

Best of Both Worlds: Agritourism Part 1

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SPEAKERS

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Phillip Stokes 00:04

This is Science by the Slice, a podcast from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Center for Public Issues Education. In this podcast, experts discuss the science of issues affecting our daily lives, reveal the motivations behind the decisions people make, and ultimately provide insight to solutions for our lives. Hello, and welcome to Science by the Slice. I'm Phillip Stokes, and in this two part series, we're talking about agritourism. That term by itself may or may not mean a whole lot to you. But what feelings and emotions come to mind if you imagine yourself sipping wine on a vineyard in Napa Valley, or horseback riding through the Appalachians picking red ripe delicious strawberries on a cool winter morning in Florida, taking your family to a pumpkin patch for that perfect family portrait or cutting down your own Christmas tree. Just not how Clark Griswold did in National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation

01:13

You see kids, this is what our forefathers did. I can't feel my legs. They walked out into the woods they picked up that special tree and they cut it down with their bare hands. Mom I came from my hips. Clark, yes Honey, Audrey's frozen from the waist down. It's all part of the experience honey. There it is.

Phillip Stokes 01:37

When you listen to that scene, while comical, I want you to key in on two things said by Chevy Chase's character. He makes a connection to our history when he referenced what our forefathers did. Also, when his daughter was complaining of being cold, he responded by saying it's all a part of the experience. Now while it's illegal to walk into the woods and remove a tree from land you don't own those motivations for Clark Griswold to connect with his family roots and have the experience of being in nature are two of the same reasons that draw people to farms and agritourism. With less than 2% of the American population directly involved in agriculture, agritourism has become one of the primary ways the public can experience agriculture. Nostalgia for days spent on a family member's farm, a desire to be in nature and aspirations for fun, memorable experiences are just a few of the reasons people visit agritourism operations. And in this episode, you'll hear much more about agritourism in a conversation led by Michaela Kandzer, one of the hosts of Science by the Slice as she talks with Dr. Joy Rumble, Assistant Professor in the Department of

Agricultural Communication, Education and Leadership at The Ohio State University. Dr. Rumble's research focuses on consumers' perceptions of different agricultural issues or topics, and how communication can influence those perceptions over time. Prior to being at Ohio State, Dr. Rumble was an assistant professor here at the University of Florida, conducted research through the PIE Center, and she led studies to better understand consumers' perceptions on agritourism, she studied what brought people to farms. What were the most enjoyable parts of the visit, the types of educational opportunities enjoyed while on the farm, and analyze the data to create recommendations for agritourism operators. So we'll join in on the conversation between Michaela and Dr. Rumble as Dr. Rumble starts out by defining agritourism.

J Joy Rumble 03:52

Yeah, agritourism for me is a farming operation that attracts visitors from outside of the agricultural industry for the purposes of Education, Recreation, or even just retail experiences.

M Michaela Kandzer 04:07

Okay, so what is the importance or the significance and the benefits of agritourism and agritourism operations in Florida and in the United States?

J Joy Rumble 04:17

I think there's lots of reasons why agri tourism can be beneficial or significant and on many different levels. So for individuals or for consumer audiences, agritourism operations provide not only means to local food often but also just a means of nostalgia a lot of times, coming to those operations remind them of visiting maybe a relative's farm when they were children, or drawing them to their family roots or history and so it can be really significant and important to the visitors of agritourism operations from that standpoint, on the local level, agritourism can be really important to local economies to drive to tourism to the local area, provide economic benefit, provide jobs, all of those things. And I think particularly in a state like Florida, you have the benefit of tourism and agriculture being the top two industries in the state. And so there's a real opportunity for agritourism operations to take advantage of that and to bring some additional capital to their local communities, especially if they can advertise in relation to those other popular tourism events. You know, maybe visitors go spend a day at the beach and get sunburned and they don't want to spend a day laying on the beach the next day, well, then they have the opportunity to visit the agritourism operation. Broadly, agritourism offers the opportunity for us as an industry to help connect people back to agriculture. Help them to understand where their food comes from. The steps producers might be taking, from an environmental standpoint, what they're doing to, you know, maybe control invasive weeds or invasive pests that might be on the land. They're growing practices, and really just helping people understand how food gets from the farm to their table.

