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Marketing Strategies for Agritourism Operations

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Agritourism in California has the potential to profitably direct market farm products and services, to serve as an alternative use of farm and ranch land, or to supplement your farm income. Creating your marketing strategy and plan of action will help you promote and sell your on-farm products.

WHAT IS A MARKETING STRATEGY?

Your marketing strategy explains how you will promote your agritourism or nature tourism enterprise. It describes what you will offer customers so they walk through your door, and what you will do so they come back. It helps you determine who your customers are and how to attract those who most benefit your business. Uniquely your own, your marketing strategy is a function of your products, pricing, promotion, place of sale, customers, competitors, complementary businesses, and your production and marketing costs. Like your business plan, your marketing strategy is fundamental to your enterprise's success. It starts with your business idea and continues through the sale of your product or service. As a result, your marketing strategy is a dynamic process that changes as you evaluate, learn, act, and reflect.

To develop and implement your marketing strategy, begin by reviewing your business plan. Where are you now? Where do you want to be, and how do you get there? Examples and tables throughout this publication can help you better understand the specific needs and goals of your enterprise. Keep in mind what actions you want to take to attract your customers, to encourage them to buy your products, and keep them coming back.

UNDERSTAND THE MARKET

Agritourism is a great way to add value to your products that can help keep you farming. Market the food or fiber you make into a destination. Who lives within 30 miles? With the rise of the local food movement, many of your customers may be within 30 miles of your farm.

Develop your brand. We are in the “visual” age where images—on your Web site, and on your various forms of promotional material—speak for your product.

Your marketing strategy begins with research. Take time to understand the market in which you'll be working—the world of people looking for entertainment, relaxation, and education on farms and ranches, and the agritourism and nature tourism industry ready to offer them just that. Your research will help you evaluate the feasibility of your dreams and uncover information important to your plans.



KNOW YOUR INDUSTRY

Identify the agritourism and nature tourism trends that can impact your enterprise. Project how the market might change and what to do to keep in step. Are urban “foodies” still excited about eating local food and drinking local wine with famous chefs in orchards? Are U-pick berries popular with large immigrant families this year? Did all the other local pumpkin patches add a pony ride or a corn maze? The popularity of social media networking and the Internet mean that social media and a Web site are “must have” promotional tools for your farm or ranch.

You can learn about recent agritourism and nature tourism trends from the following sources

- topical articles in print and web-based travel magazines, journals, and newspapers
- free Google alerts for “agritourism” or other keywords that correlate to what you offer
- local agencies like your visitor’s bureau, chamber of commerce, Cooperative Extension office, Resource Conservation and Development Council, Farm Bureau and Small Business Development Center
- Web sites such as the Small Farm Program (www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/agritourism) and the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center (www.agmrc.org/)
- the consumers—your target customers. Ask what they like and what they avoid, and use this information to improve your product.

Understand the Customer

Identify your target customers. Discover who is already visiting your area. Tourism boards and your chamber of commerce can provide information about the agritourism or nature tourism market clientele. From this larger market, determine your specific clientele.

Will it be families, teenagers, or people on the go? In 2008 California agritourism operators hosted a wide variety of visitors: families, youth and school groups, individual consumers, wedding parties, reunion groups, artists groups, senior groups, and participants in business retreats. For operators with pumpkin patches and school tours, their visitors were primarily families and younger children. For wineries, U-pick operations, and weddings sites, adults without children were more predominant.

“Selling is getting rid of what you have, while marketing is making sure you have what you can sell,” explained one marketer. “The aim of marketing is to know the customers so well that the product fits them and sells itself.”

Build Strong Community Relations

Fundamental to any service industry is good public relations. Work to build and maintain a good positive image and a sound reputation with your customers, local community, region, state, and industry. Your community can provide valuable emotional, financial, and entrepreneurial support. As you embark on your new venture, become community involved!

Set up a Farm FAM Tour

A familiarization tour (known as a “FAM tour” in the tourism industry) shows an invited group of participants what a group of agritourism operators in a particular area has to offer. The tour is offered free of charge or at a reduced rate.

You can use the FAM tour as a tool to market your agritourism enterprise directly to consumers. In a FAM tour, you invite potential customers to your farm to view your facilities and learn about its unique activities. If you are planning to host school groups, contact your local schools and invite administrators or teachers out to show them how your activities can benefit or inform their students. Treat them like VIPs.

If your customers are tourists in the area, contact your local chamber of commerce or tourist bureau so they know you are there. Organize a FAM tour for them. You can also invite the media and other operators and community businesses that may compliment yours. FAM tour participants are people with the potential to influence others to support or visit the operations on the tour.

Build Your Off-Season Offerings

Liberty Hill Farms hosts corporate meetings in its off season in the snowy mountains of Vermont near Rochester. Cabot Creamery, also in Vermont, hosts meetings at the farm, and afterwards, participants mention Beth and Bob’s farm in their blogs. How’s that for great advertising?

In Hampshire County, Massachusetts, the Delta Organic Farm focuses on visitors who want to visit and stay at an organic farm, but it also hosts local groups year round with its conference room and commercial kitchen.





WHAT MAKES YOU SPECIAL?

The qualities you offer that make customers feel special are also key to business success. Your unique features distinguish your agritourism or nature tourism operation from all others. This is also called branding. Identify those features. Do they include any of the following?

- the length of time your operation has been in business (for example, a century-old, family-run farm)
- your location (one hour from the Pacific Ocean)
- the size of your operation (12,000-acre cattle ranch)
- your product or service (outdoor recreation for young singles)
- a unique quality of your product or service (a restaurant on an organic farm)
- benefits of your product or services (solitude)
- unique people involved in your operation (nationally renowned horse trainer)
- your price (affordable family adventure)
- your reputation (featured in Northwest’s Best Places to Stay)
- the lifestyle you offer (the spirit of the West)

Know Your Product

The importance of knowing your product can’t be overemphasized. A “product” denotes something that is tangible, designed, manufactured, and packaged. An obvious component of the manufacturing industry, the product is a less obvious element of a service industry. But these industries also have products, and

your knowledge of your own is essential to a good marketing plan. When you consider your product, consider your product mix, service, and overall atmosphere or theme.

Product Mix

What products will you have on your shelf? Why have you chosen those particular products? For example, if you sell primarily impulse-buy items but carry core items to keep customers coming back, describe your strategy.

Service

When you are shopping, do you prefer hunting the aisles on your own or being assisted by staff? Decide what level your service will be and how it makes sense in your business plan.

Overall Atmosphere or Theme

What emotions will your customers take away from their experience? Too often, business owners fail to consider how the customer feels after the business exchange. These feelings are critically important to service businesses. In fact, sometimes what the customer remembers from the experience is the only “tangible product.”

Identify Your Features and Benefits

The features of your enterprise are fundamental to its success. Equally important are the benefits that each feature offers. Why? Although it’s the features of your enterprise that make it unique, it’s their benefit to the customer that draws in clientele.

Table 6.1 provides examples of features and their benefits. Review it, and then write down the top three features of your enterprise and their benefits to your target customers.

Table 6.1

TYPES OF FEATURES			
Product	Price	Promotion	Placement
The definition of your products or services	The cost, price, and payment for your products or services	How you tell your customers about your products and services and how you sell them	Where you sell your products or services
EXAMPLES			
Product or service Features: shape, size, package, special characteristics, identification (name, color, logo) Optional services Product quality Staff quality Style Parking Location Scenic beauty Remoteness Guarantees Transportation	Price Cost of similar items Discounts Credit terms Group rates Weekly rates	Brochures Demonstrations Samples Advertising Sales promotions Personal sales Collaboration Mailing lists Packaging Brand or logo Location of sale Customer testimonials	Distributors: grocery store, farmers’ market, restaurant Visibility Ease of purchase Timeliness Consumer’s awareness of availability Timing Frequency of service Tie-in Co-branding (selling another business’s product while it sells yours)

DEVELOP YOUR MESSAGE

When you know your enterprise’s features, you know what makes your enterprise unique—and you can better educate people about your business, both verbally and in writing. In other words, when you know what makes your enterprise unique, you can form key messages for a public relations and advertising program.

