



Tourism Business Information

Farm and Country Holiday

Introduction

Farm and Country Holidays provide the opportunity for farming communities to supplement their income. This may be achieved by a farm establishing accommodation or by operating as an attraction and allowing casual visitors to experience or observe aspects of rural life. It can also be about working with other tourism operators and businesses to bundle a range of accommodation, activities and experiences.

However tourism is a very competitive industry and is often a 24 hour a day, 7 day a week business – in other words it can be very hard work. This Fact Sheet aims to give you some background, highlight issues to think about and identify other sources of information to assist you in deciding if establishing or expanding a Farm or Country Holiday tourism business is right for you and your business.

Please ensure you also read *Feel free ... to Start Smart* which provides an introduction to the tourism industry and key steps in starting a tourism business.

What is a Farm Stay?

A farm stay can be any type of accommodation located on a farm. The farm maybe a working farm or simply a rural property. The accommodation can range in standard from luxury to rustic. It could be in the homestead with full catering or as a bed and breakfast, or alternatively as a self contained separate homestead, cabin or bunkhouse located on the property (eg shearers quarters), etc. Some operators offer a number of different types of accommodation on their property to attract a wider range of visitors.

What is a Country Holiday

A country holiday is where visitors temporarily travel into a rural environment to enjoy, experience or observe the environment as part of their leisure, pleasure or recreation activities. They may choose to stay on a farm or in other types of accommodation, eg a motel in town.

For some consumers simply driving through the country satisfies their expectations of a country holiday. Other consumers will want to stay in a rural setting. There are also consumers who will want to participate in as many rural activities as they can, such as, feeding the animals, milking the cows, riding on a tractor, horse riding, mustering, billy tea and camp cooking, etc.

This provides a wide range of possibilities for anyone wishing to develop a tourism component for their existing business.

Facts and Figures

In 2001 around 40% of all holiday/leisure makers who visited farms were families or groups with children, followed by almost 30% who were couples. The age range for visitors is very broad with no age being more highly represented than another. It is possible however that certain ages may prefer some activity and experience types over others. For example 'farm work' activities may appeal more to younger couples and 'leisure' activities may appeal more to older couples.

The following table provides some statistics regarding holiday/leisure visitation in Regional NSW.

	Trip for the purpose of holiday/leisure	Farm visit as part of the holiday/leisure trip
Total Visits to Regional NSW	9,000,000	195,000
Total No. in Families/Groups with Children	3,000,000	33,000
Total No. in Families/Groups with Children to 'Country NSW'	1,500,000	24,000

Bureau of Tourism Research, 2001. *Note: 'Country NSW' = regions excluding Sydney and Coastal NSW.

The statistics indicate there maybe the potential to increase the number of people who visit farms, in particular families and groups with children.

More than half of the people who visited a farm had an income in excess of \$52,000 p.a. The most popular accommodation choice for visitors was to stay at the property of friends or family, followed closely by self-catering cottages or apartments. This may indicate that there is scope for day activities and experiences that would appeal to the target audience.

What Visitors want

Because the largest group of farm and country holiday makers is families or groups with children, research was undertaken to identify what children want in a holiday (conducted by Ingenuity Research for Tourism New South Wales). Whilst a beach holiday is still 'tops with kids' there are some farm and country holiday activities that are seen as being 'popular and cool'. The results have been separated into different age groups:

Ages 6-7

Visiting a farm
Animals
Camping
Fishing
Horse Riding

Ages 8-9

Swimming
Camping
Horse Riding – girls predominantly

Ages 10-13

Active holidays
Camping
Cycling
Boating
Horse Riding – girls almost exclusively.

A recurring theme regardless of the age group is camping. Other research has highlighted that camping is also popular with adults. In addition the research has highlighted that children's level of interest in 'rural' product, whilst generally low, is higher than adults perceive.

