



# COUNTY OF SISKIYOU

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**  
**Building ♦ Environmental Health ♦ Planning**  
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**ALLAN CALDER, AICP**  
DIRECTOR

## STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: June 21, 2017

TO: Siskiyou County Planning Commission

FROM: Randy Chafin, Interim Planning Director

SUBJECT: Agritourism Zoning Conceptual Discussion

### BACKGROUND

At the May 17<sup>th</sup> meeting the Commission was provided a White Paper on agritourism (attached) and a publication from UC Davis entitled Agricultural Issues Brief (attached). Three members of the public addressed the Commission on this topic.

Commissioners suggested that the activities and uses that come under the definition of agritourism need to be carefully defined and expressed concern about additional regulation that might result if agritourism is addressed in the County Zoning Ordinance. Commissioners also suggested that in addition to minimizing the permitting process that the environmental review process should also be minimized.

The Commission asked that the discussion of agritourism be continued to the June meeting with the possibility of the Commission making a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors at that time.

### ANALYSIS

As staff has explained, several property owners in agricultural zones have recently come forward with proposals to bring members of the general public onto active farm and ranch lands in order to engage in group entertainment, social, and educational activities. This proposed activity and use is referred to as agritourism.

The existing County Zoning Ordinance currently makes no provision for such activities and uses in agricultural zoning districts. Therefore, such activities and uses are not permitted.

To respond to demand and be proactive, staff believes that consideration should be given to amending the Zoning Ordinance so that agritourism uses are permitted in certain locations, under certain circumstances, and subject to an appropriate level of regulation in order to ensure that such uses are compatible with nearby agricultural and non-agricultural lands.

Staff believes that amending the Zoning Ordinance to permit agritourism could be of considerable interest to certain members of the farming and ranching community, the general public, and individuals interested in engaging in agritourism activities. As such, before proceeding with preparation of amended Zoning Ordinance language, staff believes that this concept should be fully vetted so that an approach to

regulation that is appropriate for Siskiyou County can be devised and all advantages and disadvantages of addressing agritourism in the County Zoning Ordinance can be identified.

### **PLANNING STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

**CEQA** – There is no project requiring CEQA analysis at this time. If and when the Planning Commission takes action to recommend to the Board of Supervisors that it adopt amended Zoning Ordinance text, a determination based on an appropriate level of CEQA analysis will be warranted.

**Recommend** to the Board of Supervisors that an Advisory Committee be formed to determine whether the County Zoning Ordinance should be amended to address agritourism and how such uses and activities should be regulated.

### **SUGGESTED MOTION**

I move that the Planning Commission recommend to the Board of Supervisors that an Advisory Committee comprised of representatives of the County's farming and ranching community and others be formed for the purpose of discussing the possibility of amending the Siskiyou County Zoning Ordinance to address agritourism, including defining its meaning in the context of Siskiyou County and avoiding the imposition of unnecessary regulation.

### **PREPARATION**

Prepared by the Siskiyou County Planning Division

For additional information, please contact:

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### **ATTACHMENTS**

- 1) Agritourism White Paper, dated 4/13/17
- 2) US Davis Agricultural Issues Brief, dated 9/2003



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**ALLAN CALDER,**  
DIRECTOR

**TO:** Planning Commission

**FROM:** Randy Chafin, Interim Planning Director

**DATE:** May 17, 2017

**SUBJECT:** Item for Discussion:  
Agritourism Zoning Conceptual Discussion

## **WHITE PAPER - AGRITOURISM ZONING CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this white paper is to initiate a discussion among the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors about the concept of agritourism and the possibility of revising the Siskiyou County Zoning Ordinance in a manner that would accommodate, and possibly encourage, such uses and activities. Planning staff has developed this white paper in cooperation with staff from the Siskiyou County Economic Development Council. In addition, staff contacted planners in other rural California counties to gain insight on how agritourism is handled elsewhere.

This white paper provides some basic information about agritourism and attempts to identify potential benefits and drawbacks of allowing agritourism through an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance. Planning staff requests feedback and guidance from the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors before beginning the process of developing revised zoning text.

Increasingly, the County has been asked to identify the zoning districts and locations that would permit what is, for the purpose of this white paper, referred to as agritourism. Also, the County is aware that agritourism, in various forms and intensities, is already taking place in certain agriculturally zoned areas of the County. Currently, the County Zoning Ordinance does not specifically recognize nor allow agritourism in the agricultural districts.

