

# Agritourism in Gippsland: An introduction



## REPORT COMPILED FOR AGRIBUSINESS GIPPSLAND INC

by Madeline Toner and Susan Webster

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This report compiles information gathered through a variety of forums undertaken by Agribusiness Gippsland.

Among the activities that have provided the source materials for this report are:

- Victorian Agribusiness Summit, Cowes, Victoria, August 2009
- Grow more money off your land, Morwell, Victoria April, 2009
- Agritourism dinner, Duart Homestead, Maffra, Victoria November, 2009
- Bureau of Regional Science focus group, Sale, Victoria, November, 2009.
- Advice on a successful B&B operation, Gippsland 2010.

**Alex Arbuthnot, chair of Agribusiness Gippsland said “We commend Federal Agriculture Minister Tony Burke for recognising the potential of agritourism.”**



Various funders of these activities included: Regional Development Victoria; Victorian Department of Primary Industries; Elders; Wellington Shire Council, Rural Skills Connect, Wellington Regional Tourism and Latrobe City Council.

Agribusiness Gippsland thanks them for their ongoing support.



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## 1. BACKGROUND

The beginning of 2009 saw a sudden and serious cut in farmgate milk prices across Australian dairying.

Price 'step downs' of up to 25-30% followed a series of droughts across eastern Australia and even farmers with good equity started to worry about the sustainability of their businesses.

Dairying areas more exposed to international trade prices – notably Victoria – were among the most affected regions. Those with water access vulnerability, such as northern Victoria and parts of the irrigated areas of east Gippsland, were even more at risk.

Concurrently, beef prices were pushed lower by reduced overseas demand and oversupply of dairy choppers.

Farmers with low equity in their businesses, young farmers or those who had invested heavily in infrastructure, were among the most vulnerable.

In the face of insecure farm incomes and rural unemployment, farmers and rural communities are looking for ways to diversify their incomes.

Agritourism comes as an opportunity at a time when poor economic performance is placing pressures on rural communities.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agritourism provides an opportunity for farmers to diversify their farm incomes by opening some or all of their farm enterprise to visitors.

It can provide an income buffer during times of volatile prices for agricultural commodities.

It can bring external money into agricultural-based economies.

Experience has shown that agritourism operations tend to supplement, not substitute on-farm income. In some cases and at certain times of the year agritourism operations out-earn farming activities.

Wider-scale, there is mutual benefit for communities by inviting tourists to share their environment. Visitors have the opportunity to meet locals and understand more about the country, food, farming and the environment.

For locals, the character and culture of the community is reinforced by the interest of tourists; this helps engender local pride.

Research shows a hallmark of **successful** agritourism operations is involvement by the wider community in attracting visitors and supporting their stay.

Other criteria of success have been established. These include:

- Location/closeness to town and to attractions
- Hospitality-driven operators with creativity and an ability to listen
- Ability to manage/enrich the visitor experience
- Market research
- Business acumen
- Good-quality, standardised road signage and printed literature/maps
- Strong local community back-up

**Failure** in the sector can sometimes be attributed to a lack of quality rural accommodation and insufficient activities for tourists.

Tourism can help make small towns economically viable and improved economic performance can help employ and retain local young people.

However, agritourism operators need to find the right balance to optimise the farm business, the product, the tourists and their own lifestyle/family needs.

Diversifying into agritourism requires new skills in business and personnel management as well as an understanding of regulatory requirements.

### 3. WHAT IS AGRITOURISM?

While the definition of agritourism remains unclear for many, including national and state tourist organisations and local councils, the Bureau of Rural Sciences states: "Regional agritourism and food tourism activities include visits to a working farm, winery or agribusiness operation (including restaurants, markets, produce outlets, natural attractions) for enjoyment, education, or active participation in activities and events."

Agritourism refers to the broad range of activities offered to tourists by farmers – accommodation, food and beverage, activities, events, products for sale... even farm work experience.

