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Washington State Agritourism Report

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Executive summary

Overview

Farming in Washington faces significant challenges, with the ongoing loss of farmland and pressure on small producers. Addressing these structural barriers is critical to protecting the state's food supply. By advancing the policy recommendations in this report, Washington can help preserve rural agriculture, support agritourism, and strengthen ties between communities and local food systems. While Washington has long been a center of agricultural production, consolidation, along with rising costs of labor, infrastructure, and marketing, has reduced the total number of farms in Washington and diminished farmers, growers, and ranchers' capacity to make a living in agriculture. New trends in agritourism and the increasing variety of venues available have created a burgeoning niche that needs to be addressed at the structural and policy level.

The Legislature funded the work to convene stakeholders and develop a report with recommendations to support agritourism across Washington. This report provides strategies for farmers, policymakers, and anyone interested in agriculture to provide innovative ideas for combining traditional forms of agriculture with tourism, while preserving agricultural land and creating policy safeguards to mitigate possible negative impacts of agritourism in Washington.

Legislative proviso language

The Washington State Legislature commissioned an agritourism study through a proviso in the 2023–2025 operating budget, directing the Department of Commerce to produce a statewide report.

The proviso language authorized Commerce to work with stakeholders to assess barriers, opportunities, and policy options for supporting agritourism across Washington. The proviso required the resulting report to the Legislature to include how other states regulate and permit agritourism and bring together interest groups that include farmers, ranchers, local governments, and community organizations to bring resolution of outstanding issues, such as permitting and use of agricultural buildings for agritourism purposes:

\$250,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 is provided solely for the department to provide a grant for a study on how other states regulate and permit agritourism and bring the advocates of interested groups together to resolve outstanding issues about permitting in agricultural areas, the sale of beer, wine, and cider, and the use of agricultural buildings for agritourism purposes. A report of the findings and recommendations must be submitted to the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036 by June 30, 2025.

Summary of key findings

This study explores key challenges facing agritourism in Washington, including regulatory barriers, development pressures and the impact of state, county and local policy alignment on farmland preservation. Data were collected through stakeholder meetings, focus groups, interviews, and the Commerce Agritourism Research Project Survey (ARPS), yielding 677 qualitative and quantitative data points from January to March 2025. These insights inform the report's findings and recommendations.

Washington farm characteristics

- Most farmers are small-scale operators; 77% of the respondents owned less than 100 acres of agricultural land.
- 62% of farmers operated year-round.
- Over 40% made less than \$40,000 (gross) a year.
- Most farmers were beginning to offset their income with agritourism enterprises.

Attitudes on agriculture and agritourism

- While there was considerable diversity regarding what surveyed stakeholders considered agritourism, the activities most strongly associated with agritourism were those that took place on a farm and had something to do with farming itself.
- The most controversial activities were event tourism, particularly wedding venues and concerts in barns, both because these types of activities are most clearly not related to farming or growing, and because they tend to bring in large numbers of people and negatively impact the rural, agricultural character of the locations.
- The need to differentiate between hobby farms and investment ventures versus working farms producing commercial food products.
- Respondents expressed that the biggest benefit of agritourism is the preservation of agricultural land.
- The biggest concerns for agritourism were the authenticity of farming operations and zoning conflicts.

Reform needs in Washington

- Definitions of agriculture and agritourism: Respondents expressed the need for a definition of agritourism that ensured **commercial production as a foundational use and tourism as an accessory use**.
- Policy at the state and county levels: Respondents expressed the need for a statewide definition of agritourism with some **guidelines that counties could further interpret** and expand on for themselves.
- Support for marketing could include some kind of protected **designation of origin guidelines** to protect the authenticity of agricultural products in the region where they are produced, or to create a statewide branding umbrella for all Washington-produced food, fiber, beverages, etc.
- Washington State Growth Management Act and recent rulings emphasize that **any recommendations must take into account “size, scale and intensity”¹** of proposed activities to ensure they are congruent with the rural and agricultural landscapes where they would take place.
- Forward-looking support for tribal operators and for **emerging tribal agritourism**.

¹ RCW 36.70A.177(3)(b)(ii) outlines specific requirements for nonagricultural accessory uses should and how those requirements are to be consistent with the size, scale, and intensity of existing agricultural use of the property as well as limited in size.

Recommendations

This report outlines the following recommendations to mitigate issues and support agritourism in Washington.

- 1) Refine the definition of agritourism in Washington.
- 2) Develop guidance for local governments and an agritourism operator toolkit to successfully start up and operate agritourism operations.
- 3) Clarify definitions and create policy pathways.
 - a) Establish policy for farm stays.
 - b) Create clear guidance and a pathway for farm hospitality and seasonal dining operations to consider farm stays when regulating short-term vacation rentals (STVRs), address adult beverage licensing regulations and provide common-sense pathways for alcohol sales in agritourism.
 - c) Clarify the distinctions between Farm Stands/Farm Stores and Grocery Retail and ensure appropriate guidelines are in place that support the farmer/operator.
- 4) Increase marketing support for agritourism.
- 5) Establish financial incentives and funding opportunities.
- 6) Provide business development training and support.
- 7) Define and support liability protection and risk management.
- 8) Improve infrastructure and transportation systems, including signage, public transportation initiatives and support further broadband development across rural Washington.
- 9) Encourage conservation easements, Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE) and farmland mitigation programs.
- 10) Promote environmental stewardship, including educational programs, eco-friendly guidelines for agritourism operations and incentives for sustainable agritourism operations.

Farming in Washington is challenging, and growers face significant hurdles. This report illustrates global, national, and statewide trends in the disappearance of farmland and of small farmers who successfully grow food. The need to address structural obstacles to farming is in the State's interests and a vital part of our food supply and food security in Washington. We believe that by implementing these policy recommendations, Washington may have an opportunity to help further preserve rural agriculture and farmlands, enhance the viability and sustainability of agritourism, foster economic growth and strengthen the connection between consumers and local agriculture.

Introduction

While Washington has long been a center of agricultural production, over the past 30 years, consolidation, along with rising costs of labor, infrastructure and marketing, has reduced the total number of farms in Washington and diminished the capacity of farmers, growers and ranchers to make a living in agriculture.

More recently, agritourism has been celebrated as a tool for Washington farmers to maintain their farms while diversifying income. Today, Washington's agritourism industry is a rapidly expanding sector that enables small and mid-sized farms to diversify their income through activities such as farm tours, U-pick operations, festivals, farm-to-table meals, and on-farm events. More than 4,800 farms participate in direct sales and agritourism, with most being under 100 acres and nearly half are operated by women. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, 4,845 farms offered direct sales or agritourism, including 342 that focused solely on agritourism and 143 that combined both. Top offerings include beef, fruit and vegetables, as well as specialty experiences such as farm stays and educational programs, with the majority of operations earning less than \$50,000 a year.

New trends in agritourism and the increasing variety of venues have shaped a fast-growing industry that needs attention from lawmakers and planners to provide a better structure. The Legislature funded this report to identify the structural challenges farmers and growers face in Washington, specific challenges related to land-use management under the Growth Management Act and recent Washington State Supreme Court rulings, and recommendations to address these challenges.

While many rural areas have capitalized on recreational tourism, such as hunting, fishing, skiing, or mountain biking, agritourism is a relatively recent trend in which people travel to rural areas to experience farming, ranching, food production, wineries, and rural culture.² Agritourism is a commercial enterprise that combines agricultural production with tourism to attract visitors for the purpose of education or entertainment while providing income for the operator.³ The term agritourism is used interchangeably with “agrotourism,” “agri-tourism,” “farm tourism,” “agricultural tourism,” and “agritainment.” Examples include U-pick operations, feeding or petting zoos, corn mazes, pumpkin picking patches, hayrides, dude ranches, Christmas tree operations, living history farms, winery tours and wine tastings, demonstration farms, rural bed-and-breakfasts or farm stays, and garden tours.

This report is divided into four parts:

- 1) **Land-use:** Outlining the agritourism context in Washington
- 2) **Key Findings:** What obstacles limit agritourism in Washington, how state and county guidelines shape it, and how development pressures affect both agritourism and the preservation of agricultural land.
- 3) **Recommendations:** Detailing 10 policy recommendations.
- 4) **Appendices:** Covering the research methods and design, a summary of the data, the history of agriculture in Washington and its decline, the development of agritourism in the state and its local challenges, and agritourism trends and impacts in the United States and Europe.

Defining agritourism

Legal definitions of agritourism

The increase in agritourism in the United States has prompted several states to come up with their own definitions of agritourism in order to generate supporting guidelines. For example, Louisiana defines agritourism as “the travel or visit by the general public...to a working farm, ranch or other commercial agricultural, aquaculture, horticultural or forestry operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education or participation,” (see Table 1 for examples of states around the U.S). Some states stipulate that agritourism includes members of the public, whether or not they paid to experience the venue. North Carolina, for example, states that “An activity is an agritourism activity whether or not the participant paid to participate in the activity.” Other states, like Utah, South Dakota and Kansas, emphasize that an activity is not agritourism if the participant is paid to participate. In this case, paying a participant could be confused with employing a farm worker, which would fall under different liability and tax laws.

Overall, two themes emerge from the states that have implemented agritourism laws:⁴

- 1) That an activity must align with the state’s definition of agritourism; and
- 2) That the participant or consumer pays to engage in these activities.

Some states, like Arkansas, specifically state that roadside fruit or vegetable stands are not agritourism activities, while other states, like Delaware, note that agritourism is not to include activities such as “rodeos, hunting, fishing, boating, canoeing or kayaking, picnicking, diving,” and so on. As a caveat, none of the definitions we found included “wedding venues” as an agritourism activity.

² Szymanski, Kat. Agritourism and the Allure of Rural Culture: Four Trends for 2023. Realtors Land Institute, May 23, 2023.

³ Agritourism, an Overview. The National Agricultural Law Center. Accessed, 11/30/2024.

⁴ Defining and Regulating Agritourism: Trends in State Agritourism Legislation 2019-2020. Center for Agriculture and Food Systems. University of Vermont.

Table 1. Definitions of agritourism by state

State	Definition
Idaho	"Agritourism activity" means any activity carried out on a farm or ranch that allows members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment or educational purposes, to view or enjoy rural activities including, but not limited to, farming, ranching, historic, cultural, on-site educational programs, recreational farming programs that may include on-site hospitality services, guided and self-guided tours, bed-and-breakfast accommodations, petting zoos, farm festivals, corn mazes, harvest your-own operations, hayrides, barn parties, horseback riding, fee fishing and camping. An activity is an agritourism activity whether or not the participant paid to participate in the activity.
Utah	"Agri-tourism" means an activity that allows members of the general public to view or enjoy agricultural related activities, including farming, ranching, or historic, cultural, or natural attractions, for recreational, entertainment, or educational purposes. (a) An activity may be an agri-tourism activity whether or not the participant pays to participate in the activity. (b) An activity is not an agri-tourism activity if the participant is paid to participate in the activity
Colorado	"Agritourism" means the practice of engaging in activities, events, and services that have been provided to consumers for recreational, entertainment, or educational purposes at a farm, ranch, or other agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness operation in order to allow consumers to experience, learn about, and participate in various facets of agricultural industry, culinary pursuits, natural resources, and heritage.
Virginia	"Agritourism activity" means any activity carried out on a farm or ranch that allows members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment, or educational purposes, to view or enjoy rural activities, including farming, wineries, ranching, historical, cultural, harvest-your-own activities, or natural activities and attractions. An activity is an agritourism activity whether or not the participant paid to participate in the activity.
North Carolina	"Agritourism activity" -- Any activity carried out on a farm or ranch that allows members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment, or educational purposes, to view or enjoy rural activities, including farming, ranching, historic, cultural, harvest-your-own activities, or natural activities and attractions. An activity is an agritourism activity whether or not the participant paid to participate in the activity. "Agritourism activity" includes an activity involving any animal exhibition at an agricultural fair licensed by the Commissioner of Agriculture pursuant to G.S. 106-520.3.
Arkansas	(2)(A) "Agritourism activity" means an interactive or passive activity carried out with or without payment to an agritourism activity operator on a farm, ranch, or agribusiness operation related to agriculture, food production, historic traditions, or nature-watching conducted by an agritourism activity operator for the education, entertainment, or recreation of participants. (B) "Agritourism activity" includes without limitation: (i) A farming or ranching activity; (ii) The viewing of historic, cultural, or natural attractions; (iii) A harvest-your-own activity; (iv) Nature-watching; and (v) An activity involving an animal exhibition at an agricultural fair. (C) "Agritourism activity" does not include: (i) A road side fruit and vegetable stand; or (ii) An operation exclusively devoted to the sale of merchandise or food at retail;
Louisiana	"Agritourism" means the travel or visit by the general public to, or the practice of inviting the general public to travel to or visit, a working farm, ranch, or other commercial agricultural, aquacultural, horticultural, or forestry operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or participation in the activities of the farm, ranch, or other agricultural, aquacultural, horticultural, or forestry operation.

The definitions in Table 1 illustrate the growing need for states to define an industry that combines farming, aquaculture, and growing or ranching with recreation, education, and enjoyment.⁵ Stipulating that paid employment is not agritourism, or that roadside fruit stands are not agritourism, is an attempt by states to provide what may or may not be acceptable activities under agritourism definitions. WWOOFers, or those who participate in the Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms, are not considered part of the agritourism industry for some states, while other states specifically include language to include non-paid participants like WWOOFers. In practice,

⁵ Data taken from WNR 102616, "[Agritourism Definition by State \(pdf\)](#),"

WWOOFers are part of the global agritourism trend, which includes tourists interested in getting back to the land or in participating in food production in different places. Non-payment for engaging in farming activity does not exempt them from the overall agritourism market; rather, it points to the need for clear definitions of agritourism for governing agencies. In part, the distinction between volunteerism and paid work is intended for legal considerations, including landowner liability in the event a person is injured on private land. The National Agricultural Law Center outlines the three levels of liability for any landowner:

- 1) A landowner's duty of care depends on whether the person is a trespasser, a licensee or an invitee.
- 2) A trespasser garners no special considerations except for the landowner to avoid actively hurting them, while a licensee is someone who is on the property without economic benefit to the landowner (for example, a hunter or fisherman accessing private property).
- 3) An invitee is owed the highest duty of care, which may include warning signs, risk management plans and other modes to ensure the safety of individuals on private property.

To mitigate these issues, 39 states have passed various kinds of agritourism legislation. Eight of these states—Arkansas, Idaho, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New York, Oklahoma and Vermont — have a standalone agritourism law, meaning they have specific laws for agritourism separate from other legal policies. The remaining 31 states regulate agritourism through secondary laws addressing agriculture, civil liability, land use, zoning, tourism, state culture and history, wildlife, parks and recreation, property, sports and amusement and taxation.

Types of agritourism

A part of the work of defining agritourism involves examining its economic activities by type.

Agritourism has been linked to other niche tourism markets, including sustainable or regenerative tourism, health and wellness, and experiential and community-based tourism. These forms of tourism may be interchangeable with agritourism, helping us understand what agritourism is and how it contributes to other forms of tourism and travel. Sustainable and regenerative tourism, for example, includes traveling to venues and businesses that are committed to reducing their climate footprint by incorporating renewable energy, reducing waste and promoting eco-friendly practices.⁶ Regenerative tourism goes beyond just traveling and includes some kind of practice or project to restore ecosystems and communities. Examples of regenerative tourism include planting local crops while on vacation or participating in climate-friendly activities.

Health and wellness tourism has also been incorporated into agritourism trends. Mindful of fitness, spirituality, or health concerns, travelers are increasingly looking to yoga centers offering locally sourced produce, or farm stays that allow them to be in nature and eat food produced on-site⁷. Agritourism is uniquely suited to provide the kind of opportunities the health and wellness traveler desires.

Experiential travel involves authentic and immersive experiences such as farm stays, culinary workshops, farmers markets, food festivals and farm-to-table dining venues where the traveler can experience the daily life of a farmer, winemaker, or culinary practitioner⁸. Many tourists, for example, have never picked their own produce or watched someone milk a cow. These experiences can help educate the public about where their food comes from and sustainable farming practices.

⁶ Szymanski, Kat. Agritourism and the Allure of Rural Culture: Four Trends for 2023. Realtors Land Institute, May 23, 2023.

⁷ by Lina Zhong 1, Baolin Deng 1, Alastair M. Morrison 2*, J. Andres Coca-Stefaniak 2 and Liyu Yang 1 Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health 2021, 18(20), 10875; <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182010875>

⁸ Wing Yin Chan, Chester Kin-man To, Wai Ching Chu, Desire for experiential travel, avoidance of rituality and social esteem: An empirical study of consumer response to tourism innovation, Journal of Innovation & Knowledge, Volume 1, Issue 1, 2016, Pages 24-35.



Lastly, community-based tourism is a model that aims to benefit everyone involved. While the invasive and destructive types of mass tourism are well known, particularly in places like Phuket, Thailand, Nepal or Goa, where tourism has stripped the local community, polluted pristine beaches and transformed once-beautiful places,⁹ community-based tourism attempts to mitigate the sometimes destructive nature of tourism by incorporating experiences where tourists can learn from local practitioners and share in their life experiences, rather than changing the places they visit.

Agritourism demographics overview

Understanding the demographic and economic characteristics of U.S. farms provides important context for evaluating the growth and potential of agritourism in Washington State. National data from the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture reveals several trends relevant to agritourism development, including a rise in direct-to-consumer farm sales, an increase in beginning and younger farmers, and expanded internet access across farms. These shifts suggest growing interest in diversified revenue streams, such as agritourism, particularly among newer, more tech-savvy producers.

While the average age of farmers continues to rise, the increase in younger and first-time producers points to a generational shift that may support innovation in farm-based experiences. Additionally, changes in gender representation and persistent disparities in farm ownership and income among Black producers highlight the importance of equity considerations in agritourism policy. A detailed analysis of these demographic trends and their implications for agritourism is presented in [Appendix B](#).

Agritourism in Washington

The combined trends of consolidation across Washington’s agricultural industry, the development of labor-intensive crops such as apples and wine grapes, and the continued decline in gross agricultural income have prompted farmers to diversify their farm income through agritourism. The emergence of agritourism during the 1990s prompted the State to define agritourism in 2007. Washington defines agritourism in RCW 4.24.830 as:

[A]ny activity carried out on a farm or ranch whose primary business activity is agriculture or ranching and that allows members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment, or educational purposes, to view or enjoy rural activities including, but not limited to: Farming; ranching; historic, cultural, and on-site educational programs; recreational farming programs that may include on-site hospitality services; guided and self-guided tours; petting zoos; farm festivals; corn mazes; harvest-your-own operations; hayrides; barn parties; horseback riding; fishing; and camping.

Of the 35,793 farms in Washington, 4,875 farms offer direct sales or agritourism.¹⁰ An estimated 4,360 farms offer only direct sales, 342 only agritourism and 143 both. In Washington, agritourism activities fit into five categories: direct sales, education, hospitality, outdoor recreation, and entertainment. While most farm operators are full owners (81.5%), almost half are female and the majority of owners are between 55 to 64 years old – see Table 4.7 listing the total number of Washington’s direct-sale farms, agritourism farms and farms that offer both agritourism and direct sales.

⁹ Devraj, Ranjit. Mass Tourism Brings Dollars but with all the Baggage Too. SciDevNet, Feb. 7, 2024.

¹⁰ Schmidt, Claudia, Agritourism in Washington. Based on the 2017 Census of Agriculture.

Table 4.7. U.S. agriculture census data (2017)

Demographics	Direct Sale Farms	Agritourism Farms	Both Direct Sales and Agritourism
Percentage of full owner	81.5%	68.7%	69.9%
Percentage of female owners	47.1%	46.8%	53.4%
Percentage of farms more than 10 years old	60.7%	71.3%	64%
Percentage of farms with fewer than 50 acres	82.5%	67%	68.5%
Top Products	Beef cattle, fruit and tree nut, vegetable and melon, diversified livestock	Diversified livestock, floriculture, beef cattle, diversified crops	Fruit and tree nuts, vegetable and melon, diversified livestock, diversified crops
Percentage of owner age (55 to 64)	28.2%	29.3%	25.9%
Percent of farms that make less than \$10,000	34%	23.8%	18.2%

While direct farm sales operations sell mostly beef cattle, fruit and tree nuts, agritourism farms produce a more diversified range of livestock and floriculture. Roughly two-thirds of these farms are smaller than 50 acres, and one-third make less than \$10,000 per year.

While the above data concerns agricultural production, a 2010 study by Washington State University Extension surveyed existing agritourism operators in the state, focusing on the characteristics of the farms and operators, the types of activities offered, and the motivations and challenges of operating their businesses. The report identified 292 farms that engaged in agritourism in 2010, and received 116 responses, or a 40% response rate. Ranch and farm tours were the most common activity (see Table 4.7), followed by farms that hosted special events. Seasonal activities included Christmas tree farms, roadside fruit and vegetable stands, and pumpkin patches. While these activities were the most common, they were not considered the farm's primary activity. Overall, wine production and wine tasting were identified as the most common primary farm activities.

Agritourism operators are also relatively new to the industry. According to the WSU Extension Study, over a third of respondents had been in business for fewer than 10 years. Event-related activities like catering/events had been in business the longest, with 43 respondents stating they had been in business 11 to 20 years.

Regional agritourism activities

In the United States, agritourism has been primarily a way for farmers and ranchers to diversify their enterprises to stay viable in competitive crop and livestock markets, which are driven by economies of scale¹¹. While larger farms have experienced gains in productivity over the last 30 years through consolidation and exposure to global market factors, smaller farms have faced more competition and have struggled to maintain the viability they once had. Alternative models that include agritourism are therefore vital for small farms to survive. Another challenge for small farmers is urban sprawl, which increases the cost of agricultural land and property taxes near densely populated areas. Again, agritourism is often touted as an antidote to this problem by leveraging urban proximity. Other social and personal motivations for agritourism include personal interest and values, companionship with guests and educating the public.

Agritourism is based on regional agricultural production, but farmers' and ranchers' ability to engage in such activities is also determined by each county's land-use regulations. Not surprisingly, agritourism activities differ across Washington.

Agritourism by region in Washington

○ Northwest

- In the Northwest – including Whatcom, Snohomish, Skagit and San Juan counties – common agritourism activities include roadside fruit stands, Christmas trees, pumpkin patches, U-pick flowers and ranch and farm tours.

○ Puget Sound

- In the counties of Pierce, King and Mason, U-pick fruit and vegetable operations and bed-and-breakfasts are common.

○ Southeast

- In the Southeast – Whitman, Yakima, Walla Walla, Klickitat, Grant, Douglas, Chelan and Benton counties – agritourism centers on wine-related activities such as wine tours and wine tastings.

○ Northeast

- In the Northeast – Stevens, Spokane, Pend Oreille and Okanogan counties – agritourism features dairies, wine tasting, roadside stands and farm and ranch tours.

○ Pacific Cascade Range

- In the Pacific Cascade Range – Wahkiakum, Thurston, Skamania and Clark counties – agritourism includes wedding venues, pumpkin patches and bed-and-breakfasts.

