

# **CENTER FOR PUBLIC ISSUES EDUCATION**

**IN AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

## **Statewide Plan for Agritourism**

Funding provided by an FDACS specialty crop  
block grant

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## For More Information

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## Situation

Florida is home to 47,000 farm operations covering approximately 10,000,000 acres of farmland (National Agriculture Statistical Service [NASS], 2016). Florida's favorably warm climate allows for the production of a diverse array of more than 300 crops, many of which are specialty crops. Despite having a multi-billion-dollar economic impact (Hodges, Rahmani, & Court, 2017), many small farm operations have to seek alternative revenue to remain in operation. Additionally, the agricultural industry suffers from a lack of consumer awareness of its operations and contributions. In addition to agriculture, Florida tourism contributes more than \$112 billion to the state's economy and attracts approximately 100 million visitors annually (Oxford Economics, 2018; State of Florida, 2017). The state's favorably warm climate, diverse farm operations, and rich tourism heritage provide ample opportunities for agritourism (Francesconi & Stein, 2017). Currently, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS, 2017) reports there are 121 registered U-pick operations, 172 farmers markets, 19 Christmas tree farms, 41 seafood festivals, and 38 wineries and distilleries in Florida, all of which can be classified as agritourism operations.

Florida's legislature has defined agritourism as:

Any agricultural related activity consistent with a bona fide farm, livestock operation, or ranch or in a working forest which allows members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment, or educational purposes, to view or enjoy activities, including farming, ranching, historical, cultural, civic, ceremonial, training and exhibition, or harvest-your-own activities and attractions. (Online Sunshine, 2016, para. 1)

Agritourism is one of fastest growing outdoor recreation activities (Cordell et al., 2008), and between 1999 and 2008, more than 71 million people participated in agritourism activities. This fast-growing industry can boost the revenue of farm operations by allowing them to benefit from increased exposure that leads to greater direct sales (Francesconi & Stein, 2017). Additionally, direct sales to consumers helps decrease the environmental impact associated with the packaging and transportation of food (Evans & Hodges, 2006). Agritourism also provides viable means of increasing the general public's understanding of agriculture, its challenges, and contributions. Schools often participate in agritourism programs to help educate students on where their food comes from.

While agritourism does offer benefits to the farmer and visitors, farmers face a variety of barriers to participation in agritourism. Having visitors on the farm increases the chance for injuries and contamination of food products. Additionally, concerns with theft and accessibility make participation in agritourism difficult. Government regulations related to zoning, health, and food services introduce additional barriers. Farmers have also found it difficult to develop effective marketing strategies to promote their agritourism operation and attract visitors (Hilchey, 1993; McKenzie, Wysocki, Farnsworth, & Clark, 2015).

## Florida Agritourism Resources

There are several organizations in Florida who provide resources for Florida's agritourism industry. These organizations include University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS), FDACS – Division of Marketing and Development, Florida Agritourism Association, Visit Florida, and Florida Farm Bureau Federation.

### UF/IFAS

UF/IFAS provides resources for agritourism operators. They offer a series of [fact sheets](#) on agritourism opportunities and challenges, agritourism laws, and guidelines for farm tours. Additionally, stories of recent news and upcoming events associated with agritourism are featured on [IFAS Blogs](#) under the agritourism tag. Extension agents throughout the state provide additional agritourism support to agritourism operators and visitors.



## FDACS Division of Marketing and Development

FDACS – Division of Marketing and Development provides resources for both agritourism operators and visitors. [Agritourism operators](#) can access business development resources, the Florida Market Bulletin, and *Fresh from Florida* membership information. The Florida Market Bulletin is an advertising forum for small farmers who are unable to afford statewide advertising. The Florida Market Bulletin can be used by farmers to advertise or learn of potential purchasing opportunities. The Bulletin can be accessed by anyone, so it is possible that farmers could use it to advertise an agritourism operation, but reach to a consumer audience is likely limited due to a lack of awareness.