Activities undertaken by the visitors could include, but are not limited to:

- Wine tasting
- Tourist mazes
- Farm stays
- Produce picking
- Pony and hay rides
- Shearing demonstrations
- Cheese tasting
- On farm camping
- Milking demonstrations
- Animal petting
- Bed and breakfast
- Farm produce sales
- Cooking classes
- Bird watching
- Fruit and berry picking

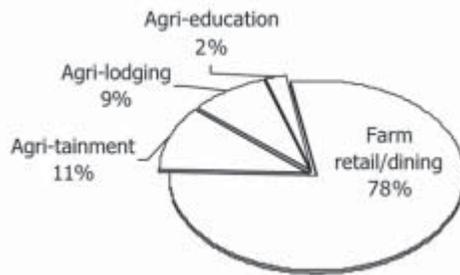
A more comprehensive list can be found in Appendix A.

A survey of agritourism operators in Pennsylvania<sup>1</sup> found most respondents (84 percent) considered themselves to be farm retail/dining agritourism providers.

Agri-tainment was the next largest sector at 11 percent, followed by agrilodging at 9 percent and agri-education at 2 percent. (See Figure 1)

Farm markets were the most widely offered farm retail/dining activity, followed by roadside stands and gift shops. School tours topped the agri-education category, followed by agricultural shows/tours and garden/nursery tours. Agricultural festivals/fairs/shows were the most offered agri-tainment activity.

**Figure 1: Primary activity of agritourism operator**

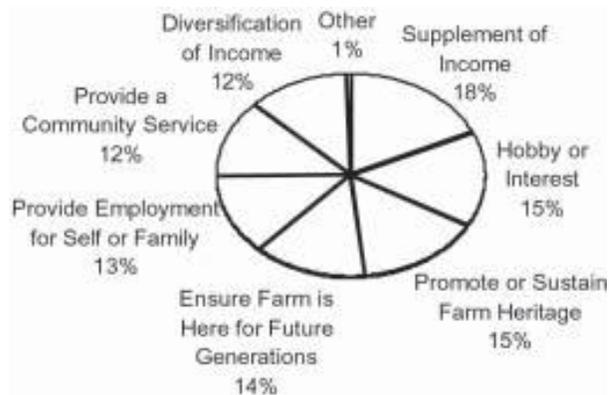


Source: <http://www.rural.palegislature.us/agritourism2006.pdf>

When asked about their motivations for becoming involved in agritourism, the highest percentage of responses (18 percent) was to supplement income. (See Figure 2)

There was little variation in the percentages of other responses. This indicates that agritourism operators were guided by a variety of motivations for their involvement in the agritourism industry.

**Figure 2: Reasons for involvement**



Source: <http://www.rural.palegislature.us/agritourism2006.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> [Agritourism in Pennsylvania: An Industry Assessment](#),

## 4. AGRITOURISM ACROSS GIPPSLAND

### ***Bass Coast Shire***

No specific figures on agritourism exist.

The Shire sees agritourism as a new area for traditional farmers but an effective way to supplement farm income while still working on the farm. The shire is planning to run workshops on farm diversification and value-adding in conjunction with Landcare and the Department of Primary Industries.

The Shire is compiling a list of businesses which are classified as operating in the agritourism sector. The list includes 23 businesses covering industries including wine; farm stays; alpaca and associated products; venison and fine leather; emu oil; local, traditional and organic produce; trout and bush tucker; orchids and berry picking.

### ***Baw Baw Shire Council***

No specific figures for agritourism exist. However, agritourism is seen as an important niche market, with potential for further expansion.

### ***City of Casey / Shire of Cardinia***

No specific figures on agritourism exist.

### ***East Gippsland Shire***

No specific figures on agritourism exist.

The East Gippsland region is so dominated by nature-based attractions and activities that food and wine, and more specifically agritourism, are still emerging with more operators and farmers starting to delve into it.

Agritourism is seen to provide a potential secondary strength for the region under the banner of food and wine, arts and culture or festivals and events.

Farm produce outlets include:

- Twin Rivers Farm-Food and Wine Trail
- Wineries
- Fresh fish produce from the boats and specialised retail outlets
- Cheese makers, an olive producer, etc.
- Events such as Farmers Markets, the 'Gippsland Inspired' 2008 which was a compilation of wine and food events.
- Of special note are the activities of the Food and Wine Network of Eastern Gippsland which is working on building up the strength of local produce in local restaurants.

Farmstays are not yet common in East Gippsland, except at one largish establishment in the high country which is also a group camp destination.

### **South Gippsland Shire**

Agriculture is overwhelmingly the most important sector of the South Gippsland Shire's economy and tourism is one of the Shire's growing strengths. Linking the two industries has potential benefits for both sectors. Agritourism will see secondary income streams for traditional farmers, in addition to providing a new product from which the tourism industry can gain leverage.