### **What is agritourism?**

Agritourism, in its simplest definition, is when people not associated with a farm or ranch are invited to the farm or ranch to purchase products or engage in agricultural activities. Visitation can be as quick as purchasing an item and leaving (e.g., a produce stand, farmer's market, or tasting room) or can involve extended stays (e.g., rodeo, festival, retreat, social gathering, or dude ranch).

The Agricultural Issues Center at the UC Davis Cooperative Extension offers the following description of agritourism:

Agritourism is a business conducted by a farmer or rancher for the enjoyment or education of the public, to promote the products of the farm and generate additional farm income. It provides rural experiences to urban residents and economic alternatives to farmers and ranchers. Agritourism enterprises include such activities as farm tours, roadside stands, bed and breakfast businesses, and cattle drives.

Agritourism brings diversification opportunities to farms and ranches that can help buffer fluctuating markets. It can increase farm revenue and increase community economic activity. It can provide economically feasible ways to care for natural habitats, natural scenic areas, natural resources, and special places. Agritourism can also turn urban residents into strong allies of farms and ranches.

Agritourism brings diversity to agricultural operations, supplements income in low-revenue seasons, provides income that can help save the family farm or ranch, and promotes agricultural products.

The following definition of agritourism is contained in the Yolo County Zoning Ordinance:

An income-generating activity conducted on a working farm or ranch, or other agricultural operation or agricultural facility, for the enjoyment and education of visitors, guests, or clients. Agricultural tourism refers to the act of visiting a working farm or ranch, or any agricultural or horticultural operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or ranch or agricultural operation that also adds to the economic viability of the agricultural operation. Agritourism includes activities and uses that are appurtenant to the agricultural operations, that benefit from location in a quiet, sparsely populated, agricultural or natural environment, and that do not include commercial or retail uses and activities that are not directly related to agriculture such as sales of goods and services typically found in urban areas. Agricultural tourism uses include, but are not limited to, wine, beer, and olive tasting; sale of local agricultural products; lodging (bed and breakfast and farm stays); and event centers that accommodate weddings, music, and limited dining.

### **What sections of the Siskiyou County Zoning Ordinance currently could permit agritourism?**

Currently, the Siskiyou County Zoning Ordinance makes no specific provisions for agritourism uses and activities. However, there are provisions that, through a use permit application, could be interpreted by the Planning Commission to allow the approval of certain uses and activities. However, as with all discretionary approvals, the path forward for a proposed agritourism use is presently uncertain.

In the AG-1 (Prime Agricultural) zone, the AG-2 (General, Non-prime Agricultural) zone, and the R-R (Rural Residential Agricultural) zone there are no permitted uses that would allow agritourism activities or uses, including *Accessory uses incidental to agricultural*. However, *Article 15 – General Provisions, Conditions, and Exceptions* identifies several uses and activities that may bear some similarity to agritourism. Those occur in *Section 10-6.1502*, as follows:

(c) Establishments or enterprises involving large assemblages of people or automobiles, as follows:

- (4) Recreational facilities privately operated,
- (5) Resorts, and
- (6) Public celebrations

Article 15 allows the Planning Commission to approve uses of the type listed above subject to the filing and approval of a use permit. Granting of a use permit is a discretionary action, which means that in order for the proposed uses and activities to be approved, the Planning Commission must find that the proposed uses and activities are compatible with the purpose of the AG-1 or AG-2 zoning district and will not result in unmitigated environmental impacts. Use permit applications are subject to environmental review under CEQA and a noticed public hearing.

### **Some issues to consider**

The purpose of preparing this conceptual outline and vetting it with both the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors before proceeding with actual zoning text is so that both entities are in accord on what the revised ordinance will accomplish. Keep in mind that while we currently are aware of a limited number of instances of existing and proposed agritourism uses, the revised Zoning Ordinance text should provide a sufficiently large “umbrella” under which a wide variety of other proposals may come forward for approval in other parts of the county. In fact, the language added to the Zoning Ordinance could serve to attract agritourism uses. Some initial thoughts for consideration:

- Siskiyou County contains an abundance of productive growing and grazing land
- Siskiyou County is blessed with varied natural landscapes that are conducive to outdoor gatherings and events
- Nationally, there is a trend toward bringing tourists into agricultural operations for educational and tourism purposes
- How should agritourism be defined in Siskiyou County?
- What are the benefits of agritourism to growers and ranchers?
- What are the benefits of agritourism to the County tax base?
- What are the benefits of agritourism to residents and visitors?