The Growth Management Act (GMA), first adopted in 1990, is a series of statutes primarily codified under Chapter 36.70A RCW that were developed to accommodate growth. It requires that the fastest-growing cities and counties complete comprehensive plans and development regulations to guide future growth. In addition, all jurisdictions

¹¹ Whitt, Christine, Sarah Low and Anders Van Sandt. Agritourism Allows Farms to Diversify and Has Potential Benefits for Rural Communities. Amber Waves, USDA Economic Research Service. U.S. Department of Agriculture. 11/04/2019.

are required to protect critical environmental areas and conserve natural resource lands, such as farms and forests.

Natural resource lands include agricultural, forest and mineral lands (WAC 363-190-030). The GMA requires jurisdictions planning under RCW 36.70A.040 to designate areas where natural resource industries—such as forestry, agriculture, mining and fisheries — can thrive. They must also adopt comprehensive plan policies and land-use regulations to protect these lands and ensure that other land uses do not interfere with the long-term economic viability of these industries. There are three types of natural resource lands that must be designated:

- 1) Agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance
- 2) Forest lands of long-term commercial significance
- 3) Mineral lands of long-term commercial significance

The two primary threats to resource lands are operational interference from encroaching incompatible uses and conversion of the land base to non-resource use. The GMA treats the conversion of natural resource lands to other uses as irreversible, which is the reason for their early designation and conservation in the GMA planning process.

Agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance are lands not already characterized by urban growth that are used or capable of being used for the commercial production of agricultural products (including fruits and vegetables, livestock, turf and seed production, horticulture, wine production, some Christmas trees and finfish in upland hatcheries).¹² Long-term commercial significance is determined by reference to the qualities of the land itself, including its growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition, in consideration of its proximity to population areas and the possibility of more intense uses. The minimum guidelines for classifying agricultural lands in WAC 365-190-050 list eleven factors, in addition to soil characteristics, that must be considered in determining which lands should be designated and conserved. Counties and cities may further classify additional agricultural lands of local importance.

Agritourism is generally considered an accessory use on agricultural lands of long-term significance. The GMA allows accessory uses on designated resource lands for agricultural and non-agricultural activities, provided no more than an acre of land is converted out of productive agricultural use (RCW 36.70A.177). Counties may also use innovative zoning techniques in agricultural lands to conserve the area and support the agricultural economy, but non-agricultural uses should be limited to lands unsuitable for agricultural purposes. Accessory uses should maintain consistency with the fundamental goal to avoid conversion of resource lands and should not create operational interference with adjacent agricultural operations. Non-agricultural accessory uses are to be of a size, scale, and intensity of agricultural use on site and fit within already developed areas or not otherwise convert more than one acre of agricultural land to non-agricultural land. As long as agricultural production remains unaffected, jurisdictions can also explore innovative methods for developing certain uses on or adjacent to designated resource lands. This includes basing development standards on soil quality and incentivizing development on lower-quality soils while promoting agricultural uses on high-quality soils. If certain uses would interfere with agricultural activities on designated lands, then local governments have the authority to limit them within development regulations.

Other types of agricultural zoning

Zoning ordinances are determined by each of Washington’s 39 counties and include a variety of regulations for residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural use. While the GMA provides the framework for regulating agricultural lands, counties have broad discretion to define and regulate agritourism activities and uses. In Washington, there are a variety of agricultural zones, including urban agricultural zones, which allow structures that

¹² Washington State Legislature, "[WAC 365-190-030, Definitions](#),"

enable or encourage the use of farming, such as apiaries, greenhouses or farm stands. While jurisdictions are required to designate and conserve agricultural resource lands of long-term significance, jurisdictions also generally have other zoning districts where agriculture occurs but are not designated agricultural resource lands, such as rural zones. There may be more flexibility in agritourism uses on these lands that are in agricultural production but are not designated resource lands.

Current agritourism challenges

Several challenges related to agritourism have arisen as more farmers and ranchers incorporate agritourism, and counties work to balance agricultural land preservation while allowing flexibility for farmers. While much of the controversy centers on zoning ordinances, other issues such as the sale and consumption of alcohol, current use taxation, the transfer of development rights, the legality of short-term rentals and conditional use permitting have led to litigation, moratoriums and regional proposals to modify zoning ordinances throughout Washington. Neighbors and local governments may worry about noise, traffic, environmental impacts and impacts on rural character. These tensions especially arise when agritourism includes event venues.

A recent Growth Management Hearings Board (GMHB) case, *King County v. Friends of Sammamish Valley*, emphasized the importance of preserving designated agricultural lands and discouraging incompatible accessory uses. In September 2019, King County enacted Ordinance 19030, amending zoning and business licensing regulations for wineries, breweries and distilleries (WBDs) and accompanying tasting rooms. The ordinance was challenged by Friends of Sammamish Valley and Futurewise for violating the GMA and the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and brought before the Growth Management Hearings Board (GMHB) and ultimately, the Washington State Supreme Court. The case was focused on the impact of the ordinance on lands designated agricultural lands and rural lands under the King County Comprehensive Plan, particularly in the Sammamish Valley.

In its assessment of the Ordinance, the GMHB focused on several areas of GMA compliance – accessory uses, comprehensive plan farmland and environmental policies, and comprehensive plan agricultural production district buffer policies. The Board found that the Ordinance violated RCW 36.70A.060(1)(a) because it failed to conserve productive agricultural land by allowing incompatible uses, and it did not restrict agricultural accessory uses and activities to be consistent with the size, scale and intensity of the existing agricultural uses on the property. The GMHB also found that the County had failed to address the full range of probable impacts in its SEPA checklist, and that the SEPA Checklist provided inadequate and inaccurate information regarding the impacts of the WBD Ordinance.

Skagit County has been studying its agritourism regulations since 2021, recognizing that agritourism uses are growing in the county but that its existing code may not adequately regulate them on agricultural resource lands. In January 2024, the Skagit County Commissioners adopted an interim ordinance temporarily suspending issuance of new permits for wedding and event venues on agricultural lands, while allowing existing businesses to continue operating. At issue is the proliferation of agricultural land used for weddings and concerts, along with the associated noise, traffic, and disturbances to the neighborhood. The moratorium was enacted to prevent new businesses from establishing themselves before commissioners decided on stricter policies that would curtail or limit much of this kind of activity on agricultural land. Prior to this moratorium, the Agricultural Advisory Board recommended to the planning commission a set of policy changes that were hotly contested by proponents of tourism.¹³ Some people felt that hosting weddings and other events was necessary for small farmers to survive, and to limit these events would exacerbate their financial challenges, forcing them to sell to bigger farms that could operate on thinner margins or to “wealthy people who would turn the land into estates with horses –

¹³ Sowards, Adam. Skagit Agritourism controversy is about more than weddings in barns. *Salish Current*, March 28, 2024.

essentially taking the land out of production.”¹⁴ Others felt that wedding events and other venues were taking away from the rural character of the county and causing unacceptable disturbance to the community, as well as making it increasingly difficult for neighboring farms to continue farming without complaints from the newly operating “venue neighbors,” who were calling in complaints for dust, spray, fumes, and noise. In the fall of 2025, Skagit County proposed code changes that include an updated definition of agritourism and a tiered system for agritourism uses based on guest numbers and the number of days of activities on the property. Additionally, if applying for a permit for more than 10 days and 50 guests, farmers must verify that they have received a certain amount of farm income per acre over the last three years. The proposed changes emphasize agritourism uses being secondary to primary agricultural use.

In Pierce County, similar issues have surfaced, causing the Planning and Public Works Department to develop a definition of agritourism (previously the county did not have one), as well as regulations on the size of the farm, number of acres in production, the size of any commercial structure on the property, acceptable uses of agritourism as well as language guiding septic systems, commercial use and so on. The code specifies two different categories for agritourism:

1. **"Level 1"** – Where there are at least two acres of agricultural crop production (or five acres of animal husbandry) and a cap on indoor retail sales
2. **"Level 2"** – Which allows slightly larger operations tied to horticultural nurseries and greenhouses. The definition emphasizes that agritourism must be associated with ongoing agricultural use and that at least 50% of products offered for sale must be produced in Pierce County.

Small farms are on the rise in Snohomish County – of the 2,774 farmers in Snohomish County, 871 were new or beginning farmers¹⁵. New subdivisions and increased population density have increased the traffic and water runoff, but also increased visitors to local farms and the opportunities for agritourism. The influx of farmers and growing population has led to many controversies, including increased competition among farmers for business opportunities. In some cases, wealthy newcomers have started buying up farms for wedding venues, and in others, farmers are calling the county to turn in their neighbors for not paying open-space taxes – a liability that could result in back taxes of \$64,000.¹⁶ Linda Neunzig, the agricultural coordinator for Snohomish County, notes that dairies are transitioning to education and tourism, rather than selling off the farm – but according to County regulations, agritourism operations must actively farm their land. “You can’t just come in and buy a barn and say I’m going to do weddings in it,” says Neunzig.

In a final example, the city of Chelan in Chelan County held a public meeting in April 2024 to address conflicts between development proposals in city limits that were clearly more home-stay and tourism-oriented than farming. Traditionally, agritourism has been allowed in Chelan and its neighboring urban growth areas to help farmers increase their income and remain viable. A recent application by resident Tim MacDonald for the development of a winery, event center, room for up to 120 vehicles, and 20 homestay units was partially denied by the Chelan County Hearing Examiner. City planners and residents feared that allowing 20 homestay units would create a precedent for further vacation rental development and lie outside the original agritourism intent. MacDonald argued that he had done due diligence and complied with existing agritourism compliance laws by adding five acres of grapes to incorporate agriculture into each lot. In March 2025, the city of Chelan adopted a new agricultural-based short-term

¹⁴ Simonelli, Isaac Stone. Skagit County searches for common ground in contentious agritourism debate. Cascadia Daily News, December 13, 2024.

¹⁵ Santran, et, al. “ESD Administration of the H-2A Temporary Worker Visa Program.” JLARC, January, 2024

¹⁶ Personal Interview, Linda Nuenzig. December 12, 2024.

rental code that would allow agritourism nightly rentals in Special Use Districts, subject to certain agricultural parameters.¹⁷

As we have seen in the previous examples, incorporating visitors and hosting events on designated agricultural lands can disrupt neighborhoods and often result in litigation or controversy between the landowner, neighbors and/or county ordinances. See History of Agritourism in [Appendix A](#) for more information about litigation cases nationwide related to this topic.

A common theme is the need to balance supporting the rural and agricultural economy with the impacts that often arise from agritourism. Striking this balance requires different approaches in each County and even in different parts of the same county. A rapidly growing metropolitan county will have different needs and levels of capacity than a small rural county that sees only a handful of operations.

The impacts of agritourism operations grow with the scale of the operation. Successful operations tend to grow, so what was once a small business with no discernible impact can, over time, reach a point where the intensity starts to disrupt neighboring properties. Successful operations also create conditions that mutually support one another. Multiple successful operations in an area can quickly create impacts that were not anticipated when looking at any one operation in isolation.

Some successful operations may have started without a permit or grown rapidly beyond their original permit. As these operations try to legalize their existing operation, they often find that there are multiple regulatory issues beyond zoning that they need to address.

Amendments to Washington's definition of agritourism

In an attempt to ease conflicts associated with agritourism, Washington State lawmakers are exploring legislative solutions. For example, during the 2025 legislative session, SB 5055 proposed a variety of measures to support agritourism and to add language to [RCW 36.70A.177](#) explicitly allowing agritourism as an accessory use on agricultural resource lands. The proposed bill included language permitting agritourism activities, including “direct sales, educational activities, entertainment, seasonal outdoor activities, and hospitality.”¹⁸ These activities would be included in the zoning ordinance as accessory uses (any use of the property or structure on the property that is subordinate to the primary use) and must promote agriculture and rural character within agricultural zones. Furthermore, the bill stated that counties may permit agritourism after consultation with neighboring landowners and after establishing criteria for adequate water, septic, and parking, as well as curfews and seasons of use to avoid disturbing the peace and quiet enjoyment of neighbors.¹⁹ The bill also sought to amend Washington’s building code²⁰ and would allow agricultural buildings used for agritourism to waive some of the current commercial building standards if the venue is open for only six months or less each year.

Also in SB 5055, the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board was instructed to create a licensing process to allow agritourism venues to serve alcohol. The bill stated:

“There shall be a beer and wine license to be issued to an agritourism venue for the sale of beer, strong beer, and wine for on-premises consumption. (2) Agritourism venues may sell beer and wine for off-premises consumption if the beer and wine is manufactured by a microbrew or craft winery located within the state. Agritourism venues must provide a plan to prevent minors from unlawfully accessing alcoholic beverages.”

¹⁷ Maltais, Mike. “Chelan City Council approves agricultural based short term rental code.” Lake Chelan Mirror, March 17, 2025.

¹⁸ RCW Draft State Law Amendments, Bill 5050, accessed 12/17/2024.

¹⁹ RCW Draft on Planning and Development, proposed addition to section 36.70, accessed 12/17/2024.

²⁰ RCW Draft State Building Code Guidelines, 19.27. Accessed 12/17/2024.

At the end of the 2025 session, all parts of this bill were struck except the commercial building requirements, and the bill did not progress beyond the session.

House Bill 1261, signed into law in 2025, allows farmers who engage in agritourism on their property to remain eligible for the Open Space tax relief program. The law allows certain incidental agritourism uses without jeopardizing the land's open space classification, provided they occur on less than 20% of the farmland.

All the above policy considerations would support and encourage agritourism and pave the way for further development. As we have seen in the various counties, however, not all agritourism growth is desirable and many Washington counties are adopting stricter policies regulating agritourism. Carefully considered regulations, along with a clear understanding of the conflicts and ramifications of agritourism, are needed to mitigate future issues.

Balancing agritourism benefits with land-use impacts

Agritourism in Washington has had mixed benefits over the last 20 years. For some farmers, it has enabled them to diversify their income and stay on the land. It has also led to increased interest in farming and helped educate the public about traditional forms of agriculture. On the other hand, the lack of clarity about what constitutes agritourism, as well as the involvement of multiple stakeholders in policy decisions, has made it a legal and logistical conundrum for those trying to implement it. It has also contributed to the urbanization of many communities in Washington, with increased traffic, pollution and noise, as well as new developers moving into rural regions. And in some cases, overnight rental development and commercial use have rendered the original intent of the existing agricultural legislation obsolete. The next section describes our research methodologies and presents the results of our study, which focuses on the specific issues and stakeholders in each county.

Research results

Key research questions

- What are some of the obstacles facing agritourism in Washington?
- How does the relationship between the state and county guidelines contribute to agritourism?
- What are the growing concerns with development issues facing agritourism across the state, and how do these relate to the preservation of agricultural land and farming?

Various data-gathering methods were used for this report, including stakeholder meetings, topic-specific focus groups, personal interviews with key stakeholders and policymakers, and qualitative and quantitative survey data collected throughout January through March of 2025.

In addition to the above meetings, our team sent out Commerce's Agritourism Research Project Survey (ARPS), which asked stakeholders a set of questions that were designed and vetted by our research team, along with county and state officials. The ARPS contained seven qualitative questions, yielding a total of 466 responses. These responses, along with data from the stakeholder meetings, comprise 677 data points included in the results of this study.

In total, information from over 200 individuals across 14 stakeholder meetings. In addition to stakeholder meetings, we held five focus groups on topics including farmers, alcohol sales, farm stays, county planners and tribal producers. We also met with the Pierce County Agritourism Board, Futurewise and several county planners, both individually and in group meetings across the state. These meetings were held primarily via Zoom, with invitations sent out via e-blasts with partners including Commerce, Washington State Destination Marketing Organizations,

Washington State Department of Agriculture, Eat Local First, and word of mouth. We also conducted one-on-one interviews with county planners, tourism leaders, farmers, ranchers and growers, the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB), Washington State Department of Health (DOH), Eat Local First and Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).

In addition to the above meetings, a survey was sent to stakeholders that asked them 7 qualitative questions, resulting in 466 responses. These responses, along with data from the stakeholder meetings, comprise 677 data points included in the results of this study. More details on the survey approach and full findings are presented in [Appendix D](#). Key findings from this research are as follows:

Key findings

Washington farm characteristics

- Most farmers are small-scale operators; 77% of the respondents owned less than 100 acres of agricultural land.
- 62% of farmers operated year-round.
- Over 40% made less than \$40,000 (gross) a year.
- Most farmers were beginning to offset their income with agritourism enterprises.

Attitudes on agriculture and agritourism

- While there was considerable diversity regarding what should be considered agritourism, the activities most strongly associated with agritourism were those that took place on a farm and had something to do with farming itself.
- The most controversial activities were event tourism, particularly wedding venues and concerts in barns, both because these types of activities are most clearly not related to farming or growing, and because they tend to bring in large numbers of people and negatively impact the rural, agricultural character of the locations.
- The need to differentiate between hobby farms and investment ventures versus working farms producing commercial food products.
- Respondents expressed that the biggest benefit of agritourism is the preservation of agricultural land.
- The biggest concerns for agritourism were the authenticity of farming operations and zoning conflicts.

Reform needs in Washington

- Definitions of agriculture and agritourism: Respondents expressed the need for a definition of agritourism that ensured commercial production as a foundational use and tourism as an accessory use.
- Policy at the state and county levels: Respondents expressed the need for a statewide definition of agritourism with some guidelines that counties could further interpret and expand on for themselves.
- Support for marketing could include some kind of protected designation of origin guidelines to protect the authenticity of agricultural products in the region where they are produced, or to create a statewide branding umbrella for all Washington-produced food, fiber, beverages, etc.
- Washington State Growth Management Act and recent rulings emphasize that any recommendations must consider “size, scale, and intensity” of proposed activities to ensure they are congruent with the rural and agricultural landscapes where they would take place.
- Forward-looking support for tribal operators and for emerging tribal agritourism

Policy recommendations to strengthen agritourism in Washington

1. Refine the definition of agritourism in Washington

Rationale

Agritourism can help mitigate the financial ups and downs faced by farmers, but currently, there is no requirement for someone to be a commercial farmer or rancher before adding agritourism to support their operations. If it is not required that farming comes first, hobbyists or entrepreneurs can start agritourism businesses that have little or nothing to do with real agriculture or protecting farmland. This causes confusion, creates tension in communities, and leads to conflict and controversy. If agritourism is one tool in the toolbox to help keep the land in production and keep farmers farming, then some kind of commercial production must be required first. The current definition of "agritourism activity" under [RCW 4.24.830](#):

"Any activity carried out on a farm or ranch whose primary business activity is agriculture or ranching and that allows members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment, or educational purposes, to view or enjoy rural activities, including, but not limited to: Farming; ranching; historic, cultural and on-site educational programs; recreational farming programs that may include on-site hospitality services; guided and self-guided tours; petting zoos; farm festivals; corn mazes; harvest-your-own operations; hayrides; barn parties; horseback riding; fishing; and camping."²¹

[USDA also defines agritourism as](#) "a form of commercial enterprise that combines agricultural production and/or processing with tourism in order to attract visitors onto a working farm, ranch, agroforestry, or aquaculture operation and produces supplemental income for the farm operator."²²

It includes a wide range of activities that encourage the general public to appreciate agricultural surroundings and natural resources. These activities – which align with the definitions of agritourism in dozens of states – may include:

- Activities and events for educational, entertainment and recreational purposes
- Dining, tasting and food for immediate consumption
- Sales of farm-grown or-raised produce and products
- Hospitality and lodging services

Strategies

- We recommend creating a clear regulatory definition of agritourism that establishes what commercial agriculture is and helps the state and counties define local regulations and supports. This will ensure that commercial agriculture is a prerequisite to any agritourism accessory use endeavors.
- Having a clear definition of agritourism helps everyone understand the rules – like zoning and business requirements. It ensures local governments apply land-use policies consistently across the board, reducing confusion and red tape. It also helps new business owners know that to offer agritourism, they first need to be doing real farming. It also helps create a shared understanding among policymakers, agencies, and communities, allowing for consistency across counties when developing local policies.

²¹ Washington State Legislature, Revised Code of Washington, "[RCW § 4.24.830](#)"

²² U.S. Department of Agriculture, "[Local Food Directories Definitions](#)"

- This definition could be based on the USDA’s definition of agriculture: “USDA defines a farm as any place that produces and sells—or normally would have produced and sold—at least \$1,000 [gross] of agricultural products during a given year. USDA uses acres of crops and head of livestock to determine if a place with sales less than \$1,000 could normally produce and sell at least that amount.”
- While we recommend setting the minimum \$1,000 USDA gross sales threshold at the state level, counties could choose to increase that minimum threshold to fit their local jurisdictions and what makes sense for them. Another consideration for the definition is a possible exemption from a commercially viable standard for non-profit educational, religious or interpretative activities.
- We recommend a mechanism similar to the [Open Space Taxation laws](#), which would create a way for farmers, growers and ranchers to establish that they are using their land for commercial agricultural purposes before they qualify for engaging in agritourism business, by initially presenting a Schedule F (or certified organic, or some other form of certification).²³ After the initial qualifying year, there should be a periodic renewal/proof of income every few years.
- We recommend adding “growing” and “aquaculture” after ‘farming; ranching.’

Stakeholder feedback

- “These terms should be reserved for real WORKING operations and not token agriculture...”
- “Allow the broadest definition of agriculture to exist at the state level and let local counties pare it down if desired.”
- “You HAVE to have a good definition of what agritourism is for Washington state!!!!”

2. Develop guidance for local governments and an agritourism operator toolkit

Rationale

County governments in Washington State have substantial control over land use and development. They oversee unincorporated areas and enforce zoning codes, issue permits, and regulate agritourism activities. Counties also manage infrastructure, public health, and economic development initiatives.

- **We recommend creating an Agritourism Guidebook for counties, so they have support in developing agritourism regulations and making decisions.**

Planning departments and county commissions (or councils) decide how state laws, such as the Growth Management Act, are applied locally, affecting everything from farmland preservation to agritourism business approvals. Some counties have more restrictive policies, while others support agritourism more widely, depending on local priorities and political dynamics.

- **We recommend creating a Toolkit that will help guide the hopeful Agritourism Operator through the process that they will need to undertake.**

Strategies

An Agritourism Guidebook for counties would help counties implement, offering guidance and recommendations that they can choose to follow, providing greater clarity and context for supporting agritourism in ways that preserve and protect rural and agricultural lands and minimize conflicts. Guidance would assist county planning staff and elected officials in developing agritourism regulations that encourage agritourism responsibly while maintaining consistency with the GMA and other local regulations.

²³ Washington Department of Revenue, "[Open Space Taxation Act](#)"

A Toolkit or Guidebook for agritourism operators would provide guidance to agricultural operators who are interested in engaging in agritourism activities. The toolkit would help agritourism operators successfully plan, operate and market their businesses. This would include legal and regulatory considerations such as zoning and land-use requirements, health and safety and liability requirements.

Examples

- Michigan Agricultural Tourism Advisory Commission created its Model Ordinance: [Michigan Agricultural Tourism Advisory Commission](#).²⁴
- The Idaho Association of Counties has created a Model Ordinance for Agritourism. The template was provided by the IAC to assist counties in complying with the requirements of House Bill 608, which mandates the adoption of APA ordinances by January 1, 2025: [Agriculture Protection Area Model Ordinance \(PDF\)](#).²⁵
- The Growth Management Act includes provisions that allow individual counties to adopt additional regulations as needed. The Guidebook should reference this. Oregon, for example, has several laws that allow wineries, cideries and breweries on agricultural land, but they must comply with a set of standards designed to protect agricultural land. Restaurants and bars are not allowed.