However, at present agritourism is still an emerging and small sector of the tourism industry in South Gippsland. The issue with insurance some years back had an impact on the industry.

The wine industry is the largest representative of agritourism in South Gippsland, but is still a relatively small industry.

There are a small number of berry farmers and other niche producers but there is a lack of detailed statistics.

The council reports growing interest the sector and a number of people have recently approached the council with ideas.

In terms of general tourism, South Gippsland has:

- 1.1 million visitors annually, mostly half-day trippers and overnight stays
- Of those who stay, the average length of stay is 3.7 nights.
- The average spend per person per night is \$366.
- Tourism contributes \$223 million to Shire's economy and employs over 1,800 people.
- More than half of all business in Shire relies on tourism for some or all of their income.

Although most people associate the area with Wilson's Promontory, sight-seeing, fishing, bushwalking, beaches, etc, one in four people would visit a farm or food producer if the facilities/product was available.<sup>2</sup>

Characteristics associated with the South Gippsland Shire are:

- 92% natural attractions
- 43% Wilsons Promontory
- 30% rolling green hills
- 19% the beach
- 4% farming
- 2% history and heritage
- 2% food and wine<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Visitor Profile, Visitor activities - 'The Economic Impact of Tourism in Prom Country 2004*

<sup>3</sup> *Visitor Perception - 'The Economic Impact of Tourism in Prom Country 2004*

## THE SUCCESS FACTORS

Addressing Agribusiness Gippsland's *Diversify your Income* forum at Morwell dairy farmer Max Jelbart discussed two of the factors he considered critical for the operation of a successful agritourism operations.

Paramount was main road frontage, ideally on a road used by tourists.

Max owns Caldermead farm, a café/petting zoo and public milking facility about 1.5 hours south-east of Melbourne on the Bass Highway. He also owns a working commercial dairy farm south of Leongatha.

He stressed the need for prominent signage designed to catch the attention of a car driver and passengers and offering sufficient time for them to decide to pay a visit.

Without either of these attractants, an enterprise would have to build up a reputation as a niche or unique venue, he explained.

Several US studies<sup>4</sup> have identified crucial pointers to a successful agritourism enterprise. These include:

- The natural hospitality of the operators and their ability to interact with a range of guests – some of whom will be difficult.
- The ability of all family members to accept strangers on their 'private' territory.
- Accessibility (distance to large urban centres and roads to the area).
- Proximity to public recreation areas and facilities.
- A friendly and cooperative host community.

Expanding some of these factors, German research<sup>5</sup> found that tourists were selecting farm-based accommodation close to other attractions or tourist routes rather than selecting the accommodation as a destination only. The research also indicated that hosts put much more weight on the farm environment than the guests, who were more swayed by a "change of environment/landscape"... and inexpensive accommodation.

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<sup>4</sup> *Agritourism in Pennsylvania: An Industry Assessment, The Opportunity for Agritourism Development in New Jersey, Taking the First Step, Oklahoma Agritourism, Agricultural Diversification and Agritourism: Critical Success Factors and A Guidebook for Evaluating Enterprise Opportunities.*

<sup>5</sup> *Holidays on Farms: A Case Study of German Hosts and Guests, Journal of Travel Research, Opperman, 2000*

Likewise, the support of the local community was found to be the single most important determinant of agritourism success, according to a US survey (Rilla 1997). “Those who were most successful had an infrastructure that nurtured them,” she reported

According to another research report<sup>6</sup>, ways to boost community connectivity include:

- Hosting school groups for tours of the alternative farm-based enterprise
- Advertising local specials and events
- Talking with locals as they make their purchases
- Thanking locals for their support and patience during busy seasons
- Conducting market research in the local community
- Sponsoring public events

## **THE CHALLENGES**

Some foods cannot be sold by producers – sales of raw milk are banned. Some vegetable growers prefer contracted sales to supermarket chains.

Lloyd Bowman of Wellington Shire explained to the Duart forum the need to consider water supply, wastewater disposal and road access to a potential B&B property.

