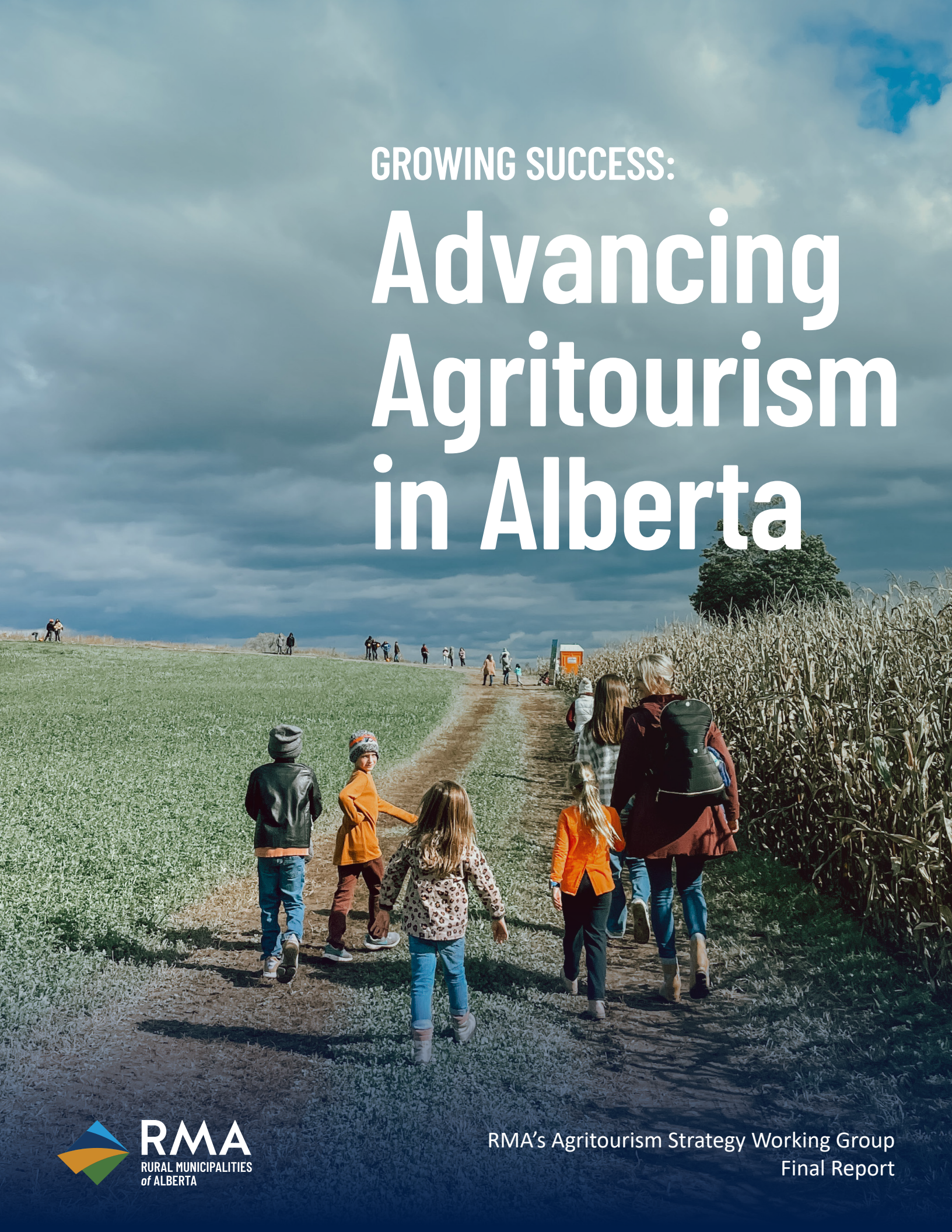


GROWING SUCCESS:

Advancing Agritourism in Alberta

RMA
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES *of* ALBERTA

RMA's Agritourism Strategy Working Group
Final Report



Contents

Executive Summary 5

Introduction 11

Agritourism in Alberta 14
Agritourism Across Canada 15
Agritourism Strategy Report 17