Additional provisions that should be included are further kinds of qualifying or limiting benchmarks. For example, [Oregon does not allow](#) event venues, or restaurants or bakeries on its version of agricultural lands of long-term significance.²⁶ There are some exceptions. Drawing the line at a certain number of events makes sense (as Oregon does), but outright allowing event venues does not. Farm-to-table dining or events with limits can work, but restrictions apply to restaurants or bakeries. These kinds of thoughtful, nuanced approaches are essential to creating the tapestry of agritourism and agriculture at the appropriate size, scale, and scope that will address the tensions of economic vitality, support growers and keep rural and agricultural lands both rural and in agriculture.

This mechanism should be followed up with an Agritourism Toolkit: a checklist of ‘next steps’ to take. This would include health (septic, water, food safety), planning and building with referrals to the appropriate county department. The checklist would ensure clarity about the multiple entities that must be contacted to pursue an agritourism operation, creating a roadmap for hopeful operators to follow.

The next edition of the WSDA Regional Markets Program’s Handbook for Small and Direct Marketing Farms will include an updated fact sheet on agritourism to help guide farmers through important considerations and regulatory processes required to add agritourism to their operations.

- [Handbook for Small and Direct Marketing Farms: Regulations and Strategies for Farm and Food Businesses](#)²⁷
- [Travel Oregon’s Agritourism Handbook](#) is a fantastic resource for all the steps along the way.²⁸

Responses from stakeholders

- “Local county ordinances... are clunky, cumbersome and make adding or expanding agritourism unattractive.”
- “We need an ombudsman to help farmers deal with the government...” (capacity plus navigation signal results in Toolkit/Playbook).
- “We need less subjective nuance and a more clear path forward for farmers...”

²⁴ Michigan Agricultural Tourism Advisory Commission, "[Agricultural Tourism Local Zoning Guidebook and Model Zoning Ordinance Provisions](#)"

²⁵ Idaho Association of Counties and American Planning Association Idaho Chapter, "[Agriculture Protection Area Model Ordinance](#)"

²⁶ Oregon State Legislature, "[ORS Chapter 215 – County Land Use Planning: Resource Lands](#)"

²⁷ Washington State Department of Agriculture, "[Handbook for Small and Direct Marketing Farms: Regulations and Strategies for Farm and Food Businesses](#)"

²⁸ Oregon Agritourism Network, "[Oregon Agritourism Handbook](#)"

3.a. Establish policy for farm stays

Rationale

The next set of four embedded recommendations will be organized into four subsections, as they are closely related and are better addressed collectively for ease of context and communication.

Farm stays, which are essentially short-term vacation rentals (STVRs) on working farms or ranches, have wide-ranging implications for agritourism. Counties have vastly different needs and challenges regarding housing stock and STVR pressures, so as much local jurisdictional control as possible should remain at the county level. Notwithstanding, the additional supporting accessory-use revenue from a farm stay could dramatically improve a small farm's bottom line without significant changes in scale or scope. Many recent "reactionary" STVR laws passed have not taken farm stays into account.

Strategies

- We recommend that this be explicitly addressed in the guidance for agritourism with helpful guidelines and criteria to evaluate for decision-making by the counties.
- Suggested pathways:
 - If the county currently has a cap on total STVRs, consider creating a separate cap dedicated to farm stay-type operations.
 - If STVRs are only allowed in high-density tourist-dedicated areas, consider allowing a modest number of permits for Farm Stay STVRs in rural/agricultural areas, if that might fit with the county's needs and values.
 - Recognize that the added components that would qualify a location as a farm stay are often intense and could require staffing, hands-on help, and a lot more work for the operator, so that many would-be STVR operators may not be interested in creating a farm stay.
- Use these criteria to evaluate a farm stay:
 - **Direct interaction:** Is there hands-on time with the working farm? For example, at Ferry County's K Diamond K Guest Ranch, visitors help feed livestock, bottle-feed young animals, and experience ranch life firsthand.
 - **Lodging only:** Evaluate short-term rental on farmland with no guided or educational activities.
 - **Taste and harvest:** Are there chances to taste seasonal products from the farm, vineyard or orchard, or to help with harvest?
 - **Work and learn:** Are there working vacations or other learning opportunities that align with agritourism's core values?

Examples

- [Leaping Lamb Farm](#) (Alsea, Oregon)²⁹

A working sheep farm with chickens, a donkey, and a few rotating guest animals. Guests stay in a farmhouse or cottage and can help feed animals, collect eggs, and help with seasonal farm chores.
- [Stony Creek Farmstead](#) (Walton, NY)³⁰

In the Catskills, this farm offers canvas "glamping" tents with wood stoves. Guests help with chores like milking cows or harvesting veggies

²⁹ Leaping Lamb Farm, "[Leaping Lamb Farm & Farm Stay](#),"

³⁰ Stony Creek Farmstead, "[Stony Creek Farmstead](#),"

○ [Willow-Witt Ranch](#) (Ashland, Oregon)³¹

A 440-acre organic ranch offering both furnished tent cabins and a cozy farmhouse. Opportunities to help with livestock, explore wetlands, and learn about permaculture. Deeply focused on sustainability and land stewardship.

3.b. Create clarity on requirements for on-farm dining experiences

Rationale

Explore a ‘ferme auberge’ (France) or “agriturismo” (Italy) model that is in line with our rural and agricultural lands in size, scale and scope.

Without some kind of intervention, operators must invest in full-scale commercial kitchens, which must be located in the proper zoning, Group A water systems, and have large-scale infrastructure requirements. This effectively disallows any kind of small-scale, appropriately sized experience that agritourism is best designed to offer. It’s a “go big or go home” scenario, unless innovation can be applied.

In discussions with the DOH, there are ways to leverage existing variance processes to enable a farm-to-table dining experience, but the current language and regulations lack clarity and specific guidelines, so very few counties are aware that this is possible or understand how to implement it.

- Well testing and Group B water systems
- Wastewater disposal protocols on properties with septic systems
- Appropriate menus and catering permits for safe food preparation in a ‘farm kitchen’
- Allowing temporary structures for dining and preparation
- Food handling guidelines

Response from stakeholders

- “Current language and regulations lack clarity... DOH seems very interested in helping to create clarity and... permitting pathways for seasonal farm dining.”
- “This effectively disallows any kind of small-scale, appropriately sized experiences... It’s a ‘go big or go home’ scenario...”

3.c. Establish a pathway for licensing alcohol and adult beverages

Rationale

Pursuing a license for an agritourism operator to serve alcohol under current LCB licensing pathways is not straightforward. There are no clear pathways for a rural, agricultural property to obtain any license other than a Snack Bar license, which currently only allows the sale of single-serving beer containers. The other permit options for serving wine or beer either require you to be a full-service restaurant with permanent dining structures and on-site food preparation or be a brewery or a winery. Appropriate size, scale and scope for agritourism operations are not consistent with putting restaurants on farms.

An additional concern for agritourism operators is that visitors (for example, to a fall harvest celebration in a U-pick pumpkin patch with evening farm activities) bring their own beer or wine and consume it in the parking lot or in their cars. This is dangerous for many reasons, and it can’t be monitored.

³¹ Black Sheep Inn and Spa. “[The Black Sheep Inn and Spa, A Tranquil Finger Lakes B&B](#).”

We recommend expanding the Snack Bar License to include wine and cider and separately exploring a Farm Dining Wine and Beer license to accommodate on-farm service.

Strategies

- Instruct LCB to expand the Snack Bar License pathway to include Wine and Hard Cider (single-serve cans or bottles) and ensure licensing requirements are clear and approachable for agritourism operators and agritourism scenarios.
- Create an Agritourism Farm Hospitality wine and beer license for the on-farm dining operations. This would require some level of coordination between DOH and LCB, and a thoughtful directive that does not inadvertently create 'bars and restaurants' in rural and agricultural landscapes.

Examples

- [Rowan County, North Carolina](#) – The Rowan County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to approve an ordinance change that allows properties in the agricultural zoning district to have on-site consumption and sales of alcohol, making it easier for agritourism operations to serve alcohol to adults.³²

Responses from stakeholders

- “Visitors... bring their own beer or wine and consume it in the parking lot... dangerous and can’t be monitored.”
- “There are no clear pathways... except a Snack Bar license...” (mismatch with rural, small-scale uses).

3.d. Establish a pathway to define and regulate farm stands and farm stores

Rationale

Currently, some counties classify a farm stand as "Grocery Retail" if it wishes to sell eggs, cheese, or other refrigerated products. If a county has decided to classify a farm stand as grocery retail, the farmer or operator must have significant, costly infrastructure to pursue farm store operations. However, farmers' markets in Washington already have existing guidelines that allow for the same products to be sold without these infrastructure requirements. We recommend that DOH clarify the definition of a farm stand and farm store from a grocery retail, as well as clarify the health and safety regulations.³³ Strategies include:

- Clarify the food code to distinguish farm stands from grocery stores and reduce regulatory burden for farmers.
- Consider allowing Farm Stands to sell temperature-controlled items in the same manner they are allowed at Farmers Markets.
- Consider allowing farms to sell temperature-controlled products sourced from other local farms and food businesses (not just their own products) without triggering the grocery store license process.
- Reduce or remove the handwashing/restroom requirements if food is not consumed on-site. If the store is not staffed full-time, then allow portable toilets and handwashing sinks to suffice.³⁴

³² Salisbury Post, "[County Allows On-Site Sales, Consumption of Alcohol at Agritourism Sites](#)"

³³ Note, Commerce is not recommending allowing raw milk to be sold at a farm store.

³⁴ Note: sometimes these are unstaffed, self-serve stores, or sometimes the farm owner/operator is the only person in the store and uses their home restroom.

4. Increase marketing and promotion initiatives

Rationale

Because most agritourism operations take place on farms, advertising is essential to attract visitors, and respondents expressed the need for a structured marketing program and marketing assistance for agritourism for small and medium-sized farms.

Strategies

- State of Washington Tourism and Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) throughout the state, along with WSDA and Washington Filmworks should develop, promote and share statewide agritourism messaging and support future marketing campaigns that promote Washington farms, ranches, wineries and breweries, and other agritourism operations as visitor destinations. Long term, explore the brand of State of Washington that SWT has already developed to potentially create a State of Washington Grown brand that could be leveraged both nationally and in-state to further elevate growers, ranchers and farmers. Leverage the global equity of the SWT destination brand to amplify WA Grown, tapping SWT-branded assets and other resources at minimal or no cost.
- Support [Eat Local First](#) nonprofit with their extensive online resources, interactive maps and guides showcasing agritourism.³⁵
- Strengthen or encourage partnerships between the State of Washington Tourism, Washington State Department of Agriculture, WSDMO (Washington State Destination Marketing Organizations), Washington Filmworks and small businesses to cross-promote agritourism experiences.

Examples

- Oregon's [Travel Oregon Agritourism Initiative](#) supports branding and marketing campaigns to promote farm visits and local food tourism.³⁶
- Vermont's [DigIn Vermont](#) initiative provides a statewide online agritourism platform that connects visitors with farms, food experiences, and seasonal events.³⁷
- Kentucky's [Kentucky Proud: Farms Are Fun](#) program includes an agritourism component to promote farm visits and local agricultural products.

Responses from stakeholders

- "Marketing! Need help reaching the millions of tourists..."
- "Street signage could improve foot traffic. Promoting farms... across social media is helpful."
- "Marketing for small farms."

5. Establish financial incentives and funding opportunities

Rationale

To diversify their income and preserve farms, research showed that grant programs, funding opportunities, and other financial incentives in other states are not only helpful for farmers but also necessary to encourage agritourism.

³⁵ Eat Local First, "[Eat Local Washington State Food Support Local Farmers](#)"

³⁶ Travel Oregon, "[Welcome to Oregon Agritourism Handbook](#)"

³⁷ DigInVT, "[Find a Vermont Food Experience](#)"

Strategies

- Consider expanding existing tax incentives for farmers, growers and ranchers to ensure that agritourism-type operations are included when appropriate and expand tax incentives for small and medium-sized farmers, growers and ranchers wherever possible.
- Leverage Washington Tourism Marketing Authority (WTMA) to support marketing and infrastructure development for agritourism businesses.

Examples

- Virginia offers grants through its [AFID \(Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development\) Fund](#) to support agritourism businesses and enhance farm profitability.³⁸³⁹
- North Carolina's [Agritourism Networking Association](#) offers agritourism operators financial assistance and business development resources.⁴⁰ This is an independent 501(c)(3), but is an outgrowth of the state's agriculture department.

Responses from stakeholders

- Respondents called for "grants, tax credits or financial incentives to help reduce or offset the cost of insurance, permits and other liability concerns."

6. Increase access to business development and training

Rationale

Agritourism operators expressed their need for training programs on hospitality, safety, and visitor engagement. This includes training on state, county, and local ordinances, covering health and safety standards, traffic flow, parking and noise.

Strategies

- We recommend partnering with universities, community colleges, and farm business support organizations to develop agritourism-related curricula and opportunities for mentorship, such as the WSDA Regional Markets Program, WSU Cooperative Extension, and the WSU Hospitality Program.
- Partner with [Washington's Workforce Development Boards](#) to train employees for agritourism roles, including tour guides and retail staff.⁴¹

Examples

- [Travel Oregon's Agritourism Handbook](#) is a fantastic resource for all the steps along the way.⁴²
- The [University of Idaho](#) offers agritourism workshops and training programs for rural entrepreneurs looking to expand their farm businesses.⁴³
- [Virginia Cooperative Extension](#) provides hands-on training and educational resources to help agritourism operators improve business management and the visitor experience.⁴⁴

³⁸ Virginia Economic Development Partnership, "[Agriculture & Forestry Industries Development Fund \(AFID\)](#)"

³⁹ The planning grant program was launched in 2012, alongside the facility grants program. It has distributed more than \$1 million to localities to encourage the creation of strategic plans for priorities like agritourism or forestry development. It provides awards of \$20,000 (to a single locality) or \$35,000 (to multiple localities working together).

⁴⁰ North Carolina Agritourism Networking Association, "[North Carolina Agritourism Networking Association](#)"

⁴¹ Washington Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board, "[Regional Workforce Plans](#)"

⁴² Travel Oregon, "[Welcome to Oregon Agritourism Handbook](#)"

⁴³ University of Idaho Extension, "[Website for University of Idaho Extension](#)"

⁴⁴ Virginia Cooperative Extension, "[Agritourism](#)"

- The University of [Tennessee's Pick](#) program includes agritourism education and training for farmers to enhance customer engagement.⁴⁵

Responses from stakeholders

- "We need advocacy... to help shape county regulations to be more Farm and Agritourism friendly."
- "Having capacity... to coordinate and host agritourism." (TA/capacity building)
- ADA & compliance are costly/painful pain points → pair guidance with TA. "Expense of complying with ADA codes, fire codes, permits, water, sanitation, and building codes."⁴⁶

7. Liability protection and risk management

Rationale

Respondents also expressed a need for grants, tax credits, or financial incentives to help reduce or offset the costs of insurance, permits and other liability concerns. While some of the guidance can be covered in the Agritourism Toolkit, additional support using the following strategies could ensure that farmers and growers maintain viability when adding agritourism operations to their business model.

Strategies

- We recommend creating an agritourism liability insurance tax credit to offset insurance costs. Credits would be limited to businesses under a certain size/including a revenue cap, to ensure support goes to smaller farms (for example, see [Illinois](#)).
- Provide risk management workshops and legal guidance to help agritourism operators navigate liability concerns (for example, see [NE workbook](#)).
- Include the WSDA's Handbook for Small and Direct Marketing Farms and the [RCW 4.24.835](#) limited liability signage in any toolkits or checklists: [Agritourism—Warning Notice](#).⁴⁷

Examples

○ Illinois: Agritourism Liability Insurance Tax Credit

- Illinois introduced a tax credit for agritourism operators, applicable for tax years beginning on or after Jan. 1, 2022, and ending on or before Dec. 31, 2023. Eligible operators can receive a credit equal to the lesser of 100% of their liability insurance premiums or \$1,000. The total statewide credits are capped at \$1 million annually. Unused credits can be carried forward for up to five years. The credit has not been extended beyond 2023, but applications for the specified years are accepted until February 28, 2025. Link to Illinois Department of Agriculture, "[Agritourism Liability Insurance Tax Credit](#)."⁴⁸
- [Wolters Kluwer Solutions+3AGR+3FarmWeekNow+3Wolters Kluwer Solutions](#)

○ Kansas: Agritourism Liability Insurance Credit

- Kansas offers a tax credit to registered agritourism operators, amounting to 20% of the liability insurance cost, up to \$2,000 per tax year. This credit is available to corporations subject to Kansas corporate income tax and is not extended to individuals or pass-through entities. Unused credits can be carried forward for up to three years. Operators must register with the Kansas Tourism Division to be eligible.

⁴⁵ University of Tennessee Extension, "[Agritourism in Focus: A Guide for Tennessee Farmers \(PB 1754\)](#)"

⁴⁶ The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted in 1990, is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including employment, education, transportation, and access to public and private spaces open to the general public. See 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.

⁴⁷ Washington State Legislature, "[RCW § 4.24.835](#)"

⁴⁸ Illinois Department of Agriculture, "[Agritourism Liability Insurance Tax Credit](#),"

- Oregon's "[Limited Liability Agritourism Law](#)" protects farm operators from certain visitor-related lawsuits, reducing legal risks.⁴⁹
- Virginia has comprehensive agritourism liability laws that require clear signage to inform visitors of inherent risks while providing strong legal protections for farm businesses.
- [North Carolina](#) offers a statewide agritourism liability waiver program to shield farm owners from frivolous lawsuits.⁵⁰
- [Texas has established](#) broad protections for agritourism landowners.⁵¹

Responses from stakeholders

- "Preservation of agricultural land was seen as the highest benefit" (76% most important).
- Concerns with wedding/concert venues changing rural character → justify stewardship guardrails.
- Include RCW 4.24.835 signage in checklists ("Agritourism—Warning Notice").

8. Infrastructure and transportation improvements

Rationale

Because most small farms lie outside urban centers, respondents expressed a need for improved infrastructure and transportation across the state.

Strategies

- We recommend investing in rural transportation infrastructure, including signage, road maintenance, and public transit connections to agritourism destinations in areas where parking and traffic are especially challenging, particularly during certain times of year (e.g., Tulip time in Skagit).
- Provide grants for farms to develop signage, accessible pathways, and other visitor-friendly infrastructure.
- Support the work of the Washington State Broadband Office for continued broadband expansion in rural areas to enhance digital marketing, online bookings, and visitor experiences. <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/wsbo/>

Examples

- [Idaho's "Broadband Task Force"](#) aims to expand internet access in rural areas, thereby improving the operations of agritourism businesses.⁵²
- [Vermont's "Working Lands Enterprise Initiative"](#) funds infrastructure improvements, such as farm signage, road access, and digital tools for agritourism operations.⁵³
- [Minnesota's "Rural Roadway Program"](#) provides funding for improving transportation access to agritourism sites.⁵⁴

Responses from stakeholders

- Community impact concerns: "Traffic congestion... noise levels... concerts... alcohol creating unsafe situations..."
- "Because most small farms lie outside urban centers, respondents expressed the need for improvement in infrastructure and transportation..."

⁴⁹ Oregon State University Extension Service, "[Oregon Agritourism Inherent Risk Law: Limited Liability Sign Guidance \(Fact Sheet 9\)](#),"

⁵⁰ NC State Extension, "[Direct Customer and Farm Visitor Liability \(Agritourism\)](#),"

⁵¹ National Agricultural Law Center, Tiffany Dowell Lashmet, "[Landowner Liability Protections: Texas Recreational Use Statute, Agritourism Act, and Farm Animal Liability Act](#),"

⁵² Idaho Department of Commerce, "[Idaho Broadband Task Force](#),"

⁵³ Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, "[Funding Opportunities | Working Lands Enterprise Initiative](#),"

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, "[Rural Business Development Grants – Minnesota](#),"

9. Conservation easements, PACE and farmland mitigation programs

Rationale

The goal of agritourism is to help preserve agricultural land and small farms. Programs that tie land protection to development activity have been shown to be highly effective, in conjunction with other policies, in supporting long-term protection of farmland.⁵⁵

Strategies

- We recommend encouraging counties to support the development of conservation easements with deed restrictions. This method creates a pathway to tie the desired development and conversion of some portion of farmland to the permanent conservation of another portion.
- Farmland mitigation is an appealing approach because it ties protection to development activity. Programs require the protection of an equal or greater amount of comparable land to offset the impact of development. Protection can be accomplished by fee purchase, purchase of an agricultural conservation easement, or the dedication of funds to a qualified farmland protection entity.

Examples

- Skagit County's Farmland Legacy Program is a county-funded initiative that compensates landowners for placing a perpetual conservation easement on their land. Landowners retain ownership of their land and continue their farming operations as usual.
- Delaware's Agricultural Land Preservation Program allows landowners to voluntarily preserve their lands through a two-phase process.
- The California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP) is a statewide grant program that supports local efforts to establish agricultural conservation easements and land improvement projects with the goal of preserving important agricultural land resources and enhancing sustainable agricultural uses.

Responses from stakeholders

- "Preservation of agricultural land was seen as the highest benefit" (76% most important).

10. Environmental Stewardship

Rationale

In conjunction with Washington's broader goal of preserving existing agricultural land and limiting urban sprawl, environmental stewardship should serve as the guiding ethos for all agritourism operations.

Strategies

- We recommend offering incentives for eco-friendly farm tours, renewable energy installations and waste reduction programs to encourage sustainable agritourism practices.
- Develop educational programs highlighting regenerative agriculture, local food systems and conservation efforts to engage visitors in sustainability efforts.
- Create guidelines for agritourism operations to minimize environmental impact while enhancing visitor experience.

⁵⁵ See [Farmlands Under Threat: the State of the States](#).

Examples

- Grant County, Oregon, has an "Eco-Friendly Agritourism Grant Program" which provides funding to farms that implement sustainable tourism practices.
- Vermont's "Farm to Plate" initiative integrates agritourism with sustainability education, encouraging farm visitors to learn about conservation and regenerative agriculture.
- California's "Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education" program funds projects that promote environmentally friendly agritourism initiatives.

Responses from stakeholders

- "Forward-looking support for tribal operators..."

Conclusions

This report comes at a critical time. Washington growers and farmers face significant obstacles in staying in business and holding onto their farms. Development trends, pressure for more housing, urban sprawl, consolidation in the fruit industry, rising tariffs and other unforeseen events all contribute to the economic vulnerability of small farmers. This report sought to understand the major obstacles facing Washington farmers and identify a set of key recommendations based on this research.

We found that the majority of Washington's farmers, ranchers and growers were small operations, with 77% owning less than 100 acres. The majority of these farms operate year-round, and nearly half earn less than \$40,000 per year. Approximately 31% of farmers have yet to launch agritourism businesses, and over half have at least one partner who works another job. Most of these farms retained fewer than five employees. Together, these characteristics indicate that farming is neither lucrative nor easy. Our background research illustrated global, national and statewide trends showing the disappearance of farmland and small farmers who successfully grow food. Clearly, addressing structural obstacles to farming is a vital part of our food supply and food security in Washington.