Agritourism visitors can be directed to recreation opportunities throughout the state. FDACS features [recreation opportunities](#) under the categories of: Aquarium Fish; Caring for Lawn, Garden and Landscaping Plants; Fairs and Livestock Shows; Seafood Festivals; U-Pick Farms, Wineries and Vineyards. In addition to recreation opportunities, FDACS provides resources for those seeking to buy [Florida grown products](#), also known as *Fresh from Florida*. Visitors to the FDACS webpage can be directed to information and locators for: Christmas Tree Farms; Community Farmer’s Markets; Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs); Crops in Season; Ferns for Floral Arrangements; Hay Suppliers; Seafood Festivals and Retail Markets; U-pick Farms, Wineries and Vineyards; and Restaurants serving *Fresh from Florida* products.

## Florida Agritourism Association

The Florida Agritourism Association was founded in 2013 and seeks to promote and expand Florida’s agritourism industry. The association provides resources and information to both agritourism [operators](#) and [visitors](#). Agritourism operators can join the association for \$100/year. In exchange, members receive marketing and promotion assistance through the association’s website, social media, and monthly newsletter. The association provides an agritourism toolkit aimed at guiding agritourism operators or those interested in starting an agritourism operation. The toolkit guides readers through Florida’s agritourism law, deciding whether to participate in agritourism, assessing resources, developing a business plan, agritourism benefits, possible agritourism activities, identifying a target audience, hospitality and customer service, retail sales, lodging, agritourism resources, and licensing. Operators are also able to purchase agritourism signage required under Florida’s agritourism law from the association. Members are also able to be listed on the Visit Florida website.

The Florida Agritourism Association provides agritourism visitors with the opportunity to locate agritourism operations. The Association links to more than 100 Florida agritourism destinations. Visitors can search for operations by location or type of activity. The activity categories include: Farm, Nursery, and Ranch; U-Pick & U-Cut; Vineyards & Wineries; Wildlife, Birding, & Exotics; Farmers Market and Special Crops; Trail Riding, Hunting & Petting; and Mazes. Descriptions, images, operation location, and contact information are provided for each agritourism operation. The association is also working to develop a mobile app that could be used by visitors to locate agritourism sites.

## Visit Florida

Visit Florida is primarily a resource for agritourism visitors to locate agritourism opportunities. Currently when visitors open the *Visit Florida* website, there is no tab for Agritourism. However, if they search for “agritourism” they are directed to a page titled [Agritourism and Farm Tours in Florida](#). Once on this page, the website visitors can search through featured agritourism operations, view a map of featured agritourism locations, and read about Florida’s opportunities to experience agriculture and rural life. A limited number of agritourism operations are currently featured.

## Florida Farm Bureau Federation

The Florida Farm Bureau Federation (FFB) seeks to support agriculture by improving rural life and increasing agricultural profits. FFB advocates on behalf of the agricultural industry and has been instrumental in helping to establish and pass Florida’s agritourism law. Additionally, FFB provides resources to agritourism members by keeping them abreast of



policy changes or issues impacting agritourism. FFB has an [Agritourism](#) publication on their website that can be a resource to agritourism operators

<http://www.floridafarmbureau.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/09/AgritourismBooklet07.pdf>. Additionally, FFB’s monthly publication [FloridAgriculture](#) reaches a large readership of more than 140,000 agriculturalists and consumers. The publication often features agritourism operations or discusses issues related to agritourism. This publication can help to keep agriculturalists informed, as well as help to make consumers more aware of agritourism and related issues.

## Floridians’ Awareness and Preferences for Agritourism

A series of focus groups were conducted with Floridians in 2016 to explore their perceptions and preferences related to Agritourism. When the participants were asked to describe what agritourism was, many were unable to discern what agritourism was or recall any agritourism operations they were aware of. After being presented with a definition about agritourism, many participants talked about visiting a farm owned by a close acquaintance or attending farmer’s markets. Others described flower or food festivals, and Walt Disney World’s EPCOT Food and Wine Festival and the Flower and Garden Festival. However, as the focus groups continued and participants shared experiences, they began to identify other agritourism activities, including brewery, winery, and distillery tours, U-pick operations, corn mazes, and community garden activities.

Participants were asked to describe how they decided to attend these different agritourism events. Some participants said they planned the activities ahead of time when deciding to go on a vacation or day trip, but they were not necessarily searching for the term “agritourism.” Others said they decided to participate after seeing a sign for a U-pick operation or winery while driving. Participants were also asked to describe how far they were willing to travel for agritourism activities. Most said they wanted to stay local and did not want to travel further than two hours away. Some participants said they had participated in agritourism activities in other states and even countries, but the sole purpose of the travel was not to visit the agritourism operation.

