



Educational Opportunities and “Agri-tainment” on Your Farm or Ranch



Perhaps you are considering a farm or ranch tourism/recreation enterprise as an educational opportunity to educate your local community or outside visitors about agriculture or some particular historical or natural attraction of your property. You may still charge a fee for entrance or access, but the intent of the operation, as defined in your marketing plan, will be educational rather than profit oriented.

1. DETERMINE WHO YOU WOULD LIKE TO EDUCATE

You’ll want to identify who the target audience is for your educational project. While your audience will likely consist of a range of age groups, interests, etc., you will want to think about who you want to reach and what you want them to learn. For example, if you want to target elementary students, this will determine the nature of your exhibits, how you explain them, and what types of activities (hands-on) you may want to provide.

If students are the primary target audience, consider the following contacts:

FFA: local high schools have agricultural classes under the leadership of an FFA advisor or teacher. Your operation may provide classroom credit opportunity to work into the lessons for the students.

4-H: County Extension offices house this program. Your local extension agent may be able to provide you with leaders who would be interested in your educational program. Classrooms: Consider talking with local school principals and instructors about field trips to your operation.

If adults are your target, consider these organizations:

Local Rotary, Lions or Elks clubs; church groups; Chamber of Commerce: Often these groups set up tours for their members and your operation may be able to educate and inform the local community about farming/ranching in a way that could never be told through books or television. Also, the Chamber of Commerce are often the first place out-of-town visitors call when looking for a unique opportunity or something of interest in the area.

2. DETERMINE WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES OR ATTRACTIONS TO PROVIDE

Depending on your target audience, there are many opportunities you can use to develop an educational tour. You might give a general tour of the farm or ranch; show how wool is produced— from shearing to spinning wool; provide a small plot of ground for the school to raise a garden of flowers or produce and donate the products to charitable organizations; shoe a horse, demonstrate crop harvesting, milking, etc. Most every aspect of your everyday activities are completely foreign to someone who doesn’t live on a farm or ranch.

- Will you need volunteers to help with the project?
- Is there a local organization that might be willing to help by providing volunteers?
- Should the project be seasonal?
- How many people can you host at one time?
- Will participants just watch or will there be hands-on activities?

3. COST CONSIDERATIONS

As an educational function, your project might secure help paying operating expenses from agricultural organizations, community groups or other donors. For example, if your tour/activity is designed to educate about beef production, you might approach the Oregon Cattlemen's Association about sponsorship and funding of some of the project. For a complete list of agricultural organizations and commodity commissions in Oregon, contact the Oregon Department of Agriculture Information Office at 503-986-4550. There are other organizations which may also be a good source of volunteers to help staff your project such as the Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Women for Agriculture and the Agri-Business Council of Oregon.

4. DEVELOP AN ITINERARY

Develop an outline of each and every stop or location, what will happen at that site, who will provide explanation or supervision, how long will you spend at each location, what materials will be needed, and how long the entire tour or experience will last. Try picturing yourself going through your tour or presentation as a participant and determine what a visitor would want to know.

5. TOUR DAY

You should have taken care of all preliminary preparations and plans so that when your group arrives, you only have to worry about performing the task of taking them through the tour. Be sure you've checked for potential hazards or risks. Keeping the tour group size to 15 helps with managing the process. Be flexible -- things will go wrong. Just keep smiling and remember to have fun with your program. Make sure you have access to restrooms for your visitors.

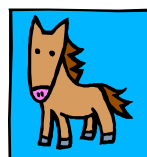
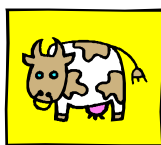
6. ASK FOR EVALUATIONS

The best way to know how successful your project was (what it was like, and what could be improved) is to ask for an evaluation. This can be as simple as asking the teachers who took part in the classroom field trip to provide verbal comment about the project. Or, it can include a written questionnaire or suggestion forms that the participants can fill out. If you have volunteers who are helping with your project, ask about their observations of activities and participant reactions and feedback.

7. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

You will likely encounter questions about controversial issues from some of your audience, depending on their age and knowledge of agriculture. Be aware of hot topics, such as field burning, animal rights, food safety, use of pesticides/chemicals, etc., and be able to answer in a thoughtful, informative, and friendly manner.

Be prepared for any situation. Make sure you are ready to handle an emergency (ambulance, police, fire, etc.). Go over emergency phone numbers with volunteers and talk about emergency procedures.





OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- Have a greeting station that the arriving guests can identify as the beginning location of the tour.
 - Greeting stations can also provide general information on the farm, facility, general agricultural questions, etc., and keep guests from wandering away from where you want them to be.
- If your tour is for the general public, tours should be held each 1/2-hour or hour, and provided on a fixed schedule that can be published for marketing purposes.
- Provide two individuals to accompany each tour—one as guide/interpreter and one to follow behind to assist and keep people from straying from the group.
 - Offer small samples as gifts or for sale as mementos for the visit. Information sheets are also helpful.
 - Provide ample parking for private cars and buses.
 - Provide 2-3 restrooms or porta-potties for public use depending on size of the audience.
 - Water should be provided for cleansing hands following restroom use and for drinking.
 - Provide prominent signing to identify the location and on-site objects, such as machinery, equipment, crop identification, etc.
 - Walk through your facility with an eye for items that might pose dangerous or hazardous conditions. Remove or correct these situations.