With the knowledge of what makes your enterprise unique, you now can decide how best to attract customers. You can hire a professional to develop your message or you can brainstorm with family members and outside partners. If you do it yourself, have fun! Be innovative. Remember that your message should attract attention, retain interest, build desire, and encourage a call to action. It should reflect—and be reflected in—your business name, logo, Web site, print materials, and advertisements. When developing your message, ask yourself: what information do I want to provide visitors and what image do I want to project? Pull in the values your family has identified and the unique mix of features and benefits you just uncovered. Then identify your products and services, budget for the enterprise, set prices, determine the method for making reservations, and create clear directions to your site. Once you’ve determined your message, filter it down to one statement worth remembering and repeating. This makes it easy for others to describe your enterprise.

LAUNCH A PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN

Promotion is a big job that requires you to complete tasks in advance and on time. It calls for you to create rates, design and distribute promotional materials, and follow established concrete timelines. Note that publications, seasonal customers, and travel agencies require early notice for their advertising schedules, and community relationships take time and patience to build. So start your

Table 6.2
My Features and Benefits (EXAMPLE)

Features	Customer Benefits
Remote location	Rest and relaxation Free from city bustle Clean air Unspoiled natural beauty
Nearby location	Minutes from town Oasis in your own backyard Family day-trip U-pick farm
Farm stand	Our vegetables are the freshest Experience vine-ripe flavor Reminiscent of childhood
Small facility	Intimate setting Exclusive get-away Garden cottage fantasy
Moderate prices	Affordable Won't hurt the family budget

promotional activities well before you open your enterprise—3 to 12 months ahead of time.

What’s more, make sure that every person in your community knows about your new enterprise and what it offers. Word of mouth is the least expensive and one of the most effective forms of promotion. It is also the best way to develop customer loyalty.

Here are some other valuable marketing tools:

- Add a blog to your Web site.
- Put up posters.
- Hand out flyers.
- Collect customers’ email addresses and start a monthly e-newsletter with recipes, news about what’s fresh, upcoming events, and stories about your animals.
- Distribute brochures and business cards.
- Include recipe cards and bookmarks with products.
- Offer samples, where allowed.
- Provide press releases to local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations.
- Have the local press write a feature story about your unique establishment.
- Post your media stories on your Web site or Facebook page.
- Tell customers about your product—where it’s grown and how it’s made.
- Encourage customers to refer you to friends, and offer them a discount for every referral that walks through your door.
- Donate to a local charity or event.
- Work with local restaurants to offer your product on their menu (and make sure your brand name is mentioned).
- Join the local chamber of commerce, or better yet join an agritourism association, if there is one nearby.

Whatever marketing tools you select, make sure that they’re the most effective ones available for your targeted customers. Don’t choose only those you like best or feel most comfortable with. In addition, be consistent with your marketing tools.

What Is Your Marketing Cost?

Marketing research, promotion, and continual customer feedback is an ongoing cost of business, so budget for it each year. Your marketing costs depend largely on your enterprise size and type and on your advertising and sales methods. Expect to pay 10 to 25 percent of your total operating costs for marketing during your first four years. As you build a strong reputation and brand, however, your marketing costs will decrease unless competition and other external factors compel you to put more money into marketing to maintain your market share.

Don't select promotional methods and then change them before they have a chance to succeed. Too often, the small business owner gets a new idea, modifies the original message or look, and ends up confusing the consumer.

A fictitious example is the 3G Family Orchard with its farm stand and pie shop. Because local surveys indicate most farm-stand customers come from a 20-mile radius, local awareness was vital to this enterprise's success.

So the operators of 3G Family Orchard posted local road signs. They produced brochures and distributed them at local hotels, motels, tour bus companies, and travel agents. They improved their Web site and designated a web manager on staff to keep it updated weekly. They also received free local media coverage that stemmed from a recent newspaper article about the orchard and its history.

The second example was the Working Landscapes Ranch (also fictitious) with its focus on nature tourism. Its operators were targeting young seniors and vacationing families. For promotion, they contacted travel agents specializing in nature tourism, distributed press kits, advertised in an online travel magazine with a sponsored link that fit their customer demographics, and added a YouTube video feature to their Web site that featuring a fall foliage roundup.

Word-of-mouth was the most common form of promotion of the 332 California agritourism operators surveyed in 2009. Roadside signs, business cards, and brochures, along with a regional guide, were tied with Web sites for the next most popular form of promotion. Feature stories, newsletters, and paid advertising formed the third tier. When asked about the effectiveness of these tools, word of mouth, Web sites and feature stories rated highest.

Why the Internet is Essential

An April 2007 survey conducted for Expedia by Harris Interactive asked travelers where they would turn for accurate information for summer travel planning. Online travel sites were the top response (52%), followed by recommendations by family or friends (45%). Rounding out the responses were travel guidebooks (25%), travel community sites (19%), magazines and newspapers (19%), traditional travel agents (17%), and convention and visitor bureaus (16%).

What Price?

What you charge customers reflects what it costs you to manufacture, market, and sell your product/service relative to the features and benefits provided by local competitors. To determine this, take your breakeven point (the cost of business expenses and add a percentage for profit (your "margin"). If you find yourself charging substantially more than your competitors, review the results of your market research. If you find yourself charging far less, look again at your quality of service; perhaps it needs upgrading.

Consider providing group bookings and large-sales discounts for added profit. Although it's unwise to "buy" business, a smaller margin on a larger volume might earn you money.

Be strategic. For example, consider seasonal prices. If you increase summer prices, you might decrease winter prices too and thus stimulate customer interest during a time you'd otherwise see little activity. Or you might simply save your summer profit for your slow time of year.

Almost three quarters of California's 98 million travelers made their 2004 travel arrangements online, according to the California Travel & Tourism Commission.

The Internet is used every day by members of the general public as their first source of information. The vast majority of California agritourism operators have a Web site; even those spending \$500 or less annually on marketing had Web sites. One operator commented: "The Internet is proving to be the biggest PR tool we have. Lots of Bay Area families came after a customer posted a rave review of us."

If you don't yet have any Internet presence, an easy way to start is with a blog on a free site such as WordPress.com or Blogspot.com. You can post a profile of your farm with open hours, directions, and a list of products. You can post and update your events, add photos and YouTube videos, link to your Twitter account, and, perhaps most importantly, have a Web location where you can direct people for more information and where you can be found by anyone. Tips on effective Web sites, are described later in this publication.



Web Sites—Can't Live Without 'Em!

Take a good look at your current Web site and compare it with other agritourism sites you like or have heard about. You can create your own Web site or hire a Web site developer to do it for you. The [calagtour.org](http://www.calagtour.org) Web site has a listing of other California operators, and the North American Farm Direct Marketing Association has some great examples at www.nafdma.com. Regardless of who creates your site, make sure it is easy to use and includes key information such as directions, hours of operation, how to contact you, calendar of upcoming events, products in season now, and customer reviews. Make sure the site is kept current if you want customers to return to it. Keep it clear and simple. Be consistent with information used in your other promotional materials.

Web consultant Gerry McGovern runs a great blog on Web effectiveness. Check his site at <http://www.gerrymcgovern.com/>.

Here are a few of his tips on effective Web site design:

- Make sure your customer can navigate your site quickly to ensure that you don't lose them, never to return!
- Manage your customers' time. The Web is not free. It charges people their time. Successful Web sites deliver the most value for the least amount of viewing or navigation time. Google is the benchmark for success on the Web. Google is obsessed with time. Your time. Google is all about helping you find stuff quickly. See what you can do to make your site like theirs.
- Create clear navigation menus for your customers' top tasks and use the words they would search for as they complete the tasks. Good web navigation is not subtle or overly complicated. It is clear, precise, familiar, and consistent.

