

Is a Farm/Ranch Recreation Business for You?

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So, you're thinking about starting a farm or ranch recreation business?

This may be the response you'll get from friends or family members. Opening up your farm or ranch to visitors could change your whole life, and you'll need to thoroughly check it out before you open for business. The following information is only a starting point as you begin to explore a tourism business.



Commercial private recreation operations are accepted and have flourished for decades in the eastern United States, primarily due to high public demand and a limited amount of public land access. Even out west with relatively more public land, there is increasing demand for private land recreation. Why? Because with overcrowding on public lands, there is an increasing feeling that less crowded, private land recreation will provide a higher quality recreation experience - even at a higher cost - than that obtained on public land.

Farm/Ranch Recreation: What is It?

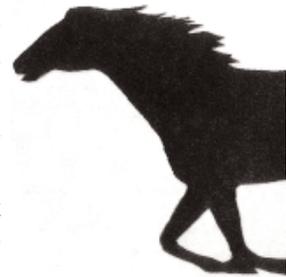
Farm/ranch recreation is simply any recreational activity enjoyed by guests for a few hours, a few days, or a few weeks while on a farm or ranch. It was first legally defined in the U.S. by the Wyoming Department of Public Health as "a ranch/farm facility containing or having under use agreement one hundred sixty (160) acres or more which may for a charge to the public provide activities for not more than a daily average of eight (8) persons in any given thirty (30) day period or may include sleeping facilities in not more than four (4) sleeping units along with accompanying meals. Meals and lodging shall be considered an adjunct to the activities to the activities which take place on the ranch/farm and are not available to non-registered guests".

As you can tell from the above definition, recreation offered by a farmer or a rancher is a secondary activity to generate supplemental income. The activities offered are limited only by the imagination or resources available. These activities help the farm/ranch recreation industry to fit nicely into the travel industry's

definitions of adventure travel, ecotourism, heritage or cultural travel and is generally thought of as a destination vacation. As a result, many state tourism promotional efforts include farm/ranch recreation, so check out:

- state web sites to see what is offered
- state brochures to get an idea of what is being sent to potential tourists
- your state tourism 'inquiry telephone number' to ask for specific information about potential tourists.

Space, aesthetics, new learning experiences, adventure, and the opportunity for recreationists to do their own thing with a rural American family, away from crowds, are valuable resources and services which can be provided by farmers or ranchers. For potential guests in stressful jobs, and those wanting to get back to nature, rural recreation can provide a measure of 'wellness' in today's health-conscious society.



Farm/ranch Recreation: Decisions to Make

Answer the following questions to help decide "why" you are thinking about starting a farm/ranch recreation business? Be honest with yourself!

1. Why are you considering a tourism business? (Money? Bored? Can't get away to travel and you can travel by meeting new people? You like people and want to share your life with others? You already have many friends and relatives visiting, why not open up a business? Do you need help with the farm/ranch work?)
2. How much extra time do you have to spend with guests? (This may take some thought about seasonal activities, division of family responsibilities, part-time help, etc)
3. How much money will you need from the tourism business to feel good about your decision?
4. What do you have to offer besides warm rural hospitality?



The following list can be used for a brainstorming session on what you may have to offer and the decisions you need to make about your available resources (the categories are not intended to include all of the ideas). For a longer, more detailed inventory assessment, self assessment checklist, refer to the Farm and Ranch Recreation Handbook. The handbook has many checklists, case study examples, pricing examples, profit and loss statements, etc.



People (check all that apply and then add all of the other people in the family or hired help you have available).

- Family members and their individual talents.

This is the major resource with a tourism/recreation business on a farm or ranch. If you plan to promote ranching and ranch work and your primary rancher in the family is against the tourism idea, then you don't have a rancher.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farmer | <input type="checkbox"/> Chef |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rancher | <input type="checkbox"/> Book keeper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wrangler | <input type="checkbox"/> Promoter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Storyteller | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

Are you and the rest of the family cutout to handle guests? (This is probably one of the first steps in deciding on whether to open up your operation to guests. You are already in business if you own a farm or ranch. Working with corn fields or cattle can be very different from working with people, however you may find the stress and rewards are very similar).

Activities

- Ecotourism - ecotourists feel an obligation to not only study, appreciate, and promote natural resources, but also to study, appreciate, and promote rural people (and their culture) who make a living directly from the land.

- Crops
- Rural way of life
- Wildlife in their natural habitat
- Nature hikes
- Photography of birds, wild flowers, trees, etc.
- Beautiful sunsets, stars, clear skies

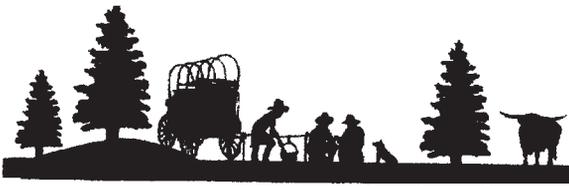
- Adventure Travel

- Horseback riding
- Hiking
- Fence building
- Feeding animals
- Harvesting crops/irrigating
- Fishing and hunting
- Home-cooked food



- Heritage/cultural travel

- Family history around the kitchen table
- Area history
- Farm/ranch practices and changes
- Old buildings
- Local history
- Native American culture
- Rocks and petroglyphs
- Religious



There are so many activities offered on farms and ranches around the world, we could go on with pages under activities. To get more ideas check out the activities listed by operators on the national web site database, www.farm-ranch-recreation.com. Also, while you're on the web site, look in the handbook for the many pages dedicated to taking an inventory.