Participants were asked what they want out of an agritourism activity. For the most part, the participants did not want to engage in strenuous activities and preferred leisure activities. The participants wanted to be able to embark on a self-guided tour and move at their own pace rather than follow a rigid schedule. Participants also valued being able to make local purchases at agritourism venues such as specialty places for products like honey, wine, or blueberries. Additionally, agritourism operations that evoked a sense of nostalgia to “simpler times” were attractive to participants. Amenities were also an important consideration. Bathrooms, cooling options (shade or air conditioning), and food options were some of the top amenities the participants were looking for. The participants said they would prefer to learn about Agritourism from TV, social media, word of mouth, the internet, signs, and emails.

Due to the lack of familiarity with the term agritourism, participants were asked to describe what they thought about the name “agritourism.” The participants said the name was okay, but not something they were familiar with or that they connected with agritourism-type activities. Alternative names were provided, and the participants indicated they liked “Farm Visit,” “Farm Tourism,” and “Vacation Farms” about the same or slightly more than agritourism. Some participants did point out that these terms were restrictive to the specific types of activities. The participants also did not view themselves as tourist so any terms with “tourism” in them did not connect with them. Agritourism might not be the best term to use to promote these types of activities with the public.

## Florida Agritourism Operator’s Needs and Concerns

During agritourism workshops held with producers in 2017, agritourism operators were asked a series of questions to better understand their needs and concerns regarding agritourism. When asked about their greatest challenges the



operators discussed funding and business planning for their agritourism operation. Navigating regulations impacting their operations were also a challenge. Finding the time and being familiar with best practices to marketing their operation were challenging to many operators. They found competition to be increasingly challenging especially in regards to “fake farmers” or those buying agricultural products elsewhere and reselling them as their own. Urban sprawl was a challenge to zoning and land availability. Lastly, they found the criticisms of visitors and false reviews to be challenging to deal with and overcome.

When asked about the education and training that they needed, many operators listed topics that could help them overcome the challenges they face in their operation. They requested agribusiness training specifically in crop/livestock selections, navigating rules and regulations, collaboration, and marketing. Under marketing they specifically wanted training on how to sell their products to the public, target different audience demographics, utilize social media and hashtags, promote events, select the right media channel for promotion, understand marketing stats and trends, use collaborative marketing, build media relations, establish brand ambassadors, utilize search engine optimization, handle bad social media reviews, and solicit social media help. They also requested guidance on having livestock and animals on an agritourism operation and taking animals to schools. Finally, the agritourism operators requested education on understanding how to measure statistics and success of their operation.

From tourism boards, the operators indicated that they needed promotion and marketing help. Regarding marketing they requested signage, marketing across counties, and more emphasis placed on rural tourism. They also needed tourism boards to interface with legislators and governments (local, state, national) on their behalf. The operators also looked to tourism boards for regulatory guidance and grant opportunities. The operators indicated that they also needed to better understand what services tourism boards provide.

From state and county governments, the agritourism operators needed regulatory guidance and proactive communication. They also requested that the greenbelt classification that is a requirement for operators under the agritourism law be enforced and regulated. The operators requested the following services from state and local governments: tax breaks; new business incentives; zoning support and waivers; economic recognition of agritourism; ecotourism support; and the development of farm trails.

## Benchmarking of Agritourism in Other States

Every state has agritourism operations, but the number, promotion, and awareness of these operations vary greatly. Several states have very active and robust agritourism industries. North Carolina, Tennessee, and California were selected for benchmarking in this report.

### North Carolina

In North Carolina, the [Department of Agriculture and Consumers Services](#) provides information to farmers about why they should participate in agritourism and what benefits they may experience. Additionally, their website includes information about applying for the state’s road sign program to help promote agritourism operations to travelers as well as information about agritourism laws and rules. Several resources are available for agritourism operators, including links to other state’s agritourism webpages. The page also links to the [North Carolina Agritourism Networking Association](#). The North Carolina Agritourism Networking Association offers agritourism operators information about upcoming conferences, membership, farm tours, liability warning signs, resources, and legislation.

Both the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service’s website and the North Carolina Agritourism Networking Association’s website offer agritourism visitors operation locators. The North Carolina Agritourism





Networking Association’s website allows visitors to view a map and locate agritourism operations by region. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service’s website allows visitors to search by category and by county.