Case in point: at the Working Landscapes Ranch's Web site it took less than 30 seconds to find out when its next tour was with the help of a simple calendar on the home page. At the 3G Orchard Web site, the farm's list of upcoming events took 2 minutes to locate—buried in the last page of the navigation bar titled "Our philosophy." Hmm.

The more you delete, the more you simplify. The more you simplify, the more you increase the

chances of your customers succeeding on your Web site, and the greater the chance they'll return.

Choose the right words. Clear and concise words work best on a Web site. No amount of beautiful images will save you if words can't guide your customers to your information.

How do you rank on Google or other search engines? Having an actively updated (daily or weekly) Web site that has been established for a while places you higher on Google or Yahoo search results. Linking your Web site to other popular and related Web sites will also help new customers learn about you.

Utilize online directories. Chileno Valley Ranch uses www.pickyourown.org/ to market its fall apple crop and has found it to be very successful in bringing customers to its ranch. This directory, while not fancy, comes up first in searches no matter what terms customers type in, hence its value. See the sidebar for other online marketing directories, some of which are free to join.

Other Web Essentials

Domain name: your web address is important. So is your url (universal resource locator), which is your online address, so make it short and clear. There are various domain registries online where you register and pay for your name.

Webhost: you need to pick a service that will host your Web site. There are many choices, such

List your business on CalAgTour.org

The UC Small Farm Program hosts a searchable online directory of California's agricultural tourism operations for use by visitors looking for a farm or ranch to visit. The directory is located at www.CalAgTour.org. <http://ucanr.org/sites/CalAgTour/>.

If you are a working farmer or rancher operating an agritourism business or organizing an agritourism event, we invite you to complete the directory application http://ucanr.org/sites/CalAgTour/Add_your_farm_to_the_directory or the event listing application http://www.calagtour.org/Event_Calendar/ online so we can include your business and events in the directory. The listings are free. If you're already listed, please check your listing <http://ucanr.org/sites/CalAgTour/> and update it if needed. You can use the directory application http://ucanr.org/sites/CalAgTour/Add_your_farm_to_the_directory form for updates. We'll contact you if we have any questions.

Sign up now online! http://ucanr.org/sites/CalAgTour/Add_your_farm_to_the_directory/.

Online marketing directories

www.calagtour.org
www.pickyourown.org
www.agritourismworld.com
www.farmstayus.com
www.ruralbounty.com
www.chefscollaborative.org
www.localharvest.com
www.sleepinthehay.com



as Yahoo, Inmotion, and iPage, or you can check webhost sites that list the most popular. Check with another operator to see who they use.

Software: There are software programs for you or your web designer to use in setting up and maintaining your Web site. Dreamweaver is very popular, but unless you have the time to learn you may want a web designer to design and set up your initial site. Another option is Webware, a web-based design tool that allows you to design and set up your Web site without downloading software to your computer.

Masthead or banner: Look at the mastheads of other Web sites to see what style you like as a potential customer. The Philo Apple Farm in Mendocino (www.philoapplefarm.com/), Amy's Farm in Ontario (www.amysfarm.com), and Seven Sycamores Ranch (www.sevensycamores.com/) in Ivanhoe, near California's Sequoia National Park, are three examples of clear and easy-to-navigate Web sites.

Photos: while some Web sites use lots of photos and few words, what people read and use to navigate your site are keywords and clear navigation words, not photos.

Google alerts: Use Google alerts as a way to track your farm in the news and online. Track your free promotions, news stories, and any media source from YouTube to the local press. In Google, type in "google alerts" for an explanation of how this works. Experiment with adding an alert for your farm name and for the word "agritourism." We tried this for six months and received on average 5–10 alerts per day on various news items from around the nation with some great ideas. If your Web site is not showing up in Google searches, think about what you can do to increase your free media exposure.

Use video and post on YouTube: Although there are many video-streaming sites, Google is by far the most popular. A small, economical hand-held camcorder, such as the Flip or the iPhone 4, allows you to create your own video and post it to YouTube.com without much fuss in under an hour. From YouTube you can link to your Web site and Facebook page, and your viewer can easily share your video with others. There are multiple online tutorials to help you create your first video. At last review there were 468 videos on YouTube for "agritourism." You can add your farm video too.

Think about adding your operation on Google maps at <http://maps.google.com/>. Type in your farm

name or take a look at Work Family Guest Ranch's Web site at <http://www.workranch.com/> to see how much good information can be made available to your potential visitor or guest.

You can also register your farm at www.google.com/places, and add photos and videos that correlate with other nearby services.

Using Social Media

According to statistics from the California Travel & Tourism Commission we know that

- 86% of Americans travel with their cell phones, which they use to call ahead to see what's blooming on the farm today or to book an experience
- 70% of 15–30 year olds use social networks such as Facebook to learn about and share with friends. This usage is growing with older travelers as well.
- 75% of web users trust online reviews more than other written sources

Being visible is paramount. Posted customer review comments and ratings are important, and most of all, the visual appearance of your web presence is crucial, whether it's on your Web site, a Facebook page, your blog, or a Twitter account.

While we know that the Internet is the Number One source of travel planning and purchasing, it's the consumer who is becoming the medium or gateway to your farm or ranch via social media and networking sites. The Web site Tripadvisor, which is made up of travelers' reviews, is used by one of four travelers; blogs about your site are also popular sources. Randall Travel Marketing predicts this consumer-to-consumer style of travel information sharing will be one of the largest trends to impact the travel and tourism industry in the near future. Simply put, the consumer is now in control of tourism marketing.

If you think Twitter is a type of bird, a blog is a low spot on your farm, and a Facebook page is something you see at the post office, then you need to educate yourself. Plan to attend a regional or national agritourism workshop. The National Farmers Direct Marketing Association is a great resource, as well as your local Cooperative Extension, tourist bureau, and Resource and Development Council. In California, there are at least two to three annual workshops about getting started in agritourism.



Free social media sites

Facebook (www.Facebook.com) is a social networking site that connects friends and families. The Web site currently has more than 350 million active users worldwide. MySpace is another popular social networking site.

Twitter (www.twitter.com) is a free information networking and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as “tweets.” Tweets are text-based posts of 140 characters displayed on the author’s profile page and delivered to the author’s subscribers, who are known as “followers.”

YouTube (www.youtube.com) is the place to upload videos about your events, testimonials from customers, a virtual tour of what visitors will see at your ranch, and much more. You can then post a link to the video on your Web site, blog, or with Twitter.

Digg (www.digg.com) is a social news Web site for people to discover and share content from anywhere on the Internet by submitting links and stories, and then voting and commenting on those links and stories.

Stumble Upon (www.stumbleupon.com) is an Internet community that allows users to discover and rate Web pages, photos, and videos. It is a personalized recommendation engine that could be very useful for your operation.

Delicious (www.delicious.com) is social bookmarking web service for storing, sharing, and discovering web bookmarks.

Reddit (www.reddit.com) is a source for what’s new and popular online. Users can vote on links that they like or dislike, help decide what’s popular, or submit their own links.

TripAdvisor Media Network (www.tripadvisor.com) is the largest travel community in the world, with seven million registered members and 15 million reviews and opinions from travelers.

“The social media revolution is radically changing how direct-marketing farmers communicate with their customers,” said Michael Straus, founder of Straus Communications and former vice president of marketing at Straus Family Creamery. “However, it’s important to select the right tools for your marketing strategy; otherwise, you could risk a lifetime in Tweeting with insignificant results.”

Using Facebook to Advertise

Small, niche farm products can be highlighted on Facebook. Use the shop function on Facebook to create a fanstore if you plan to ship or sell products by mail.