Also attending the Maffra dinner was Ann Andrew who jointly runs a sheep enterprise and also provides self-contained cottage accommodation. She noted: “I really have to caution people thinking of going into agritourism. It’s not always a positive experience. Many Australian farmers would not be really happy having tourists around. It’s not something many people could take on 365 days a year. It’s very expensive to set up and you’re committed to be there. The best set-up would be a purpose-built facility for tourists and then you introduce the animals.”

A US study into constraints experiences in eco-tourism lists lack of information, the need for market analyses, and liability concerns (Lynch and Robinson 1998). “Marketing skills are essential to a successful recreation-based enterprise. This is usually an unfamiliar task for private land owners.”<sup>7</sup>

## **AGRITOURISM TRENDS**

The Sale workshop heard some of the trends emerging: older tourists preferring premium foods at higher prices, Asians – increasingly young Asians – keen to sample seafood, and the European model of ‘wellness’ tourism combining spas/exercise and healthy foods.

Frank Norden from Wellington Tourism highlighted a couple of highly successful Gippsland agritourism ventures including llama treks, deer shooting (for Asian clients paying \$1500 a day) and quirky accommodation such as a Japanese Zen cabin.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agtour/publications/Agritourism%20Report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> [http://nercrd.psu.edu/Publications/Reports/FINAL\\_REPORTS/mcdill.pdf](http://nercrd.psu.edu/Publications/Reports/FINAL_REPORTS/mcdill.pdf)

The group discussed how the Gippsland 'menu' had diversified in recent years – away from traditional dairy, sheep and beef farming to niche industries such as olives, wines, specialised vegetables and fruits. The change coincided with the growth of smaller landholdings, the group said.

In the US, researchers are noting that agritourism can bring changes to family dynamics. When traditional couples enter the sector, the woman generally runs the tourism enterprise. "Over time it is quite possible for the tourism enterprise to generate more profit than the farming enterprise. Even when this is not the case, the literature points out that the role women in the household shifts due to increased earning power.

"The role of the men, on the other hand, especially in farm-based lodging operations, seems to change little."<sup>8</sup>

## **CURRENT RESEARCH**

The Australian Government Bureau of Rural Sciences is undertaking a project which aims to identify the key drivers of regional agritourism and food tourism in Australia.

Senior social scientist Saan Ecker will publish a report of a Gippsland case study involving 20 people around the Sale district.

The report will be published in April, but before then the department is conducting an on-line survey of agribusiness tourism in Gippsland.

The project focuses on selected regions in Australia and aims to identify:

- characteristics and features of regional agritourism and food tourism
- drivers encouraging the development and maintenance of regional agritourism and food tourism initiatives
- the range of institutional, community and business driven approaches that generate successful agritourism and food tourism outcomes.

The first phase of the project involved a review of relevant literature and examined 10 regions where agritourism and food tourism activities occurred. The current phase involves a more detailed assessment of businesses and initiatives within six regions (the Tamar Valley in Tasmania; the Harvest Highway in Western Australia; Orange and the Northern Rivers in NSW, East Gippsland in Victoria and the Tropical North region in Queensland) where agritourism and food tourism is already a key industry.

Interviews, a workshop and a survey of agritourism and food tourism businesses will be conducted in each case study region.

The BRS team ran an online survey from late November/early December among agritourism operators. The survey did not include cafes and restaurants. It was seeking to establish the hours worked in agritourism operations and the income arising.

The BRS report will be issued in April 2010 and circulated to all survey participants, however, a draft of the report was obtained in January.

It noted the research agenda consisted of three main topics:

1 Benefits of regional agritourism and food tourism

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agtour/publications/Agritourism%20Report.pdf>

2. Key drivers and barriers to the progress of regional agritourism and food tourism

3 Solutions and opportunities to progress regional agritourism and food tourism

The question put to the focus group was:

What are the benefits of agritourism and food tourism and what does it contribute to the wider community?

Among the responses were:

- supports the triple bottom line (environment, economic, social) at the regional scale)
- youth employment—keeping young people here
- bridge the gap —city/country
- lifestyle choice
- extra income stream
- learning (for tourists)
- micro level: might be able to be a price setter rather than a price taker
- in five to 10 years time this will be a significant part of Gippsland industry
- partnership in region's businesses.