## Tennessee

The state of Tennessee also features agritourism resources on their Department of Agriculture website. They provide agritourism operators with educational and marketing resources. Much of their marketing resources are tied directly to their *Pick Tennessee Products* state brand. They offer applications for the state branding program as well as directional road signs. Additionally, they hold regular agritourism workshops and an annual conference. They also link to agritourism resources on the University of Tennessee website and the Tennessee Agritourism Association’s website.

The University for Tennessee’s Center for Profitable Agriculture has a program titled [\*Agritourism Ideas to Action\*](#). This program is targeted to existing or developing agritourism operators. The program includes resources on the following topics: Understanding agritourism; Assessing your resources; Planning for success; Understanding regulations; Marketing effectively; Playing it safe – Safety and Emergency Preparedness; and Protecting your assets.

The Tennessee Agritourism Association has a consumer centered and attractive [website](#). Under their “Find a Farm” tab visitors can search for agritourism operations by alphabetical order, activity type, region, season, and month. Additionally, the association provides a calendar of events. The association’s page also links to other state organizations providing agritourism resources such as the Center for Profitable Agriculture at the University of Tennessee, Tennessee Department of Agriculture, and Tennessee Farm Bureau.

## California

The University of California’s Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program seeks to provide professional development for agriculturalists, tourism professionals, and government staff working in agritourism. The program offers workshops, archives past presentations, and links to websites providing additional agritourism support. The archived presentations include topics such as *Assessing a Farm or Ranch for Agritourism*, *Liability Management Strategies*, and *Agritourism Marketing Methods* among many others. The websites they link to include resources from a variety of states including *Extension Training for Agritourism Development* out of Rutgers, *Integrating Safety into Agritourism* from the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety and *Agritourism Ready: Agritourism Emergency Preparedness* out of The Ohio State University.

The University of California also houses the California Agriculture Tourism Directory in their Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. The directory website allows visitors to search for agritourism operations, stay abreast of upcoming events, connect on social media, and follow a food blog. Visitors can search for agritourism operations by region, county, or activity (listed as things to do). The directory also links to a long list of farm trails, wine trails, and local agritourism associations. Additional agritourism operator resources are found on the University of California’s Small Farm Program webpage.

The *Visit California* website also provides information on agritourism in the state under a tab title “Culinary.” The agritourism operations included on the site are farm tours & drives, farm stays, u-pick farms, farm-to-table dining, and food and flower festivals.



## SWOT Analysis

### Strengths

**Strong tourism industry.** More than 100 million people visit Florida each year. The tourism generated by these visitors contributes more than \$112 billion to the state's economy. In addition to the state's visitors, Florida is home to nearly 21 million residents. The strong tourism environment makes Florida an ideal place for agritourism.

**Florida Agritourism Association.** The Florida Agritourism Association is a resource to agritourism operators and visitors alike. They have a web platform that directs visitors to agritourism operations and they provide a toolkit and marketing resources for agritourism. Additionally, they work on behalf of their membership and provide support to help move the agritourism industry forward in Florida.

**Successful Operations.** Florida is home to many successful agritourism operations. The success of these operations provides evidence of potential growth for the agritourism industry. Successful operations serve as a model to others and can be beneficial in organizing a collective movement for agritourism throughout the state.

**Agritourism Resources.** Several organization in Florida provide resources to agritourism operators and/or visitors. These organizations include UF/IFAS, Florida Agritourism Association, Florida Farm Bureau Federation, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumers Services, and Visit Florida. Examples of the resources provided by these organizations include operation locators, tool kits, policy support, marketing and promotion support, and fact sheets.

**Agritourism Legislation.** In 2013, Florida legislature passed the Florida Agritourism Law (F.S. 570.96 and F.S. 570.85-89) which reduces the liability for farms participating in agritourism. It is not a replacement for liability insurance, but it does provide operators with some assurance and protections. The law is similar to agritourism laws passed in other states. There are some eligibility criteria that must be met in order for operations to be covered under the law.

**Fresh from Florida program.** *Fresh from Florida* is a state-wide promotional campaign for Florida grown food. The *Fresh from Florida* logo is used on packaging and signage. Consumers have come to recognize this logo and its connection to Florida grown food. Agritourism operators can become members of the Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign. The membership allows them access to the *Fresh from Florida* logo, reduced costs at industry trade shows, point of purchase materials, farm signs, and promotions.