“[By] using Facebook we are interacting with

our customers/fans in a much more direct and immediate manner,” comments Michael Zilber, store manager for Cowgirl Creamery. “And from a purely commercial standpoint we are able to keep them informed on our latest products, specials, and events. But more importantly we can use it to further our company philosophy and outreach, which helps extend the brand in general. By posting about a variety of subjects related to other cheese makers, artisan cheese in general, and sustainable agriculture, we are furthering content that supports Cowgirl and the issues we think are important to our business.”

Use Facebook’s reviews wall to post visitor comments. Gather your visitor email addresses when they come and ask them to sign on as a fan.

Some operators have experimented with online sales via Craigslist. Folks at Rossotti Ranch tried it but reported that, “we haven’t had much luck with Craigslist. We mainly posted on it hoping we might get a response, but usually don’t.” They sell most of their meat goats through the Bay Area Meat CSA Web site or to dinner or tour guests to their farm outside of Petaluma in Sonoma County.

Start a Blog

Blogging from your Web site or Facebook is another great way to keep your fans and customers connected to you. Loren Ponica from Stemple Creek Ranch is a daily blogger. Stemple Creek is a family cattle ranch in Marin County, California. The family raises grass-fed beef and lamb on their own organic pastureland just a few miles from the Pacific Ocean. Loren manages the ranch with his father, Al, who, if you asked him about blogging, would probably ask, “Is that a new board game?” Generational preferences count! Remember what we said about current and future visitors and their preferences in Chapter One.

If you don’t have a son, daughter, or employee who uses these free promotional tools, look for a volunteer who can help you set these up. Facebook is easy to use and might be the perfect place to start.

So now you’re wondering, which one do I set up? The answer is, as many as you can keep up-to-date! Your Web site and Facebook should sync seamlessly, picking up friends and fans from Facebook and customers via your Web site.

Jane Eckert, a farmer and top agritourism consultant, has many excellent “how to” articles about



selecting a web designer, setting up a blog, creating an e-newsletter for your customers, and more on her Web site (<http://www.eckertagrimarketing.com/index.php>). She surveyed agritourism operators about their use of social networking and found that 56.5% of the respondents were already utilizing Facebook as a marketing tool for their business and a surprising 65.1% were using Facebook for their personal use. Businesses spent an average of one hour per week updating and checking their information, and while some operators used “group” pages as their marketing tool, most used “fan” pages.

Free, promotional Web sites: The best part of these promotional tools is that they are free. The biggest cost is the time it takes for you or someone else to set them up and keep them fresh on a daily or weekly basis.

Check out consumer purchasing trends. The USDA’s Farmer Direct Marketing Service (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing>) is a good source. Direct marketing includes farmers’ markets, u-pick farms, roadside stands, subscription farming, community-supported agriculture, and catalog sales. The USDA Web site describes consumer trends in the purchase of fruits, vegetables, nuts, honey, meats, eggs, flowers, plants, herbs, spices, specialty crops, Christmas trees, and value-added products such as cider, jellies, and preserves.

Work with the Press

The media can provide you invaluable exposure and public validation. Develop a working relationship with the media in your area. Using simple and free public relations techniques is one of the most effective ways for your enterprise to get promoted.

Create a Press Kit

Start by creating a press kit, either online or printed. If you are creating a printed press kit, present your material in a folder with sleeve pockets. Either type of press kit should include

- a brief cover letter, including your operation’s web site address and your email address.
- your press release
- two business cards in a printed kit; the same information online
- a brochure, including photos of your farm or ranch
- location and directions
- services provided

- a brief biographical sketch
- press clippings, if available
- testimonials from customers

Actual news is probably the most important element of a press kit. Reporters and broadcast producers receive hundreds of press kits and—unless you offer them something of news value—yours will likely go into the round file. With an online press kit, you’ll be emailing your press release to the media. Follow up promptly with a courteous reply to make sure the journalist received your release.

Continue to develop a relationship with the local paper. You can usually find the email addresses of various reporters at the paper’s Web site or at the end of articles. Figure out who covers agriculture and business. Call or email that reporter and introduce yourself. Send press releases about any new happenings or upcoming events at your enterprise to keep your name, logo, and public image on the reporter’s “radar screen,” even during your off season. Be patient but persistent, sooner or later, you will be contacted.

Find an Angle

Consider using one of these angles for your press release:

- strong local story
- public impact
- interesting or unusual information
- useful advice; consumer protection or other helpful information
- celebrity
- human interest
- timeliness
- proximity
- localizing national trends and/or stories

Craft a Key Message

There may be occasions when you need to communicate a specific idea or response to a problem in your operation. Use a public relations tool known as “key messages.” Break the information you want to present via the media into three or four main points. These main points are your key messages. Key messages allow you to tell your perspective of the story and provide consistent information to the news media. They help you focus under pressure and may lessen the chance that you’ll be misquoted.

Key messages should be the most important information that you want to convey to the public. They should be

- the most essential information, boiled down to a simple sentence
- factual and truthful
- concisely written
- as simple as possible

After you craft your key messages, take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with them. If you have time, rehearse them. Don't memorize them, however, or you'll sound stilted in an interview. Instead, learn each point well and phrase it several ways.

Print journalists call well-composed messages "good quotes," while electronic media call them "sound bites." In a television news story, the average sound bite is 25 words or fewer. Note that it is often used for rhythm and pacing and not for information.

Prepare for an Interview

Before you are interviewed, take a moment to anticipate the reporter's questions. If you were the reporter, what would you ask? If you have time, ask your colleague, partner, or family member this same question. This simple exercise will prepare you for the majority of a reporter's questions.

Also, take a moment before your interview to choose three or four key messages and rate them in order of importance. Your goal is to work your key messages into your answers during your interview. This way you can benefit from your interview by reaching your intended audience with your key messages.

Expect to make one point, possibly two, during an interview. Studies show that most viewers remember just one point of a television or radio show segment.

During the Interview

Above all, remain cordial, no matter what the reporter's demeanor. This is an important element of the interview that you can control. If you allow the reporter to upset you, you might lose focus on your key messages and why you agreed to be interviewed in the first place.

When responding to a question, start off by giving a definitive answer—your conclusion—and then explain yourself. This style of answering helps the reporter get quotes and helps organize your thoughts.

While you're being interviewed, imagine that you're talking to an audience, or even a friend, rather than to a reporter. Use conversational language.

Avoid acronyms, jargon, complicated statistics, and technical terms. The point of an interview is to inform your audience members, not to educate them. Therefore, make sure your quotes or sound bites answer the reader's or listener's key question: how does this affect me? Be specific. Keep your answers short, concise, and right to the point. Use short examples, illustrations, and anecdotes to illustrate your point. Avoid jokes.

Be truthful. If you don't wish to answer a particular question, reply that you are not prepared to discuss this topic, or it would not be appropriate to comment on that at this time, rather than the evasive "no comment."

Never agree to speak "off the record" and assume what you say next will not appear in print. Follow this simple rule: never say anything you wouldn't want to see in print or on the evening news.

It's helpful in interviews to use bridges. A bridge is a phrase that can lead you from a topic back to your key messages. For example, the time-tested transition "A question I'm often asked is..." can lead you back to a sound bite. Think up a few bridges that are comfortable for you.

Remember that an interview doesn't have to follow a strict question-and-answer formula. Think of it as a conversation with the reporter. It's acceptable for you to sometimes take the lead; if you wait for the interviewer to ask you the "right" question, it might never happen! So answer a question directly and then "bridge" back to one of your key points.

Encourage the reporter to visit your site or to mention it in the story. If you're lucky enough to interest the news organization in a feature story, the reporter will want to come to your farm or ranch. Spend the entire visit with the reporter; provide superb customer service and something for the reporter to take away. Make sure there are customers there the day of the interview who can speak positively about their experience as well.

Target bloggers as another creative way to promote your farm or ranch. There are several bloggers who write about agritourism and the local food movement. Find them and send them your media packet or a story about you. If they live nearby, invite them out to your site.