A key challenge is to improve perceptions of this type of holiday. It needs to be seen as an interesting and exciting alternative to the traditional holiday. Providing a range of 'farm work' and 'leisure' activities and experiences for both adults and children may assist in improving this perception.

Opportunities

The analysis of the research indicates that there may be a number of opportunities worth investigating. Below are some case studies of existing product that highlight some successful farm and country holiday product. There are also ideas on how they may be further developed by adding value and providing more to see and do.

Case 1

A cattle farm in picturesque mountain country which provides comfortable, no frills homestead accommodation with dinner, bed and breakfast. They also have a number of secluded, self-contained rustic cabins. In addition there is a serviced, unpowered camping area by the river with bbqs, pit toilets, etc.

Development Idea: Encourage guests to explore country attractions beyond the farm. Negotiate with a café and/or restaurant in town to put together picnic baskets for guests to purchase or to offer a free drink with meals when they dine-in.

Case 2

A working sheep farm in western NSW providing upmarket homestead accommodation and self-contained cottages (catering optional). The visitors are actively encouraged to join in all farming activities.

Development Idea: Offer optional campfire cooking with billy tea and damper, include bush and ghost stories around the campfire.

Case 3

A property adjoining a National Park with purpose built eco-sensitive, self-catering cabins offering overnight or long term stays.

Development Idea: Negotiate with National Parks for guided walks through the park both during the day and night, and/or talks to guests regarding the park, their work, the local flora and fauna.

Case 4

Sheep property that encompasses rugged gorge country with no guest accommodation available. They provide, for day visitors, sheep shearing and sheep dog demonstrations, animal petting and feeding. In addition they provide access to pre-booked 4-wheel drive groups to the adjoining gorge country for day visits or to bush camp.

Development Idea: Offer optional morning or afternoon tea for day visitors. Work with a local accommodation providers to bundle the accommodation and the farm visit together, approach other local attractions who may wish to participate.

Case 5

A property located on a river offers comfortable but basic self-contained cabins located along the river. They have fishing gear, canoes, tennis courts, badminton, volley ball available for guests and have identified safe swimming holes.

Development Idea: Offering optional tents with the cabins to allow the kids to safely camp out under the stars whilst the parents can choose the comfort of the cabin. Identify good photography spots, build hides for observing local fauna eg bird watching.

Case 6

Educational tours

a) An areas cotton farmers joined together with the local Visitor Information Centre to provide guides to observe the harvest and processing of cotton for shipment to manufacturers. They either lead

visitors on self-drive tours (in a convoy) or accompanies coaches. The core market for the tours is Free and Independent Travellers (FITs).

b) A Rice Growers Association and the Tourism Manager combined to provide industry educational tours for the international market. Core market is agricultural industry representatives.

Other ideas:

- Provide tours of your farm with explanations of the production processes, tastings (where appropriate) and offer your produce for sale to visitors.
- Offer mini-musters – even gathering in the chickens for the very young children.
- Provide suggested itineraries for visiting other attractions in the district.
- Whip cracking, lassoing, horse riding demonstrations.
- Opportunities to participate in harvesting, egg collecting, planting of crops, etc.
- Hay or tractor rides.
- Provide campotel accommodation.

Consider what you and your area can offer a visitor. Mix and match from the ideas discussed above, create your own and work with other local businesses to bundle complimentary products together. Make it easy for potential visitors to see they can have an interesting and exciting holiday by visiting your area and business.

Visitor Feedback

Your visitors are the most important part of the business – if they are not happy with your product then the business will fail. Seek information about your visitors when they book and seek feedback when they have visited. The types of information you should be seeking includes: where your visitors are from, their contact details, how they heard about you, what did they like/not like, their suggestions/improvements/comments, would they recommend your business, etc.

This information will assist you in identifying your market and targeting the promotion of your product. It will also help you develop your product to better meet your visitor's expectations. You will be able to monitor your success as a business as your visitation grows.