The focus group explored the regional timeline of agritourism and food tourism development

- early 1900s – Gippsland became holiday destination (trains)
- 1950s-60s – Latrobe playground (fish 'n' chips)
- 1980s – West Gippsland Gourmet trail (Melbourne day-trips)
- late 1970s – Host farms started. This was influenced by:
  - more disposable income
  - people wanting change
  - shorter stays
  - smaller families
- Late 1980s – Change in type of agriculture, more entrepreneurial investment
- Mid 1990s –Twin Rivers Trail
  - First farmers markets
  - Koonawarra food hub
  - TV chefs
- 2003 – Strategic planning started and more culturally diverse visiting e.g. Asians
- 2005 – Feast on East
- 2007 – Destination Gippsland
- 2008 – More international visitors

The group was asked to nominate drivers of agritourism and food tourism in the region:

- support and planning e.g. training and certification
- impetus started by strategic planning processes
- risk and suitability assessment
- assisting farmers to be more productive
- connections between café/outlets and farms — matching it up
- locals and parochial attitudes will drive networking
- people are willing to pay more for fresh quality — price/cost squeeze
- farmers looking for something else—may be able to stay (on land).

The group was asked to nominate barriers to agritourism and food tourism in the region:

- looking to government for answers (a subsidy or propping up grant)
- regulations
- Zoning/plan (looking at rezoning for tourism development)
- issues with regulations preventing sale of products not produced on farm (might be needed to supplement farm produce)
- transport
- OHS. Some things are impossible e.g. having to chlorinate rain water for commercial businesses
- lack of integration of information across between private operators and government
- might not be critical mass of product
- immature product and operator ‘burn-out’— standards and quality done badly
- lack of regular air services (not economical)
- knowing what we don’t offer and what we could offer — e.g. virtual farm journeys if you can’t do the farm walks.
- caution in it (farm stay) being seen as the ‘answer’
- takes time to show people farm operation
- need to understand the risks
- definitions of sector are not well developed (in planning)
- promotional vehicle missing for on-farm activities (it’s there/coming for food)
- capital outlay required versus the small scale income
- this region is unsophisticated at identifying and capitalising on tourist drivers
- set-up cost (e.g. an interpretative centre) can be large and risk failure
- for entry: many don’t have the capital/ infrastructure \$\$
- lack of data on the industry to back up the strategies (e.g. Census).

Opportunities and solutions

Based on the discussion, participants were asked to nominate opportunities and solutions for agritourism and food tourism in the region:

- as well as responding to the interest in seeing real on-farm operations, could provide a virtual experience — e.g. DVD etc to reduce burdens on operators
- get beyond the owner-operator business to a co-operative (disconnected) operator – e.g. tour bus taking people from site to site instead of onus on individual.
- build organic and bush tucker opportunities
- zoning—availability of small blocks (South Gippsland/Bass) for horticulture
- Green Globe certification (CRC for Sustainable Tourism) if meet standard
- more accommodation
- need a stand-out drawcard
- find out what the Melbourne consumers want
- using the Eastern Gippsland Food and Wine Network as a network
- education, training and consistency in service
- Gippsland model different to other models e.g. Try something different to Yarra Valley
- directional signage
- value-adding — tourists won't come just for agritourism
- draw further attention from government — to add to impetus here by other initiatives
- need critical mass
- provide funding for infrastructure for entry players
- use a co-operative overarching body for promotion, marketing and signage if you want to meet the standards
- having an overall promotional strategy e.g. promotion, training and infrastructure
- get more professional—treat it as a 'trade' to get recognised
- standards—getting consistency in customer service
- need more B&B-type accommodation to allow interaction with locals
- signage—marketing the concept to everybody
- make product sexier—not just a farm stay
- marketing the concept
- determining what the consumer wants
- build the food and agitourism culture
- perceptions of Gippsland as just broadacre need to change
- long-term support, perseverance. Opportunity for partnership with the government
- Landcare—bringing people in to the farm
- hidden treasures—e.g. Mallacoota.

## **FINANCIAL FOOTPRINT**

The Sale focus group convened by Agribusiness Gippsland on behalf of the Bureau of Rural Science heard that, while agritourism might not be an easy fit with a functioning farm, there can be dollar benefits.

Experiences from food growers suggest they pitch farmgate prices just under double the wholesale price they receive “and a little less than what they get from restaurants,” said BRS senior social scientist Saan Ecker.

