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Local Food Program

2018 AGRITOURISM CURRICULUM

Small farms face many challenges for long-term survival (Tew & Barbieri, 2012), but in some regions of the nation, the local food movement is transforming the agricultural and food services sectors, and agritourism and farm visits are improving small farm viability by providing supplemental income. This is particularly true in North Carolina, as interest in local food consumption has increased over the past decade, evidenced by the growth in direct sales from farms to consumers shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
North Carolina Direct Sales Change from 2007 to 2012

Number of farms selling directly to individuals for human consumption	↑ 21%
Value of agricultural product sales directly to individuals for human consumption	↑ 9%

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2012). *2012 Census of Agriculture*. Retrieved from <http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/>.

This widespread public interest in local foods is undeniable, but few people visit farms for leisure or purchase local food while vacationing (with the exception of vineyards). NC State Tourism Extension's work with small farms across the state reveals that many small farmers report high interest in receiving visitors as a strategy to earn additional income, selling farm products to the visitors, enhancing customer relationships, and even involving guests in some helpful farm work (Kline, Cardenas, Leung, & Sanders, 2007). In addition, many small farmers want to increase their direct to consumer sales, whether to members of neighboring communities or to tourists visiting the area.

In an effort to address the increased interest in agritourism expressed by farmers in the state, Extension's Local Food Program Team, through its Economic Impacts Work Group, has developed an agritourism training based in the recent work of many North Carolina Tourism and Extension specialists. We believe that by formatting the training as a series of short, interactive exercises, we will reach and retain a greater number of farmer participants interested in expanding their operations to include an agritourism activity.

Module 1 of the training introduces agritourism to trainees and explores its many manifestations.

Module 2 asks participants to look inward to determine whether they have the personality and the facilities needed to run a successful agritourism operation.

Module 3 begins the work of planning for an agritourism enterprise through the development of a business concept, elevator pitch, and mission statement. It also directs trainees to identify their customer segments and research the competition.

Module 4 continues the planning by examining pricing structures and introducing the types of financial projections the successful agripreneur will have before launching the agritourism enterprise. Trainees will be encouraged to visit with the small business center at their local community college for a professional review of their projections.

Module 5 expands the support network for the aspiring agritourism entrepreneur and introduces trainees to grant and other funding sources to finance the development of their agritourism enterprise.

Module 6 examines various marketing channels for the agritourism entrepreneur and encourages trainees to seek feedback from customers.

Module 7 provides a brief overview of legal and risk considerations for the agritourism enterprise.

Module 8 wraps up all of the previous trainings and provides trainees with a step by step guide to completing a business plan.

How the agent delivers these 8 modules will vary by agent. They may be delivered as stand-alone modules, but we strongly suggest that they be delivered as a series of breakfast or lunch meetings, lasting no more than an hour each, and that they be scheduled at least every other week so that they can be concluded within a 4 month period. Each module builds on the knowledge gained in the last module.

In addition to the interactive exercises that should be completed during the meeting time, trainees will also be asked to do a small amount of homework in preparation for the next meeting.

While the short-term goal of the training is for trainees to complete the training with at least the framework for an agritourism business plan, the long-term goal is for trainees to launch their agritourism enterprises. Experts may disagree on the nexus between a written business plan and a successful agritourism enterprise¹. However, all agree that the time devoted by the aspiring agritourism entrepreneur to researching the competitive landscape and refining marketing methodologies is time well spent.

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¹ http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/229824/2/NCAT_Agritourism_YeboahK.pdf