M Michaela Kandzer 06:08

Can you just kind of talk about what an agritourism operation could look like? So I know that there are a lot of them, they all kind of, you know, do different things or look differently or interact with their customers in a different way. For people that maybe have not realized that they've been to an agritourism operation before or maybe want to go one or not really sure what that experience looks like. Can you just explain that for our listeners?

J Joy Rumble 06:29

Yeah. So I think that's a really important thing to touch on. I'm glad you asked that. Because actually, when we did some research with consumers in Florida, when we did some work on agritourism, we would ask them, What agritourism sites have you visited and they weren't sure what agritourism was or that they had visited. And then the more that we discussed it with them. They said, Oh, yeah, I've done that. So it can be anything from like wineries, and u-pick operations to corn mazes, or crop mazes. U-pick flowers, hay rides, wedding venues that are on agricultural grounds, and all sorts of things like that. And then very closely related is also eco tourism, which a lot of times might cross into agricultural lands, especially in Florida might, you know, things like birdwatching, or guided hikes and stuff like that, that maybe go through ranch lands.

M Michaela Kandzer 07:22

Okay, and so you also talked about kind of this cross section where agritourism also educates the public and people that visit their operations about where their food comes from, or you know how the farm to table analogy. And so how can agritourism operations benefit the ag industry by raising awareness about these topics?

J Joy Rumble 07:42

I think they have a real opportunity to educate the public, because you know, they're coming there for some sort of recreation or maybe even education or maybe just to buy something. But there's an opportunity to make that a more holistic experience. And whether it's providing historical facts or just did you know facts, or even just as simple as labeling different pieces of equipment or different products or crops around the operation that they might see can go really a long way and hoping to educate the public. Of course, more formal education can be utilized as well, such as provided maybe guided tours, or even little workshop Skills Workshop, maybe a canning demonstration, if that matches the operation and really a lot of different things that can be done.

M Michaela Kandzer 08:31

So you talked about doing research on this topic previously. So what kind of things did you research and what were some of the findings and what were some of the most interesting things that you could share with us today?

J Joy Rumble 08:42

Yeah, so we asked consumers about their experiences with agritourism. And then what they wanted out of agritourism operations. And a lot of that focus was how they learned about the operations. But then also once they got there, what type of information that they wanted and how they wanted to interact. And a lot of that had to do with educational information. And some things that we learned from them is that there was they wanted a variety of experiences when it came to education. They wanted to be able to learn through self discovery, through maybe like, you know, those labels or placards that just provide short little

facts, but some people also wanted more of the guided tours, or even materials that they could take home with them and read later. So that was one of the main things that we learned was really how they wanted to receive information and what they were interested in.

M

Michaela Kandzer 09:33

After like learning that information, how can that be implemented? Or what did you guys do with that information to help you know agritourism operations across the across the state across the US?

J

Joy Rumble 09:42

So with that information, we actually wrote a couple of different EDIS pubs publications, which are published by University of Florida Extension, and those provide some guidance for agritourism operations as they think about hosting tours on their farms or operations, implementing educational opportunities, really developing those educational programs. And so there's, I think there's three different documents that hit on those different things. And so I guess just kind of a plug for those EDIS documents to take a look at those, because they really do provide some step by step guides, as well as some examples of things that you might be able to do on your operation.

M

Michaela Kandzer 10:26

Okay, yeah, that's really cool. So I'll be I'll be sure to look those up, and also link those in the show notes. So that way, people can quickly find them and look into this. So I know we already kind of touched on this a little bit. But one of the questions I want to ask today were what are some of the ways that agritourism operations can incorporate education into their operations? So I know we talked about you know, they can do it either a little bit more formally through guided tours, or a little bit more passively through, you know, having plaques next to their farm equipment, or, you know, having demonstrations for people to watch or take on materials. Are there any other ways that you can think of that agritourism operations do or can incorporate education into their operation?