Getting Support

No one person has all the answers to your business problems or needs. However, there is a range of knowledge, experience and free advice available to anyone willing to ask and listen. Most banks, accountants and even legal people, will give you an initial free consultation. Talk with industry associations, local councils, government agencies and your local Tourism Manager. Go and visit other tourism businesses offering similar services and learn from their experiences. Leave no stone unturned; this is your future.

Many organisations exist to specifically work with the tourism industry and/or with businesses. When you contact an organisation that is not specifically focused on Tourism ask if they have an Economic or Business Development Officer.

Feel free ... to Start Smart lists a number of organisations that are useful to anyone setting up a business. The contact details for these are in the Contact List for Tourism Operators available at www.tourism.nsw.gov.au/corporate in the Industry Services section, under Growing your Business. Alternatively these organisations are listed in the White Pages.

Please read Tourism New South Wales' fact sheets developed to assist operators understand and complete key tasks in establishing and growing a business.

Legal Issues

Any business, particularly a people related business, must meet a number of legal requirements. Below are just some of the issues a farm or country holiday operator may need to consider.

Local Council

Is the proposed business acceptable under the current zoning of your land?

Do you need a licence from council to run the business?

Are all the Health and Building Regulations met?

Will it affect your rates?

Electricity/Gas/Water Suppliers

Will changes to your business affect the rates you are charged for these services?

State Government

If you will be taking visitors on tours or providing transport you will need Passenger Vehicle Accreditation which is available through the Department of Transport.

If you are taking visitors into National Parks, Reserves or State Forests you may need a licence from the National Parks & Wildlife Service.

Any boating activities may need to be licenced by the Waterways Authority of NSW.

Will you need to register a new name or change your business details? Contact the Department of Fair Trading for more information.

Will you need any other licences for your businesses? Contact the Business Licence Information Service.

Insurance

Will your existing insurance cover paying visitors? What other insurance do you need?

What will the public liability insurance cost to cover your visitors during the proposed activities? How much would you need to charge visitors to cover the cost? The Workers Compensation Insurance is higher for farm staff so try to distinguish between your tourism staff and your farm staff.

Please talk to your insurance broker to find out more information and other tourism operators who may know of insurance companies that specialise in farm and country holiday tourism products.

Other Considerations

The Feel free ... to Start Smart guide (Section7), asks a number of questions to help determine if running a tourism business is for you. However combining a tourism business with managing a property requires a few more questions. How will you manage the running of the Farm or Country Holiday product, with the day to day management of your property? How will you deal with the seasonal highs and lows of both businesses?

You will need to think about your location to possible markets. Are you located a few hours from a major city, which would mean you could be a short break destination? If you are located further away then you may be part of driving holiday destination. Are you located near the main road network or will visitors need to be given detailed directions to your property? What is the quality of the road to access your property? Are they suitable all year round? Can you offer your product all year round or will there be seasonal variations?

If you're providing self-catering accommodation, are there supermarkets or general stores nearby for visitors to obtain supplies? If not, visitors will need to be advised to bring all their supplies with them. Alternatively, are you willing to arrange their supplies for an additional fee?

When developing your brochure, and please refer to the 'Creating your Own Brochure' fact sheet, you will need to ensure you provide your potential visitor with the answers to these questions to ensure they don't have unrealistic expectations. In this way you may avoid unnecessary disappointment.

Conclusion

Farm and Country Holiday tourism may provide you with a rewarding and profitable business capitalising on the attributes of you, your family and property. However it can also be a distraction from your other business and offer many points of conflict.

The decision to begin operating any tourism business must be taken with care. You need to consider your own and your families suitability to the industry. Be clear about how you will manage the commitment and potential conflicts that may occur in operating your businesses.

Consider what your farm and country holiday product (and the surrounding area) has to offer visitors. Carefully research your potential market, your competition and all your legal requirements. Develop a well thought out and comprehensive business plan. If the tourism industry is for you and you approach it in a business like manner, you may develop a business that is rewarding both financially and personally.



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