- Here are some of the potential concerns to be addressed:
  - Compatibility with agricultural operations and residential use of adjacent and nearby properties regarding traffic, noise, nighttime lighting, use of pesticides;
  - Sufficiency of roadways;
  - Sufficiency of water and wastewater systems
- Need for limits (size of gatherings, times per year, hours per day, etc.) on agritourism to ensure that the primacy of the underlying agricultural production is not lost
- Possible imposition of conditions of approval to ensure long-term and ongoing compatibility and compliance
- Under what circumstances should agritourism be allowed as a permitted use and under what circumstances should it be conditionally permitted (i.e., requires a use permit)?
- Under what circumstances should agritourism proposals be administratively approved by staff vs. discretionarily approved by the Planning Commission?
- Could allowing agritourism inhibit the ongoing agricultural productivity of the land on which agritourism uses occur?
- Could allowing agritourism inhibit the ongoing agricultural productivity of the land adjacent to land on which agritourism uses occur?
- Could allowing agritourism create conflicts with the use and enjoyment of adjacent and nearby non-agricultural parcels?
- In which zoning districts should agritourism uses and activities be allowed?
  - Prime Agriculture (AG-1)
  - General, Non-prime Agriculture (AG-2)
  - Rural Residential Agriculture (R-R)
- Given the significance of the proposed zoning amendment, the critical importance of agriculture to Siskiyou County, and the potential widespread public interest, should a citizen's advisory committee be formed to provide additional input into this concept before it is "fleshed out" in the form of a zoning text amendment?

RC:vt

## Obstacles in the Agritourism Regulatory Process: Perspectives of Operators and Officials in Ten California Counties

Diana Keith, Ellen Rilla, Holly George, Ramiro Lobo, Laura Tourte and Roger Ingram<sup>1</sup>

**A**gritourism is a business conducted by a farmer or rancher for the enjoyment or education of the public, to promote the products of the farm and generate additional farm income (Hilchey 1993). It provides rural experiences to urban residents and economic alternatives to farmers and ranchers. Agritourism enterprises include such activities as farm tours, roadside stands, bed and breakfast businesses, and cattle drives.

Agritourism brings diversification opportunities to farms and ranches that can help buffer fluctuating markets. It can increase farm revenue and increase community economic activity. It can provide economically feasible ways to care for natural habitats, natural scenic areas, natural resources, and special places. Agritourism can also turn urban residents into strong allies of farms and ranches (Tavernier et al. 1999).

In California opportunities for agritourism abound. There is a diversity of agricultural operations, natural landscapes and interests, plus a growing population—all of which provide prospects to farmers with interest, vision, skills and commitment. But entry into agritourism is complicated by limited landowner experience, a short supply of information, and a complex regulatory system (Black & Nickerson 1997).

Government agencies require that many business operators obtain clearances, permits and licenses. These require that operators meet certain conditions before they can legally start a business. County government typically enforces many state laws governing businesses, including local

county zoning law that may also apply to an operator. For example, the county planning department coordinates approval processes for land use permits while the environmental health department enforces state health codes related to agritourism ventures.

In this *AIC Issues Brief* we examine local regulatory obstacles facing California farmers and ranchers interested in agritourism operations.

- What regulatory roadblocks impede the development of agritourism enterprises?
- What new or revised policies, if any, are being adopted by counties to facilitate the development of agritourism enterprises in their counties?
- What changes to the regulatory system are desired by agritourism operators?
- What discrepancies exist between county officials' knowledge about the agritourism permitting process, requirements, and costs and on-the-ground experiences of agritourism operators?

To learn what regulatory obstacles face potential agritourism operators in California, we interviewed 29 experienced people in 10 counties. The counties were El Dorado, Marin, Mendocino, Placer, Plumas, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, and Stanislaus. They included 16 officials (county planners and environmental health specialists) and 13 agritourism operators. The interviews were conducted between January and June 2001. The county selection was based on

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<sup>1</sup> Diana Keith is a community development specialist. Ellen Rilla is a Cooperative Extension (CE) advisor and county director in Marin. Holly George is a CE advisor and county director in Plumas and Sierra counties. Ramiro Lobo is a CE small farms advisor in San Diego County. Laura Tourte is a CE advisor and county director in Santa Cruz County. Roger Ingram is a CE advisor in Placer and Nevada counties.

geographic distribution and level of perceived activity in agritourism.