J

Joy Rumble 11:08

Yeah, so, you know, signs are always good, like we talked about, but some other things that I think people don't always think about are, you know, self guided tours around a farm or even audio tours, there's lots of really cool apps these days, that would allow you to easily set up an audio tour, or even a scavenger hunt around the operation where, you know, visitors can look for clues. And then maybe if they complete the whole scavenger hunt, maybe they get \$1 off of their purchase, or a coupon for something of that sort. So that can be really fun for people. But also like guided tours, you know, you think of, I don't know, I feel like everybody's been on a tour, maybe at a Cavern or even at Disney. If you ride like the if you go to Animal Kingdom, and you ride the bus and they go through the Safari, they, you know, they talk to you, and they tell you what you're seeing and kind of give you the history of things. And I think there's an opportunity to do that at farms and agritourism operations as well, but also providing, you know, some face to face like demonstrations or workshops, if, you know, I'm thinking particularly of like animal operations, maybe there's a petting zoo component to an operation, you know, there's opportunity, opportunity to introduce people to maybe an animal more in depth where you talk more about the animal and their behaviors, and maybe how you care for them and things like that. But I think there's also opportunities to do that with non animal operations, different crops and things you could feature as well and discuss maybe, where they

grow, when they're available, how you can purchase them how you can prepare them, I think that's a big thing, especially when we talk about local food, consumers tend to get into habits of their food purchases, and then when they're presented with maybe something new that grows locally, they might be a little bit hesitant because they don't know what to do with it. And so I think that's also just an opportunity is to let them know when things are available, but also what to do with them.

M

Michaela Kandzer 13:06

Yeah, and I think something that's personally really interesting to me about agritourism operations is that a lot of times they span from adulthood to children, like there's always something for everyone.

J

Joy Rumble 13:18

Absolutely. And I'm glad that you brought up that agritourism is something for people of all ages. Because as we do think about, you know, these educational opportunities, it's also important to think about what audience you're tailoring those educational opportunities toward. So, you know, a scavenger hunt for adults might be look look different than a scavenger hunt for, you know, maybe an elementary audience. And so you have to really think about who you're trying to educate. Are you trying to educate those parents? Or adult visitors? Are you trying to educate the children who through the activity their parents would be educated too but who's really that primary audience, and really focus those educational activities to those audiences

M

Michaela Kandzer 14:02

Yeah, for sure. And just being able to have the flexibility to you know, like, you brought it up to you when you said that, you know, parents learn through the activities that the kids are doing as well. So like having something extra that the parents can also find interesting and educational, that isn't quite as elementary. I think that's a really cool point, too. So what are some of the recommendations that you have for people who own their own agritourism operations?

J

Joy Rumble 14:26

Well, some a recommendation that I would have is to think about the broader objectives that you have for your agritourism operation. Of course, everybody's gonna be you know, primarily focused on the business objectives, you know, you want to make a profit, etc. But think about those broader impacts such as those to the industry or maybe even just your local community. And then think about what you want to change and that broader perspective. So do you want to change your communities knowledge or appreciation of agriculture? Do you want to change Maybe their are behaviors related to buying or legislation? And if you find yourself answering yes to one of those many questions or options to that broader perspective, then you can really focus in your educational programming, it's to try to change those. And some specific steps to do that is to understand the change that you want to make, determine who your audience is determines your desired outcomes. So whether that is maybe just increasing purchases of local food or voting a certain way on legislation, or getting involved in agriculture in the local community, focus on those desired outcomes, design those learning activities around those outcomes. And then, of course, after you implement it, take a moment to reflect and even just informally evaluate how successful those activities

were in achieving your outcomes. Or maybe they even achieved some other goal that you didn't even know you had. But definitely taking a moment to think about the changes you made and determine whether they were successful or not, is going to be really important.