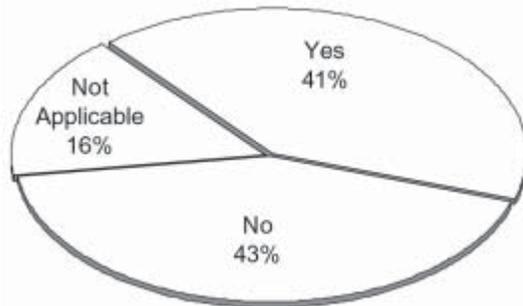
Local foods command up to a 20% premium, the group estimated. Events such as farmers’ markets were a useful drawcard, although mainly to an older shopper with more discretionary spending power ... and more time.

In the US, the survey of agritourism operators in Pennsylvania<sup>9</sup> asked if they were able to support their family and/or the future of their operation without agritourism activities: 43 percent said no. (See Figure 2)

Agritourism providers, on average, attributed approximately 4 percent of their total on-farm net revenue to agritourism.

Additionally, an average of 1.1 members of the respondents’ families worked off the farm to support the family and/or the future of the operation.

**(Figure 2) Are you able to support your family and/or farm without agritourism activities?**



Source: <http://www.rural.palegislature.us/agritourism2006.pdf>

A Californian survey conducted by a researchers from University of California (UC) Cooperative Extension and the UC Small Farm Program in 2008 found most respondents reported some profit, with most planning to expand or diversify their agritourism offerings over the next five years.

Almost half of the operators reported gross revenues from their agritourism of less than US\$10,000, however, another 22 percent reported more than US\$100,000 in agritourism receipts for 2008.

They reported making more money from direct sales of agricultural products than from other activities, with an average of 45 percent of all agritourism gross income resulting from direct sales, the survey found.

Another US research project<sup>10</sup> found that appears that for marginal farming enterprises, agritourism can help retain the family on the farm ... “However, this does not mean that

<sup>9</sup> *Agritourism in Pennsylvania: An Industry Assessment*

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agtour/publications/Agritourism%20Report.pdf>

the farming enterprise will gain significantly, if at all, from the revenues generated from the tourism income.” The researchers concluded that, on these marginal properties, the best an agritourism venture can do “is to ensure the marginal survival of the agricultural enterprise. If however, the farm has a good location relative to tourist requirements, and the other critical success factors of a farm based tourism business are paid attention to by the operator, then an agritourism operation has the potential to prosper independent of the farming enterprise.”

The research revealed that the more successful the farm-based tourism enterprise becomes, the less likely resources allocated to maintaining or expanding the farming operation.

“Not only did the resources seem to move out of farming and into tourism, but the type of farming also changed. Where once food crops and animals were the primary farm raised products, animals for show and crops for value added specialty foods have become the norm if farming is practiced at all.”

Conversely, a study in Hawaii (Cox, Fox and Bowen 1995) indicated that early success in farm-based tourism saw farmers diversifying crops to meet tourists’ demands for specialty foods and value-added products.

### **SOME STRATEGY SUGGESTIONS**

Agribusiness Gippsland’s research, a literature review and discussions at our various forums have presented a number of potential action items. These are:

- Training for farmers, tourism professionals and economic development officers to help develop agritourism standards, business management, and marketing.
- Consideration of a large-scale food interpretation centre.
- Pitching Gippsland agritourism at specific niche markets (eg: a seafood experience for Asian visitors, wellness’ breaks, farmer-market experiences for time-rich older visitors)
- Undertaking an industry-wide QA audit, establishing an ongoing model and explaining this to the visitor audience.
- Establishing agritourism’s credentials with state and federal policy makers, local government and decision-makers within local communities.
- Investigating ways of allowing direct sales of produce from farms.
- Regional and state advisory panels appointed within Tourism Victoria.
- Investigate potential links with farming groups (VFF/UDV/HAL etc.) as well as R,D and E services
- Dedicated travel-industry-backed campaigns timed to fit in with the farming calendar.

- Compiling a comprehensive and up-to-date directory available in print and electronically, with categories cross-referenced: (eg: fine dining; arts/crafts; heritage; natural treasures; high-activity breaks; family fun etc)
- Developing a how-to guide, (such as Dairy Australia's People in Dairy website) with information on regulations that affect existing or potential agritourism operators, risk and insurance matters, business planning, decision-making tools, management information, marketing, customer service, employing staff, best practices examples, and other practical information.

## Conclusions

There is great potential benefit to farmers and rural communities from agritourism through the diversification of income and the opportunity to improve the viability of farms.