### Weaknesses

**Low familiarity with agritourism.** Research has found that consumers have low familiarity with the term agritourism and they struggle to identify what activities or operations classify as agritourism. The lack of familiarity with agritourism can hinder promotional and marketing efforts to attract agritourism visitors.

**Marketing focus on tourists.** The term agritourism lends itself to be more attractive to tourists rather than local residents. Additionally, some of the agritourism marketing has been focused on tourists. Local residents may struggle to identify and partake in agritourism activities if they are not reached with marketing information and/or if they perceive that the activity is designed for tourists.

**Not all operations are part of the Florida Agritourism Association.** The Florida Agritourism Association is well positioned to be the source of a comprehensive listing of all agritourism operations, but not all operations choose to be members. The association does charge a membership fee to join, so not all agritourism operations are members. Operations who are not members are unable to benefit from many of the resources provided by the association.

**Lack of collaboration among organizations contributing to agritourism.** There are several organizations contributing to the success of agritourism in Florida (UF/IFAS, FFB, FAA, FDACS, Visit Florida). While all of these organizations are



providing valuable resources, their efforts are disjointed and not very collaborative. For example, Florida Agritourism Association is the only organization that lists the other organization's as resources on their webpage. The lack of collaboration can also lead to the unintentional duplication of work.

**Lack of understanding of roles/services of different organizations among operators.** Agritourism operators are aware of the different organizations contributing to the success of agritourism in Florida, but they find difficulty distinguishing the roles of different organizations. Uncertainty causes some operators to criticize organizations for not providing resources they think they should provide. Additionally, the confusion leaves some operators to never find the resources needed to help make their operation a success.

**Regulatory guidance.** In addition to the Florida Agritourism Law, agritourism operators seek guidance on many regulatory topics. This may include guidance on zoning and land use, food safety, fire codes, permitting and others. Operators need additional regulatory guidance, but it is unclear who should provide that guidance.

**Lack of economic reporting available on agritourism industry.** Many economic reports for agriculture highlight different commodities. However, economic reporting on agritourism is difficult to find and in some cases, is non-existent. A comprehensive count of the number of agritourism operations in the state, the number of jobs provided by these operations, and the economic revenue produced by these operations is not readably available. Economic information can help to demonstrate the impact of the industry.

## Opportunities

**Encourage Florida Agritourism Association Membership.** The Florida Agritourism Association can be a great resource to operators and visitor alike. Increasing membership would provide more resources for the organization to benefit operators while also creating a more comprehensive listing of operations for visitors to enjoy.

**Re-examine categorization of operations on locators.** In the Florida agritourism locators, visitors can look at a map or search by activity. There is an opportunity to expand usability and functionality of these locators by allowing visitors to search not only by activity, but also product, season, and/or month as demonstrated by other state's agritourism operation locators.

**Educate operators.** Operators indicate that they need continuing education particularly in the areas of marketing and regulation. Offering ongoing educational workshops or online educational resources for operators could help to increase individual success as well as the success of the industry. Increasing knowledge of available resources is also needed.

**Expand agritourism listings on Visit Florida.** Few agritourism operations are currently listed on the Visit Florida website. There is an opportunity to expand the agritourism listings on this website in order to drive visitors to agritourism operations throughout the state. A Florida Agritourism Association membership benefit is being listed on Visit Florida. However, it does not appear that all members are listed on Visit Florida.

**Re-brand agritourism with familiar terms.** Consumers do not connect with the term agritourism and they are not aware of what type of activities constitute agritourism. There is an opportunity to re-brand agritourism with a term(s) that is more familiar and attractive to a consumer audience. Doing so could drive consumer interest and participation in agritourism.

**Increase agritourism marketing.** Consumer awareness of agritourism operations is low. However, many express interest in participating in agritourism activities. Increasing marketing efforts could increase awareness of agritourism and drive participation in agritourism activities. There is an opportunity to expand agritourism marketing at the individual operation, county or region, and the state-wide level.



**Identify grant funding opportunities.** Organizations contributing to agritourism as well as individual agritourism operation could benefit from grant funding. Actively searching for and pursuing these opportunities to help to elevate the agritourism industry in Florida.