M

Michaela Kandzer 16:03

Yeah, I think that the idea just to be very intentional about what you're doing is really an important thing to take home, too. I like the way you put it, though, thinking about what are the impacts are the changes or the lasting legacy that I want to leave in my community or my local area? And then how can I accomplish that with the operation that I have? And the you know, the gifts that I have? How can I use that to educate the public or make changes in my community or support my economy? I think that's really interesting.

J

Joy Rumble 16:33

If you get people to come to your operation and make that initial, maybe purchase or visit, it can quickly become a tradition that people do every year. And so like I remember, when I lived in Gainesville, it seemed like the thing to do in the spring was to go out to Red, White and Blues Farm the blueberry farm outside like by Williston, everybody wanted to go out and do that. And then like, it was like, every year, we were waiting for spring to come around. So we could go get that blueberry milkshake, or that blueberry ice cream or go pick those u-pick blueberries. And so I think it quickly becomes a tradition, I see the same thing here in Ohio, there's a really popular corn maze operation just outside of town here in Worchester. And people come from all over the state to go to it. But like, every year, people are waiting for that to open. And you know, we're going to go do the corn maze and get the pumpkins and they even have like bonfires like you can rent a bonfire ring and cook s'mores over it with your family. And like, it just becomes a tradition that people start to look forward to. And then it becomes that kind of yearly economic benefit that the community can come to expect. And I think that, you know, last year with COVID, a lot of agritourism operations were kind of hit hard by that. But I think a lot of them actually found maybe more efficient ways to operate to make experiences more enjoyable for everybody. I know a lot of them were doing like advanced ticket sales, where you buy tickets for admission at a certain time. And they found that during peak season that really helped to improve the traffic flow and prevent overcrowding, and so that people had more enjoyable experiences. And if you can continue to facilitate those more enjoyable experiences, then I think that helps to, you know, help spread the word and get people to keep coming back year after year as well.

M

Michaela Kandzer 18:24

Yeah, and I think that's really interesting, too, because I know we live in a world of COVID right now. And so, I know that you haven't researched this, but I mean, I think we can all know that. COVID-19 has most definitely impacted agritourism operations. And so what do you think so what do you think some of those impacts were? Do you think that most of the time agritourism operations are outside? So did that also help them out? You know, like, what do you think that kind of looked like?

J

Joy Rumble 18:49

I mean, I can only speak just kind of from observation that I experienced here. But what I experienced what I saw going on here is that it was most definitely the advanced ticket sales. But also, yes, it was

popular because it was opportunities for people to do something that was outside where they felt like they could distance themselves enough to still be safe. And so kind of like, you know, the national parks have been getting all the headlines for being like super overcrowded, within the last year or so, because it's people are getting outdoors, because their opportunities have been limited because of COVID. And so, yeah, I think that while, you know, it was maybe touch and go for a little bit navigating different mandates and stuff. I think they most of them ended up being able to adapt and identify some things that were really beneficial.

M

Michaela Kandzer 19:40

Yeah, and things that they would be like he's like the advanced ticket sales, something that they learned from the pandemic that they want to carry forward in the future. I think that's really cool to kind of also just show the resiliency and the adaptability, like you said, of the agritourism industry. What does safety look like on an agritourism operations? Is that something people have been concerned about? or when visiting agritourism operations?

J

Joy Rumble 20:03

Yes, most definitely. And some colleagues of mine actually led an EDIS document on the safety as well. And there in Florida there is the Agritourism Association that I would encourage all producers to be a part of as well the Florida Agritourism Association. And they actually sell a sign that is tied to the state legislation there that provides some level of protection to the farms. It states something to the effect that this is a working farm. We're not responsible for injuries and stuff like that. But the Agritourism Association in Florida can be a great resource for some of those liabilities, thinking about insurance that you might need, as well as what the state law says about agritourism operations, as well as just a great network of other people to talk to. But as far as safety goes, you know that most of these are operational, you might have heavy equipment, you might have animals, that's gonna bring in disease that's gonna bring in, you know, just all kinds of risk. Fall and trip hazards are another one that's really big, you might have slippery areas, you might have just trip hazards, you know, people running through a field, you know, is usually good opportunity to fall or, you know, a lot of the operations, you know, make slides and climbing apparatuses out of tires and different things like that. And so, you know, really cool stuff, but it does present opportunities for somebody to possibly get injured and you just have to make sure those protections are in place. If you're serving food, of course, then you have the risk of foodborne illnesses. Definitely making sure in COVID, you're also maybe taking extra precautions, maybe offering masks, hand sanitization of course, hand sanitizer is a good idea even in non COVID times any signage that you might need for those sorts of things. But like I said, the Agritourism Association is a good resource for those things.