The farmers and stakeholders reflected in this report had specific concerns, including the need for a clear statewide definition of agriculture and agritourism. Furthermore, this report points to the need for clear guidelines to identify a clear path forward for agritourism operations.

There's no single fix for what farmers are facing, but agritourism could be one way to help them stay afloat — so long as it's done with care and clear rules to protect the community. To help agritourism venues, farmers need a statewide marketing plan and grants to subsidize and incentivize agritourism activities. There was additional concern regarding the GMA and the recent ruling by the Washington Supreme Court to suspend food sales that were not derived from the farm. This issue has wide-ranging possible outcomes for most agritourism operators.

This report provides strategies for farmers, policymakers, and anyone interested in agriculture to generate innovative ideas for combining traditional agriculture with tourism, while preserving agricultural land and creating policy safeguards to mitigate the negative impacts of agritourism in Washington. The report suggests that small-scale agritourism operations can provide farmers with alternative income streams and higher wages for employees. Additionally, focusing on agriculture as a form of tourism can educate the general public about the value of food, where it comes from and the need for sustainable agricultural practices in the 21st century. However, understanding the impacts of tourism on traditional forms of agriculture and how these venues are changing agricultural land, zoning regulations and event venues is fundamental to achieving a successful agritourism policy. Food production is increasingly important in the context of climate change and an oft-disregarded aspect of conservation. We believe that by understanding where our food comes from and empowering small farmers, growers, ranchers and aquaculture producers, Washington can lead the way in sustainable food production by supporting our farmers and preserving our agricultural and rural lands.

This report offers ten recommendations to address the structural, legal and policy-level issues facing small farmers. These recommendations include:

- 1) Refine the definition of agritourism in Washington.
- 2) Develop guidance for local governments and an agritourism operator toolkit to successfully start up and operate agritourism operations.
- 3) Clarify definitions and create policy pathways.
 - a) Establish policy for farm stays.
 - b) Create clear guidance and a pathway for farm hospitality and seasonal dining operations to consider farm stays when regulating short-term vacation rentals (STVRs), address adult beverage licensing regulations and provide common-sense pathways for alcohol sales in agritourism.
 - c) Clarify the distinctions between Farm Stands/Farm Stores and Grocery Retail and ensure appropriate guidelines are in place that support the farmer/operator.
- 4) Increase marketing support for agritourism.
- 5) Establish financial incentives and funding opportunities.
- 6) Provide business development training and support.
- 7) Define and support liability protection and risk management.
- 8) Improve statewide infrastructure and transportation systems, including signage, public transportation initiatives and support further broadband development across rural Washington.
- 9) Encourage conservation easements, PACE and farmland mitigation programs.
- 10) Promote environmental stewardship, including educational programs, eco-friendly guidelines for agritourism operations and incentives for sustainable agritourism operations.

By implementing these recommendations, Washington can enhance the viability and sustainability of agritourism, foster economic growth and strengthen the connection between consumers and local agriculture.

Glossary – Agritourism and Washington planning context

Accessory use: A secondary use customarily incidental to the primary agricultural use of the property.

Agritourism: Visitor activities that occur on working agricultural lands and are accessory to the primary agricultural use (e.g., U-pick, tours, tastings, classes). Local definitions vary; this report recommends a standardized, GMA-aligned definition.

County Playbook: A step-by-step guide for county planners: intake, checklists, reviews, mitigation, conditions, and permit issuance.

Farm stand: A small on-site retail facility selling farm products, primarily those produced on the property or locally; thresholds help preserve agricultural character.

Farm-stay: Short-term, low-impact overnight accommodations on working farms or ranches with standards to preserve agricultural character and mitigate impacts.

GMA (Growth Management Act): Washington statute guiding land use planning; relevant to how counties regulate agritourism while preserving resource lands.

MOU: Memorandum of understanding; used to formalize partnership roles (e.g., tribal consultation pathways).

PACE: Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements. State or local programs that either fund acquisition of, or directly purchase, agricultural conservation easements

SEPA: State Environmental Policy Act; environmental review process that may apply to certain projects.

Short-term vacation rental (STVR): Temporary lodging; distinct from farm-stays when not accessory to agricultural production.

Toolkit: Practical, plain-language materials (checklists, templates, workflows) for both county staff and operators.

TA (Technical Assistance): Hands-on support (training, office hours, templates) to help counties and operators comply and improve outcomes.

UGA (Urban Growth Area): A boundary that separates urban from rural areas for planning purposes under the GMA.

Appendix A. History of agritourism

Agritourism in Europe and Elsewhere

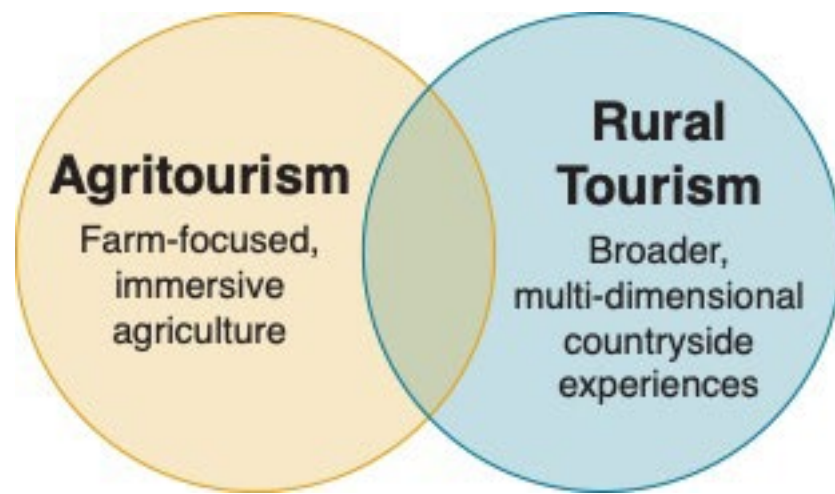
For centuries in Europe and elsewhere, agriculture was central to rural life. Agriculture defined the labor and economy of most rural locales and was the bedrock of a community's seasonal celebrations, traditions and subsistence patterns. Across the Alps, farmers kept goats and dairy cows and subsisted on cheese and household gardens. In the Mediterranean, farmers tended vineyards and olive groves, and in Northern and Eastern Europe peasants grew wheat, potatoes and rye. Scholars assert that people have probably been gathering at farms, ranches and vineyards for as long as there has been agriculture. By the mid-eighteenth century, modern or proto agritourism began in the Southern regions of Italy where aristocrats, seeking to escape the summer heat, congregated in mountain farms or summer retreats. Elsewhere in Europe, alpine tourism was well established by the early nineteenth century, and similar trends were seen in India, where the British Raj moved to their summer homes or tea estates during the monsoons.

Rural tourism as a niche market, and specifically agritourism, was not identified until the 21st century⁵⁶. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, farming and other rural industries (ranching, mining, and forestry) declined as farmers abandoned their farms and moved to jobs in the city. Rural flight was a serious problem in many communities. Within two generations, people began to see country life as a thing of the past, prompting a new nostalgia for how things used to be and a curiosity about rural life that has driven the travel industry ever since.

Early forms of rural tourism were linked to farms where people from the city sought solace or novel experiences in the country. Farms and farm stays were the primary activity and infrastructure of rural tourism in Europe. Italy, after three decades of rural decline, became the first country to regulate farm stays, passing a law in 1985 that encouraged overnight stays at farms to diversify farmers' income and save the remaining farms in its countryside. The term agriturismo was coined, and Italy now has between 9,000 and 20,000 farm stays. Their success prompted other European Union countries to enact similar policies to boost farm incomes and create rural jobs. Austria soon followed suit, as did Poland in the early 1990s. Accueil Paysan, the first French organization formed in 1987 to encourage farm stays, was soon joined by dozens of other organizations, all organized around charters that emphasized certain agricultural and tourist standards. These charters emphasized the traditional character of the farm stay, stating that each farm-stay must be a farm first and a tourist operator, second⁵⁷. France's farm stays, called fermes auberges (farm-inns) are traditional farms specializing in dairies, wineries, olives, and other farm products that offer various levels of accommodation and cuisine. The farms are linked not only by hiking trails, but a common value of good food, traditional production techniques and an emphasis on agriculture over tourism. Today, there are approximately 456,000 farm-stays in France, representing roughly that many small farms that still practice traditional forms of agriculture.

⁵⁶ Lane, Bernard, Kastenholz, Elizabeth and Lima, Joanna et al. Industrial Tourism and Agri/Rural Tourism in Europe. Directorate General For Internal Policies Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies. 2013.

⁵⁷ Monaco, Emily. France's Centuries old mountain farm-stays. BBC. July 26, 2024.



In Europe, farm-stays and agritourism are centered around culinary traditions and food production, where the production of specific types of food and drink are the crux of tourism in that region⁵⁸. The authenticity of food traditions in these regions has prompted EU legislation, such as protected designation of origin (PDO), protected geographical indication (PGI) and traditional specialties guaranteed (TSG). These laws require that the names and labels of certain foods and drinks can only be used in that region and only when following specific protocols.⁵⁹ Popular examples include Asiago, Gorgonzola, and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheeses in Italy and Champagne and Cognac in France. PDO regulations stipulate that the entire production process, from raw materials to the finished product, must be manufactured in that region. This designation is considered the highest level of geographic indication protection. An example of a PDO product is kalamata olives, which are grown and processed in the Kalamata region of Greece. PGI laws require that some or most of the product's key characteristics come from the region it is named after. Some of the processing can be done elsewhere, but the key ingredients must come from the region, for example, Roquefort cheese, where the specific mold used to make the cheese comes from the caves in Roquefort, France⁶⁰. Today, there are 3,500 European products with a PDO or PGI certification. Such designations protect the culinary and production traditions of local agriculture, which creates an agritourist venue in Europe.

Agritourism versus rural tourism in Europe

European scholars prefer the term "rural tourism" over "agritourism" because, while tourists may stay overnight at a farm, they do not spend all their time there. Instead, they tend to explore the countryside and neighboring counties and towns, often engaging in recreational activities such as fly fishing, hiking, and birdwatching. Additionally, the central role of farming has continued to decline, despite tourism-based revenue. Most European scholars note that while a farm-stay is part of the tourist draw, rural tourism in Europe is multidimensional and not easily classified. Furthermore, not all European farm-stays embrace the values of traditional agriculture.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, rural tourism in Europe was highly politicized, drawing on common themes of nostalgia and conservation. Tourism provided a reason to recognize and appreciate the past and traditional farming techniques. Jose Bove and Francois Dufour's book, "Le monde ne'st pas une merchandise" (The World is not for Sale), is both a manifesto for sustainable farming and traditional practices and a romantic marketing presentation for rural tourism. Like industrial heritage tourism, rural tourism in Europe provides a justification for

⁵⁸ Chase, Lisa et al. Agritourism: Towards a conceptual framework for industry analysis. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems and Community Development*. April 2, 2018.

⁵⁹ Chase, L., & Grubinger, V. (2014). *Food, farms, and community: Exploring food systems*. Lebanon, New Hampshire: University Press of New England.

⁶⁰ Geographical Indications and Quality Schemes Explained. European Commission, Agriculture and Rural Development, accessed 12/12/2024.

preserving the physical past (farms, landscapes, villages) and its traditions (traditional farming techniques). Peter Keller, the head of Switzerland’s tourism policy, wrote that “The countryside as a creative counterbalance to the hyper-civilized urban centre is no illusion...farmers must be kept on the land.”⁶¹ In Europe, farming and tourism have become largely inseparable, but scholars note that, in reality, most farm stays do not offer farming activities but rather wine or cheese tastings and other opportunities for direct farm sales.

In addition to the farm, tourists require two other key features: peace and quiet and access to nature. Access to nature is strongly driven by interest in exercise – hiking, walking, cycling, skiing, or other ambulatory activities – and is dependent on the legality of countryside access in different countries. Britain, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany and Austria, for example, have dense networks of walking trails, well-mapped and with clear legal rights of access.

Today, rural tourism in Europe is again on the rise, surpassing pre-COVID numbers. Indeed, one unforeseen impact of COVID-19 was an increase in visits to rural and uninhabited areas. In 2021, rural tourism accounted for 43.8% of the total overnight accommodations. Between 2019 and 2021, the percentage of nights spent in urban locales dropped by six points, whereas overnight stays in rural areas rose four points.⁶² People were also more likely to plan to travel around nature-based tourism and remote locales. Destinations that focused on events, international and business tourism were hit the hardest, while rural destinations increased between 2019 and 2021 and continue to increase today.

Impacts of rural agritourism

Quantifiable Complications

Definition Dilemma

- Different countries use different definitions
- Italy = strict, farm-based
- Scotland = broad, includes rural activities
- Impacts what counts as “authentic”

Authenticity vs. Experience

- Milking cows = Agritourism
- Wine tasting = maybe
- Bird hunting = Not agritourism
- Definitions shape policies, taxes, and reputation

Authenticity vs. Experience

- Private farms ≠ public ticket sales
- Tourist spending is spread out:
 - Farm stay > Bakery > Waterfall > Church
- Only 1 part is agritourism

Proponents of rural and agritourism claim that tourism offers benefits to local economies and to the preservation of their environments and socio-cultural traditions. The benefits of agritourism are hard to quantify for several reasons. First, there is the problem of definition. Today, most countries have a legal definition for agritourism. These definitions influence the policy and regulatory environment, which determines how they are treated by taxing and regulating authorities. Looser definitions can result in the erosion of tourism quality and related industries, while restrictive definitions can make agritourism seem elitist or insignificant to the larger travel industry. Central

⁶¹ Keller, Peter. Tourism Policy and Rural Development, The Tourism Committee of the OCED, 1990.

⁶² Sajin, Nikolina and Karin Finer. Rural Tourism Briefing. European Parliamentary Research Service.

to these definitions is the concept of authenticity, where tourism changes the nature of farming, for example, a petting zoo versus a sheep farm, or wine tasting versus an authentic vineyard. The Institute for Regional Development at Eura Research in Bolzano, Italy, for example, collaborates with colleagues worldwide to develop a shared understanding of agritourism, enabling them to support policymakers and agritourism leaders across various countries. In Scotland, researchers have adopted a looser definition of agritourism that encompasses a variety of activities in rural areas, while Italy has used a stricter definition to denote a more “pure” agritourism focused on working farms. Other activities, even if they take place on a farm, are not considered agritourism.

Tracking the benefits of agritourism necessitates a clear definition of what falls under agritourism and what does not. To further complicate matters, the nature of tourism and visitation in general is hard to differentiate. A tourist family might stay overnight at a farm, breakfast in town at a local bakery, hike to a waterfall in the afternoon, and tour the church before dinner. None of these activities, except the farm-stay, is, by definition, agritourism; hence the difficulty of tracking overall economic benefits. Agritourism, as opposed to heritage or industrial heritage tourism (museums, cathedrals, and other public sites) is harder to track because it largely takes place in the private sector. Museums, churches, mosques, railway stations, and public monuments generally require entry fees and thus generate precise revenue receipts. Many agritourism enterprises do not differentiate between specific sales and gross farm revenue. Despite these complexities, this section offers an analysis of economic, environmental and socio-cultural benefits of agritourism.

Economic trends

The simplest economic indicator for rural or agritourism might be the number of overnight farm stays or accommodations on operating farms, but European farmers who offer overnight accommodations count these profits against their operating farm expenses. In the U.S., by contrast, most counties have ordinances for nightly rental accommodations, including farm-stays, so predicting how much money is generated from agritourism is easier. To date, there is little specific data on the number of overnight farm-stay accommodations in Europe. EU tourist accommodation numbers also do not differentiate between hotels, Airbnbs, other nightly rentals and farm-stays. The total number of international overnight stays in the EU in 2023 was 29 million beds, up 6.8% from 2022 and exceeding pre-COVID levels by 2.4%⁶³. According to Eurostat, there were 9.1 million agricultural holdings in Europe in 2020, and the average occupancy rate for hotels and overnight accommodations in Europe in 2023 was 49%. Assuming every farm offered overnight stays, that would be roughly 4.5 million overnight stays in Europe in 2023, generating approximately US\$562 million in revenue for overnight accommodations. This number is intended for approximation only and suggests that, while agritourism is obviously an economic benefit to rural communities, the complexities of accurately describing that benefit render it nearly impossible to do so.

One of the largest calamities in England’s recent history was the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001, which shut down rural tourism due to various movement restrictions. When the government began calculating compensation measures, it estimated national rural tourism at around 14 billion euros, compared to 18 billion for the agricultural sector. In 2008, EuroGites, the rural tourism umbrella group, estimated that rural tourism supported 900,000 jobs in the EU and generated \$150 billion in gross revenue.

Another measure for the economic impact of rural tourism can be seen in Europe’s national parks and protected places. In the U.K., the percentage of tourism-related businesses in and near national parks is double that of rural England as a whole. In national parks, 27.5% of businesses and 21.2% of jobs are tourism-related. Lamie et al. suggest that, overall, rural tourism generates ten times the income of industrial or heritage tourism.

⁶³ Tourism Statistics, Annual Results for the Accommodation Sector, 2023. EuroStat. Accessed 12/07/2024.

Other economic impacts include the acquisition of new skills, usually within the IT, hospitality and customer care industries. These skills are transferable across industries and beneficial to local communities. The availability and use of the Internet are particularly useful for workers learning skills like website design and marketing.

Rural tourism has also been linked to repopulation throughout the countryside. Outmigration and the associated depopulation of rural areas strain local infrastructure, making it harder to maintain community hospitals, transportation systems, libraries, schools and other services. Rural tourism attracts lifestyle migrants, or people from urban areas with an interest in country living. Lifestyle migrants are footloose and economically mobile, usually working in IT with remote jobs and incomes⁶⁴. Lifestyle migration has become increasingly common in rural tourist locales and is part of the driving force for rural renewal. Most lifestyle migrants bring money, cultural capital and new skills into rural and economically depressed areas. In one study, lifestyle migration accounted for 31% of the local community and 24% of overall spending (27). In-coming migration also affects the housing market, causing home values to rise, including property taxes and local renovations. Although these migrations can have negative social and cultural impacts, they are still associated with economic benefits.

Lastly, rural tourism has also helped bring women into the workforce, particularly in areas that previously had male-dominated industries such as mining, ranching and farming. Women tend to participate in hospitality jobs more than men do. In 2022, 58% of the hospitality workforce was women, and 33% of the travel industry businesses were owned by women.⁶⁵

Negative economic impacts largely stem from lifestyle migration and the associated rise in housing prices, particularly through the purchase of second homes and the loss of housing availability for local people. In the popular ski resort town of Germ in the Haute-Pyrenees, for example, 97% of the properties are second homes, and one in ten homes in France are owned by an absentee homeowner⁶⁶. Elsewhere in Europe (Cornwall, Wales, Barcelona, and Lisbon), residents are being priced out of tourist locales due to second and vacation homes, sparking protests, arson attempts and vandalism. In Brittany, where one in two homes are second homes, two properties in Morbihan were graffitied with the message, “Finis les riches” (No more rich people). Some counties and states are imposing higher taxes on second homes or removing tax credits for them. In Scotland, 25 out of the country's 32 counties have abolished the 10% tax discount on second homes, while in Wales, the county has imposed a 300% increase on second-home property taxes. Such attempts illustrate the positive and negative economic impacts of rural tourism, of which agritourism is part.

⁶⁴ Tate-Libby, Julie. TwispWorks Comprehensive Economic Study. TwispWorks, 2021.

⁶⁵ Sonesta International Hotels, “There is patriarchy at the highest levels of hospitality leadership. It’s getting more equitable. Hospitality News, Industry News. May 29, 2024.

⁶⁶ Hughes, Rebecca Anne. It was ours but now it’s gone: Residents in Europe’s tourist hot spots slam second homes. Euronews, September 4, 2024.

Quick Overview

Potential Benefits

- Conservation Incentives
- Agritourism justifies conservation of landscapes and ecosystems.
- Protected Areas Growth
- 120,000+ rural and biodiversity areas protected in Europe, supported by tourism.
- Ethic of Preservation
- Tourism encourages stewardship of land, wildlife, and cultural heritage.
- Farmer Engagement
- Farmers adopt conservation practices seeing nature as an economic asset.

Potential Risks

- Over-visitation can lead to damage
- Too much impact can lead to erosion, deforestation, and destruction of fragile ecosystems.
- Urbanization Pressure
- Roads, ski runs, and second homes could disrupt natural and rural areas.
- Possible on-farm Disruption
- Unguided tourists could damage crops, disturb animals, and frustrate farm workers.
- Viral posts can bring unplanned tourism surges, harming nature and culture.
- Could lead to loss of Rural Identity
- Tourism-driven change can erode traditional livelihoods and local heritage.

Like economic impacts, environmental impacts from rural or agritourism are similarly complex. Lamie, et al. note that rural tourism tends to valorize landscapes and nature, thereby creating an ethic of conservation and preservation. In many rural places, farmers realize the landscape and wildlife are as valuable as the food they produce, prompting conservation and other pro-environmental policies within local networks. As Lamie writes, “Without the input and justification provided by rural tourism, the conservation of Europe’s rural landscapes, ecosystems, built environments, communities and cultures would be hard to justify.”⁶⁷ Today, there are over 120,000 rural landscape and biodiversity protected areas in Europe, which requires financial and political inputs from local jurisdictions for conservation purposes.⁶⁸ Importantly, these inputs are justified by the economic benefits of tourism. For governing agencies, conservation efforts require a strong need for financial justification of protected area management. Agritourism and rural tourism are often used to make this case.

Unfortunately, the drive to boost conservation can sometimes do the opposite. The environmental damage from over-visitation is well documented (for example, see Germanovich, Aleksey Greigoriviech et al., 2020; Nicholas

⁶⁷ Lamie, David et al. (pg. 41)

⁶⁸ European Environmental Agency, March 31, 2023.

Wise, 2020, and Angelo Belliggiano et al, 2020).⁶⁹⁷⁰⁷¹ Unmanaged visitation, visitors that use natural areas like parks, forests, or wilderness zones without oversight, planning or infrastructure to guide visitor behavior, can lead to physical damage to fragile ecosystems, particularly in alpine environments. Deforestation caused by ski runs, roads, and parking construction leads to landslides and erosion, as well as trampling of vegetation by large numbers of hikers, and the overall urbanization of scenic areas. Noise and litter have also been linked to over-visitiation, as well as damage to ecosystems from biking, climbing and other outdoor recreation activities. While these issues have to do with rural tourism, not specifically agritourism, they must be considered as one of the by-products of agritourism, which generates visitors, increases the time spent in tourist locales and attracts growing semi-permanent populations of second homeowners, all of whom engage in multiple forms of tourism in the same place. With regard to farm-stays and on-site farm tourism, some environmental impacts include disturbance of livestock, disruption of traditional farming practices, frustration among farm operators and workers at the presence of tourists, and the destruction of fragile farm crops, irrigation systems, and other infrastructure by on-site tourists.