After the Interview

Be realistic. Don't be disappointed if your story differs from what you expected. Reporters strive for balanced stories, so even what you believe should be a positive story could have one or two negative components.

Once the interview is over and you're back in the office, follow post-interview etiquette:

- Promptly supply any materials you promised to the reporter. Make sure that your contact information is on them.
- Never ask to see a story ahead of time, but always urge the reporter to call you if he or she wants to double check any of the information that you provided or has follow-up questions.
- Never pressure editors or station managers to prevent a story from running in the newspaper or being broadcast.
- Tell the reporter how much you liked the story. Make yourself available to the reporter for other calls about agriculture or tourism-related topics.

Newsletters

Electronic newsletters, also known as e-newsletters, are another creative way to tell your story and connect with your customers.

As we described earlier, you can blog from your Web site and Facebook page, and you can also send out an electronic newsletter. Some operators have newsletters they mail seasonally, but we encourage you to go paperless. You can get a short, timely newsletter out in a few hours instead of the weeks that it takes to write, design, print and prepare a bulk paper mailing. You can always print out some copies to leave at your counter for customers to pick up, but the e-newsletter is a great way to stay connected to all of your customers. You're also sending a green message about reducing paper waste and recycling. On each e-newsletter be sure to provide your recipients with an opt-out option if they do not wish to receive future copies.

There are many online companies that offer online email management and other promotional materials such as event fliers, newsletters, and promotions. Constant Contact (www.constantcontact.com) is used by many non-profit organizations, but there are many others. Take a look at some of the current electronic materials you are getting in your email and scroll down to the bottom of the copy to see who sent

it. For a nominal fee they will manage your list, make flier templates available, and more.

Read the California AgTour Connections' e-newsletter (<http://www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/agritourism>) about agritourism and nature tourism; it has some great features on agritourism operations, and you can get good ideas on writing tips for your own.

Advertise

Press releases, feature articles, YouTube videos, and media interviews are all free promotion. Advertising, however, is paid-for promotion. You pay for time on radio and television, on a search engine like Google (via its online ads and sponsored links), and you pay for space in newspapers, travel magazines, billboards, Web pages, and on signs. Although advertising is the most expensive way to publicize your enterprise, it can be a good way to gain first-time clients. Make sure the advertising outlet you choose is the best way to reach your target customers.

Bear in mind, however, that your advertising must be noticeable and it must be frequent. You should explore different media's visibility, coverage, timing, and cost before you choose a method. If you are interested in Internet advertising, Google or Yahoo will have details about how their sponsored links or "adwords" work. Talk to other farms or ranch operators who you notice have advertised about their success rate. Be sure to advertise only what you can deliver.

At least 10 California agritourism operations reported that they spent between \$1,000–4,999 in 2008 on advertising, yet they did not have a Web site.

If we haven't convinced you yet, spend those advertising dollars designing your site and get out there. Everyone else is, especially your customers! A Web site can be designed for you for anywhere from free to \$2,000. There is no excuse.

Assess Your Competitive Advantage

Before you launch into advertising, it's important to analyze your competition. By doing so you'll learn your own strengths and weaknesses and discover some complementary businesses. Collaboration among complementary businesses can increase sales.

Take time to assess your competitive advantage. Identify your competitors, compare your enterprise with theirs, and determine the changes you need for a competitive advantage.



Do this by asking yourself these questions:

- What activities can people participate in within my area?
- Do these activities compete with or complement my enterprise?
- Would my targeted customers like to participate in these activities?
- What other locales—locally, regionally, and in other states— offer experiences similar to mine?
- What makes my enterprise and locale different from others?
- How could I collaborate with complementary businesses?

Who Is Your Competition?

Who and what does your product compete with? Who is selling a similar product? Think carefully before you jot down names. Your competition could be less than obvious. For instance, television networks consider not only other networks as competition but the computer- and electronic-game industries too. If you're reserved about looking into other businesses, you might find this exploration uncomfortable—but it must be done!

How Do You Rate?

Rate your enterprise and the competitors you just identified. This exercise can help illuminate changes you can make to gain a competitive advantage.

What Could You Change?

Based on your notes, write out the changes your enterprise might need to improve its competitive advantage.

What Makes You Different?

Consider your distinguishing characteristics once again. What makes your operation special? Write down why your agritourism or nature tourism enterprise stands out above others.

SELL SMART

Now comes the time to sell your products and services. You need to make your products stand out. You need to make your services attractive. And you must make both your products and services easy to purchase.

Strategize!

- Give your business a personality: choose a name; design a logo; compose a catchy slogan.
- Present your product with attractive and identifiable packaging; use colors, pictures, and similar packaging for similar products or services.
- Capture the value of your product or service by using phrases like “the spirit of the west” or “a unique weekend getaway.”

“Little Things” Count

Promotional items are the extras that add value to your enterprise. They can increase the appeal of your products and services. Perhaps the most important “little thing” you can offer is availability. Ensure that your product is continually available, unless it is seasonal. If you provide a service, make sure that you are fully staffed and otherwise prepared to offer your service as long as possible. Providing knowledge about your product and your community is important, as is ensuring privacy for your customers if they desire it. If you offer accommodations, support your community by including a small gift in the room that is locally made. A small jar of hand cream or honey is authentic and unique—better than a cheap item made overseas.

Tips for Better Sales

Each agritourism and nature tourism enterprise has its own methods to increase sales. Incorporate into your selling efforts whatever methods suit your

Table 6.3 Little Things Count

Type of Enterprise	Promotional Items
Farm stand	Recipes and menu suggestions Special packaging Theme merchandising Processing: jams, chutneys Contests, coupons, loyalty cards
Bed and breakfast	Recipes Jar of preserves Package of homemade cookies
Working farm/ranch	Locally made hand cream Leather keychain T-shirt or hat with logo
Hunting and fishing stays	Recipes Box with tied flies Complimentary photograph of guest with catch Free shipping home
Birding or photo safaris	Check-off list of area wildlife Complimentary bird checklist
Camping	Flashlight with logo Trail maps Wildlife guides Point of origin is important; stay close to home



operation. Whatever you do, make sure you charge an adequate fee for your products and services. Operators usually charge between \$5–8 per student for school groups to come to their farm. But many operators we surveyed in California did not charge for this activity in 2008. You provide an essential and unique service and need to be paid for your time and effort. While service activities like tours have a strong marketing angle related to direct sales, other cultural festivals or farm demonstrations are an important source of income. “We have not developed our agritourism into a moneymaking operation,” said one operator. “Most visitors are non-paying customers. We are moving in the direction of paid activities and stays.” The sooner the better! See why you need a marketing plan and strategy?

Nature tourism

- Post visible road signs that lead to your operation.
- Know your product and teach your staff about it—whether it’s chicken care, pumpkin carving, or canoe paddling.
- Provide as many natural settings as possible.
- Furnish remote and quiet areas that are easy to find.
- Set aside a picturesque spot where guests can be photographed. Offer to take their photograph.
- Erect wildlife feeders and bird nesting boxes to attract a diversity of species.
- Post interpretive signs.
- Provide numerous options for active participation.
- Sell nature goods that are locally produced such as birdhouses, walking sticks, or honey.
- Sell guidebooks, picture books, disposable cameras, local postcards, and stamps.
- Hand out brochures and free postcards of your enterprise.
- Post a local map showing areas of special interest.
- Post local nature tourism events.
- List upcoming nature festivals and activities on your Web site.
- Develop an electronic mailing list of existing and potential customers; send them flyers about upcoming events at your operation or in the region.

Shops at farm stays and B&Bs

- Provide baskets with handles.
- Post payment methods you accept such as cash, checks, credit cards.
- Put up signs that identify local goods, with stories and photographs of the maker, farmer, or farm.