M

Michaela Kandzer 22:11

So do you have any other thoughts or any parting thoughts that you'd like to share with our listeners today just thinking about agritourism? If they want to visit one? Or if they happen to own one? Or would like to own one one day? What would you like to tell those people?

J

Joy Rumble 22:23

Yeah, so I think you know, incorporating educational opportunities into an agritourism operation can probably be a little bit overwhelming, especially when you're just trying to get all the business components

to work. And, you know, you're worried about all of the things dotting your i's crossing the t's making sure the experience is good for everybody. And maybe the educational opportunities feel like an extra or an add on or just one more thing that you had, like you want to do, but maybe isn't necessary. And it might be easy to say, well, I'll do that next year, or I'll do that next year, you know, and just keep putting it off. But I would really encourage operators to try one thing start small. Maybe the first year is just labeling things, or maybe placing staff at points of interest to answer questions. And just see how that goes. And if you start to see positive comments or reactions to that, maybe you'll do it again next year, maybe you'll identify something else that you can add. And I think it's a good kind of offseason project to think about how you can incorporate those things. And another recommendation that I have is visit other agritourism operations in your state, but as well as other states if you're able to get out to other states, because I always learn a ton by visiting other operations and not only just observing maybe what they're doing from an educational standpoint or, but also what they're doing from maybe a marketing standpoint, a safety standpoint, maybe even just layout or traffic flow, maybe what they're doing for traffic, just maybe maps of the operation, different things like that. Just be a really keen observer and see what you're experiencing and how you can maybe take things that you like and adapt them to your own operation.

M Michaela Kandzer 24:16

Yeah, I like that be a good student learner, right?

J Joy Rumble 24:19

Yes, yes.

M Michaela Kandzer 24:20

So I think that's all the questions I had for you today. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

J Joy Rumble 24:25

If you are working in agritourism, connect with your your peers who might be doing agritourism as well connect with your local county extension agent and the Agritourism Association and you should be in good hands and if you have any further questions, you can feel free to reach out to me at Rumble.6@osu.edu.

P Phillip Stokes 24:55

I want to thank Dr. Joy Rumble for being a guest on Science by the Slice, we'll be sure to include resources to her research in the show notes, as well as other resources on agritourism. And in part two of this series.

M Michaela Kandzer 25:12

We are currently at Red White and Blues Farm in Williston, Florida. We were able to take out our whole entire Pie Center team today we've done lots of fun stuff, looked at pumpkins, pick some flowers, picked Zinnias wrote on the pumpkin eater, which is a combine that drives around the farm, we're done the big

slide that was really fun. It's much, much taller once you get up there, and it looks from the ground. (screaming)

P

Phillip Stokes 25:43

That's audio from some members of the Pie Center going down the slide at Red, White and Blues Farm in Williston, Florida. You'll have to see it to better visualize what the slide and the farm look like. And you're in luck, because we created a short promo video of our time at the farm, which you can see on the Pie Center social media. And while at the farm, Michaela interviewed Jeff Manley, Director of agritourism for the operation, and he shares what it's like to manage and grow multiple agritourism operations. So in a way, we invite you to come with us to the farm and listen to part two in this series available now. As always, I want to thank everyone involved in Science by the Slice, Michaela Kandzer who led our conversations for this series, Rachel Rabon, Valentina Castano, Sydney Honeycutt, Ricky Telg, Ashley McLeod-Morin and Alena Poulin. I'm Phillip Stokes. Thanks for listening to Science by the Slice.