Other environmental impacts include the building or purchase of second homes, particularly in protected areas where building is restricted. When tourism grows too much in rural areas, it can change local culture and the economy, making the place feel less rural. If communities depend too heavily on tourism for income, it can put traditional ways of life – like farming or ranching – at risk. Social media has recently led to an increasingly significant problem for many areas, with users posting photos or “selfies” in rural, undiscovered locales. These posts, often by influencers with thousands of followers, can transform an area almost overnight, attracting thousands of tourists with little planning or infrastructure. Not only does this destroy ecosystems and recreation areas, but it also destabilizes locals' sense of place, their culture and heritage, which increasingly become part of the tourist gaze. Technologies like smartphones and GPS tracking can lead tourists anywhere – this new access to strangers from all over the world can be overwhelming and problematic for the places they visit and the people who live there.

Agritourism trends in the United States

In the United States, the term agritourism is relatively new; however, the practice of visiting farms and ranches to learn about agriculture or to celebrate seasonal harvests is a longstanding tradition. In the American West, in the late 19th century, many farmhouses served as country inns where travelers heading west could spend their nights at farms along the way, paying for their room and board with farmwork or payment. As the U.S. became more urbanized throughout the 1800s, families living in cities would visit farms or ranches to escape city life and learn about rural living, farming and ranching. Dude ranches in the American West began to attract wealthy Easterners and Europeans for hunting trips and sightseeing excursions. By the 1920s and 1930s, dude ranches were a major tourist attraction throughout the Rocky Mountains.

As in Europe and elsewhere, efforts to measure agritourism in the U.S. have been problematic. Challenges around definition, as well as funding limitations for cross-state research, have led to a lack of information on the value and impact of agritourism. Agricultural extension programs, which offer training, information and support services for agriculture in various states, must first justify funding for agritourism research based on its value and impact on agriculture and local economies. Again, such information is hard to find because the scope and scale of much research is lacking. In 2002, the U.S. Agricultural Census, which is mailed out every five years, expanded its data on

⁶⁹ GERMANOVICH, Aleksey Grigorievich et al. Impact of Tourism on Sustainable Development of Rural Areas: International Experience. *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism*, [S.l.], v. 11, n. 4, p. 965-972, June 2020. ISSN 2068-7729. Available at: <<https://journals.aserspublishing.eu/jemt/article/view/5227>>. Date accessed: 09 Dec. 2024. doi: [https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.11.4\(44\).21](https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.11.4(44).21).

⁷⁰ Wise N. Urban and Rural Event Tourism and Sustainability: Exploring Economic, Social and Environmental Impacts. *Sustainability*. 2020; 12(14):5712. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12145712>

⁷¹ Belliggiano A, Garcia EC, Labianca M, Valverde FN, De Rubertis S. The “Eco-Effectiveness” of Agritourism Dynamics in Italy and Spain: A Tool for Evaluating Regional Sustainability. *Sustainability*. 2020; 12(17):7080. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12177080>

income from farm sources to include income from “recreational services,” with instructions that included examples such as “hunting, fishing, etc.” In 2007 and again in 2012, the censuses revised their terminology to include “agritourism and recreational services,” accompanied by a range of examples such as “farm or winery tours, hayrides, hunting, fishing, etc.” Despite these changes, the U.S. agricultural census remains limited in the examples it provides. In a survey of agritourism farms in Colorado and California, expanding the examples of agritourism income to include direct farm sales, accommodations, entertainment, events, outdoor recreation and educational activities led to much greater detail and a more complete understanding of the scale and scope of such activities.

Despite its limitations, the U.S. Agricultural Census Survey is the most comprehensive and reliable data source on agriculture in the U.S. According to the 2022 census, the United States has 1.9 million operating farms, 116,617 of which offer direct farm sales.⁷² This number has declined from 2017, when the total number of farms was 2.04 million and direct farm sales totaled \$133,276. The value of farm sales increased slightly during this period, however, totaling \$3.26 billion (as opposed to \$2.8 billion in 2017).

Of the 116,617 farms offering direct sales, only 28,617 farms claimed to offer “agritourism and recreational services” (compared to 28,575 in 2017). The average income per farm from agritourism and recreational services was \$44,004, up from 2017, which averaged \$33,222⁷³. The U.S. Census of Agriculture also tracks value-added farm products, but only those for human consumption (jams, jellies, wine, etc.), and excludes things like cut trees or nursery stock. According to the 2022 census, total agritourism revenue was \$1.26 billion, up 12% from 2017.

Core and peripheral activities

Scholars Smith and others note the change in terminology from 2002 to 2012 to “recreational services” to “agritourism and recreational services.” and the expanded list of representative activities may limit compatibility across periods and confuse actual understanding of the industry’s growth. While agritourism appears to have grown substantially in the U.S., the actual number of farms and the products or activities they engage in, are unclear. The inconsistencies in terminology reflect the need for a standardized definition of agritourism nationwide, as well as within individual states. Smith and colleagues argue for the adoption of a two-tiered framework for understanding agritourism where core and peripheral activities are delineated on the basis of location (on farm or off farm), or to the degree to which that activity is connected to agriculture. Core activities must take place on a working farm and include things that are embedded in agricultural production or the marketing of farm products, for example: direct farm sales of agricultural products either sold on the farm or in farm stands and U-pick operations, as well as farm-tours, farm-to-table meals, overnight stays and on-site agricultural festivals. Seasonal events like corn mazes, pumpkin patches, or tulips in Skagit, are based on the seasonality of growing things and the celebration of their arrival or harvest. These activities can have a festival or party-like atmosphere, including food trucks, beverages, and activities for all ages, but are still rooted deeply in seasonal celebrations that define many agritourism activities. More peripheral activities may lack a deep connection to agricultural production, even though they take place on a working farm or ranch. Examples include venue activities like weddings, concerts, or recreational activities like hiking and biking through orchards, vineyards or wheatfields. Other types of peripheral activities that are closely connected to agriculture, but do not take place on a farm, are farmers’ markets and agricultural fairs. Whether these activities should be considered agritourism can be controversial and depends on the definition of agritourism.

⁷² Agritourism in the United States Fact Sheet, based on the 2017 U.S. Census.

⁷³ 2022 Census of Agriculture, page 13.

Whether activities are core or peripheral, agritourism in the U.S. has been divided into five main categories:

- 1) Direct Sales – include those in which the customer buys directly from the farmer
- 2) Education – opportunities include farm programs or school tours on farms
- 3) Hospitality – includes any farm-based bed-and-breakfast, farm stay or on-farm dinners, as well as tastings in a winery or brewery on a vineyard or hops farm
- 4) Outdoor Recreation – refers to any activity that takes place on a farm for customers (for example, hunting or fishing or Christmas tree cutting)
- 5) and Entertainment – includes seasonal farm-based celebrations as well as weddings and concerts that have no tie to the seasons

Regional challenges for agritourism operators

While definitions may be problematic, different regions of the U.S. face different challenges, based on their geography and access to resources. According to a study in 2022, while most agritourism operators are concerned about liability issues, the biggest challenges for farmers were limited access to resources, e-connectivity, and regulations and liability issues⁷⁴. Researchers Chadley Richard Hollas and others found in 2022 that farmers in the West were more concerned with zoning and regulations, while farmers in the Midwest were more likely to have concerns about liability, and farmers in the South had more difficulty with e-connectivity and access to resources. In California, for example, agritourism operators were more likely to face challenges with inadequate information from permit-granting agencies⁷⁵, liability statutes that offer little support for agritourism operators, and barriers with complex and difficult to understand regulations. Other farmers in the West expressed frustration with “city-based bureaucrats” who make decisions limiting on-farm accommodations for farm workers and visitors. In agricultural regions farther from urban centers, limitations on development and accommodation can severely limit a farmer’s ability to use agritourism venues. In the Northeast, agritourism operators expressed frustration with building codes and conservation land restrictions, which inhibited the development of agritourism and the success of new farming venues. Some farm operators, however, wanted stricter zoning and regulation. Farmers in the West cited cases of large operations that hosted event venues on land with no agricultural output. These operations hindered the productivity of working farms with increased traffic, tourists (and subsequent constraints for tilling, dust, spraying, farm vehicles, etc.) and other negative impacts. Another issue with zoning and regulations was the complexity and sometimes incompatibility between county and state laws. Farmers cited the hoops they had to go through for multiple permits, only to find that none of them actually met the regulatory requirements. Other operators quoted prohibitive fees, making it unviable to operate legally. These operators were able to “fly under the radar,” but noted that if they (fees and permits) ever became an issue, they would close immediately. Finally, farmers in the South faced more problems with e-connectivity in rural areas. Access to high-speed, reliable Internet was a problem for farmers offering accommodations, accepting credit cards, maintaining a website and updating the public on COVID-19 protocols.

Agritourism litigation in the United States

The above issues highlight the need for a clearer understanding of which activities constitute agritourism and how they are protected and mitigated under U.S. law. The National Agricultural Law Center helps farmers and agritourism operators understand the legal issues inherent in agritourism and manage the risk of liability. A 2024 study by Peggy Kirkhall and Ellen Essman surveyed the litigation surrounding agritourism operations throughout

⁷⁴ Hollas, C. R., Wang, W., Chase, L., Conner, D., & Kolodinsky, J. (2022). Challenges for the agritourism sector in the United States: Regional comparisons of access. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 11(4), 61–76. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2022.114.003>

⁷⁵ Rilla, et al. 2001.

the United States, how these issues were resolved and legal incidents that have occurred but have not produced litigation.

Litigation cases fall into two main categories: land use and personal injury. Land use issues center on whether agritourism activities on land designated for agricultural or farm use are permitted or violate existing land use laws. The typical scenario involves a farmer adding an activity to their farm, raising the question of whether that activity is legally permissible. Kirkhall and Essman summarize 10 case studies where such issues arise. In one example, Stoller Vineyards, an established winery in Yamhill County, Oregon, applied for a conditional use permit to construct a building which would house a tasting room, a limited-service restaurant, a commercial kitchen and several offices and storage rooms⁷⁶. The building would also be used to host up to 44 events per year. The county approved the building, but an opposing group, “Friends of Yamhill County,” opposed the permit approval, arguing that an events venue and commercial kitchen were not permitted as “farm-use-related commercial activities” in an exclusive farm-use district. The court upheld the county’s decision, arguing that the food service events and winery were in conjunction with farm use under Oregon State law. They also reasoned that such events would be ancillary to the primary purpose of wine-making and production, which were agricultural activities.

In Pennsylvania, landowners wanted to offer farm-to-table educational classes in their historic barn on 12.5 acres⁷⁷. As the property was zoned residential-agricultural, they applied for a conditional use permit under the township’s ordinance that allows for a historic site to be used for educational purposes. The Board of Supervisors approved educational classes for children, but denied the adult workshops in the evenings, arguing that such workshops were not educational. Upon appeal, the case went to court, where the court ruled that “educational” use must conform to the primary function of the structure—in this case, a barn. The court upheld the board’s decision not to allow farm-to-table adult workshops, as they would be more in the style of entertainment than in the function of education.

In another case involving the use of a barn, a Michigan couple bought a residential property with a barn and began hosting weddings, receptions and other events in the barn as an ancillary use on their property. The venue grew in popularity and went to court. The Court of Appeals found that the traffic, noise, and the proposed construction of a parking lot had no connection to the house and were therefore considered a primary, not ancillary, use for residential property. Finally, in another Michigan case involving a barn and wedding venues, the Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the zoning committee, which argued that weddings did not constitute agritourism activities, which, under Michigan law, are relegated to “corn mazes, hayrides and pumpkin patches.”

Indeed, much of the agritourism litigation in the U.S. centers on the use of agricultural facilities as wedding, concert, or large-event venues, with six out of 10 cases involving weddings and other events. In most cases, the definitions of agritourism or agriculture in these areas are either too loose or must be redefined by the township, county, or a governing ordinance. For example, the Supreme Court of New Hampshire recently sided against a special permit for weddings in an agricultural district, stating that New Hampshire’s definition of agritourism did not support the use of weddings, where:

⁷⁶ Adding events at a vineyard in an “exclusive farm use” zone: *Friends of Yamhill County v. Yamhill County*, 298 P.3d 586 (Or. Ct. App. March 19, 2013)

⁷⁷ A wedding barn as an accessory use to a residence: *Webster Twp. v. Waitz*, No. 325088, 2016 Mich. App. LEXIS 1109 (June 7, 2016)

“Attracting visitors to a working farm for the purpose of eating a meal, making overnight stays, enjoyment of the farm environment, education on farm operations, or active involvement in the activity of the farm which is ancillary to the farm operation” and the definition of “agriculture,” which means all operations on the farm as specified in the statute and any “practice on the farm incident to, or in conjunction with such farming operations.”⁷⁸

These cases illustrate the point that agritourism’s definition must be carefully defined by each state, and those events that do not constitute ‘agritourism’ must be considered. In two other cases involving land-use issues, the court of appeals found that music concerts and a gun range did not constitute agritourism activities as defined by state law.

Second only to land-use issues, the most common cases involving agritourism in the U.S. involve personal injuries. Many personal injury cases occur on farms, but not all result in litigation. This is partly because some personal injury claims are settled out of court or are covered by the property owner’s insurance policy. According to the study by Hall and Essmen (2024), cases that have resulted in litigation involve physical dangers on the farm and agritourism operators’ negligence in mitigating them. Two cases involving injury in a corn maze resulted in different court decisions. In the first case, a man fell and broke his leg while exiting a corn maze through open water that had risen due to heavy rains⁷⁹. The plaintiff claimed that the farm should have had appropriate measures to address rainwater and that the danger was not open or obvious under Michigan law. While the circuit court sided with the farmer, an appeals court found that the farmer should have made arrangements for rainwater and ruled in favor of the plaintiff. In the second case, an eight-year-old boy tripped and fell on a cornstalk while searching for his sister⁸⁰. A lawsuit ensued, but the court found that a cornstalk posed an open-and-obvious danger in the corn maze and ruled in favor of the farmer.

In another case, a seven-year-old girl came into contact with E. Coli after touching cattle and goats at a petting zoo in Minnesota⁸¹. The girl became very ill and was diagnosed with hemolytic uremic syndrome, which requires ongoing dialysis treatments and possibly kidney transplants. The girl’s parents filed a negligence claim against the farmers, arguing that they failed to take common-sense precautions to prevent E. coli, such as installing hand-washing stations near the animals. The defendants went to trial, where a jury sided with the parents and eventually awarded \$7.55 million in damages to the girl and her parents.

In summary, several of the land use cases fall on the plaintiff’s side, which does not bode well for agritourism operations that are poorly defined or located in states with poorly defined agritourism legislation. In personal injury cases, the majority are settled out of court or resolved through private insurance policies. In cases that go to litigation, the open and dangerous doctrine and immunity statutes play a critical role in allocating liability.

⁷⁸ “Agritourism” is not within the definition of “agriculture”: *Forester v. Town of Henniker*, 118 A.3d 1016 (N.H. Sup. Ct. June 12, 2015)

⁷⁹ Exception to open and obvious danger doctrine for effectively unavoidable dangers:

Davis v. Lenhart, No. 329092 (Mich. Ct. App. Sep. 22, 2016)

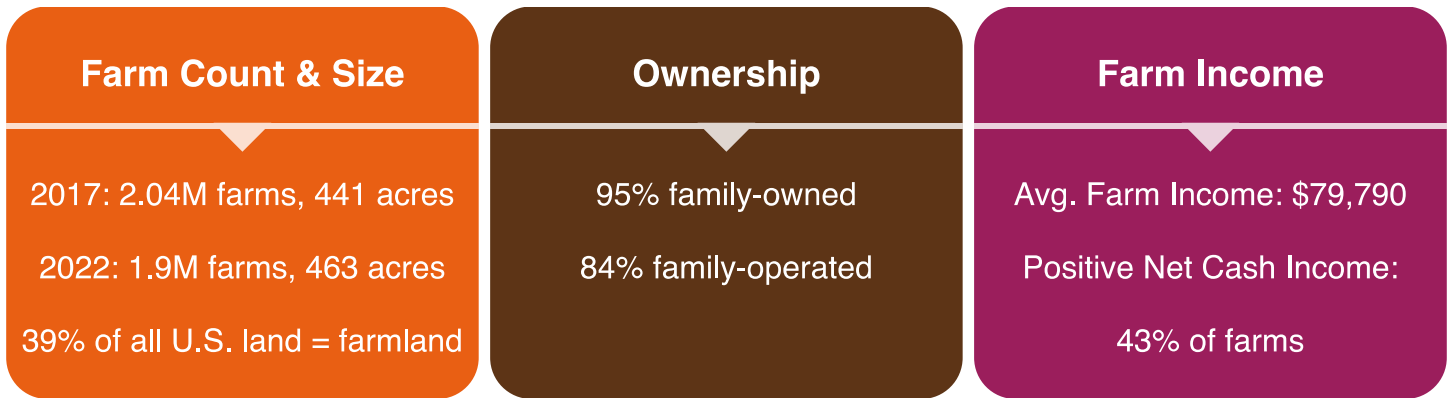
⁸⁰ Fallen corn stalks are open and obvious dangers of a corn maze: *Spinella v. Fink’s Country Farm, Inc.*, 15-1548, 2017 N.Y. Misc. LEXIS 2054 (Sup. Ct. N.Y. May 24, 2017)

⁸¹ Duty to minimize risk of exposure to E. Coli from farm animals *Stephanie Heidish, et al. v. Dehn’s Pumpkins LLC*, No. 27-CV-14-17068 (Minn. Dist. Ct. Hennepin Co. Feb. 22, 2017)

Takeaways for Appendix A

While agritourism is well established in European countries, it is a relatively new phenomenon in the United States. In Europe, agritourism is more concerned with issues of authenticity and reproduction, sparking legislation such as the protection designation of origin or protected geographic identity laws. European scholars prefer the term rural tourism to agritourism, acknowledging that the range of activities in the countryside overlaps with farming in various ways. Most rural tourism in Europe focuses on accommodation and farm stays, where tourists can experience traditional agriculture and taste regional products such as cheese, wine, and olives. Economic impacts are hard to quantify, but they point to a trend: rural tourism is on the rise, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of the economic impact literature concerns the influences of lifestyle migration, rising home costs in rural locales, and repopulation. On the surface, the environmental impacts of rural tourism are positive because the landscape becomes valuable in and of itself, but the rise in tourism often causes problems with waste, pollution, overcrowding and the loss of rural character. In the United States, confusion over how each state should define agritourism and the lack of a cohesive definition have led to numerous litigation issues and conflicts with land-use and zoning laws. Agritourism in the U.S. centers more on entertainment activities like pumpkin mazes, hayrides and petting zoos, while culinary tourism or farm-to-table venues are highly contested under current agritourism definitions. Scholars Lisa Smith and colleagues (2021) argue for a distinction between core and peripheral activities to better understand agritourism. Such models may be helpful to states when creating their own definitions and legislation for agritourism activities. Finally, current litigation underscores the importance of defining what constitutes agritourism, the primary concern of this report. In the next section, we review the unique history of agriculture in Washington, the development of agritourism and questions to address at the policy level.

Appendix B. Agritourism demographics



The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conducts a mail-in survey every five years to track agricultural trends in the U.S., including land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, and income and expenditures. This survey tracks farm and ranching data from any household claiming more than \$1,000 worth of income in the calendar year.

The 2022 Census of Agriculture from the USDA shows a continued decline in the total number of U.S. farms. In 2017, there were 2.04 million farms and ranches with an average size of 441 acres. In 2022, there were 1.9 million farms and ranches (a 7% decrease) with an average size of 463 acres (up 5%). This accounts for 39% of all the land in the U.S. Of those farms and ranches, 95% were family-owned, and 84% were family-owned and operated. Average farm income levels rose to \$79,790 per farming household, with a total of 43% reporting a positive net cash farm income. Direct farm sales increased by 16%, representing a total of 116,617 farms that reported \$3.3 billion in sales. Overall, income from farming remains concentrated in a few farms. Most farms and ranches make less than \$50,000. Of the 1.9 million farms and ranches in the U.S., only 6% reported income of \$1 million or more, yet these farms accounted for 31% of U.S. farmland. The 1.4 million small farmers and ranchers who made less than \$50,000 a year accounted for 74% of all farms and only 2% of total farm sales. Of the operating farmland, nearly three-fourths was used by farms specializing in two commodity categories: oilseed and grain production (32%) and beef/cattle production (40%).

Farmers have been aging over the last 50 years, suggesting a general decline in the number of young farmers entering the industry. For example, the average age of a farmer in 1945 was 48.7 years old. Today, the average age is 58.1. However, the 2022 census reported a lower increase in the average age (0.6 years) since 2017. There has also been an increase in the number of beginning farmers in the U.S. One million farmers reported having less than 10 years of experience, representing an 11% increase since 2017. Beginning farmers are also younger, with an average age of 47.1 years. Additionally, the number of younger producers has increased (totaling 296,480 under 35), representing 9% of all producers. While farmers in the U.S. have been historically male, cisgender and heterosexual (73.6% in 2017), only 64% of producers were male in 2022.⁸² Women-owned farms or women operating farms also increased from 2017. In 2022, 1.2 million female producers accounted for 36% of all producers, while 58% of all farms had at least one female decision maker.

Black producers decreased from 2017, as did the number of Black-owned farms. In 2017, there were 48,697 Black producers and 32,186 Black-owned farms. In 2022, there were 46,738 Black producers and 30,136 Black-owned farms, representing decreases of 0.4% and 6.4%, respectively. Black operated farms saw the largest decrease, with

⁸² Burdsall, Natalie. Queering Farming: How LGBTQIA+ Farmers are Reimagining Agriculture. Global Food for Thought, June 28, 2023.

a total of 35,470 Black-operated farms in 2017 and 32,653 in 2022. The states with the highest count of Black producers in 2022 were Texas, Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana. Black producers are older and more likely to have served in the military than U.S. producers overall. Their farms were also smaller, both in average acres and sales.

The results of the 2022 U.S. Census of Agriculture point to an increase in agritourism across several data points. First, the increase in direct farm sales, which usually occurs along with some type of agritourism venue. The number of farms reporting a net increase in income, along with the \$79,790 in income, also points to alternative cash revenues from agritourism. Additionally, the increase in younger beginning farmers points to a younger demographic entering farming, even as the average age of farmers continued to increase. This suggests the presence of younger, perhaps business-oriented professionals entering the industry, as well as an increase in farm venue diversity across the board. Lastly, internet access improved across U.S. farms, rising from 75% in 2017 to 79% in 2022. This may reflect an increase in reliance on technology and the need for websites or social media to advertise farming venues.

Summary

While agritourism is an expanding industry across the United States, more research is needed to understand the drivers of this market, the challenges associated with agritourism trends and the specific policy measures other states and governing agencies have adopted to address these challenges. The following section provides a review of the literature on the international and national agritourism market, as well as its current trends and impacts.

Appendix C. Agriculture and the development of agritourism in Washington

Introduction

Washington is one of the most agriculturally productive states in the U.S., generating \$12.8 billion in revenue in 2022, up 27% from 2021, ranking second in the nation with 15 million cultivated acres and over 300 varieties of crops.⁸³ In 2022, the value of Washington's overall crop production was worth \$8.6 billion, and livestock was worth \$4.18 billion. Both crop and livestock production were up from the previous year by 22% and 38%, respectively. Additionally, Washington produces 67% of the apples in the U.S., 92% of the raspberries, and 77% of the hops. It is also a lead producer of spearmint, sweet cherries, concord grapes, peppermint oil, pears, plums and prunes. Altogether, Washington's farms cover 15 million acres of farmland⁸⁴ and include approximately 35,700 farms. Of these, 89% are classified as small farms grossing less than \$250,000 annually. Agriculture and food manufacturing contribute approximately 164,000 jobs and generate \$20.4 billion annually. This section examines the history of agriculture in Washington, the subsequent development of agritourism throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, and the specific challenges and controversies that farmers and agritourism operators in Washington face today.