All interviewees were selected based on their knowledge of and recent experience in the topic. The agritourism operators owned an assortment of agricultural operations and tourist enterprises. Three had farmed or ranched roughly 40 years, while two had done so for just more than one year. The remainder had been in operation for an average of 27 years.

The operators we selected had run tourism operations anywhere between two days and 30 years. All but three operated “small farms” according to the USDA definition (grossing sales of \$250,000 or less annually). All operators owned most if not all of the land on which they ran both their agricultural and their tourism businesses.

This study was part of a University of California Cooperative Extension project on small farm diversification. Funding was provided from UC workgroup funds and a Renewable Resources Extension Act grant.

### Officials’ Perspectives about Agritourism

All county officials supported the idea of tourism on the farm or ranch. When officials were asked their views about agritourism, they responded positively. Agritourism was “good,” “great,” and “wonderful,” they said. They cited both economic and ecological reasons.

Their economic reasons were that tourism brings diversity to agricultural operations, supplements income in low-revenue seasons, provides income that can help save the family farm or ranch, and promotes agricultural products. Ecological reasons were that tourism helps to protect agricultural land from housing development, helps to protect riparian corridors and fish populations, and provides a “more holistic approach to sustaining agriculture and the land.” One official said simply that agritourism protects his county’s heritage.

Ten county officials had seen an increase in queries and applications within the agritourism industry. Officials in Mendocino and Santa Cruz counties experienced no increases in interest or activity,

however. The two Placer County officials presented opposing views, with one reporting “no increase” and the other “significant increase.” Within El Dorado, Mendocino, Placer, San Diego, and Sonoma counties, the increased attention revolved primarily around wineries.

Within Placer and Marin counties, the increased operator attention on agritourism was viewed as farmers’ and ranchers’ search for economic viability—*any* economic viability without regard for tourism specifically.

Nevertheless, all but two officials saw increases in agritourism in their counties. Although the increase in absolute numbers was small, the increase in percent was significant. For instance, the number of permits issued in Placer County tripled from two to six in the past five years.

### Operators’ Perspectives about Agritourism

The 13 agritourism operators we interviewed had diverse backgrounds and operated a variety of agritourism businesses. They ranged from a fourth-generation rancher offering lodging, trail rides, and guided hunts to retired urbanites running an upscale bed and breakfast (B&B) on their small diversified farm to an owner of a new farm stand to the general manager of a longstanding corporate winery.

In some cases, diversification took a different path from the original agricultural operation. For example, two Marin County dairies diversified into activities unrelated to their original operations—one added a B&B and wine-tasting room and the other an organic pumpkin and produce enterprise. In some cases though, the original agricultural operation laid the “bedrock” for the agritourism operation. Vineyards led to wineries that often led to wine-tasting rooms, reported officials of several counties.

Every operator planned to continue farming or ranching. Moreover, these operators all hoped to continue their tourism operations for at least the next 10 years. Some planned to expand their agritourism enterprise by adding, for example, new vegetables to their produce stands, more species to their petting zoo, more activities to their farm, and processed foods to their stock of fresh produce.

## Obstacles and Costs in the Permitting Process

To start an agritourism enterprise, operators must comply with multiple county requirements and get county zoning approval. They must obtain clearances, permits, and licenses to meet certain conditions. They need to follow a planning and permitting process that addresses land-use development, environmental health, public health and safety, licenses and taxes, and direct marketing (Keith et al. 2002). However, different counties have different requirements for different operations—and some agritourism activities in some counties require no permits or licenses, only inspections. Once in business, the agritourism operation is subject to inspections that monitor and enforce compliance.

## Operator Views about Obstacles and Costs

Each operator had at least some experience with agritourism rules and regulations. Some instigated their enterprise long before many current regulations existed. Some ran enterprises that required little legal oversight while others encountered countless regulations. Few operators had anything good to say about the process they experienced while permitting their agritourism operation. Table 1 summarizes operator and county official opinions about the problems described in this and the next section.

Eleven of the agritourism operators considered rules and regulations unclear, overwhelming, and sometimes unnecessary. Two suggested that their county doesn't understand family farms. But where operators were familiar with agritourism rules and regulations governing their businesses, four said "yes," one said "no," and the remaining eight provided such guarded answers as "I think so," "I assume so," "I know some," and "I'm familiar with the ones that affect our business." In summary, the agritourism regulations that operators already have addressed are still not fully understood.

Operators also viewed the permitting process with dissatisfaction and mistrust. While there was the view that the permitting process was "very legitimate" and recent changes were "very positive," the overwhelming perspective was that the process was chaotic, confusing, misleading, frustrating, time-consuming and costly.