- Provide ready made gift baskets, gift-wrapping, boxing, and shipping.
- Decorate rooms with objects you’re selling and place an order pad at the checkout counter.
- Develop and sell a recipe book with recipes that incorporate your products.
- Sell local picture books, disposable cameras, local postcards, and books of stamps.
- Set aside a picturesque spot where guests can be photographed; offer to take their photo.

U-pick farms

- Post road signs that lead to your operation and clearly state your business hours.
- Provide different sizes of take-home containers.
- Offer already harvested crops.
- Post a large map of your operation at the entrance and—if your operation is large— hand out maps to help customers navigate.
- Hire enough staff to provide selection assistance, quick checkout, and purchase carryout.
- Make sure all staff members wear easily identifiable clothing such as logo t-shirts, hats, vests, and name tags. (This builds team spirit too.)
- Provide hand-washing and restroom facilities.
- Furnish convenient places to sit. The longer customers are on your property, the more they will buy.
- Bring people in one end of the operation and provide parking along the way out. This arrangement brings customers nearer their crop of choice, limits parking problems, and places checkout at the exit.
- Develop a mailing list and a Web site where you offer recipes and announce upcoming crops.
- Post copies of recipes and news of upcoming crops in your booth.

Roadside stands and farmers’ markets

- Post easy-to-see prices.
- Have employees wear easily identifiable clothing.
- Provide a choice of products and packaging.
- Sell both pre-bagged products and bag-your-own products.
- Place baskets and bags in convenient locations.
- Use suggestive merchandising—place complementary products side by side, for instance.
- Offer ready-made gift baskets, gift-wrapping, boxing, and shipping.
- Provide a customer sign-up sheet where you can collect emails and mailing addresses



- Post copies of recipes and news of upcoming crops in your booth.
- Know your produce and products from the ground to the table, and teach your staff the same.
- Provide samples, abiding by food-handling regulations.
- Provide good customer service and quick checkout.

Increase Your Off-Season Sales

Even as you breathe a sigh of relief after the your last pumpkin leaves the farm or your last Christmas tree is sold, don't forget your off season! Look around to see what could be offered to customers during your slower time. Develop a conference room in your barn or an out building that can accommodate weddings in the summer and groups in the winter. Co-sponsor a community event. Plumas County hosts a wonderful Barns, Birds, and Barbeque Tour that draws birders, history buffs, and businesses. Invite these groups back in the winter to use your conference room. If you have the room and parking, consider co-hosting a charity event. Down the road from our property in rural Sonoma County is the Victorian Christmas Tree Ranch. They co-sponsor a very successful "Trees for Troops" event during their season. Staying involved with your local civic groups gives you the perfect link to these types of events as well as others that could occur during your quieter season.

EVALUATE YOUR MARKETING SUCCESS

It's important to continually evaluate your marketing success. Evaluation allows you to determine whether you're progressing toward your sales goals and—if you are progressing—whether you're moving as quickly as planned. Evaluation also allows you to deal with problems and identify additional marketing efforts. Customer satisfaction matters. This is the age of the empowered, cynical, skeptical, hype-resistant customer. It's a great time to be a customer, and it's a great time to be a customer-centric organization. Customers who are highly satisfied will tell their friends about the good experience. And what drives satisfaction? A good price, a unique experience, and delivery with care to the customer.

One way to be a customer-centric operation is with a simple customer survey. An informal survey asks customers how they learned of your enterprise, what they enjoyed at your operation, or what you could do to improve it. You'll also want to gather

their gender, age, size of the group they came with, income range, overall satisfaction, and zip code. Zip codes tell you where your customers live. The more you know your customers and their preferences, the easier it will be for you to customize your efforts to have them coming to the farm repeatedly.

You could survey your customers in several ways. Consider placing short and simple comment cards on tables. Have one of your employees gather this information as visitors are wrapping up their visit. You could use volunteers who are fans or friends of your farm, as long as they are a positive, approachable adult or teen.

Online surveys can also be very effective, but you need to take care not to overwhelm your customers with too many questions, and you need to ask their permission.

Another evaluation technique is listening for off-hand comments. Train your employees to listen when customers wait in line or walk to their car, and ask your employees to write down their comments as quickly as possible. Yet another evaluation technique is performing a head count: simply count the number of people who walk through your door. Are the numbers increasing? Are there peak days of the week or month for visitors?

Coupons, too, can gauge your marketing success. Insert coupons into a mailing and when you redeem them, count them. You might even color-code coupons by new-versus-repeat customers or geographic region.

You might also offer discounts. For instance, you might advertise that if guests mention your radio advertisement they receive a discount of some kind. Keep track of discounts and when your promotional period ends, count them. What's more, this method allows businesses with years of information to compare this year's sales data with that of years prior, looking at the same period and taking into consideration weather and disaster-related impacts.

During your regular staff meetings, talk about the requests, comments, and complaints you've received from customers. Listen closely. When your customers ask, "Do you have...?"; they're telling you what you should have.

All in all, learn from your evaluation. Creatively use the information you receive. Use it to refine your marketing strategy; to hone next year's budget; to better publicize and promote your products and services; and—ultimately—to increase your sales.



LOOK AFTER YOUR CUSTOMERS

It is important that you serve every person with respect, consideration, and a smile. According to one fourth-generation fruit grower, customer relations are the key to her success. She treats customers as she treats guests in her home so they feel comfortable and want to return.

Welcome!

Your goal is to build relationships that create repeat customers—the best and least expensive marketing tactic. So, start with a good first impression.

Personally greet each guest. If you are unable to greet them yourself, have an employee do so.

Introduce yourselves by name and be casual, friendly, and direct. Such a small gesture creates a favorable impression and puts visitors at ease. Keep in mind that first impressions are often derived directly from the person greeting your customers and from the person answering your telephone.

Foresee Customer Questions

In an age when time is the most valuable resource of all, it is vital to answer customer questions as quickly and concisely as possible. This is true on your Web site, and it is also the case for your agritourism experience.

What do you want to know when you visit someplace new? Whatever you want to know is likely

Top Ten List of Marketing Ideas for Agritourism Operations

By Jane Eckert, www.eckertagrimarketing.com

1. Focus your time and energy on having a professional Web site for your business. Absolutely nothing is more important in the Internet age than a good Web site. It has now replaced a brochure as your calling card. If you miss this first idea, then you might as well ignore the rest of this list.
2. Stay in touch with your best customers through an e-newsletter. It's fast and the most inexpensive way to communicate. Make it easy for customers to sign up with their email address both at your farm and on your Web site. Then make at least monthly contact during the months that you are open. More frequent contact is preferred.
3. Increase your use of promotional offers. All customers today are looking for deals. Use coupons and special offers (such as "Buy 1, Get 1 Free") to entice new and existing customers to return to your business more frequently.
4. Don't rely on the media to find you. Be proactive and learn your local media, how to write a press release, and get them to do a story on you. A well-placed article about your business is far more effective than any advertising that you can purchase.
5. Make a positive first impression! Customers take only a few seconds to form an impression about you and your farm when they drive up to the property. Get rid of the unsightly farm equipment, irrigation piping, chemical barrels, and general trash, etc. that detract from a visitor's impression of your farm.
6. Look at the products you sell. Customers today expect first quality, always. Make sure you listen for customer requests and ask them what else they would like to see you selling. Be ready to expand your product line to other value-added products, more produce or bakery items, etc. The customer will give you ideas to increase your sales if you will only ask questions and listen.
7. Focus on your employees. The first step is hiring the right people, but after that make time for training and re-training. Hire people who are willing to learn. Never take for granted that they know your business or how to treat a customer. Also, be sure you set a good example.
8. Connect with your local, regional, and state tourism groups. It is the job of these associations to bring visitors to the area. They have the marketing knowledge and budget to do so. If you don't take advantage of this connection, you are missing out on a tremendous marketing opportunity.
9. The internet is moving ahead quickly. If you have never heard of Facebook Fan Pages or Twitter, it's time to learn now. While the online social media takes time to develop and maintain, it is a great, FREE resource to spread the word about your business.
10. Get ready to grow beyond your expectations! Most farmers think too small when it comes to making an addition to their building or parking lot. Think big.



to be what your customers want to know. Therefore, prepare yourself with answers in advance.

