

# GROWING AGRITOURISM

A Toolkit for Planning and Developing  
Your Agritourism Business in Simcoe County



*experience*  
**SIMCOE COUNTY**



# GROWING AGRITOURISM



Growing Agritourism: A Toolkit for Planning and Developing Your Agritourism Business in Simcoe County contains all the information you will need to help you decide whether agritourism is right for you. The toolkit also outlines the steps you will need to take to add an agritourism component to your existing farm business or to help grow your existing agritourism business. This pamphlet is a condensed version of the fuller Toolkit. This pamphlet covers the following topics:

- WHAT IS AGRITOURISM?
- IS AGRITOURISM FOR ME?
- PLANNING FOR YOUR BUSINESS
- LAND USE PLANNING
- FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
- MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

To download the full toolkit, visit:  
[experience.simcoe.ca/resources](http://experience.simcoe.ca/resources)

# WHAT IS AGRITOURISM?

Agritourism that happens on farm properties includes uses that promote the enjoyment, education or activities related to the farm operation. **Examples include (but are not limited to):**

ON-FARM RETAIL

FARM TOURS

ACCOMMODATIONS SUCH AS BED AND BREAKFASTS

RECREATION SUCH AS HORSE RIDING

Agritourism may also interact more broadly with rural tourism activities that include off-farm agriculture-related businesses. **Examples include:**

FARMERS' MARKETS

SPECIALITY RETAIL FEATURING LOCAL PRODUCERS OR FOOD PROCESSORS

LOCAL FOOD-RELATED EVENTS AND FESTIVALS



While the Toolkit focuses primarily on farm-based agritourism, it will also be of benefit to individuals interested in starting or developing off-farm agritourism operations.

The main difference between agritourism and traditional agricultural businesses is the idea of welcoming visitors to your farm. Consumers want to know more about how food is produced and where their food comes from, and agritourism can enable consumers to learn. You, as a producer, may also want to get to know some of the people you grow/raise food or agricultural products for. In a time when rural and urban spaces seem far apart, agritourism can provide an avenue for us to learn from each other and to have some fun!

# IS AGRITOURISM FOR ME?



Getting into agritourism can be exciting, and the opportunities in this industry are ripe, but running an agritourism business is not for everyone. The following questions can help you navigate whether agritourism is right for you, your family and your business:

- **Do you want to broaden or diversify your income stream?**
- **Are you interested in promoting your particular product or brand?**
- **Do you like interacting with other people regularly?**
- **Do you like educating people about your farm and agriculture more broadly?**
- **Are you willing to accept the risk and liability associated with inviting people onto your farm?**

- Are you willing to pay the cost of insurance that comes with inviting people onto your farm?
- Are you willing to develop a business plan and revisit it regularly to help support the success of your operation?
- Do you have access to enough capital to invest in the infrastructure, facilities and equipment in order to make this business opportunity work?
- Are you skilled with having an online presence such as a website and social media for marketing and/or sales?
- Do you have demonstrated customer service skills?
- Are you prepared to manage a team of employees?
- Are you prepared to train and educate a team of employees about your farm and agriculture more broadly?
- Are you interested in working on weekends, holidays and outside of regular work hours, in addition to your regular farm work?
- Have you or will you connect with your neighbours to learn whether they support your plan to invite the public to your farm?
- Are you willing to invest your time in the administrative aspects of agritourism, including regulatory and land-use planning paperwork/documentation?

# PLANNING FOR YOUR BUSINESS



**Alongside determining your agritourism offering, try developing a business plan. Developing a business plan should involve the following steps:**

**1. Set your business goals for the short, medium, and long term.**

To do this, reflect on your own personal goals, and your business vision, mission and values.

**2. Identify Projected Cashflow**

Expenses include your fixed costs, such as taxes, insurance, mortgage payments, etc. These costs remain relatively consistent regardless of your sales volume. Expenses also include variable costs; as the term suggests, these expenses will vary depending on the scale of production. Variable costs include expenses for crop inputs, livestock feed, marketing materials, employee wages etc.

Income includes all of your revenue streams, such as product and ticket sales.