Agritourism also offers educational benefits, bringing the wider community in touch with the importance of agriculture, the challenges it faces and the contribution it makes to the nation. The importance of showing children how food is grown cannot be undervalued and there is more and more concern that children do not understand where their food is coming from.

City dwellers are also seeking to understand the experiences of their country counterparts. The effects of drought, flood and bushfire on rural lifestyles becomes more real for those who have had some experience in the country. Visit to farms and rural enterprises give city dwellers the opportunity to learn and incorporate rural Australia into their consciousness.

Agritourism can increase the demand and appeal of local products, create direct marketing and value-added sales opportunities and stimulate a local economy.

Unfortunately, very little information on the value of, or demand for, agritourism exists at present. Benchmarking data is necessary to measure any future growth or developments in the sector.



## **APPENDIX A:** Report on a presentation to the Maffra dinner by Pauline Pocaro

A remote, mountainous region of Italy, only two-fifths the size of Gippsland, attracts more than double our visitor arrivals and lists 2500 agritourism ventures, according to Agritourism Australia founder Pauline Porcaro (*pictured right*).



Gippsland lists two online, she said.

The Italian Government backed program seeks to stop farm families leaving the land from the Alto Adige region. The Gallo Rosso (Red Rooster) campaign saw farmer unions backing the idea. Since the program started in 1999, the area now boasts 2506 accommodation providers, 34 farm bars and 37 farms who offer food/wine products.

Porcaro stressed the need to lobby for backing to see similar industry growth and working with other tourism attractions to build critical mass.

Also try to establish a point of difference between a Gippsland venture and those of the neighbouring enterprises, she said.

Consider craft weekends, a recording studio bungee jumping, bushwalking or bee-keeping as some of the options for agritourism.

### **Potential agritourism product ideas:**

Agricamping; Agricultural festivals; Agriculture students' camp; Animal displays; Antiques/agricultural museums; Artists' retreat; Bed and breakfast; BBQ nights; Bicycling tours; Bird watching; Catering special events; Community gardens; Company picnics; Cooking classes; Cooking demonstrations; Corporate picnics; Country dance venue; Craft centre/sales; Cross country skiing; Cultural festivals; Demonstrations; Diet retreat; Displays of farm practices; Ecosystem reserves; Educational farm; Farmers' markets; Farm activities; Farm stays; Farm tours; Film making camp; Food festivals; Flower shows/nurseries; Fruit picking; General store/souvenirs; Hay rides (horse or tractor); Herb farm; Hiking; Historical farms/sites; Horse stables and riding-stay with your horse; Host a farm breakfast; Hunting/fishing on-farm; Lavender farm/products; Jam making; Living history farms; Luxury camping; Mazes (corn, hay, hedges); Mini-golf; Moonlight activities; Mountain hiking trails; Music camp; Music festivals; Organic produce sales; Outback experience; Outdoor films in summer; Parties; Petting zoo; Picking fruits; Products for sale; Pumpkin painting; Recording studio; Retreat centre; Roadside markets /stalls; Scarecrow exhibitions; School field trips; School tours; Spa and Massage Centre; Special events; Surf camps; Treasure hunt tours; Weddings; Wellness retreat; Wineries/distilleries/breweries; Yoga and youth camps.

Farm activities could include: Collecting eggs; Spotting kangaroos and koalas; Feeding-out hay; Watch a sheep dog herding sheep; Milking cows or goats; Calving; Bottle feeding lambs; Grooming of horses and other animals; Moving animals from paddock to paddock; Foaling; Leading animals in training for agricultural shows; Pre-cleaning of sheep before shearing; Sheep shearing; Picking fruit, berries or vegetables and Hay rides and hay-wagon for wheel-chairs.

**More reading:**

<http://ruraltourismmarketing.com/tag/tourism-destination/> Case studies and general information

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/entertainment.html> Putting on a show for the visitors.

[Promoting Tourism in Rural America](#) Factsheet from the US Department of Agriculture

# THE B&B ABC



## A former Gippsland B&B operator shares her tips, tricks and techniques ...

There are basically two main types of accommodation, B& B and self-contained and there are various combinations of both.

**Model A:** Traditionally a bedroom in the owner's house with breakfast served in the owner's kitchen (English traditional version)

### - Disadvantages:

- Lack of privacy for guest and owner.
- Guests in your lounge/ bathroom etc.
- Unacceptable to majority of guests in 2010.