Begin by anticipating questions. Then make sure that you and your employees can answer these questions. To answer them, your employees must have information. Freely provide it!

Employees must know the history of your enterprise. They must be able to explain your ideology and practices, including safety measures. When faced with difficult questions, you and your employees need only say you don't know the answer, but you'll find out—and then follow up! If you can't follow up on the spot, write or email the customer, considering it an added opportunity to market your business.

What questions might you be asked? Questions differ, depending on whether your visitors are local or from afar. Local customers often ask about you and your business:

- How long have you been farming/ranching?
- Why do you farm/ranch?
- What do you do about pests on...?
- Do you ever let people fish in that stream?

Customers from afar might also ask about the local area and rural living:

- What's it like to live out here?
- How are the schools here?
- What's that bird?
- Is this berry safe to eat?

Customers from afar also might ask about local accommodations and activities:

- Are there any museums or historical sites in the community?
- Where's a good place to stay in the area?
- Can you recommend a good restaurant?
- What activities and events are happening in the next few days?
- Where can I get my car fixed?
- Where will I find tourist information?

WORK WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS

Good relationships with your neighbors are personally rewarding and professionally important. They are fundamental to your success. Ultimately, good relationships can ward off problems and, with luck, create a spirit of cooperation and collaboration with which your neighborhood can prosper. So

think about your neighbors' concerns, perspectives, and values in relation to your own. Whatever your new enterprise, it will impact your neighbors. For example, what you consider an insignificant farm stand, your neighbors might see as an invitation to strangers and traffic. They might consider hunters as tranquility breakers, bird-watchers as pests, and roads signs as visual blight. Think about how you will address your neighbors' fears and viable concerns. These need attention and resolution.

What's Your Impact?

If you don't know them already, get to know the people who live near you. Introduce yourself, and explain your business, interests, and ideology. Bring them a product sample to demonstrate what your farm generates. Offer them a farm or ranch tour.

It is important to explain your new enterprise early in its development so you can listen to your neighbors' views and accommodate their concerns as much as possible. Be sure to invite them to your open house or grand opening and keep them informed as things develop.

Start your good-neighbor efforts now. Jot down the names of eight neighbors, how your enterprise might impact them, and how you can limit negative impact.

Furthering Neighbor Relations

As you consider the impact of your enterprise, you'll become more aware of your neighbors' concerns. But sensitivity is just the beginning. Good relationships must start well before your first guest arrives.

Think about the following suggestions from the Ohio Farm Bureau. This organization works to improve relationships between farmers, ranchers, and neighbors. It reminds landowners that the best public relations technique is one-on-one, face-to-face contact. Furthermore, it says it is important to be a good neighbor—aware, open, considerate, and responsible.

So keep one step ahead of the game. As you work toward your tourism goals, practice being a good neighbor. Try one or more of the following ideas:

- Host an open house or picnic for neighbors during spring.
- Be friendly to neighborhood children. Invite them to see a newborn animal or help them with a science fair project.



- Take opportunities to educate your neighbors about what you do and why. Discuss your enterprise and its specific tasks: for instance, how spreading manure on cropland recycles nutrients and puts the manure to productive use.
- Explain to your neighbors why farmers must work late into the night and on weekends during planting and harvest seasons. If they know the noise, traffic, and lights are limited to certain times of year, they'll likely be more tolerant.
- Spread manure in the most environmentally friendly method.
- Spread manure on any day but Friday—especially on a Friday before a holiday weekend. Encourage your neighbors to tell you when a fresh dose of manure will infringe upon their entertainment plans.
- Help your neighbors. For example, when snow falls, dig them out.

COLLABORATE

Just as your relationships with neighbors are important, so are your relationships with local businesses. Work with other businesses. You can do this by providing your visitors with brochures that list other local and/or related enterprises, which also cultivates your community's economic development. You might sell local goods with signs explaining their origin—and have other business owners do the same with your products and literature. Make sure that the businesses you work with share your commitment to quality, however. And monitor their promotional material to guarantee correct use of your brand.

Take a look at Ikeda's Country Market and Perry's Farms in California's Placer County. They provide an example of local collaboration. Ikeda's carries Perry's famous tomatoes, while Perry's Farms carries Ikeda's specialty peaches under Ikeda's name. Each business benefits from the other's recognizable quality. Furthermore, Ikeda's sells also to restaurants that use its brand name on their menu.

Once your enterprise is up and running, work with your competitors. No two agritourism

or nature tourism enterprises are alike, so refer the clients you can't serve to nearby providers. Find businesses with strengths that complement your own as well. For example, if you own a B&B and your neighbor offers horseback rides, you might have visitors stay with you and take trail rides with your neighbor. Or if you're a baker and your neighbor is a gifted saleswoman, you might bake bread and have her sell it. You can benefit from collaboration.

In fact, the entire community can benefit from collaboration. One resident's land might be perfect for cross-country skiing while another's is good for hunting and another's is ideal for farm stays. Meanwhile, the local natural area on public land might attract visitors, and your small town might lure urban residents.

Write down what civic groups or chambers of commerce you belong to. Think about how you and others can cooperate and collaborate. What businesses in your town can supply your new enterprise? What can you provide them?

From your competitive analysis, who attracts the same kinds of clients you want to attract. How could you work together?

If you offer canoeing opportunities, then an outdoor recreation shop and a photography shop complement your enterprise. Who and what local businesses complement your product or service? How might you work with them? What nonprofits and organizations might you collaborate with to further business development and community participation? Be sure to continue writing down ways to collaborate as ideas and events develop.

The Central Coast Agritourism Council (www.agadventures.org) is a great example of successful collaboration. The Council offers marketing exposure that a sole operation couldn't afford or have time to accomplish alone. Groups in North Carolina (<http://ncana.blogspot.com>) and Hawaii (www.hiagtourism.org/) advocate for zoning changes to allow for agritourism. Some agritourism associations offer group insurance. Anything is possible, so think about developing a group in your area that can help with what your enterprise needs. More California agritourism groups can be found in the sidebar.

California agritourism groups

See <http://calagtour.org> for the most up-to-date listing.

49er Fruit Trails & Christmas Tree Lane
(530) 878-7210

<http://www.49erfruittrailandchristmastreelane.com>

Apple Hill Growers Association
(530) 644-7692

<http://www.applehill.com>

Calaveras Grown
(209) 754-6477

<http://www.calaverasgrown.org>

Central Coast AgriTourism Council
(805) 239-3799

<http://www.agadventures.org>

Country Crossroads Map
(Santa Cruz County, Santa Clara, San Benito
Counties Farm Trails)
(831) 724-1356 or (831) 688-0748

<http://www.sccfb.com/crossroads.htm>

El Dorado County Christmas Tree Growers

<http://www.chooseandcut.com/>

El Dorado County Farm Trails
(530) 676-4263

<http://www.edc-farmtrails.org>

El Dorado Winery Association
(800) 306-3956

<http://www.eldoradowines.org>

Farms of Amador County
(209) 223-6482

<http://groups.ucanr.org/farmsofamador>

Farms of Tuolumne County
(209) 928-3775

<http://www.farmsoftuolumnecounty.org/map/5>

Fresno County Fruit Trail
(559) 262-4271

<http://www.gofresnocounty.com/Fruit%20Trail/FruitTrailIndex.asp>

Happy Valley Farm Trail (Shasta County)

