

EXPERIENCING FLORIDA AGRICULTURE

A FRESH OPPORTUNITY FOR PRODUCERS AND A FUN OUTING FOR CONSUMERS

Florida agritourism is a growing opportunity for agricultural producers that allows consumers to experience the agricultural industry. The number of agritourism operations in Florida has almost tripled in the last five years, with many more opportunities in the future to expand and reach new people.

The UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) conducted research in five locations in Florida to better understand what opportunities exist for producers and identify consumers' current awareness of and preferences for agritourism.

The researchers found consumers had low familiarity with the terms agritourism or agricultural tourism, and were unable to name local agritourism opportunities. But when they were given more information about agritourism and the types of activities considered to be agritourism, many indicated that they had visited agritourism operations, such as u-picks, crop mazes, farmers' markets, or wineries and breweries.

"The lack of understanding of the term agritourism showed the need to think about how we discuss and promote agritourism activities," assistant professor of agricultural education and communication Joy Rumble said. "There is an opportunity to grow agritourism awareness and interest by using terms that appeal to a consumer audience."

Rumble, who specializes in agricultural communication at the University of Florida, was the lead researcher for the project.

Consumers identified the Internet, newspaper, social media, TV, signs and printed advertisements as methods of finding out about agritourism operations. Social media, signs and email were among the popular preferences for how consumers would like to learn about agritourism operations.

Consumers visit agritourism operations for a variety of reasons, including entertainment, nostalgia, learning and exercise. Consumers discussed wanting to learn about different types of agriculture or specific skills such as learning to grow crops, identifying plants, or selecting ripe produce.

As consumers visit agritourism operations to learn, agritourism operations offer many educational opportunities. Preferences for educational opportunities varied among consumers. Some valued self-guided tours, while others valued guided tours or scheduled programming and some

just wanted educational materials they could take home.

Consumers wanted an affordable experience, acknowledging that different activities would cost different amounts, but preferring to pay between \$10 and \$20 per person.

Consumers also preferred the operation to be easy to get to and located away from the city. Most consumers were willing to travel one to two hours to visit an agritourism operation, but some were willing to travel anywhere in the state or travel out of the state.

When consumers were asked what characteristics would create a perfect agritourism experience, consumers described an affordable, kid-friendly, fun and educational experience. Good weather and animals were also part of their ideal experience.

In addition to learning more about consumers' preferences, two agritourism workshops were held. These workshops attracted current agritourism operators, potential agritourism operators, local government representatives, tourism boards and extension personnel.

The workshops allowed participants to visit agritourism operations and hear directly from speakers about the opportunities and challenges of owning an agritourism operation. The findings from the research and the information shared during the workshops informed the development of a statewide strategic plan for agritourism.

"The strategic plan provides a vision for moving agritourism forward in Florida and we hope that it will be a resource to agritourism operators and those providing services to agritourism operators," Rumble said.

Learn more about the PIE Center's research on consumer preferences for agritourism operations and the strategic plan by visiting piecenter.com.

Right photo: Faculty and staff with the PIE Center visit Red, White and Blues Farm in Williston, Florida.

Photos on right page courtesy of Mary Beth Henry and Katie Stofor. Expert panelists discuss agritourism in Florida.





VISIT A FLORIDA FARM NEAR YOU

Florida is home to an array of operations that showcase the state's diverse agricultural industry. Whether you want to experience a fun outing with your family at a crop maze or pick up some fresh vegetables at a local farm, you can experience Florida agriculture.

Learn more about Florida agritourism and find a local farm near you at visitfloridafarms.com.

Agritourism conferences were held in Polk County and Martin County and participants were able to visit local farms. Learn more about those farms below.

KAI KAI FARM

INDIANTOWN, FLORIDA - MARTIN COUNTY

Kai Kai Farm is a produce operation in Martin County that offers farm tours, farm-to-table dinners, and educational programs. Kai Kai Farm also hosts weddings and celebrations at their venue.

GROUND FLOOR FARM

STUART, FLORIDA - MARTIN COUNTY

Ground Floor Farm of Martin County offers locally grown food, as well as educational workshops and field trips. Ground Floor Farm features many events, including live music and art exhibits.

TRUE BLUE WINERY

DAVENPORT, FLORIDA - POLK COUNTY

True Blue Winery is located in Polk County and offers homemade wine made from locally grown blueberries. Visitors can enjoy a variety of event hosted at the winery or pick their own blueberries.

RIDGE ISLAND GROVES

HAINES CITY, FLORIDA - POLK COUNTY

Ridge Island Groves is a family owned citrus grove in Polk County that sells citrus and citrus products and welcomes customers to their farm for grove tours.

FOX SQUIRREL CORN MAZE

PLANT CITY, FLORIDA - HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

The Futch Family of Hillsborough County hosts the Fox Squirrel Corn Maze, which offers family-friendly activities during October.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CONSUMERS



Promote Affordability

Participants are looking for affordable family friendly activities, so promote the affordability of your operation in advertising.



Advertise on Social Media

Consumers were interested, but didn't know about the opportunities in their area. Ramp up advertising to increase visitor traffic.



Think About Education

Consumers want to learn. Think about how you can capitalize on informal learning opportunities at your agritourism operation.



Ask for Audience Recommendations

Consumers know what they want or how their experience could be better. Ask consumers about their opinions.



Promote Your Activity

Consumers show low recognition of the term agritourism. Directly refer to the type of activity or operation in your promotions.



Consider Promotions

Consumers expressed interest in coupons, season passes, or perks. Consider if this is right for your operation and if it is, highlight your promotions in advertising.

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