### 3. Consider your business structure

You can select between three main structures for your business:



For a more complete overview of what you need to know to plan for your agritourism business, check out these resources:

**Direct Farm Marketing Business Resources by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA):**

[omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/directfarmmkt/  
directfarmmarketing2016.pdf](http://omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/directfarmmkt/directfarmmarketing2016.pdf)

**The National Farm Business Management Resource Centre,  
Starting Your Farm Business Resources  
by Farm Management Canada:**

[takeanewapproach.ca/starting-your-farm-business/](http://takeanewapproach.ca/starting-your-farm-business/)

**Developing an Agri-tourism Operation in Ontario by OMAFRA:**

[omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/facts/16-029.htm](http://omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/facts/16-029.htm)

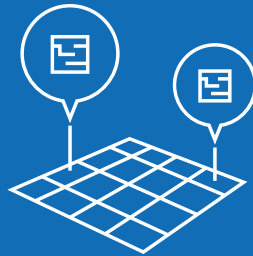
**Templates and business guides by the  
Business Development Bank of Canada:**

[bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/entrepreneur-toolkit/templates-business-  
guides](http://bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/entrepreneur-toolkit/templates-business-guides)

**Planning for success: How a business plan can work for you  
and your farm by Farm Management Canada:**

[takeanewapproach.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/producer-  
roadmap-to-success-en.pdf](http://takeanewapproach.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/producer-roadmap-to-success-en.pdf)

You shouldn't plan alone; a farm business advisor can help you. Contact a local farm business advisor by visiting the Canadian Association of Farm Advisors: [cafanet.ca/places/category/ontario-1/](https://cafanet.ca/places/category/ontario-1/).



Throughout Simcoe County, supports are available for planning and networking that will help you with your business planning activities. The organizations below can help with business planning and help you stay informed about potential funding opportunities as you develop your agritourism business.

## FIND HELP WITH BUSINESS PLANNING IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

### **City of Barrie, Orillia and all of Simcoe County (except for Clearview, Wasaga Beach or Collingwood)**

Small Business Centre of Barrie, Simcoe County and Orillia  
([barriebusinesscentre.ca/](https://barriebusinesscentre.ca/))

### **West Simcoe County (Wasaga Beach, Collingwood, Clearview)**

Centre for Economic Development and Business  
([centreforbusiness.ca/](https://centreforbusiness.ca/))



**North Simcoe (Midland, Penetanguishene,  
Tay & Tiny)**

North Simcoe Community Futures Development Corporation  
([nscfdc.on.ca/](http://nscfdc.on.ca/))

**South Simcoe (Essa, Innisfil, New Tecumseth,  
Bradford West Gwillimbury, Adjala-Tosorontio)**

Nottawasaga Futures  
([nottawasaga.com/](http://nottawasaga.com/))

**South Georgian Bay (Collingwood, Clearview,  
Town of Blue Mountains, Wasaga Beach)**

South Georgian Bay Small Business Enterprise Centre  
([enterprisecentre.ca/home/](http://enterprisecentre.ca/home/))

**East Simcoe County (including Orillia,  
Oro-Medonte, Severn, Ramara and Rama)**

Orillia Community Development Corporation  
([orilliacdc.com/](http://orilliacdc.com/))

**Other**

Business Development Bank of Canada  
([bdc.ca/en/business-centres/ontario](http://bdc.ca/en/business-centres/ontario))

Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre, Georgian College  
([georgiancollege.ca/community-alumni/entrepreneurship-centre/](http://georgiancollege.ca/community-alumni/entrepreneurship-centre/))

# LAND USE PLANNING



One of the most important calls you can make to ensure your agritourism venture is a success is to talk to your municipal planning department. You will want to make sure that your ideas are permitted in your local municipal zoning and policy by-laws. If you do not take this important step early in your planning process, you may end up facing costly delays, or even costlier, have to change plans. You do not want to realize a month before your planned opening that you need to submit a rezoning application which may take months and may or may not be approved!

Contact your local planning department by visiting [simcoe.ca/Clerks/Pages/municipalpartners.aspx](http://simcoe.ca/Clerks/Pages/municipalpartners.aspx) or by internet searching the name of your town.