**Develop agritourism trails.** Throughout the United States there is a growing trend to participate in agritourism trails. This included a mapped-out trail that takes you on a self-guided tour of agritourism operations throughout a county, region, or state. Sometimes the trails feature a variety of commodities and other times they may be focused on a specific type of operation, like wineries. [Sonoma County Farm Trails](#) and [Florida's Treasure Coast Wine and Ale Trail](#) are examples of these trails. Trails provide visitors with a guide to the operations in the area as well as the ambition to want to visit multiple operations. There are also promotional and event opportunities that can be incorporated into organized trails.

**Integrate with Ecotourism.** Ecotourism and agritourism are often discussed separately, but there is an opportunity to integrate the two together. In Florida, there are often agritourism opportunities and ecotourism opportunities in close proximity to each other and sometimes even on the same operation. For example, a blueberry farm may offer agritourism activities such as farm stays and upick blueberries, while also offering ecotourism opportunities such as bird watching or hiking. Working together could increase marketing power and reach, as well as increase visitors to both agritourism and ecotourism venues.

## Threats

**Competition.** Agritourism operations are faced with competition from events and attractions competing for visitor's time. The beaches, springs, theme parks, museums, and other attractions can overshadow agritourism opportunities. Additionally, operators sometimes face competition from other agritourism operations. A particular concern among producers is the competition presented by "fake farmers." The producers described "fake farmers" as those purchasing agricultural products and re-selling them under the impression that they grew or produced the products.

**Criticisms and liabilities.** Allowing visitors on a farm can open the farm up to criticisms and activists. These criticisms and activists could damage the operation's reputation and in extreme cases even cause the operation to go out of business. Liabilities also pose a threat to an operation's longevity. If visitors are hurt or injured while visiting an operation, the operation could be liable. The fear of criticisms, activists, and liabilities could also cause some operators to discontinue their participation in agritourism or prevent other operators from pursuing agritourism.

**Agricultural threats.** Threats that impact any agricultural operation also have the potential to impact agritourism operations. These threats may include pests, disease, weather, input costs, land availability, urban sprawl, and labor.

**Low consumer awareness.** Consumers are not familiar with the term agritourism and have low awareness of agritourism activities in their local area. Low awareness could hinder the long-term success of the agritourism industry. Consumers must be familiar with the opportunities available to them in order to participate in them.

**Undefined and overlapping roles.** Several organization in Florida are contributing to agritourism, but the role of each organization is not clearly defined. Therefore, some work is being duplicated. When work is duplicated, the overall time and money resources going toward agritourism are reduced. The undefined and overlapping roles also cause confusion among agritourism operators making it difficult for them to identify which organization they should work with.

**Agritourism Law Enforcement.** The Florida Agritourism Law was developed to help protect agritourism operators. However, operators have expressed concern that there is no enforcement of the law. There is concern that operations lacking the necessary requirements to be covered by the law may be trying to take advantage of the law.



## Statewide Plan for Agritourism

The plan was informed by the available resources for Florida agritourism, Floridians' awareness of agritourism, operators' needs, benchmarking agritourism in other states, and the examination of the SWOTs of Florida's agritourism industry. After examining the current state of agritourism in Florida, the authors identified target audiences, goals, and tactics to help Florida's agritourism industry to move forward.

### Target Audiences

Three primary audiences were identified as crucial to the future success of agritourism in Florida. The primary audiences include the organizations working on agritourism, extension agents/specialists, and growers and producers. Additionally, Florida residents and visitors were identified as a secondary audience. These audiences will be discussed in more detail below.

### Organizations contributing to agritourism

The future of Florida's agritourism is dependent on the organizations supporting the industry, providing resources to the operators, and attracting visitors. These organizations include UF/IFAS, Florida Farm Bureau Federation, Florida Agritourism Association, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and Visit Florida. These organizations will be key in implementing the goals set forth in this report.

### Extension agents and specialists

There is an extension office in each of Florida's 67 counties. The personnel in these offices can be a great resource of information to agritourism operators and visitors alike. Extension agents and specialists often offer educational training and are present at community events. This audience is well positioned to be a conduit of information and education between the organizations contributing to agritourism and agritourism operators.

### Agricultural growers and producers

Agritourism would not exist without agricultural growers and producers. Growers and producers are essential to the implementation of agritourism. This audience will be key in helping to propel the industry forward by not only participating in agritourism, but being open to education and support, collaborations, etc.