Some operators were not impacted by county policies. Others paid county fees and costs that ranged from "limited" to \$100,000 for a septic system, in addition to start-up costs. There was also the ongoing expense of inspections and permit and license renewals.

## Officials' Perspectives About Obstacles and Costs

Officials viewed agritourism regulations as protecting the environment, neighbors, and customers. They considered the agritourism permitting system important although potentially confusing, frustrating, and costly to operators. In general, they empathized with operators' frustrations about both the permitting system and regulations.

Although county officials in El Dorado, Placer, and Plumas reported no obstacles to agritourism applicants, others disagreed. Like operators, they said that obstacles included the permitting system itself. In Sonoma County, for example, approval can take from four months to two years, and the time, complexity, and expense can be prohibitive.

Officials said that obstacles also included inflexible ordinances and regulations. For example, in San Diego County, agritourism operations must be located on public roads—a requirement that stops some people from pursuing agritourism plans.

Officials reported complaints from local residents about the noise, traffic, trespassers, and number of events associated with agritourism as well as about agritourism activities altering the character of their community and commercializing the backcountry.

Officials reported that agritourism conflicts with county governance. Issues included the failure to include agritourism as an allowable use in county zoning and development codes. Zoning issues involved the rezoning of agricultural lands for commercial use and determining whether a proposed operation should be agricultural or commercial. Concern was also expressed about existing operations evolving from agricultural to commercial operations.



Table 1. **Perceived problems and suggested solutions to the county permitting process**

AGRITOURISM OPERATORS	
<b>Perceived problems</b>	<b>Suggested solutions</b>
Unclear, confusing and sometimes unnecessary	A straightforward, less expensive, timely, and flexible permitting process
Time-consuming, complicated, costly	Relaxed and fewer regulations
Viewed as the major obstacle to agricultural diversification goals	Better county awareness
	More agritourism promotion
	Increased county assistance with permitting process
	Positive, knowledgeable, and honest county employees with whom to work
COUNTY OFFICIALS	
<b>Perceived problems</b>	<b>Suggested solutions</b>
Potentially confusing to operators, frustrating and costly	Early planning necessary since permitting process is long and tedious
Ordinances and regulations are inflexible	Applicants should:
Neighborhood concerns must be considered	Be a bonafide agricultural operation
County policy fails to include agritourism concerns	Gather more information
	Have pre-application meetings with officials
	Establish positive neighbor relations
	Have completed business plans

Public health and safety concerns included water quality and food safety at agritourism sites, wine-tasting leading to drunk driving, and proper disposal of sewage and winery effluent.

In addition, operators sometimes offered goods, services, and activities not allowed by their permits. For example, some farm stands sold produce grown off-farm or used wine-tasting rooms as a draw to sell nonagricultural products.

### How Do Counties Support Agritourism?

#### *Assistance From Individual Planners*

While they disliked the process, 11 agritourism operators had positive relations with individual county representatives. Although one operator appreciated county representatives for staying away from his operation, others described these people as “helpful for the most part” and “very fair.”

General assistance varied from county to county, with few counties actively helping applicants navigate the planning and permitting process. Only four agritourism operators said they received any written materials from the county, and only one found that information especially helpful. Counties do have materials available and more on the way. Placer County’s agricultural commissioner is developing agritourism guidelines for operators. San Luis Obispo County’s environmental health department provides a B&B guide and a construction guide for retail food stands that doesn’t apply to produce stands specifically. Stanislaus County’s building department provides a plan for fruit-stands.

#### *Policy Support*

Officials reported that El Dorado, Mendocino, Placer, Sonoma, and Stanislaus counties strongly supported agritourism in general plans, ordinances and boards of supervisors actions. San Diego County was “relatively supportive” and Marin County was not

particularly supportive. A San Luis Obispo County operator reported a supportive board of supervisors after he helped change state laws to allow ranches to operate farm stays.

Few counties addressed agritourism specifically in their general plans, though both Mendocino and El Dorado counties had taken extra steps. In Mendocino County, county staff along with the county farm bureau, designed policies that encouraged agricultural diversification “where it does not adversely affect other agricultural operations.” The county has completed a study about local interest in agritourism and needs, and is hiring an agricultural planning specialist to support agritourism.

