

Safety and Risk Management

Agricultural tourism can be a mutually beneficial exchange between agriculturists and urban residents. It can help agriculturists learn more about urban concerns, while enabling urban residents to learn about farming and enjoy nature. It can also increase farm income if a fee is charged for farm visits or if products are sold to visitors. However, farm visits imply risks and potential liability to farm owners, should accidents occur that result in injuries to visitors. There is a need, therefore, to pursue prudent risk management strategies to minimize your liability exposure.

Safety is your first priority when entertaining visitors to your farm or ranch or when consumers visit your operation to participate in picking or other farming experiences, including farm tours. Your visitors' safety is largely your responsibility. Review the following suggestions as a guide to assessing your own farm or nature tourism operation for potential hazards and to prepare for a safe, enjoyable visit to your farm, ranch or nature operation.

Managing and Reducing Risks - Clearly identify the areas open to farm visitors.

One essential tool to manage risk is liability insurance. Before hosting groups of visitors or planning a public event, check with your insurance agent about the adequacy of your liability coverage. An event insurance rider may be necessary.

Identify the specific areas that guests will visit; the activities in which they will participate, how they will be supervised, and the safety precautions you will take, and any rules you will need to post. For some activities (horseback riding, for example) a "hold harmless agreement" may be a good idea. A "hold harmless" agreement indicates that the visitor is willing to assume responsibility for certain risks. It does not, however, totally absolve you of a certain level of responsibility for the health and safety of your visitors.

Plan for Emergencies. Keep a well stocked first aid kit handy. Be sure knowledgeable people are on staffs that have CPR and first aid skills. Develop an emergency plan for dealing with natural disasters such as an earthquakes, floods, and fires.

Suggest that visitors wear appropriate clothing such as closed-toed shoes (tennis shoes or boots, but not sandals). Long pants are recommended for certain activities.

When you brief visitors, explain that you operate a working production facility. As such, certain hazards come with the territory (uneven ground, insects, climate, farm odors) and visitors must accept those risks and exercise reasonable caution.

Clearly demarcate "off-limit" areas and specifically designated public areas. Rope off or block access to other areas.

Facilities and Equipment - Check on additional insurance necessities before initiating hayride activities.

Parking: Most counties require that cars park completely off the paved road. Do you have adequate space for the expected number of vehicles?

Buses: If buses must park away from your farm, plan for a drop-off and loading area.

Bathrooms: Do you have clean, well stocked, public restrooms in good operation? If you are expecting a large number of visitors, consider renting portable units.

Security: Depending on the event, you may want to employ additional help to ensure that guests do not put themselves or your farm operation at risk.

Ladders: Store ladders away from trees and public spaces to eliminate the temptation to climb. This is particularly important with regard to young people.

Tractors and Equipment: Park tractors and equipment within eyesight (if desired), but away from the visitors' area. Agricultural equipment fascinates people; however, the tractor often becomes a climbing object for children (even when they are supervised by adults). Discuss tractor safety and instill respect for your equipment. Never allow visitors to drive farm equipment.

Tractors are not passenger vehicles. Do not allow extra riders, especially children, on tractors or all-terrain vehicles, even at slow speeds. All tractors should be equipped with rollover protective structures.

Pest Management Materials: Pesticides, herbicides, and other farm management products should be safely stored, in a secure location, preferably away from public view.

Shops and repair facilities are among the most hazardous places on the farm and should generally be off-limits to the public. Close the doors and/or place a rope across the entrance with a "Do Not Enter" sign. Have farm personnel check these areas often

Livestock and Animals - *Consider animal well-being first when choosing farm animals for public interaction.*

General concepts: All interactions between animals and guests should be supervised by farm staff. Animals will behave differently around a crowd of people. They should be penned or confined for viewing, with limited, controlled access for petting. Carefully select your most healthy, "user-friendly" animals for public interaction, but remember that animal well-being comes first. Give adequate attention to odor, ventilation, manure, fly, and pest control in the visitor area.

Pets: Ensure that only very friendly, social dogs will be near the public. However, warn visitors of a puppy's sharp teeth. Even friendly dogs can do damage.

Cats and kittens: Be wary of their sharp claws and teeth.

Small livestock: Goats and sheep are generally more widely used as petting animals. As ruminants with no top front teeth, they can be handled more safely than a horse with top teeth. Also, they are smaller and lighter if they step on a child's foot.

Poultry: Geese can be very aggressive. Chickens, ducks, and other poultry may be fed. However, to limit the stress on the animals, be careful to rotate them.

Cattle and calves: Restrain any cow that will be handled, preferably in a grooming chute. Calves should be controlled. Hand milking is not recommended.

Horses and ponies: Warn visitors that animals may bite. Horse and pony riding requires special rules and insurance. Consult your agent.

Post a "Please wash your hands after handling animals" sign.

Provide hand washing facilities, hand wipes, or sanitizing hand cleaner in a convenient area.

Lagoons and Ponds - Water is a natural temptation for small children. Use ropes or fences to

prevent access.

Water is of special concern because of its attraction to children. Make sure that no visitor will be near water (secure with temporary fencing, cones and/or ropes). Do not trust parents to watch their children