Facilities

-Sleeping

- Bunk house
- Extra bedrooms
- Old barn
- Teepees
- Vacant house/s
- Old one-room school house
- Other

-Common areas

- Old barn
- Dining room
- Recreation room
- Campfire
- Front porch

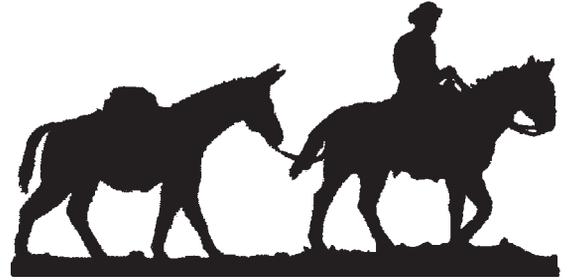
When first starting out, do not build or acquire any facilities to house guests - wait and see. When you inventory your facilities, remember the guests are coming to experience your way of life. However, guests do expect to be warm, dry and have a shower (check out the Consumer Survey of Nonresidents in the Farm and Ranch Recreation Handbook). Guests also expect some privacy and neat, clean accommodations. Drag out the paint cans and brushes and spruce up the old barn and that old bunk house. Remember, they are expecting farms or ranches and not a trailer park.

Farm/Ranch Recreation: How to Get Started

From the Idea

- 🐾 Take an inventory
- 🐾 Check local and state laws
- 🐾 Check insurance rates
- 🐾 Set short and long-term goals
- 🐾 Visit an existing farm or ranch recreation operation

- 🐾 Develop a business/marketing plan
- 🐾 Ask for advise (other operators and professionals)
- 🐾 Using your business/marketing plan and with the help of appropriate professionals, start up your tourism/recreation business.



Farm/Ranch Recreation: Where to Get More Information

A wide variety of resources await the prospective business person, such as:

➤ The nearest Cooperative Extension Service office, which has publications, addresses and telephone number, and staff who can give you personal assistance at no cost, or refer you to others.

➤ USDA, NRCS offices have publications and range/crop professionals to assist farmers and ranchers.

➤ Business schools within the state university system or at community colleges have staff, courses you can take, or in some cases, may have student interns available through the Small Business Institute, who can help you at little or no cost.

➤ Local chamber of commerce, high school business teachers, or vocational agriculture teachers.

➤ State departments of commerce can provide greater details on licenses and permits, and other assistance.

➤ Local public library. The librarian can order books from anywhere and search for information through the state library. The ON-LINE service can provide free computer searches for any subject.

➤ U.S. Small Business Administration has offices in each state.

Statistics and trends from the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at your state university.

Other sources: 1) web sites, 2) census bureau, 3) "Thomas Register" list of companies by name or product, and 4) Dunn and Bradstreet reports.

Take a look at the following materials available through the web:

1. Are You an Entrepreneur?

www.bizoffice.com/library/files/entrepreneur.txt

2. Checklist for Going Into Business, www.bizoffice.com/library/chklist.txt

3. Setting Up Your Own Business: Balancing Business and Personal Life,

ianrwww.unl.edu/pubs/consumered/nf272.htm

4. Setting Up Your Own Business: The Entrepreneur's Checklist,

ianrwww.unl.edu/pubs/consumered/nf289.htm

5. Setting Up Your Own Business: Have You Thought About? ianrwww.unl.edu/pub/consumered/nf284.htm

6. Getting Started in a Recreational or Tourism Business, www.msu.edu/imp/modtd/33510050.html

So, is your idea crazy or can it work?

The farm/ranch recreation business is not for everyone. For those who are successful and enjoy the business, the rewards are limitless. Some operators report adding recreation to the farm or ranch provided enough additional work and income to afford family members staying on the place instead of having to find a job in town. Rural families are used to hard work and long hours, but dealing with people rather than crops and livestock seems to be the most stressful part of the business for many operators. On the other hand, the diversity of guests gives the rural family a chance to travel without leaving home. Probably the biggest perk of all ... have you thought of it yet? Farm and ranch recreation is an opportunity for rural families to educate city folks about the rural way of life. Rural America needs all of the friends they can find. Good luck in the new business, may all of your guests arrive on time, pay in advance, leave happy and return often.



References:

Farm and Ranch Recreation Handbook, A Guide for Operators, Jeff Powell and Susan Rottman, 2001. www.farm-ranch-recreation.com

1996 Farm and Ranch Recreation Resource Directory, Montana Coop. Extension Service, Bozeman. 121p acxds@montana.edu; www.visitmt.com

South Dakota Farm and Ranch Vacation Business Guide, South Dakota Department of Tourism, 711 East Wells Ave., Pierre, SD 57501 www.travelsd.com

Wyoming Small Business Resource Guide, 1993, US Small Business Administration, 100 East 'B' St., Rm 4001, Casper, WY 82601 www.uwyo.edu/sbdc

USDA, NRCS. 2001. Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism: Farming for Profit and Sustainability. www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/RESS/econ/ressd.htm

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