History of agriculture in Washington

The development of agriculture in Washington is based on several factors, including the state's topography, climate and soil composition, as well as its original Native American populations and early settlers. Located in the northwestern corner of the United States, Washington shares a border with Canada to the north and the Pacific Ocean via the Olympic Peninsula to the west. Dividing the state, the rugged Cascade Mountains create a rain shadow, shaping the climate of the west side, which is characterized by heavy rainfall, hardwood forests, and a dense, hilly topography. While rainfall in the Seattle area averages 37 inches a year and up to 150 inches in portions of the Olympic Peninsula, Eastern Washington receives only 15 to 30 inches per year and is burdened by forest fires and drought. In the northern half of the state, glaciers from the last ice age retreated some 10,000 years ago, leaving younger soil and a diverse soil composition.⁸⁵ The unique topography, vegetation, and rainfall make Washington home to 12 distinct soil types, which are suitable for growing a wide variety of crops. These climatic and geographic features have played an important role in the development of agriculture and can be seen today in the diverse agricultural niches across Washington.

Agriculture on the West Coast

Before White settlement, Native American groups along the West Coast maintained a thriving population based on fishing, coastal gathering and trade routes that extended through Canada and across the North Cascades. So successful were the Tribes of the West Coast that they developed the highly sophisticated potlatch system of redistribution, which included valuable art and trade goods such as totem carvings, masks and intricate headdresses.⁸⁶ Scholars estimate that pre-contact populations numbered around 500,000 in 1750 but dropped to less than 100,000 along the West Coast after contact.⁸⁷

⁸³ Press Release, National Agricultural Statistics Service. "Value of Washington's 2022 Agricultural Production Totaled a Record High of \$12.8 Billion," October 16, 2023.

⁸⁴ Choose Washington, A Bumper Crop of Opportunity, Washington State Department of Commerce.

⁸⁵ Rowe, Kara. Agriculture in Washington 1792-1900. Historylink.org 20523.

⁸⁶ Wright, Robin. Totem Poles, Heraldic Columns of the Northwest Coast. University of Washington, Digital Collections. 2002.

⁸⁷ Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, "Indians and Europeans on the Northwest Coast: Historical Context," accessed October 20th, 2024.

Early pioneers and settlers traded with West Coast tribes, and initially depended on them for survival. Native American tribes in the Seattle area raised a variety of crops, including herds of dogs, which they used for meat and dog hair fiber, often referred to as "chiengora." By the 1840s, settlers arrived, bringing crops such as hops, wheat, apples, potatoes and grapes, as well as sheep and cattle. Early settlers drained bogs near the coast and developed small, mixed farms with a variety of vegetable crops suited to a wet, rainy climate. Today, agriculture in Western Washington is predominantly labor-intensive, with crops such as beets, spinach, cabbage, hops, and raspberries, as well as dairies and nursery operations. Dairies contribute \$1.68 billion to Washington's gross agricultural revenue, and 92% of the nation's raspberries come from Western Washington. Eggs are also among the top 10 items by production volume, generating \$460 million in revenue in 2002, up 149% from 2021.

Agriculture in Eastern Washington

With roughly twice the land area and only one fifth of the state's population, the landscape of Eastern Washington is diverse, including the hills of the Palouse in the southeast corner of the state, dryland farming plains to the east, and the rocky coulees and highlands of the North Central region. Agriculture is dependent on its bodies of water, namely – the Columbia River which flows from British Columbia through Eastern Washington to the Pacific Ocean along the Oregon border. Smaller rivers like the Methow, Okanogan, Sanpoil, Entiat, Yakima and Pend Oreille Rivers all flow into the Columbia, creating a network of waterways and lakes that traditionally formed a bioregion of plants, animals and people, dependent on water.

Pioneers and settlers carved out subsistence farms along the waterways throughout Eastern Washington. In more mountainous regions, such as the highlands of Tonasket and Oroville, settlers grew gardens where they could and raised cattle or sheep. In warmer valleys like Wenatchee or Yakima, settlers planted apples, strawberries, wheat and hops. Dryland farming techniques developed during the 1870s opened up more land that had previously been considered unsuitable for farming. By 1900, much of the land between Bridgeport and Spokane had been converted to dryland wheat. Water remained the biggest issue for farmers. Early accounts from the Wenatchee World describe families watering hundreds of apple trees by hand, hauling water in shoulder yokes from the river. While the soil and climate conditions were perfect for orchards (and apples were a firmer fruit that could be transported easily without spoiling), irrigation was a serious problem.

Hydropower along the Columbia River

Beginning in the 1930s, the Bonneville Power Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Energy, led efforts to construct dams along the Columbia River.⁸⁸ Dams would enable hydroelectric power and clean energy, flood control and irrigation throughout Eastern Washington. Moreover, they would supply power to the western portion of the state. The first dam constructed on the Columbia was commissioned by the Puget Sound Power and Light Company, a private utility district, at Rock Island Dam, near Wenatchee. Construction at Grand Coulee and Chief Joseph in Bridgeport began in 1933 and was completed in 1941 and 1938, respectively. Today, 274 hydroelectric dams on the Columbia River supply over 55% of the electricity in the Northwest.

Today, the economy of Eastern Washington relies almost solely on agriculture, with 14.7 million acres of farmland, 33% of which are irrigated.⁸⁹ Irrigation was key to the development of the apple and fruit industries of Wenatchee, Chelan, Brewster and Bridgeport, as well as the Yakima Valley, Grant County and the wine regions around Walla Walla. The construction of the dams and the large reservoirs behind them enabled farmers to pump large volumes of water into otherwise unprofitable scrubland.⁹⁰ Fruit – and more recently wine – is a value-added crop, grossing

⁸⁸ Northwest Power and Conservation Council. Dams history and purpose.

⁸⁹ Columbia River History, Northwest Power and Conservation Council, "Northwest Power Act," accessed September 2023.

⁹⁰ Miller, Kurt. Why Hydropower is critical to the food supply, The Spokesman Review. Monday, September 5, 2022.

\$10.6 billion in 2017.⁹¹ Apples alone account for 16% (two billion dollars) of Washington's economy, followed by cherries (\$465 million), grapes (\$308 million) and pears (\$250 million).⁹² The largest-acreage crops, like wheat, hay, or corn, produce only \$500 to \$1,000 per acre, while apples and other tree fruit produce \$10,000 to \$15,000 per acre. Washington is now the second-largest wine producer in the U.S. with over 1,000 wineries.

Agricultural consolidation in Washington

While agriculture is second only to aerospace in terms of gross domestic output in Washington, many of its small farms are disappearing. According to the USDA, in 1997, there were 8,446 small farms (50-219 acres) in Washington, but by 2012, there were only 7,276. The apple industry has also experienced consolidation. In 2010, there were roughly 4,000 independent apple growers in Washington. By 2017, this number had shrunk to 1,450, a 63% decrease⁹³. For apples, reproductive yields vary widely depending on technologies like trellising and planting systems, which are costly and labor-intensive. Additionally, the startup costs for an orchard are prohibitively expensive, averaging between \$75,000 to \$1 million for a 50-to-100-acre orchard.⁹⁴ It takes anywhere from five to eight years to produce a crop. These factors, along with rising labor costs and increased costs for storage, packing, shipping, advertising and navigating new regulations, have led to massive consolidations in the industry. Today, there are 1,260 apple growers in Washington,⁹⁵ but the industry is dominated by only 8 large fruit companies⁹⁶. In Western Washington, similar trends have occurred in the dairy industry. In 1969, there were 337 dairies in Snohomish County alone; today, there are only 22.⁹⁷ Statewide, the number has fallen from 1,700 in 1996 to 330 in 2022.

Agriculture is also highly labor-intensive. Today, Washington brings in about 38,664 migrant farm workers a year.⁹⁸ Traditionally, these jobs were filled by domestic migrant workers who moved from state to state or county to county, following each harvest. Increasingly, however, growers have sought H-2A class workers to fill these positions. Between 2013 and 2022, the number of H-2A visas approved for Washington growers rose by 420%.⁹⁹ According to the most recent report from the Employment Security Department, the hourly wage for farm workers is \$19.82.¹⁰⁰ Changes in immigration allowances, housing shortages, and the COVID-19 pandemic have affected Washington's fruit industry, particularly the viability of smaller farms and orchards. In addition to raising the minimum wage, recent laws have changed overtime exemption for agricultural workers. In addition, recent employment law changes have led to a rising minimum wage and removed the overtime exemption for agricultural workers. Historically, agricultural work was exempt from Washington's state overtime laws. Starting in January 2022, that exemption expired, and agricultural employees now have the right to overtime pay at 1.5 times the hourly rate under the State Minimum Wage Act.

⁹¹ Rural Migration News, November 19, 2021.

⁹² Washington State Fruit Tree Association, "2024 Washington apple crop estimated at normal size," August 12, 2024.

⁹³ Francovich, Eli. In Washington's apple country, small and midsize farmers must adapt to changing economics, consumer tastes and technology. *The Spokesman Review*, June 4th, 2017.

⁹⁴ How to Start an Orchard, Truic. October 24, 2022.

⁹⁵ Kershner, Jim. Apple Farming in Washington. *History Link.org.*, September 6th, 2021.

⁹⁶ Top 100 Fruit Growers, Growing Produce, June 24, 2011.

⁹⁷ Allison, Jaqueline. A ride through Snohomish County's one-time dairy land. *HeraldNet*, Everett Washington, February 13, 2022.

⁹⁸ Cornfield, Jerry. "Farmers and growers seek leeway under new agricultural overtime law." *Washington State Standard*, November 30, 2023.

⁹⁹ Santran, et, al. "ESD Administration of the H-2A Temporary Worker Visa Program." *JLARC*, January, 2024.

¹⁰⁰ Employment Security Department/DATA, 2020 Agriculture Wage and Practices Employer Survey.

The development of agritourism in Washington

The combined trends of consolidation across Washington's agricultural industry, the development of labor-intensive crops such as apples and wine grapes and the continuing decline in gross agricultural income have prompted farmers to diversify their farm income through agritourism. The emergence of agritourism during the 1990s prompted the State to define agritourism in 2007. Today, Washington defines agritourism as:

[A]ny activity carried out on a farm or ranch whose primary business activity is agriculture or ranching and that allows members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment, or educational purposes, to view or enjoy rural activities including, but not limited to: Farming; ranching; historic, cultural, and on-site educational programs; recreational farming programs that may include on-site hospitality services; guided and self-guided tours; petting zoos; farm festivals; corn mazes; harvest-your-own operations; hayrides; barn parties; horseback riding; fishing; and camping.

Of the 35,793 farms in Washington, 4,875 farms offer direct sales or agritourism.¹⁰¹ An estimated 4,360 farms offer only direct sales, 342 only agritourism, and 143 offer both. In Washington, agritourism activities fit into five categories: direct sales, education, hospitality, outdoor recreation, and entertainment. While most farm operators are full owners (81.5%), almost half are female and the majority of owners are between 55 to 64 years old, see Table 4.7 listing the total number of Washington's direct sale farms, agritourism farms and farms that offer both agritourism and direct sales.

¹⁰¹ Schmidt, Claudia, Agritourism in Washington. Based on the 2017 Census of Agriculture.

Table 4.7. U.S. agriculture census data for Washington (2017)

Demographics	Direct Sale Farms (4,360)	Agritourism Farms (342)	Both Direct Sales and Agritourism (143)
Percentage of Full Owner	81.5%	68.7%	69.9%
Percentage of Female	47.1%	46.8%	53.4%
Percentage of farms more than 10 years old	60.7%	71.3%	64%
Less than 50 acres	82.5%	67%	68.5%
Top Products	Beef cattle, fruit and tree nut, vegetable and melon, diversified livestock	Diversified livestock, floriculture, beef cattle, diversified crops	Fruit and tree nuts, vegetable and melon, diversified livestock, diversified crops
Age (55 to 64)	28.2%	29.3%	25.9%
Make less than \$10,000	34%	23.8%	18.2%

While direct farm sales operations sell mostly beef cattle and fruit and tree nuts, agritourism farms produce a more diversified range of livestock and floriculture products. Roughly two-thirds of these farms are smaller than 50 acres, and one-third makes less than \$10,000 per year.

While the above data concerns agricultural production, a 2010 study by Washington State University Extension surveyed existing agritourism operators in the state, focusing on the characteristics of the farms and operators, the types of activities offered, and the motivations and challenges of operating their businesses. The report identified 292 farms that engaged in agritourism in 2010 and received 116 responses, for a 40% response rate. Ranch and farm tours were the most common activity (see Table 4.7), followed by farms that hosted special events. Seasonal activities included Christmas tree farms, roadside fruit and vegetable stands and pumpkin patches. While these activities were the most common, they were not considered the farm's primary activity. Overall, wine production and wine tasting were identified as the most common primary farm activities.

Agritourism operators are also relatively new to the industry. According to the WSU Extension Study, over a third of respondents had been in business for fewer than 10 years. Event-related activities like catering/events had been in business the longest, with 43 respondents stating they had been in business 11 to 20 years.

Regional agritourism activities

Not surprisingly, agritourism activities differ across Washington:

Agritourism by region in Washington

○ Northwest

- In the Northwest – including Whatcom, Snohomish, Skagit and San Juan counties – common agritourism activities include roadside fruit stands, Christmas trees, pumpkin patches, U-pick flowers and ranch and farm tours.

○ Puget Sound

- In the counties of Pierce, King and Mason, U-pick fruit and vegetable operations and bed-and-breakfasts are common.

○ Southeast

- In the Southeast – Whitman, Yakima, Walla Walla, Klickitat, Grant, Douglas, Chelan and Benton counties – agritourism centers on wine-related activities such as wine tours and wine tastings.

○ Northeast

- In the Northeast – Stevens, Spokane, Pend Oreille and Okanogan counties – agritourism features dairies, wine tasting, roadside stands and farm and ranch tours.

○ Pacific Cascade Range

- In the Pacific Cascade Range – Wahkiakum, Thurston, Skamania and Clark counties – agritourism includes wedding venues, pumpkin patches and bed-and-breakfasts.

Appendix D. Research methods and findings

Various data-gathering methods were used for this report, including stakeholder meetings, topic-specific focus groups, personal interviews with key stakeholders and policymakers, and qualitative and quantitative survey data collected from January through March of 2025. In total, we gathered information from over 200 individuals across 14 stakeholder meetings. In addition to stakeholder meetings, we held five focus groups on topics including farmers, alcohol sales, farm stays, county planners and tribal producers. We also met with the Pierce County Agritourism Board, Futurewise, and several county planners individually and in group meetings across the state. These meetings were held primarily via Zoom, with invitations sent out via e-blasts with partners including Commerce, Washington State Destination Marketing Organizations, Washington State Department of Agriculture, Eat Local First, and word of mouth. We also conducted one-on-one interviews with county planners, tourism leaders, farmers, ranchers and growers, the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB), the Washington State Department of Health (DOH), Eat Local First and the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).

To ensure that all regions were represented in this project, we set up Zoom meetings for each region of the state:

- Eastern Washington (Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Spokane)
- North Central Washington (Chelan, Douglas and Okanogan) Wine Country (Tri-Cities, Walla Walla and Yakima Valley)
- Northwest (Whatcom, Skagit, San Juan and Island counties)
- Southwest (Cowlitz, Clark, Lewis, Pacific, Skamania, and Wahkiakum) and Metro Puget Sound (Seattle, Tacoma, Everett, Bellevue and Kent)

In addition to the above meetings, our team sent out the Washington State Department of Commerce Agritourism Research Project Survey (ARPS), which asked stakeholders a set of questions designed and vetted by our research team, along with county and state officials.¹⁰² The ARPS contained seven qualitative questions, yielding a total of 466 responses. These responses, along with data from the stakeholder meetings, comprise 677 data points included in this study's results. The ARPS results are presented here, along with our relevant findings. Key issues and recommendations arising from the meetings and the survey will be discussed in the following section.

¹⁰² See [Appendix E](#) for a full stakeholder and focus group conclusions.

Commerce agritourism survey

Figure D.1. Agritourism survey respondent data

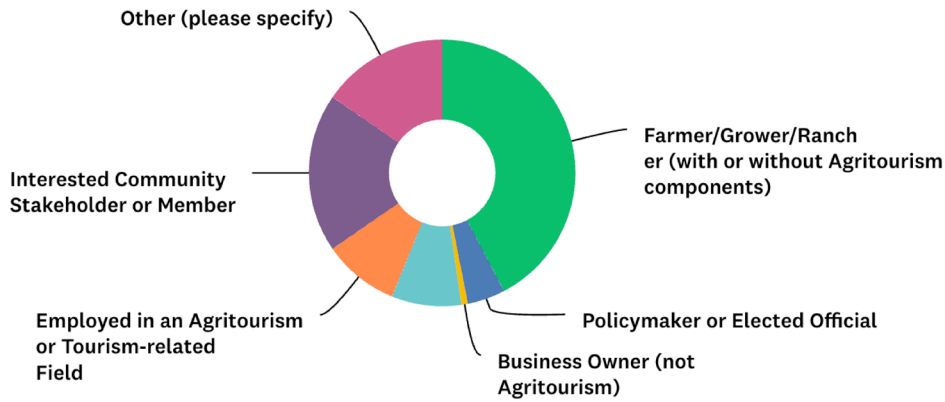


Figure D.1 shows survey data from 130 respondents, including policymakers, stakeholders, non-farmers, and active farmers/ranchers and growers. As such, it contained internal logic that directed respondents to a different set of questions based on how they answered section 1. Of the total respondents, farmers 44% (57 people), growers or ranchers 19% (26 people) and interested community members or stakeholders 9% (12 people), were employed in agritourism businesses, and another 9% (11 people) of respondents were business owners related to agritourism (for example, wineries, breweries, etc.).

Washington farm characteristics

Figure D.2. Farms by size

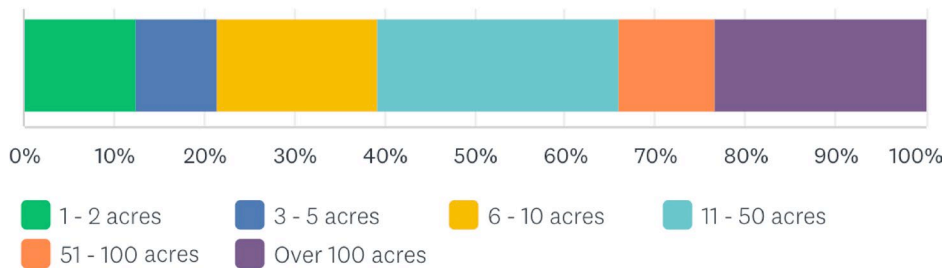


Figure D.2 shows farmers/growers/ranchers who responded to the survey; most were small operations. 27% (15 people) own farms between 11 to 50 acres, while 23% (13 people) own farms over 100 acres. Another 18% of respondents owned farms between 6 to 10 acres, 9% owned 3 to 5 acres and 12% owned 1 to 2 acres. In other words, 77% of the respondents owned farms of less than 100 acres.

The majority of farmers operate their farms year-round. Sixty-two percent (35 people) reported year-round operations, while 38% (21 people) reported seasonal business. Of these, 60% reported operating their farms for 9 to 12 months out of the year.

Income remained low for most Washington farmers. Almost half of the respondents reported gross income below \$40,000 a year, with 20% reporting income between \$10,000 to \$25,000 per year. Twelve percent (7 people) made over \$200,000, and another 5% made between \$150,000 and \$200,000 per year.

Interestingly, the majority of respondents did not participate in agritourism venues. Thirty-one percent of respondents reported no agritourism activity, and another 24% reported engaging in some agritourism activities but not charging for them. Six respondents reported that their agritourism business generated between \$2,000 to \$10,000 in annual income, and another 5% reported that their agritourism activity generated \$10,000 to \$25,000. Twelve percent (7 people) of respondents reported agritourism income exceeding \$150,000 annually. Perhaps not surprisingly, over half the respondents reported that they or their partner were employed elsewhere (54%), while 45% reported that their farm was their only source of income. Forty percent characterized their farm as their primary source of income, while 22% said it was a hobby or side business and 15% said it was a secondary, but significant part of their income. In the comments section for this question, respondents noted that they were trying to make it profitable but had not yet achieved it, or that they were in the process of growing the business to become their primary income. Some additional key findings:

- Most respondents said they were not currently involved in agritourism. According to the survey, 31% reported no agritourism activity, while 24% reported participating in agritourism but not charging for it.
- Six respondents said their agritourism business brought in between \$2,000 and \$10,000 a year. Another 5% reported earnings between \$10,000 and \$25,000 annually. Seven respondents, or 12%, said their agritourism income exceeded \$150,000 a year.
- More than half of respondents (54%) said they or their partner had jobs outside the farm. Meanwhile, 45% said the farm was their only source of income.
- When asked about how they viewed their farm financially, 40% said it was their primary income, 22% described it as a hobby or side business, and 15% said it was a secondary but important source of income.
- In open-ended comments, several respondents said they were working to make their agritourism efforts profitable or hoped to grow the business into their main source of income.
- Most respondents had been farming for over 8 years. This suggests that while agritourism has been regarded as bringing new people into farming, the average age of farmers has declined significantly over the past two decades – farms in Washington have yet to attract new or non-farmers into the business. Only 14% (8 people) had been farming for between 1 to 3 years, and another 29% had been farming for 4 to 7 years.
- Almost 40% of farmers did not have employees, while 43% (25 people) employed between 1 to 5 employees. 12% of respondents employed between 6 to 20 employees and only 1 respondent reported more than 50 employees.

Types of farms and products

While total products ranged from fresh produce, tree fruit and orchards, to dairy, meat, grains and berries, nearly half the respondents reported growing tree fruit and/or orchard products (46%). Another 45% grew flowers and plants, and 35% grew fresh produce, followed by berries (33%). In the “other” section, respondents reported growing hay, producing honey and eggs. Additionally, 13 respondents (22%) reported producing meat or dairy products, and 29 respondents grew nursery trees, trees and herbs.

The majority of these farms (75%) sold their products directly from their farm, and another 10% reported selling products at a nearby farmstand. Also, 15% sold at farmers markets and 38% are sold to local restaurants or grocery stores. A total of 34% reported online retail sales, and 13% sold to a community supported agriculture (CSA) operation.

Of the farmer/ranchers/growers who responded to the survey, 53% engaged in event tourism. The majority of these events, 62%, were weddings and concerts, and 56% were workshops and classes. Moreover, 28% offered retreats, and 22% offered farm-to-table dinners. The “other” category in this section contained comments like pumpkin patches, farm tours, mazes, hayrides and generally other forms of “agritainment” enterprises.

Almost one-third of these respondents offered fewer than five events per year. Of those who offered more, 28% offered 6 to 15 events per year, and only 10% offered more than 30 events per year.