<http://www.clearcreekcsd.com/farm.html>

Harvest Time in Brentwood
(925) 634-4913

<http://www.harvest4you.com>

Lake County Premium Agriculture
<http://lakecountyag.com/>

Lake County Farmers' Finest

<http://www.lakecountyfarmersfinest.org/>

Lodi Wine Trails

<http://www.lodiwine.com/winecountry1.shtml>

Mariposa Agri-Nature Trail

<http://www.mariposaagtour.com/>

Mendocino County Promotional Alliance
(707) 462-7417

<http://www.gomendo.com>

Merced County Blossom Trails
(209) 385-7403

<http://www.mercedrides.com/BIKE/scenic.htm>

Oak Glen Apple Growers Association (San
Bernardino County)
(909) 797-6833

<http://www.oakglen.net>

Placer Grown
(530) 889-7398

<http://www.placergrown.org/map.php>

Russian River Wine Road
(707) 433-4335

<http://www.wineroad.com>

San Mateo County Harvest Guide
(650) 726-4485

<http://sanmateo.cfbf.com/>

Sierra Oro Farm Trail (Butte County)
(530) 566-9849

<http://www.sierraoro.org>

Silverado Trail Wineries Association
(707) 253-2802

<http://www.silveradotrail.com>

Sonoma County Farm Trails
(707) 571-8288

<http://www.farmtrails.org>

Sacramento Strawberry Stands

[http://cesacramento.ucdavis.edu/Sacramento_](http://cesacramento.ucdavis.edu/Sacramento_Strawberries)
[Strawberries](http://cesacramento.ucdavis.edu/Sacramento_Strawberries)

Stockton Farms & Wineries
(877) 778-6258

<http://www.visitstockton.org/agricultural-attractions>

Suisun Valley Harvest Trails (Solano County)
(707) 290-9162

<http://suisunvalley.com>

Trinity Roots (Trinity County)
(530) 628-5495

<http://www.trinityroots.org/>

Yolo County Farm Tours
(530) 297-1900

<http://www.yolocvb.org/to-do/farm-tours>

Yuba/Sutter Agricultural Destinations
(530) 743-6501

<http://www.visitubasutter.com/agriculture.aspx>



Joint marketing

Regional marketing connects people in the agritourism sector to work together to promote their industry and geographical area. Apple Hill Growers Association in El Dorado County offers a case in point.

Working Together

The Apple Hill Growers Association (www.applehill.com/) grew out of a small group of orchard ranches that were struggling to survive. Today, it includes more than 50 members—Christmas tree growers, winemakers, and grape growers among them. Its “season” starts in June with a Father’s Day cherry festival and runs into December with Christmas tree sales. Apple sales kick off Labor Day weekend. The economic impact of this organization on the county neared \$84 million in 2003, according to the El Dorado County Agriculture Department. This is just one example of farmers and the media working together to foster and promote agriculture in their area.

Conservation & Development Council, the Cumberland County Economic Development, and the Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau in Pennsylvania produced an *Agritourism and Outdoor Recreation Guide*. This includes a directory of farmers’ markets, roadside stands, pick-your-own operations, farm stays, and other agritourism locations. It also includes information on outdoor recreation opportunities available in Cumberland County. It’s a perfect example of joint marketing by a “unified group of private citizens, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and government agencies.”

Learn tourism business skills.

Learn the skills required to operate a successful tourism business. Agritourism and nature tourism are service industries requiring an entrepreneurial approach and an understanding of market trends, consumer behavior, consumer attitudes, and consumer preferences. They demand skills and knowledge different from those of traditional agriculture.

Talk to your county economic development director.

If agritourism and nature tourism are to become distinct economic-development industries, then joint promotion, advertising campaigns, and coordinated strategic planning are needed. Cooperation and long-run commitment are necessary for success.

Approach your county board of supervisors.

Join forces with the agritourism or nature tourism operators so you can approach your county board of supervisors as a group. There might be financial support available. For example, money generated by Transient Occupancy Taxes (TOT) has been used in some areas to support and promote regional agricultural marketing efforts, which includes agritourism.

Ask to be included in visitor and economic development endeavors.

Use your chamber of commerce membership to ask your visitors’ bureaus and county economic-development agencies to include agriculture and nature tourism enterprises in destination promotion efforts and materials. There might be visiting groups that would enjoy the experiences you offer.

Innovative Co-marketing Groups

Remember the “culture” in agriculture, and check out these innovative tours, festivals, and events that make the most of their seasons and co-marketing efforts. Think about your farm or ranch and how you can tie into these larger efforts such as these.

- Carson Valley Eagles and Agriculture Tour
- Farms of Tuolumne County Farm and Ranch Tour
- Flower Fields in Carlsbad
- Fresno Blossom Trail
- Hoes Down Harvest Festival
- Mariposa Agri-Nature trail
- Napa Mustard Festival
- North Bay Artisan Cheese Festival
- Placer Farm & Barn Tour
- Placer Mountain Mandarin Festival
- Suisun Valley Fun Family Farm Days
- Yolo Combines, Bovines, and Fine Wine Tour

Start Your Own Regional Marketing Group

The Apple Hill Growers Association illustrates the value of regional marketing for both farmers and local communities. Here are some ideas for starting your own regional marketing program.

All counties have attractions. Some attractions might be agricultural—harvest fairs, demonstration farms, certified farmers’ markets, cattle round-ups, wineries, microbreweries, and food processing plants, for example. Others might lean toward nature tourism, including natural beauty, national and state parks, monuments, and nature preserves.

Learn what attractions exist in your county and who promotes them.

Think beyond simply marketing agriculture. A collaborative effort between the Capital Resource

PARTICIPATE

As you embark on your agritourism or nature tourism venture, become more involved in your community. Join community organizations and assist with one community-improvement project each year. Join the local chamber of commerce to both support other businesses and have a voice for your enterprise. Host a chamber of commerce “mixer” at your farm or ranch. Donate products to chamber of commerce endeavors and to other community functions. Operate a “green” business. Recycled products and minimal packaging go a long way towards getting an enthusiastic word-of-mouth review.

Another key way of improving your community relations is spending money locally. When you shop in your community and tell local business people you’re doing so, you’ll gain a steady source of referrals. Buying locally can save you money as well. Calculate the cost of vehicle maintenance (see the IRS Web site at <http://www.irs.gov> for current rates) for your round-trip shopping excursions. Calculate the amount of fuel you use at today’s prices. Then add a wage—even minimum wage—for travel time. The result is the money that you must save each time you shop further from home.

So, consider adopting a policy of spending some percentage each dollar at home. What you don’t purchase in your hometown, buy as close to home as possible. Use this as an angle on your marketing promotions.

Work with Local Regulators

One more way to strengthen local relations is to work closely with local regulators. During the early planning and development of your business, ask their advice. Not only will this make your work easier, but it also might gain you customers and referrals in the process.

It works! A California rancher who worked with his local legislator wanted to expand his B&B to an overnight lodge. He was frustrated that state statute required overnight lodges to have inspected commercial kitchens (B&Bs need only home-style kitchens). As a result, the rancher contacted his local legislator and convinced her to sponsor legislation allowing full-time agricultural operations to offer overnight stays with meals. One rancher’s efforts not only changed the law but expanded options for the entire community. UC ANR publications 8333 and 8334 offer other examples of counties in California that are rewriting their local permitting regulations to encourage agritourism.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- A marketing strategy is critical to the success of every agritourism or nature tourism enterprise.
- A marketing plan is what you do to get customers through the door and keep them coming back.
- A marketing strategy has several key components: the market, the enterprise’s features and benefits, the message, promotion and advertising, and the competitive advantage.
- Word of mouth is the most powerful and inexpensive promotional method.
- An easy-to-use Web site is an absolute necessity.
- Friendly employees who go the extra mile for your customers are essential
- Good relations with neighbors, local businesses, and community members are essential to the success of an agritourism or nature tourism enterprise.
- Collaboration with local businesses can be a powerful marketing tool.
- Local residents can work with one another and government-agency representatives to begin to revive their agricultural economy.

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