### Florida residents and visitors

Florida residents and visitors were identified as a secondary audience in the state-wide plan for agritourism because the primary audiences listed above will each interface with the consumer audience. The plan is focused on mobilizing the primary audiences move agritourism forward while equipping them to reach Florida residents and visitors (secondary audience) with their communication.

## Goals

Short, medium, and long term goals have been identified as part of the state-wide plan. These goals can be found below.

### Short Term Goals (1 year)

- Extension agents express intent to support agritourism operators.
- Clearly defined roles are established among organizations supporting agritourism in Florida.

### Medium Term Goals (5 years)

- Extension agents offer operator education throughout the state on an annual basis.
- Increase the number of agritourism operations in Florida by 10%.
- Develop and implement a state-wide initiative and/or brand to promote Florida agritourism.



### Long Term Goals (7 years)

- Florida residents and visitors are active participants in agritourism.
- Florida residents and visitors are knowledgeable and aware of Florida agritourism.

### Tactics

To achieve the previously mentioned goals, the following tactics have been identified.

#### Meeting of key players in organizations supporting agritourism in Florida.

Several organizations are supporting agritourism in Florida. However, these organizations are sometimes duplicating work, missing collaborative opportunities, and appear to have undefined roles in the eyes of agritourism operators. The future of agritourism in Florida depends on the support provided by these organizations. A meeting of the key players, would help to establish roles and identify collaborative opportunities to propel the industry forward. Bi-annual or more regular meetings of the key players should continue to be held after this initial meeting to help to facilitate ongoing progress and collaboration.

During this meeting, it is also for each organization to define their role in agritourism. While each organization may clearly understand the role they provide to Florida's agritourism industry, this is not clear to agritourism operators. Additionally, the roles may not be clear to other organizations supporting agritourism. Each organization should clearly define their role and the key players should identify how best to communicate these roles to agritourism operators.

#### Link to other supporting agritourism organizations.

An examination of the agritourism resources available in Florida revealed that most organizations were only discussing the resources they could provide in regards to agritourism. The organizations were not sharing with their website visitors where they could find additional information or resources. Linking to other agritourism organizations was observed in the benchmarking of other state's agritourism industries. Cross-linking between organizations enhances the collaborative environment and helps website visitors to find the information they are looking for, even if it is not on the first website they visit.

#### Training and development of extension agents to be able to train agritourism operators on the skills necessary to run a successful agritourism business.

Because of the distribution of Extension throughout the state, agents are well positioned to help educate and train operators on the skills needed to be successful in agritourism. However, the agents must first receive training on this information. The key organizations contributing to agritourism should identify the information that agents should be transferring to operators through education and training. Additionally, a system should be established to train Extension agent's and inform them of any information changes over time. Extension agent turn over should also be considered in a plan for training and development.

#### Training and development of agritourism operators.

Agritourism operators indicated that they need additional education and training to help them be successful in agritourism. This plan recommends that extension agents and specialists be the vehicle through which operators receive education and training. However, a consistent curriculum and approach should be developed for extension agents to deliver. Other educational methods may also need to be considered. All educational approaches should be evaluated to determine whether they are effective and should be continued.

#### Utilization of existing materials.

Within in Florida and throughout the United States, there are numerous resources available on agritourism. From marketing, to business planning, social media use, and beyond. Organizations are encouraged to utilize these resources for training and education where possible (with proper acknowledgment to the source). Adapting resources or seeking





existing resources to inform training and education in Florida strengthen the materials developed and save valuable time and monetary resources.

#### **Develop a branding and marketing plan for Florida agritourism.**

The development and implementation of a branding and marketing plan would help the primary audiences to connect with the consumer audience. Additionally, if all agritourism operations are supported by and utilize the same brand message the power of the brand is increased. This process would increase brand recognition and awareness of agritourism among consumers. The branding and marketing plan should establish a key message, communication tactics, social media strategies, media relations, and best management practices for agritourism operations.

#### **Lobby to support agritourism in the state tourism budget.**

Additional legislative support could help to move the industry forward. Organizations involved in agritourism, who are able to lobby for support, should lobby for support in the state tourism budget. The nature and depth of that support should be determined by the needs of the industry and the organizations who are able to lobby.

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