### - Advantages

If you have a spare bedroom with ensuite it could be used (less cost to set up)

**Model B (My experience):** B & B with bedrooms/ensuites custom-built near or adjacent to owner's home

### - Disadvantages:

Breakfast served in dining room in house (ie full breakfast ) any time b/n 7am and 9am so there's long hours and much sitting around. However guests loved a home-cooked breakfast with home-grown eggs etc.

**- Advantages:**

Ensures privacy for both parties. You could do breakfast supplies (i.e. no cooked food) in rooms.

**Requirements for running a B & B**

Usually need council permit. Council will charge a fee registering the business and will conduct annual health checks of your kitchen.

Insurance

Food safety handling and food supervisors certs. Required one-day course from TAFE (if serving food to public.) Might not apply to self-contained where they bring their own food.

Liquor licence: check recent laws.

GST compliance (depends on your taxation advice)

Credit card facilities. (arranged by your bank). NO cheques. Most people don't carry cash.

More commonly, internet access in rooms.

**Advertising budget**

Website - professionally created (YOU MUST DO THIS) and with an email address.

Links to tourism and booking sites; this will bring in extra bookings but you pay 5% commission e.g. totaltravel.com.au

Professional brochures and business cards ... leave them at info centres and elsewhere.

**Expenses:**

Your expenses should be 1/3 of your income but be prepared for them to be higher if you have debt.

Cleaning: if you need to employ someone try on a casual basis but remember they get paid 2½-times the rate on Sundays and public holidays. Otherwise it's you. I washed all sheets/towels etc but this could be a problem with farm water supplies. Perhaps BYO linen??

Rooms/showers/toilets/linen/towels must be spotless and fresh.

Gardens need to be well maintained. If doing farmstay suggest they bring warm clothes and gumboots or at least have a back up supply of your own.

City people use lots of water/ heating and cooling. .. they need to be educated and you need to budget accordingly.

**Other matters:**

I had a no dogs/no smoking policy. Dogs can be a potential problem on farm and BE ADVISED ... they will have fleas and they will sleep on the beds!! I used the "Health Department Regulations" argument.

ALWAYS answer your emails on the day they arrive... NO EXCUSE here.

Always reply to missed messages on your landline or mobile ASAP

When taking bookings you can either take a deposit (you must have a published cancellation policy) or credit card number. What happens if people turn up and then decide not to stay? This can be tricky. If you have their card number you could take the full amount but I often took the easy way out and said 'No worries'.

Make sure your website has photos and an explanation of your facilities.

When booking guests need to be very clear that they room sleeps four not 14. If they try to slip an extra person in – charge them. It's dishonest on their part.

This is a seven-day-a-week, most months, commitment. However, it is possible to block off some time for yourself either by getting someone reliable to babysit or by just saying (not quite truthfully) you are fully booked that weekend. If you don't have a break it will become a drudgery ... and that will be evident to guests.

### **Income/salary**

It is unlikely you will have much left over to pay yourself a decent salary. My partner was employed full time so it wasn't an issue. However, there are tax breaks, so check with your accountant first.

Access all areas?? Be prepared for guests not to understand the usual rules about farm/ gates/fences.

Maintain a high standard of accommodation with good quality matching furniture, co-ordinated and spotlessly clean. Don't furnish with odds and ends from the op shop. (Don't laugh.. it happens!)

Sheets/ towels /pillows/duonas.. buy the best you can afford. This all helps to make their experience enjoyable and you will get return bookings and "word of mouth" recommendations.

Guest enjoy log fires but this can have safety implications with city folk.'

Avoid the chocolates on the pillow syndrome but think of something extra for them... fresh flowers from the garden, good tea and coffee (plunger) in the room. Instant coffee belongs in motels.

### **And finally....**

You need to be able to talk to anyone and everyone, so if this is a problem for you, don't run this type of business.

A friendly smile, willingness to fix any small problems or helping with maps and places to go. Have a good stock of local info on hand ( I used to put a folder in their rooms) but be prepared.. there are people out there who will try your patience.

I thoroughly enjoyed my experience and met some wonderful people, some rich and famous, some not so ,but in general they treated my B & B and rooms with great respect and their children were, on the most part, very well-behaved.