min rides \$2/child x12 5 rides per hour \$120/hr (need to chart out based on traffic, day, etc)	