A similar question asked respondents, “If you are doing agritourism, what types of experiences/products do you offer?” Respondents were asked to select all that applied, including farm tours, workshops and education, farm-stays, pick your own produce, farm-to-table dining, animal interactions/petting zoo, horseback riding, and hunting or guiding on your land. Of these activities, 84% were farm tours, 65% were workshops and educational activities, 29% were animal interactions, and 32% were U-pick produce. In the comment section for this question, respondents listed school activities, flower arranging, nonprofit events, pumpkin patches and cider tastings.

The majority of these respondents used social media for advertising and marketing purposes as well as word of mouth (86%). Seventy-seven percent maintained a website for their venues, and 42% engaged in email marketing, while only 20% engaged in print marketing. However, 42% of these respondents said their events were “moderately successful”, while 18% reported “very successful.” Additionally, 16% remained neutral, and 20% reported that their events were only slightly successful or moderately unsuccessful.

Overall, respondents were lukewarm about their agritourism businesses. When asked how they would rate the overall success of their business, only 28% of respondents said, “very successful,” 15% said moderately successful and 15% said moderately to very unsuccessful. Thirty-five percent reported that the question did not apply.

Attitudes on agritourism and agriculture

To get a feel for the kinds of activities people associated with agritourism and which ones people did not, the report asked respondents to rate on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 was “not at all agritourism” and 5 was “absolutely agritourism”) the kinds of activities most associated with agritourism – 108 respondents answered this question. The activities most strongly associated with agritourism were touring a farm (83%), touring an apiary (80%), corn mazes/pumpkin patches and hayrides (78%), and farm-to-table dinners (71%). Farm stands, U-pick produce, petting zoos, cooking classes and wine tours received slightly fewer affirmations with responses ranging from 60% to 69% “absolutely agritourism.” Overnight farm-stays and overnight vineyard-stays received fewer responses (57% and 51% respectively), while horseback riding and concerts both garnered 44%. Weddings in barns received 33% and going to farmers markets received a 37% response rate. Wine tasting in a retail storefront, hunting on private land, and going to a farmers market received the least positive responses, with 19% and 17%, respectively. Overall, the activities most strongly associated with agritourism were those that took place on a farm and involved farming itself.

To better understand the nuances of on-the-ground definitions of agritourism, we then asked respondents to provide examples of agritourism and any enterprises that were controversial in their communities. The results were diverse, including activities like U-pick fruit farms, tulip farms, farmers markets, corn mazes, pumpkin patches, nurseries, dairies with cheesemaking classes, farm stays, farm stands, flower gardens, wineries, breweries, wedding venues, cideries, horseback riding venues, Christmas tree farms, petting zoos, dude ranches, pig racing, trout fishing, and ice skating venues.

Controversial agritourism enterprises are mostly centered on event tourism, particularly weddings and concerts that sell alcohol and attract large crowds. Altogether, comments about the problem of events and wedding venues occurred 37 times throughout the survey. Respondents described:

- “Event centers that allow events to go beyond 10 p.m., permit the serving of alcohol and since pot is legal, people are consuming/using both and [leads] to drunk and high driving...”
- “Weddings in barns. Barns are constructed to store livestock and feed, not host events. Barns lack fire protection, emergency doors, permitted lighting and adequate bathrooms. Port-a-potties are often used to get around health codes, but it is incredibly hard to hike a wedding dress up inside a [portable toilet].”
- “Everyone hates wedding venues, but we couldn’t run our farm without it. Our one-acre venue allows us to worry less about farm revenue and lets us focus on the quality of the crop we’re producing on the other 20 acres.”

Other controversial agritourism examples included bulb farms that did not grow bulbs but displayed gardens that charged admission and contributed to traffic congestion. Petting zoos and horseback riding operations were also mentioned in conjunction with issues of animal cruelty, as well as events with alcohol sales and noise complaints.

A final question regarding definitions of farming in the ARPS asked participants, “For our state, what do you think makes a farm, a farm (or orchard, ranch, dairy, etc.)?” This question was added to target the multiple, sometimes contentious ideas about what constitutes agriculture. Some people drew a line between hobby gardeners and food producers – saying that hobby gardeners weren’t farmers, while anyone who sold food was. Others said any farm that grew agricultural products counted, no matter how much money it made. Comments included:

- “Producing and selling agricultural products.”
- “Anything that is grown for enjoyment or consumption outside that serves the community as opposed to personal use.”
- “Growing a consumable product or having the potential to. Once land is converted away from farmland (development), it cannot be converted back.”
- “Definition of farm – Selling an ag product or farm experience FOR PROFIT. Profitability is what separates a gardener from a farmer.”
- “Contributing to the local and regional food system in any way.”
- “Farms are where food is actually grown, contributing to the food security and health of the land and the community it feeds.”
- “If they comply with the IRS regulations on declared income. There is a difference between a hobby farm/garden and commercial agriculture in the IRS definitions, this should be adopted at State and County levels. If a hobby farm/garden wants to do agritourism, that is fine. If a commercial farm wants to do agritourism that is fine too, but there should be specifics tied to each designation and proper sales tax and B&O tax should apply.”
- “All of these should be defined as a piece of property or operational impact that revenue is greater than associated costs of operation. These terms should be reserved for real WORKING operations and not token agriculture influences residences.”

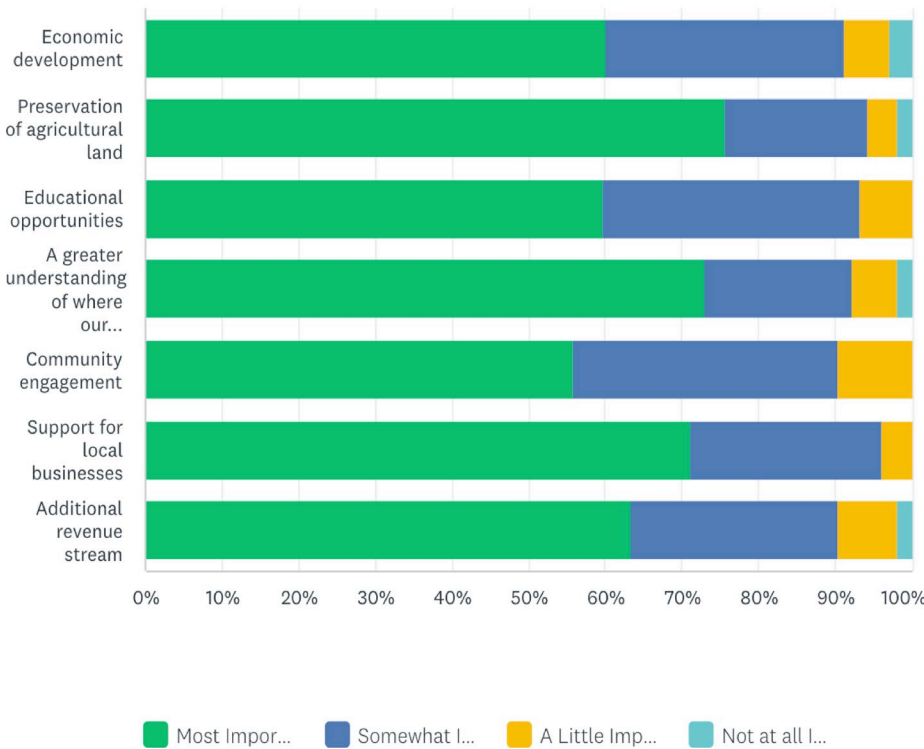
As these quotes illustrate, most respondents felt the need to differentiate between hobby farms, investment properties and working farms or operations that produce food for commercial purposes.

Interestingly, several responses included some notion of family, the farmer or the community. For example, one respondent wrote:

- “A farm wouldn’t be a farm without the family running it. I’ve found the farm becomes a gathering point for friends and family. Even those that are not involved in the farm.”
- Another respondent noted,
- “From a literal standpoint, the primary use of the land is used for growing/farming and or processing of farm-grown items. From a holistic standpoint, for many farms mean deep roots and ties within the community.”
- Other comments included:
- “Family and community.”
- “Getting the community outside, to experience nature.”
- “When it is a family run business.”
- “I would hope they are small family-sized operations. Unfortunately, corporate farms, ranches and orchards are taking over.”
- “More family farm operations that are not strictly commercial.”

The issue of emphasizing locally owned or family farms came up nine times across 88 comments, while comments emphasizing that land should be used to produce food for the community's welfare came up eight times.

Figure D.3. Benefits of agritourism by importance



Perceived benefits of agritourism and preservation of agricultural lands

Respondents were then asked to rank the benefits of agritourism from “most important,” “somewhat important,” “a little important” or “not at all important.” The benefit list included: economic development, the preservation of agricultural land, educational opportunities, understanding of where our food comes from, community engagement,

support for local businesses and additional revenue streams. By and large, the preservation of agricultural land was seen as the most important benefit, with 76% of respondents ranking it as such. The second highest benefit was “a greater understanding of where our food comes from” (73%), followed by support for local businesses (71%), additional revenue streams (66%), economic development (60%), educational opportunities (59%) and community engagement (55%). Clearly, respondents felt that the biggest benefit of agritourism was the preservation of agricultural land and instilling a greater understanding of where our food comes from. Supporting local businesses was also deemed a significant benefit, while economic development and additional revenue streams were of less importance.

A follow-up question asked, “Please identify what is most important to least important regarding preservation of agricultural lands?” Respondents were asked to rate the following from most important to least important: to maintain our rural character and scenic beauty, to help keep farmland, ranches and orchards from disappearing, to help with food security, to ensure that we have local, fresh produce and fruits (and/or meat, grains, dairy, etc.) available for our community, and for carbon sequestration to help the environment. Out of 104 responses, an overwhelming 93% (97 people) felt that keeping farmland, ranches and orchards from disappearing was the most important issue in preserving agricultural lands, followed by ensuring that fresh produce is available in our community (84%). Seventy-eight percent of respondents felt that food security was the most important aspect of preservation, followed by maintaining rural character and scenic beauty (55%) and carbon sequestration (44%).

Out of all the survey questions, these two elicited the strongest, most cohesive results, with the majority of people agreeing on the most and least important. The following questions addressed potential challenges of agritourism and were more evenly distributed across the issues.

Perceived challenges to agritourism in your community and understanding compliance laws

Respondents were asked to identify the perceived challenges of agritourism in their communities from “most concerning,” “somewhat concerning,” “a little concerning,” to “not at all concerning.” The challenges included: traffic congestion, noise pollution, environmental impacts, zoning conflicts, safety concerns, and land not being actually used for farming/agriculture. Out of 104 responses, a slight majority (42%) rated that land not being used for farming was the most concerning, followed by zoning conflicts (40%), environmental impacts (18%), safety concerns and traffic congestion (both 14%) and noise pollution (12%). Among the challenges to agritourism, authenticity of farming operations and zoning conflicts emerged as the most concerning to respondents, while noise pollution, traffic and safety concerns were less concerning.

A follow-up question asked respondents to rate the following issues on a scale of difficulty (from not at all difficult, somewhat, moderately, quite, and incredibly difficult): understanding state regulations, understanding county regulations, complying with state regulations, complying with county regulations, land use and zoning laws and liability issues, which include insurance availability and cost. Like the perceived challenges to agritourism, this question received a moderate spread of rankings, with the most difficult issue being liability, including insurance availability and cost (30%). The second most difficult issue was land use and zoning laws (24%), followed by complying with county regulations (21%) and understanding county regulations (19%). Understanding and complying with state regulations received the fewest points with 12% and 13%, respectively.

Support and resources to improve agritourism

All survey participants were asked several qualitative questions, such as: “What support or resources might help improve agritourism in your community?” and “Do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding

policies for agritourism in Washington?" These two questions generated a total of 288 responses that were coded for keywords, ideas or issues and include the following categories: the need for legislation and policy reform at the county and state level, pros and cons for the larger community, the need for marketing and grants, preservation of farmland and small farmers and insurance and liability concerns.

County/state level policy: Regulations and definitions

Of the 288 responses to these questions, 84 (30%) addressed the need to reduce and reform county regulations regarding agritourism. Comments generally fell into two main categories: reducing county regulations (58 times) and clarifying county guidelines (26 times). Specifically, respondents mentioned the onerous tasks of complying with regulations they didn't understand, the frustration of dealing with multiple agencies, and the expense of complying with ADA, fire, building, water, sanitation and other codes. Comments included:

- "Reduce restrictions on very small producers."
- "The removal of harsh, illogical and obstructive county codes."
- "Less government paperwork and mandates."
- "Allow farmer families to diversify their land use in common-sense ways without having to jump through unclear zoning codes and ordinances."
- "Less regulation."
- "More relaxed building code regulations for seasonal agritourism businesses and buildings."
- "Local county ordinances regarding agritourism are clunky, cumbersome and make adding or expanding agritourism unattractive."

Another respondent wrote:

- "Do not overregulate this fledgling industry. Address problems as they arise. Some areas of the state no longer have any available markets or processors. Agritourism will give these areas an opportunity to preserve the land from development."
- Another respondent expressed frustration at being a small farmer without the means to implement the commercial restrictions required by the county.
- "My farm is small, I typically have less than 13 people at my events. I think it's important to remember small scale farmers that are just eking out a living – don't create so many regulations that they won't be able to stay in business."
- While the majority of respondents expressed the need for less regulations at the county level, a concurrent theme was the need for a clear definition of agritourism at the state and county levels. Comments included:
- "Allow the broadest definition of agriculture to exist at the state level and let local counties pare it down if desired."
- "Create a [S]tate definition that includes examples so that there is no ambiguity."
- "We need less subjective nuance and a more clear path forward for farmers that want to diversify their revenue streams with agrotourism."

Another respondent commented:

- "Agritourism is a very contentious issue in Skagit County....They got off with a bad start by not having a good definition of what agritourism was in the first place. All the surveys they put out never asked for a definition of agritourism....You HAVE to have a good definition of what agritourism is for Washington state!!!! My advice, use something very close to the USDA definition."

Pros and cons for the larger community

The second theme that emerged concerned the larger community, with 61 comments (21%). One set of comments (29) discussed the potential for agritourism to have positive impacts on the community, including creating food networks, promoting regenerative agriculture, and educating about where our food is sourced. The second set of comments (32) highlighted some negative impacts of agritourism. These comments were slightly higher than the positive comments (32 of the total remarks) and included fears about noise impacts, traffic congestion, serving alcohol at special events and the overall impact of event tourism – particularly weddings.

Comments on the potential for agritourism included things like:

- “Living in a rural area but not on a farm, I appreciate the opportunity to have easy, direct-to-consumer, access to the resources around me. Why buy apples or eggs at the store if I can easily buy them from my neighbors? I appreciate an easy way to do that; I don't want to have to hunt down people who sell these goods. I want it to be easy for them to create a place or experience for me as a local as well as for tourists.”
- “The purpose of agritourism is to ensure food, fiber and seed production and distribution on Ag NRL zoned lands, to educate the public about food security and where food comes from and to conserve agricultural soils for future generations.”
- “I think bringing people closer to the land promotes ecosystem health, knowledge of resources and an appreciation of the process of farming/ranching/growing food sources.”
- “Consumer awareness of where and how to access our local farms and structural admin support for our farmers to more easily serve the public.”
- “Agritourism will be more successful in our community if it is coordinated among different farms and ranches, rather than each farm or ranch pursuing their own independent enterprise. For instance, if there is a food and farm trail, there must be multiple participating farms along the trail. If there is a farm-to-table dinner, it should highlight products from multiple farms.”
- “A shift in outlook from rushing to the grocery store for convenience, to slowing down and enjoying your life and the resources the earth provides us. This might be impossible to achieve, but I think this is at least becoming something that is more important to younger generations.”
- “Food resiliency, local foodshed, nutrition value, and agritourism is a keystone to supporting the public and the environmental health of our state. I would really like to see this become as important for funding opportunities as salmon recovery.”

Overall, remarks in this category were largely positive, focusing on what agritourism could contribute to the community through education, alliances and food networks. They also expressed the need for better collaboration among farmers to help agritourism become a larger network with greater impact on the community. Within these comments, the need for a community advocate emerged, with several comments like:

- “We need advocacy, someone to engage with our county to help shape county regulations to be more Farm and Agritourism friendly.”
- “Having capacity within or outside of the agricultural business to coordinate and host agritourism.”
- “Special support programs – creating opportunities within communities where it makes sense and conducting outreach so folks are aware.”
- “Extension service...”
- “We need an ombudsman to help farmers deal with the government, and we need a cooperative retainer with a law firm to help defend farmers from overzealous government officials.”

The idea of local extension offices, or a community liaison to help with regulation was concurrent with the potential that agritourism had for the larger good.

The other set of remarks about communities focused on the negative impacts of agritourism. Comments included:

- “We need noise ordinances of hosted events.”
- “Adverse impacts to nearby property.”
- “Traffic congestion.”
- “Controversial issues are rustic camping spots, concerts, events.”
- “Concerts are not appropriate on working farms.”
- “Challenges with impact to neighboring property owners who are not involved in agriculture.”
- “The biggest controversial issues are noise levels, traffic congestion and associated pollution to it, participation that includes serving alcohol which has created unsafe situations between the guests and local neighbors when guests start wandering around on to the wrong property.”
- “More specific noise regulations, please!”
- “Maybe parking or noise levels (music/concerts).”

Negative impacts also included specific comments regarding wedding venues and alcohol sales.

- “Weddings in barns. Barns are constructed to store livestock and feed, not host events. Barns lack fire protection, emergency doors, permitted lighting and adequate bathrooms. [Portable toilets] are often used to get around health codes, but it is incredibly hard to hike a wedding dress up inside a [portable toilet].”
- “Unpermitted wedding and event venues, people trying to open rural wine bars or restaurants on agricultural land.”
- “People selling pumpkins brought in from other areas and then calling it a pumpkin patch. Or fancy barns that are only ever used as wedding venues (not animals, or equipment or anything to do with farming). That’s not a farm, it’s a wedding venue.”
- “Wedding venue on a small acreage near my farm. Loud noise on weekend evenings and nights during the summer.”
- “Wedding venues and concert venues should not be allowed on lands zoned for agriculture.”

Overall, comments about the larger community ranged from big-idea remarks to specific issues that need attention.

Marketing and grants

The fourth issue that arose in the qualitative comments concerned marketing and grants. Many respondents expressed the need for help with marketing to attract people. As one respondent said,

- “Marketing! Need help reaching the millions of tourists that pass by on their way to Mt. Rainier, Mt. Adams and White Pass!!!!”
- Other quotes included:
- “Street signage could improve foot traffic. Promoting farms and touristy experiences across social media is helpful.”
- “Marketing for small farms. Some larger groups that highlight local small-scale Agritourism.”
- “More Local-Farm Stores along our major highways and consumer awareness, like a map of On-Farm retail outlets.”

In a similar vein, another respondent suggested using marketing dollars to help put on agritourism events in their communities, and several respondents noted that business classes and cashier programs would be helpful. As one respondent said,

- “We need courses in high school and college to educate on farming skills and business management of farms.”

People also expressed the need for grants, tax subsidies, tax incentives and a cost-share program to help with permitting fees and regulations. Below are remarks from two individuals:

- “Since Covid, we have been struggling with profitability. Establishing the utility infrastructure to run our ag tourism business required an enormous amount of investment, and we carry a large debt load. Any and all relevant grants have been incredibly useful to help us manage infrastructure costs. After being in business for 15 years, we are now going to start having to invest in building improvements and are worried about how to manage those expenses.”
- “Funding support for the little guys would be very helpful. There are USDA grants and NRCS grants for people in Ag-zoned areas with years of demonstrated production and tax-documented revenue. But there are more little guys trying to contribute to the food security of their own neighborhoods. Food is more nutritious the closer you eat it to its harvest and origin. This also lowers our carbon footprint by eliminating packaging and transportation. Buying direct from the producer cuts out the middleman and reduces costs to consumers. And many small and backyard farmers are using regenerative, sustainable, and permaculture practices instead of industrial farming.”

Other comments included:

- “More access and assistance with grants, more assistance and guidance to stay in compliance with regulations.”
- “Funding, value-added product infrastructure, farm business planning resources, agriculture technology/equipment access.”
- “More access and assistance with grants, more assistance and guidance to stay in compliance with regulations.”
- “Grant, lower property tax, lower utilities.”
- “A shared website and marketing materials. A shared events calendar. Help with loans. Shared equipment like a commercial kitchen, processing equipment, refrigeration.”
- “Tax incentives, greater financial, educational, and business development resources to support current and future farmers.”

Overall, the need for financial support or incentives came up 27 times, representing 9% of the total comments.

Farmland preservation: Development issues versus small farmers

The third-largest theme to emerge from the ARPS was the need to preserve small farms and farmers. Overall, 40 comments (14%) of the issues identified in the qualitative analysis concerned preserving small-scale agriculture. Most comments were concerned with larger agricultural conglomerates taking over small farms, the threat of housing and other big developments, and the over-regulation of agritourism, which contributed to the problem rather than alleviating it. As one respondent noted:

- “Small farms are at a large disadvantage to staying economically viable. Recently a large bulb farm in Lewis County was sold because the owners' kids didn't want to farm because it doesn't make any money.”
- Another respondent said:
- “Over the years, the focus has been on conservation of farmland. This has now been supported by regulations and zoning changes that have greatly limited the ability to run a profitable farming operation in many cases. Further, these regulations and zoning changes have been done without compensation to the landowners. As a result, rural landowners are locked into an extremely limited range of options for the use and ultimate sale of their properties. This must change or we will continue to suffer a loss of farming operations at the alarming rate of two per day in Washington state.”

Other comments included:

- “Change tax policies which currently allows developers to not get exemptions to state and local taxes. Increase tax exemptions for non corporate owned farms, orchards, ranches.”
- “Transfer subsidies from Big Ag to the small farmer who struggles to make a living.”
- “I see it as a way to keep farmlands available for farming.”
- “The development community has the money and incredible tax write offs to destroy once profitable farms, orchards, and ranches.”
- “As demand for housing grows, small family farms are at risk of being swallowed up for development, and once they're gone they will be gone forever. We must protect our agricultural heritage at all costs and look at underutilized commercial spaces for housing instead.”
- “As a State and as a county, we have been focused on "Saving the land" for years, but in doing so we have done a serious disservice that has had a critically negative impact on the landowner and specifically the Farmer! This must change our farming operations as we know them will continue to be lost.”
- “Local farmers should be being supported instead of challenged when diversifying their land in order to keep it in their families for generations. Businesses and their branding voice and how it correlates to farming should be considered with decision makers within counties.”
- “The farmers [or] landowners need to realize enough profit from farming to keep them from selling agricultural lands for profit.”

Liability, insurance and an uncooperative community

The final issue that came up in the qualitative comments concerned liability concerns, insurance premiums and antagonistic neighbors. These comments came up 24 times, or 8% of the total responses. As one respondent noted:

- “We're cautious about partaking in agritourism and bringing people to our ranch with so many regulations and policies. We could not financially last a lawsuit.”
- Another said: “Infrastructure updates we can't afford, liability insurance.”

- Yet another wrote: “Liability insurance is cost prohibitive. We currently invite guests for farm tours, but do not charge out of liability concerns. We rent out an RV site through HipCamp because they offer full coverage insurance for all stays booked through their site.”