The Citizens' Guide to Land Use Planning is a helpful tool to understand all the basics about land use in Ontario. Access it at [ontario.ca/document/citizens-guide-land-use-planning](http://ontario.ca/document/citizens-guide-land-use-planning).

# LAND USE PLANNING FAQS

Questions to ask yourself and your local planning department:

## **Are agritourism activities permitted on your property in the municipal zoning bylaw?**

Provincial Policy allows for agritourism activities on prime farmland as an “On-farm Diversified Use” (OFDU). However, your local municipality may have additional requirements. For example, they may have a certain threshold to ensure that your farm is considered a bona fide farm so that you may operate an agritourism business. Check with your municipality early in the planning process to ensure your proposed activity is permitted.

## **What types of agritourism activities are permitted in the zoning bylaw?**

Your local municipality may have restrictions or definitions for agritourism. For example, there may be limits on the size and location of buildings supporting agritourism activities on your farm. It is very important to check with your local municipality before you build.

## **Do you need to include parking for customers?**

Your local municipality may have requirements for parking such as surface material, size, capacity, location, and access to the road.

## **Do you intend to build a new structure?**

You may need to apply for a building permit depending on the type of structure, how large it is, and where it is located.

## **Do you intend to convert an existing building to host people (example: converting a barn to host events)?**

You may need to apply for a building permit or submit additional applications to ensure the building is up to safety codes such as fire safety, emergency safety exits, and adequate sanitary services.

## **Do you intend to host events?**

Your local municipality may have noise restrictions, limits on event gathering numbers, or restrictions on serving food or drinks. The municipality may also have requirements for overflow parking on the street and may require you to apply for an event license. The municipality may also require permits for events.

## **Do you intend to sell alcohol or allow people to consume alcohol on site?**

The Alcohol and Gambling Commission of Ontario (AGCO) is the provincial body responsible for administering the Liquor Control Act. Visit the AGCO for a helpful list of FAQs about serving/selling alcohol: [agco.ca/alcohol/general-alcohol-faqs](https://www.agco.ca/alcohol/general-alcohol-faqs). The municipality may also have restrictions on where guests are able to purchase or consume alcohol.

## **Do you intend to offer overnight accommodations?**

Check with your local municipality to learn which types of accommodations you can offer on your farm (i.e., campsite, bed and breakfast, or RV pad), what support services you need to provide (i.e. washrooms, hookups, pump-out, etc.), and the number of guests you can host.



## **Do you intend to sell products from other farms along with your own?**

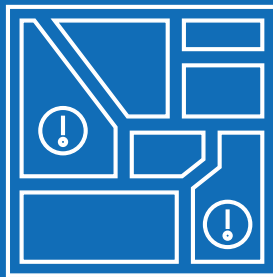
Check with your local municipality to learn which products you can sell on your farm. Some municipalities may require all or some of the available products to be produced on your farm or produced on nearby farms. Some municipalities may allow some products from elsewhere.

## **What is a zoning variance?**

In certain circumstances, you may be able to apply for a minor variance to the zoning bylaw. Minor variance applications take less time to process compared to full rezoning applications. They are for uses that follow the general intent of the zoning bylaw but do not exactly follow the specifications. For example, if you are expanding your existing retail space, and can't fit the additional parking spaces required by the parking by-law, you may seek a minor variance for relief from the requirements. The criteria to consider a minor variance are derived from the Planning Act, and some municipalities may have other criteria of what constitutes a minor variance. Contact your local planning department for the requirements of such an application.

## How will an agritourism operation impact my tax assessment?

Depending on the type of agritourism, the property tax assessment on your farm may be subject to changes. It is recommended that you consult with the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) on potential changes to your tax assessment. MPAC has a webpage of FAQs for Farm Properties ([mpac.ca/en/PropertyTypes/FarmPropertyAssessments](http://mpac.ca/en/PropertyTypes/FarmPropertyAssessments)).



## When should I call the planning department?

As soon as possible. You may be required to submit an application, whether for a building permit, special event license, rezoning, site plan approval or official plan amendment. Application times vary depending on the request and the application type. Contact your planning department at least six months in advance of your planned opening to ensure enough time.