In the mid-1980s, El Dorado County adopted a ranch marketing ordinance to encourage ranch marketing and to regulate the kinds of activities allowed. Revised in January 2001, the ordinance now requires agritourism operators to have a minimum of five acres of permanent crop or a minimum of 10 acres of seasonal crop to qualify for commercial activities—and it allows a graduated scale of agritourism production based on operation size. In agricultural zones, the ordinance allows picnic areas, handcraft sales, some gift sales, bakeshops, prepared food stands, and promotional and special events. The number and size of these events depend upon the operation size.

Placer County allows agritourism operators to post special signs to enhance their visibility. In 1997, the Placer County Board of Supervisors established “Placer Legacy” in the face of rapid growth and development. The voluntary program includes conservation easements, GIS mapping of open space and agricultural resources, and a county agricultural marketing coordinator to help local operators develop value-added products.

In Sonoma County, private groups promote farm trails and educational seminars. In Stanislaus County, the travel and tourism roundtable announces produce stand locations in a newspaper insert and farm trails. Similarly, in Santa Cruz County, there is a “Cross Roads” program for farms and ranches that open their doors to tourists.

Officials in Placer, Plumas, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, and Stanislaus counties see no need for zoning regulation change. Sonoma County has initiated a countywide plan update and formed two subcommittees to study regulations regarding agricultural processing and agritourism. San Diego County is considering a regulatory change to allow guest ranches to be “accessory” to a working farm—thereby allowing visitors to stay on a farm that has no residence. Marin County is currently revising its development code to allow B&B’s in agriculturally zoned areas and is adding language in support of agritourism to its Countywide Plan update.

## Operator Ideas For Improving the Regulatory Process

Every one of the 13 operators interviewed presented at least one suggestion for change; some offered many. These suggestions fell into six categories.

- 1 **The permitting process.** Operators wanted a straightforward, less expensive, and timely permitting process—less bureaucracy.
- 2 **Regulations.** Operators wanted to see fewer and more flexible regulations. Most wanted to see counties relax regulations written for an urban environment and a more intensive business. Many operators called for counties to relax ranch-marketing regulations to allow them to sell products grown off-property.
- 3 **County awareness.** They recommended that counties learn about the potential of agritourism and understand the benefits that agritourism offers local economies. They wanted counties to understand small farms and ranches and their problems.
- 4 **Agritourism promotion.** Operators called for more county assistance with promotion. Suggestions ranged from an agritourism signage program to co-marketing with other county and regional marketing efforts.
- 5 **County assistance.** Operators wanted explicit help with the permitting process. They

wanted clear-cut information about the process, regulations, and requirements before they even applied. They suggested that counties establish a central clearinghouse. They recommended that counties hire an agritourism specialist “who is familiar with farmers and their ‘ignorance.’” And they suggested that counties produce a booklet about starting and running the businesses of agriculture and agritourism, including the permit requirements.

- 6 **County attitude.** Operators wanted to work in a positive environment with willing and upbeat people.

## Officials’ Suggestions For Applicants

- 1 **Basic criteria.** Be sure you meet the basic agritourism criteria.
- 2 **Information and research.** Spend as much time as necessary going to county offices for information and guidance and research similar operations already in business for their expertise.
- 3 **Business planning.** Let officials know what you plan now and in the future.
- 4 **Neighbor relations.** Work with neighbors when you are developing your plans to avoid surprises.
- 5 **Patience.** Start early and allow a lot of time when applying for permits.
- 6 **Pre-application request.** Request a “pre-proposal” or “pre-application” meeting with officials so your potential project can be reviewed and discussed prior to application.

## Conclusions

Judging from the comments of the operators interviewed in 10 counties, the obstacles facing California farmers and ranchers interested in establishing an agritourism operation revolve around the permitting system, regulations, and expense.

As suggested in interviews with officials and operators, an ideal county regulatory process might have some of the following components (some of these already exist in some counties) and could address the current lack of communication between regulators and businesses:

- Form an ad hoc committee of operators and staff that meets regularly to review development codes

and looks for ways to streamline and simplify the process for operators.

- Train county staff about the realities of farming and ranching and the potential of agritourism. This could be planned cooperatively with operators.
- Hire county staff that specialize in and have knowledge about agriculture.
- Write instructive and easy-to-read materials.

There is a future in agritourism, operators and officials concur. Counties could benefit by educating themselves about the potential of agritourism by developing policy support for the industry and operators, and by helping agritourism applicants. At the same time, operators could benefit by taking responsibility for improving the agritourism regulatory process and by improving their business planning. The status quo will yield only mixed results.

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The **AIC Issues Brief** is published by the University of California Agricultural Issues Center  
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