Other comments included:

- “We have not started charging for agritourism. We need support in formalizing our program, someone to handle scheduling and advertising, and resources to understand the logistics of liability, regulations, etc.”
- “More affordable (and more options) for liability insurance.”
- “Insurance for allowing customers on site is high, especially around farm animals and around equipment.”
- Along with the high cost and uncertainty around liability issues, respondents also expressed fear and concern about hostile neighbors. As one respondent said:
- “Fearful neighbors and community members are a big deterrent of agritourism operations, and the county heavily relies on community input to make decisions. The community needs to have a more optimistic outlook on tourism in order to keep our business afloat. Possibly, general public meetings promoting agritourism in our town would start to ease the tension, but the whole process of putting your farm out there and asking for support is even intimidating in this town. Not to mention the process for applying for a permit for value-added operations is very difficult, is a gamble, and opens up your business to serious scrutiny. But the value-added operations are necessary to bring in more revenue and keep businesses running.”
- “There is always going to be the neighbor that is not cooperative with anyone or anything and they delight in making things miserable.”

Comments in this category also included improving infrastructure for agricultural products and reducing property taxes and utilities for small farm operations. Several respondents suggested reducing permit fees or offering exemptions for utilities, while others proposed grants to offset property taxes and utility costs. These comments constituted 10% of the total responses. Individual suggestions included:

- “We’d love to see incentives for climate-friendly travel.”
- “Facilities that can handle growth; upgrades.”
- “Grants for permit fees. Cost share programs similar to organic certification cost share programs we participate in would be helpful.”
- “Grant, lower property tax, lower utilities.”
- “Would love to see this become a grant-funded opportunity supported through the CDs. One example would be for marketing [or]digital infrastructure support.”
- “Since Covid, we have been struggling with profitability. Establishing the utility infrastructure to run our [agritourism] business required an enormous amount of investment, and we carry a large debt load. Any and all relevant grants have been incredibly useful to help us manage infrastructure costs. After being in business for 15 years, we are now going to start having to invest in building improvements and are worried about how to manage those expenses.”

Overall, the qualitative comments in the ARPS illustrated the need for policy reform and clarification, respondents' positive and negative experiences with agritourism, including what it could contribute to communities, and the need for help with marketing, grants and infrastructure to support small-scale agritourism.

Appendix E. Stakeholder meetings and focus groups

In addition to the ARPS, our team held a series of seven regional listening sessions in each state region. To generate discussion, we asked general questions such as, "What are the challenges and benefits to agritourism in your communities?" "What would make it easier for you to implement agritourism venues?" and "What do you think of the Washington state definition for agritourism?" We also held a series of focus groups on the Growth Management Act, nightly rentals, farm stays, wedding venues and alcohol sales, as well as indigenous agritourism, agritourism policy for planners, and agritourism policy for farmers. Finally, we interviewed 32 policymakers and planners across Washington to better understand the issues associated with agritourism and how they were being implemented at the state and county levels. Altogether, our listening sessions, focus groups and individual interviews gathered feedback from 243 people across the state. Themes that arose out of these meetings include: the lack of a clear definition for agricultural land and agritourism enterprises, the need for policies at the state and county levels, state support for marketing, emerging legal issues stemming from the Growth Management Act, along with the recent ruling by the Supreme Court and the increase of speculators rather than farmers engaging in agritourism. The comments and issues discussed during our focus groups, listening sessions and interviews fell into these main categories.

Definitions for agricultural land and agritourism

The overriding issue that repeatedly arose during stakeholder meetings and listening sessions was the lack of clear definitions of what constitutes agricultural land and agritourism at the state and county levels. Currently, the only definition for agricultural land is described under the Revised Code of Washington, [RCW 84.34](#), which addresses land within the Open Space Designations for tax purposes.¹⁰³ RCW 84.34 outlines certain requirements for agricultural land, for example, that it be 20 acres or more and devoted to the primary purpose of livestock or agricultural commodities. RCW 84.34 also requires that lots between five and 20 acres, and those less than five acres, may be considered agricultural if they are used primarily for agricultural purposes and produce at least \$200 per acre for three consecutive years. Parcels that are used for agriculture but are not contiguous to a farm may be considered agricultural if they are used primarily for agriculture. Land that meets these requirements is eligible for up to a 50% property tax exemption in most Washington counties.

Stakeholders and respondents noted that RCW 84.34 does not include land left fallow for regenerative agriculture. Farming the same piece of land year after year is not sustainable, and farming for three consecutive years may not be in the best interest of the land. Furthermore, RCW 84.34 does not include language about the preservation of farmland or farming itself, a point that many stakeholders saw as problematic for the future of farming in Washington. Respondents noted that, without a clear definition of agriculture that included preservation, different agencies were not on the same page when it came to enforcing legislation, creating policy or engaging with other agencies. For example, planning departments concerned with land-use issues are not tasked with preservation. Health departments are responsible for ensuring safe access to drinking water and sanitation, but not for helping small agritourism operators. In general, the lack of a clear, unifying definition of agricultural land at the state level, along with a mandate to preserve it, was seen as one of the primary problems with agritourism in Washington.

Respondents also expressed the need for clear definitions of agritourism at the state and county levels. Specifically, respondents expressed a need for a definition of agritourism that clearly distinguishes farming as the primary use and tourism as a secondary or accessory use. Respondents said things like, "Farmers need to show proof of farming to get engaged," and "Agritourism should be about true heritage activities, not bouncy houses and concerts." While people noted that agritourism was necessary to keep the next generation involved in agriculture

¹⁰³ Washington State Legislature, Revised Code of Washington, RCW § [84.34](#)

and that there was often more money in agritourism venues than in agriculture, the majority of respondents expressed the need for the state to provide a clear definition of agricultural land and agritourism.

Policy alignment at the state- and county-level

Without clear definitions, stakeholders reported that farmers launched agritourism operations only to find, after spending hard-earned money, that their operations were illegal or not up to code. One farmer, for example, spent all of her savings on a commercial bakery for her property, only to learn that a bakery did not constitute accessory use and was not permitted on agriculturally designated land. Again and again, stakeholders expressed confusion about the rules for activities such as cooking classes, jam-making enterprises, breweries, and wedding venues. Specific questions included: How many people were allowed per event? When did you need permits and for what? When did you need group water systems, ADA-compliant bathrooms, fire suppression and so on? On the other hand, some respondents noted that there weren't enough regulations. In Yakima County, for example, retirees were buying farms for supplemental income and opening ad hoc wineries. As one respondent noted:

- “No one wants the wine (they were going to make it in a 5-gallon bucket), but they want to do tastings and sell t-shirts.”

Respondents were frustrated by the lack of coordination between county and state officials and by the confusion over what is and is not allowed in agricultural areas. For their part, county officials noted the lack of funding and the state's recommendations on regulating agritourism operations.

A similar concern was raised regarding existing policies, such as ADA bathrooms or the commercial use of kitchens. For some small operators, the scale of health policies or building codes for commercial buildings made it too burdensome or too expensive, either halting small business plans or requiring them to build larger or more expensive facilities than they wanted. As one respondent said,

- “A small family farm has to go big or go home. We just wanted a small operation, but ended up building something much bigger with more impact than we even wanted.”
- Another respondent whose farm stand was larger than 12-by-12 feet, reported that [they] were required to comply with energy codes costing over \$200,000. These included solar panels and an EV charging station — for a farm stand.
- “This shouldn't be necessary for an agricultural building,” they said.

Another concern among respondents was the rising cost of zoning permits. In Walla Walla County, for example, permits rose from a few hundred dollars to about \$12,000 for a zoning change, according to one landowner. Respondents expressed that each county was diverse and what happened in one county was different from another. In Walla Walla, wineries and orchards have driven up the cost of permits, zoning and infrastructure, but poorer counties have yet to reach the same thresholds as the wine country in Walla Walla and Yakima. As Patrice from King County Agricultural Policy and Economic Development noted, “All counties are not the same; they have different capacities to create good policy.” Another respondent remarked:

- “Bear in mind most counties can't afford to do huge amounts of work on defining and regulating agritourism, but also remember some counties — King, Skagit [and] Snohomish — have gone to great expense and time to do the right thing.”

The general consensus from respondents in stakeholder meetings and focus groups was that the State should provide clear, concise definitions of agricultural land and agritourism as an industry, along with guidelines that counties could interpret and expand upon. Respondents stated that while counties lack the funding and support to write or implement policy, they are often tasked with interpreting it after the fact. Definitions and policy implementation should come from the state, with county control over regional zoning, policy enforcement and

interpretation. Several interviewees suggested that Commerce should create a ‘model ordinance’ to help guide counties as they pursue their own paths.

State support for marketing

The third issue that emerged in the stakeholder meetings and focus groups was the need for state-supported marketing that would create long-term value for regions and counties with distinctive, authentic crops. Several respondents mentioned trends in Europe, such as the Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) system and the need to create regional brands grounded in authenticity and place-based meanings. As discussed earlier in this report, legislation in Europe has included PDO (protected designation of origin) and TSG (traditional specialties guaranteed) schemes for decades. These designations ensure that agricultural products and their labels remain tied to the region in which they are produced. For example, Gorgonzola cheese in Italy or Champagne and Cognac in France. In Washington, Walla Walla wines would have to be grown and produced in Walla Walla, Skagit Valley strawberry and blueberry products, or Yakima Valley hops would have to come from their respective regions. These designations would protect against knock-off brands and/or mediocre-quality crops that use the same name or label. Ultimately, designations to protect crops and regional identity would create long-term value, increase agricultural production and enhance authenticity. Policymakers recommended providing guidance on “best practices” for on-farm or in-county production and retail of signature crops, as well as stipulations on using signature ingredients for locally grown products, such as blueberry jam rather than guava jam. Washington Grown, for example, could be a long-term AOC designation that would protect Washington crops, their brands, and ultimately, farmland.

In addition to state-supported designations, respondents expressed the need for state-supported strategies for small farmers that would increase visibility and viability. State of Washington Tourism, for example, could create a comprehensive marketing initiative to promote agritourism to a national and international visitor audience. Eat Local First, a Washington nonprofit that promotes the production and sale of local food, has recently launched an online mapping tool for farmers, growers, producers, and agritourism operators that offers free listings, which could be promoted to boost farmers’ visibility. Finally, a “State of Washington Grown” brand could be pursued, ideally in collaboration with State of Washington Tourism, the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and the 21 state agricultural commissions (including Washington Wine), to create a distinct AOC designation or brand strategy for a State of Washington Grown designation.

Emerging legal issues

Central to the stakeholder meetings and focus groups were discussions about the Washington State Growth Management Act and the recent ruling by the Washington State Supreme Court prohibiting the sale of food products not grown on-site at breweries and wineries.

To ensure compliance with the GMA, Commerce provides guidance and oversight with a growth management hearing board. Last fall, the nonprofit, Futurewise, petitioned the Supreme Court to stop violations of the GMA through the ‘urban sprawl’ of businesses opening in agricultural zones in King County.

On September 19, 2024, the Washington State Supreme Court issued a significant ruling in *King County v. Friends of Sammamish Valley*, invalidating portions of King County's Adult Beverage Ordinance 19030. The Court determined that the ordinance violated both the Growth Management Act and the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), setting a precedent for land-use planning and environmental review across Washington.

Ordinance 19030, enacted in 2019, aimed to expand business opportunities for wineries, breweries, and distilleries (WBDs) in King County's rural and agricultural zones. It permitted activities such as tasting rooms, events, and paved parking areas in these regions. The ordinance was intended to support the growing adult beverage industry outside Seattle.

The Growth Management Hearings Board initially found the ordinance inconsistent with the GMA. Although the Court of Appeals reversed this decision, the Washington State Supreme Court ultimately reinstated the Board's findings and concluded that the ordinance substantially interfered with GMA goals, particularly those related to preserving agricultural lands, protecting environmental quality, and ensuring adequate public facilities. Regarding SEPA, the Court held that King County's environmental assessment was inadequate. The County had issued a Determination of Nonsignificance (DNS), claiming the ordinance was a non-project action and thus, exempt from a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). However, the Court found that the ordinance's potential to significantly alter land use in rural areas necessitated a comprehensive environmental review.

This ruling reinforces the requirement that local governments conduct thorough environmental analyses under SEPA, even for non-project actions such as zoning changes. It also underscores the need to align local ordinances with GMA objectives to preserve agricultural and rural lands. The decision is expected to influence land-use planning and environmental policy throughout Washington.

Appendix F. Addendum

As of the writing of this report, the situation is still far from clear. As recently as last month, Benton County Planning denied Wheat Head Brewery in the Columbia Basin the ability to offer food from food trucks to supplement their beer sales. The county planners referenced the Supreme Court ruling in their decision¹⁰⁴. A few days later, board members of Futurewise responded to this decision in an opinion piece in the Tri-City Herald, noting that:

Residents across WA work together to protect farmland for future generations | Opinion
Tri-City Herald
Sat, March 29, 2025 at 5:00 AM PDT 3 min read

The three of us call the Tri-Cities region home: Maricela is the daughter of farmworkers; Veronika works alongside farmers to connect them to their local farm-to-table community and business boosting resources; and Ginger is a passionate advocate for local food who served on the start-up board of the new Tri-Cities Food Co-Op. All three of us agree that farmers are the heart of our society, who work tirelessly to feed their communities.

That's why we're writing to respond to the misinformation being spread in our community about a recent State Supreme Court decision, *King County v. Friends of Sammamish Valley and Futurewise*. Recent reporting in the Tri-City Herald asserts that this court decision was to blame for Wheat Head Brewery losing its food truck permit. We don't claim to know why [Benton County denied a food truck permit](#) for Wheat Head Brewery, but as Futurewise board members, we feel confident in asserting that it wasn't because of this court case.

The 2024 court decision protects farmland from sprawl and speculative development by limiting non-agricultural uses. The court decision also supports agritourism that enhances (rather than competes with) the primary use of farmland for agriculture. The intent of this legal case and the impact of this ruling are to protect farmers on both sides of the Cascades so they do not have to compete with non-farmers for land, while still allowing agritourism to supplement farmers' incomes.

The ruling doesn't ban tasting rooms at vineyards or food trucks at a brewery, or pumpkin patches. The ruling simply ensures that the primary use of agricultural land is for farming and stays that way. The court recognizes that agritourism can be an important way for farmers to support their difficult work and stay in business. This ruling provides guidance on how agricultural land can be used for secondary income sources – such as breweries, food trucks or event venues – while ensuring that farmland remains primarily used for its main purpose: farming.

The timing of this case couldn't be more crucial: according to the American Farmland Trust, Washington state is in danger of losing 192,000 acres of farmland by 2040 to sprawling development if current trends continue. We're seeing this firsthand in Benton and Franklin counties, where new subdivisions are eating up more and more acres that, in previous generations, produced wheat, onions and potatoes.

Farmers are the heart of our society. There are few things more important than preserving bountiful farmland and supporting the families working each acre. Farming has significant challenges. Agritourism is an important component of a multi-level solution that advocates for and supports farmers statewide while preserving legacy agricultural land. We encourage everyone passionate about this issue to complete the [Washington State Agritourism Study](#) to share your feedback with decision makers and help us preserve farmland while promoting density, accessibility, and a better future for all people in Washington. And if you or someone you know is having trouble with a permit for an accessory use on a farm, please reach out to Futurewise, and we'll see if we can help.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ For more information, see (<https://www.bentoncountywa.gov/newsview.aspx?nid=6664>).

¹⁰⁵ Article by the Tri-City Herald, <https://www.tri-cityherald.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/article302804689.html>

The Supreme Court ruling has wide-ranging implications for county planners and agritourism operators across the state. In the most recent legislative session, state senators introduced a bill (SB 5055) in March 2025 that sought to establish several new policies regarding agritourism but ultimately died before the end of the session. Among the bill's objectives, it would have created a new "agritourism zone" in the state's land-use code. The original bill defined agritourism as activities that "generate supplemental income for farms by connecting their resources and products with visitors." These activities included direct sales, educational activities, entertainment, seasonal outdoor activities, and hospitality. The bill would have allowed counties to permit agritourism activities after a series of conditions, such as consulting with neighboring landowners, establishing criteria for water, septic, and parking, and imposing curfews, seasonal uses, and restrictions on interference with neighboring agriculture. The bill also included a directive for the LCB to create a permitting pathway for agritourism to be licensed to serve beer, wine and cider. The bill lost these portions early on, and the remaining portion that exempted agricultural buildings used for agritourism for less than six months a year from certain building code standards, such as fire, life, and safety, died by the end of the session.

For Washington farmers and operators, this legislation would have been important because it would have removed some of the most onerous and costly building upgrades for barns, farm stands and other agritourism buildings.

Non-farmers engaging in agritourism

Finally, the issue of developers, prospectors, or retirees and hobbyists buying up farms with no intention of farming them was seen as a big problem for agritourism. Many policymakers and farmers expressed the need for farm operators to prove their farming status. As one respondent said:

- "For Snohomish county, you have to be in production, legitimate agricultural production in order to operate agritourism. You can't simply buy a barn and operate a wedding venue only. You have to have an essential farming activity."
- Another respondent said:
- "We're all growing our crops, but we're marketing them differently. This is a different business model than traditional operations. For example, U-pick fields."
- Another respondent noted that Chelan County requires agriculture to be "primary use," but does not address what constitutes primary use.

Tribal agritourism

Our last focus group consisted of tribal agritourism practitioners. Nationally, 80% of tribal members live on farms or ranches and make up 6% of the total farmland in the U.S., over 59 million acres¹⁰⁶. While tribal land is exempt from federal or state law, many tribal members farm on non-tribal lands where agricultural policies apply, and many more are interested in learning how to incorporate agritourism into their operations.

While the Intertribal Agricultural Council provides many resources for tribal members involved with agriculture, specific support for agritourism is a newer niche. Specific issues that arose from this focus group indicated that while hunting and fishing (and possibly foraging) may not be included in the initial list of most commonly accepted agritourism activities, these practices represent long-standing traditions among tribal people across the United States, as well as Washington, and should not be left out of an inclusive definition of agritourism.

Additionally, buffalo are an important source of traditional foods and part of indigenous heritage. Recently, buffalo ranching has become a new, increasingly popular arena for agritourism operations. Some of the positive impacts associated with agritourism venues include changes in attitudes regarding the capacity and skills of tribal

¹⁰⁶ American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA). Tribal Agritourism Resource Page. Accessed 4/25/2025.

government officials, as well as those of tribal farmers and ranchers¹⁰⁷. Education and agritourism venues can also increase tribal farmers' ability to diversify, establish collective food partnerships, respond to market changes and disseminate traditional knowledge to tourists and younger generations interested in food security and food sovereignty.

Overall, the main points that arose illustrated the need for further support and education for tribal practitioners on successful agritourism venues and models for reproduction. Additionally, any future State of Washington Grown initiative should ensure tribal voices are included, and tribal operators are encouraged to participate and promoted.

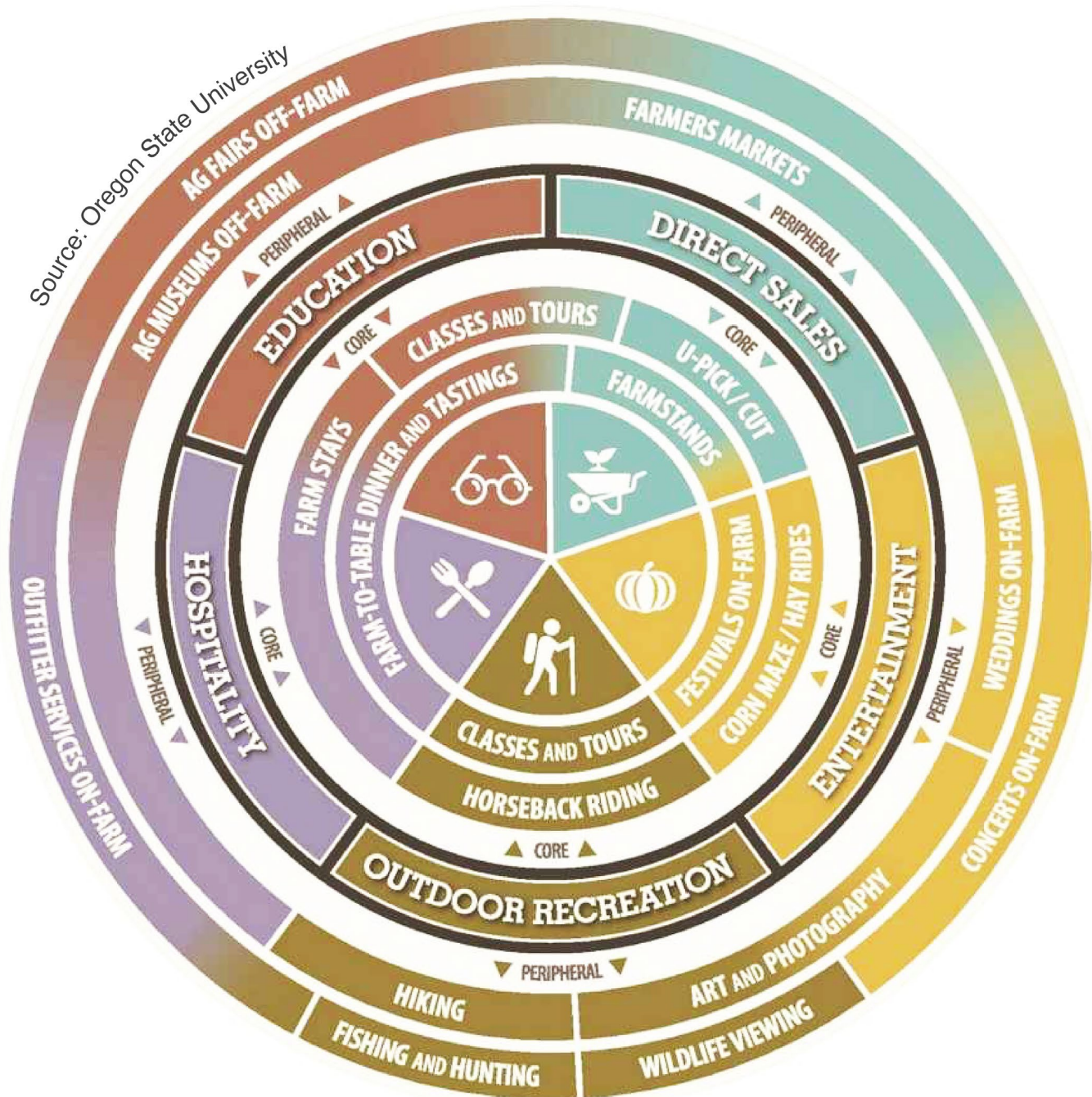
Conclusions

Overall, the qualitative comments and data gathered from the 243 policymakers, stakeholders, farmers and agritourism operators reinforce many of the same themes from the ARPS but elaborate on specific challenges and themes such as emerging state policies and their ramifications. In light of the ARPS, stakeholder and focus group meetings, we present 10 main policy recommendations in the next section.

¹⁰⁷ Curtis, et al. Innovative Food Tourism Development Strategies for Sustainability on American Indian Reservations. *Journal of Food Distribution Research*, v. 48:1.

Appendix H. Agritourism graphic

Figure H.2. Five Categories of Agritourism, including direct sales, education, hospitality, outdoor recreation, and entertainment and examples of core vs. peripheral activities¹⁰⁸



¹⁰⁸ Chase, L. C., Stewart, M., Schilling, B., Smith, B., & Walk, M. (2018). Agritourism: Toward a Conceptual Framework for Industry Analysis. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 8(1), 13–19. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2018.081.016>