**Access the full Toolkit for more questions, such as:**

Do I need a re-zoning application?  
What is an official plan amendment?  
Is my agritourism idea considered an on-farm diversified use?

# MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR MARKET

It is crucial to understand who you are marketing to, as this will determine how you want to promote your product or experience. Your target market will influence the tools that you use for marketing.

Remember the critical importance of providing a positive experience for your visitors. Word of mouth is often the single most important contributor to continued market success.



# HOW TO BUILD AN OUTWARD-FACING BRAND

Use your mission statement, vision and values to develop a brand identity. What colours, symbols, or words do you feel align well with your business's mission statement, vision and values?



It can be helpful to hire brand designers and marketers to help design your logo, website, and brand imagery, for example. The cost of these services can vary depending on your needs. Developing a logo and brand imagery may be something better-suited for a hired professional. Developing a website, however, is something that can be learned. Several website platforms provide website templates and tools for you to build your own online presence.

## What can you expect to pay for a website?

\* as of June 2021

### Wix

\$6 - \$37 per month

### Squarespace

\$12 - \$40 per month

### Wordpress

\$5 - \$59 per month

### Shopify

\$37 - \$380 per month





**Be consistent with your brand:** This applies to both who you are as a brand, but also how your brand operates. People want to be sure that they are getting the experience they expect when visiting your operation, so making sure you stick to who you are is important.

**Understand your customer's life experience:** Many of your customers will have grown up and live in urban areas often without having been to a working farm. Be patient and ready to answer questions you might think are obvious.

Check out Farm and Food Care's Ag-Ambassador resources: [farmfoodcareon.org/resources/farm-event-resources/](https://farmfoodcareon.org/resources/farm-event-resources/).

## INTEGRATION WITH WIDER MARKETING AND WEB-BASED INITIATIVES

Visitors are more likely to spend the day visiting multiple farms and operations in areas with complementary agritourism activities. This “rising tide lifts all boats” is also known as partnerships, where you can work with your neighbours or other tourism operations to help attract customers to the region.



Tourism Simcoe County supports several agritourism initiatives to draw visitors to the area. For more information on connecting with tourism marketing initiatives, email: [Tourism@simcoe.ca](mailto:Tourism@simcoe.ca)

Local chambers of commerce can also help you build your operation's brand and reach. A membership with your local chamber can allow you to take advantage of various marketing and business to business networking initiatives. You can search online for the applicable chamber of commerce in your area:

[Alliston & District](#) - [Angus](#) - [Barrie](#) - [Clearview](#)  
[Collingwood](#) - [Cookstown & District](#) - [Orillia](#)  
[Oro Medonte](#) - [Ramara](#) - [Southern Georgian Bay](#)  
[Wasaga Beach](#)

## SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS FOR SUCCESS

**Keep it simple:** Try not to overload your audience with too much information. Consider providing just enough to draw them in to your website or visit your farm.

**Hashtags:** Hashtags are a way to group like posts on social media platforms. By incorporating hashtags into your social media posts, you can draw in attention from users who may not have otherwise seen your post.

**Technology can do it for you:** If you're not someone who wants to generate social media content continuously throughout the week, you can use online programs to help generate content and schedule your social media posts across multiple platforms. Spend a chunk of time each week organizing your marketing, and let technology roll it out for you. [Hootsuite](#), [Monday.com](#), [Feedly](#), [Buffer](#) and [Loomly](#) are just a few popular platforms.

**Find your virtual voice:** Your business can have a voice. Consider how your social media can relay your mission, vision, values and brand. For example, is your voice calm, relaxing and warm? Or is it energetic and exciting?

**Talk to your customers:** Social media can be a place to interact with your customers. Don't be afraid to respond to comments, like, and share posts when appropriate. Just remember that everything you post can be seen by your customers, so it is important to keep your comments professional.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



**TCI Management Consultants**

Learn more about adding an agritourism offering on your farm by downloading the full toolkit at: [experience.simcoe.ca/resources](https://experience.simcoe.ca/resources)  
For more information, please contact:

**Tourism Simcoe County**  
[tourism@simcoe.ca](mailto:tourism@simcoe.ca)