

Farm & Nature Tourism on your PROPERTY



Image: Tourism Australia

Fluffing up the pillows in a guesthouse or showing a tourist how a working property functions might seem like an irony to those farm owners who have worked tirelessly for generations to garner a living off the land.

But for an increasing number of farmers, tourism presents a viable value-add business to existing agricultural pursuits – and can often provide the extra income needed to survive in today's hard rural economy.

Value-adding a tourism enterprise to an existing agricultural business is, in a number of cases, smart business sense. While the work out in the paddocks remains the core business, delivering the 12.1 percent of gross domestic profit and 23 percent of Australia's goods and services exports, tourism ventures on-farm can be greatly rewarding, both from an economic and social point of view.

For the farm and country property owner, tourism presents a potential alternative for improving farm income, be that as an accommodation provider; operating as a day attraction or working collectively with other tourism operators to deliver a regional experience – in tourism the possibilities can seem endless.

For the consumer, the increased ability to access nature-based activities on-farm are greatly rewarding for both domestic and international travellers. As a niche market, nature-based tourism draws these visitors out of the big cities and into regional Australia.

Wide open spaces contrasting with a lack of space in urban target markets, reveals space itself has become the prime motivator for Australian's to travel. It is in regional Australia that travellers can escape the demands of hectic urban life, or for overseas visitors, get a taste of the 'real Australia'.

Space is the motivator and regional Australia has lots of it.

Combined, the interest in value-adding a tourism enterprise for farmers and the nature-based experiences for consumers generates niche market opportunities for farm and country property owners.



What is Agritourism?

Agritourism can be characterised as a business or activity that invites visitors to come on-farm or into a rural community to enjoy agriculture, its produce and the natural environment in which it exists. Agritourism is generally an additional enterprise added to the farm, integrating tourism into agri-business.

Although the list is endless, Agritourism could be:

- Farm gate sales through farm stalls
- Tours of farm production and processes
- Technical tours for other farmers
- 'Pick your own produce'
- Farm house restaurants or cafes
- Bird watching or bush walking
- Farm stay, eco cabins, primitive camping

Generally, research suggests the types of experiences visitors to rural landscapes want are: scenic value; special wildlife experiences; cultural activities; agricultural, horticultural or forestry experiences; access to special facilities for sporting activities and ease of access to towns and main tourist routes.

Not only can Agritourism provide a potential economic boost, it can also become a rich educational resource, building bridges between communities and cultures.

It presents as an opportunity to educate tourists and business owners about living on the land. It can modify negative perceptions of issues as vast as animal welfare to current land care management.

Given strategic management, on-farm nature-based tourism enterprises could increase the economic viability of agricultural properties and the rural communities in which they exist.

What is FANT and how can it help me?

Farm & Nature Tourism on your Property (FACT) is a business development program developed by the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) and the Australian Regional Tourism Research Centre (ARTRC) at Southern Cross University. The content has been developed by the centres based on research work undertaken in the area of Agritourism.

The program is a two stage process. Stage 1 is open to all property owners who may be considering Agritourism on their property. After completing Stage 1, participants will have a clearer understanding of whether they, their property and their region are suitable for tourism.

Those who successfully complete the Stage 1 assessment tool, and decide that their property may have potential, will then be invited to continue their business planning and self-assessment through the Stage 2: Farm & Nature Tourism on Your Property Business development program.

Stage 2 is delivered by a business facilitator who will work with the participants to develop their concepts and business plans. They will also be introduced to how the tourism industry operates

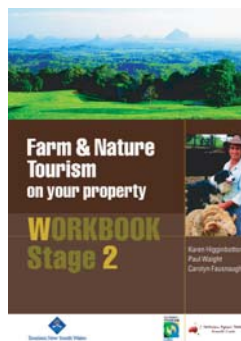
and have the opportunity to meet key stakeholders who may be able to assist them as their agritourism business develops. Other important aspects such as local planning regulations are also introduced by the program.

Stage 2 requires participants to gather information, think and speculate. Where relevant, it guides them to further action based on their answers. It shows how to use all the information they have collated to make a decision about whether to proceed with detailed financial planning of their proposed business venture. The accuracy and completeness of their answers will depend on how much time and effort they put into their research. The time it will take participants to work through Stage 2 will depend on the availability of information, the complexity of the proposed venture, and the length of uninterrupted time participants can commit to planning activities. The business development program is conducted typically over 4 workshops and followed up by on farm visits by the business facilitator.

The result, for those who have completed the program, is a clear understanding of the viability and commitment of their proposed agritourism business and a plan on how to achieve it. Whilst the outcome can never be guaranteed, businesses that have done their research and planned their proposal have a far greater chance of success and prosperity.

The aims of Stage 2

- Help further develop your business idea.
- Broaden participants thinking about possibilities and likely problems.
- Help participants to identify gaps in their resources or skills so they can address them before it is too late.
- Enable participants to decide whether their idea is worth pursuing.
- Provide the groundwork that will allow the development of a sound business plan.



For more information on how to run Farm and Nature Tourism programs in your community or region please contact Rose Wright at ARTRC by phone (02) 6626 9373 or email rose.wright@scu.edu.au or visit the centre online at www.regionaltourism.com.au.