Sustainability of the Agritourism Sector 19

Agritourism as a Long-Term Rural Economic Development Opportunity 19
Supporting Alberta's Tourism Growth Objectives 20
Alignment with Tourism Development Zones 21
Alignment with the Economic Development in Rural Areas Plan 22
Building a Sustainable Agritourism Sector 23

Agritourism Strategy Working Group 25

Setting the Stage 25
Mandate 26
Composition and Meeting Structure 26
Delegations 27

Taking Alberta's Agritourism Sector to the Next Level 29

Theme 1: Risk 30
Theme 2: Regulatory Barriers and Challenges 31
Theme 3: Education and Promotion 32
Theme 4: Operator Capacity-Building and Access to Information 33
Theme 5: Identifying and Leveraging Partnerships 33

Recommendations 35

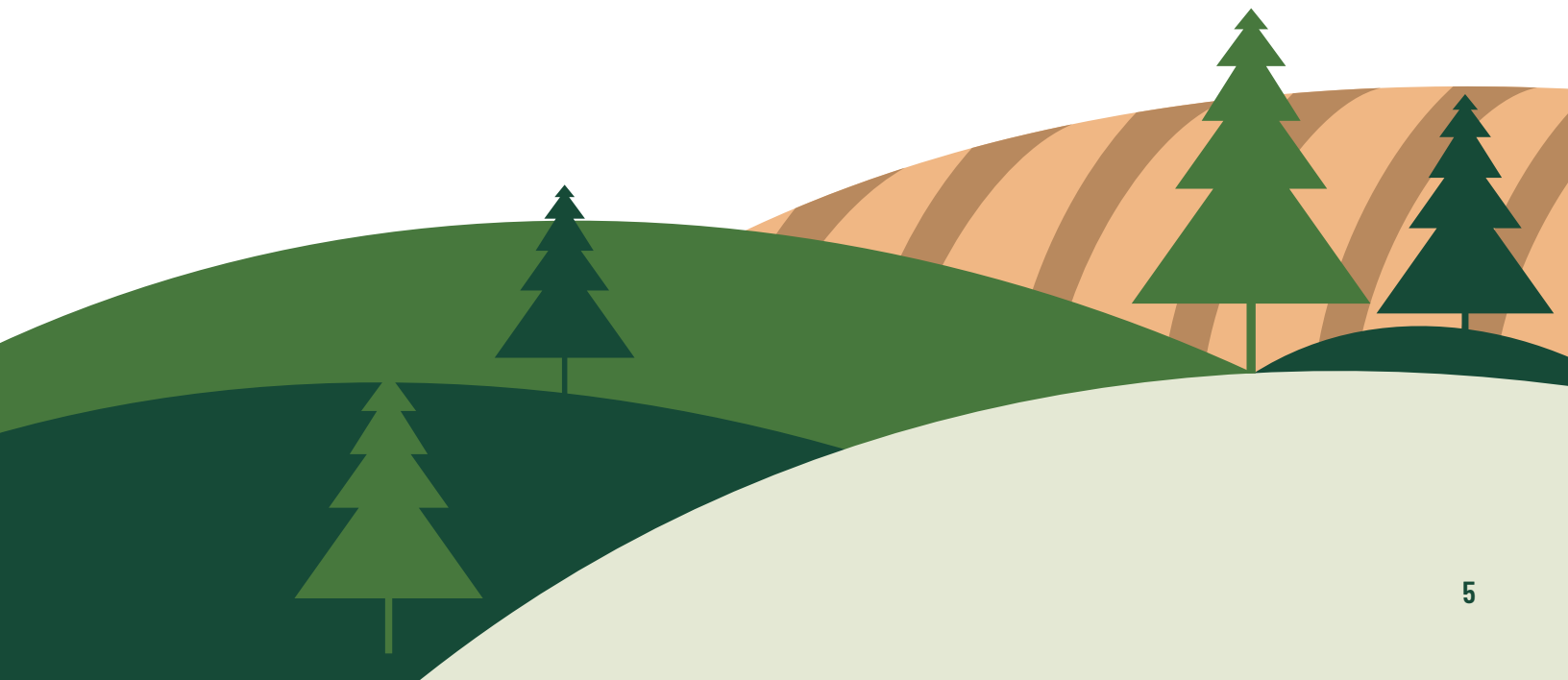
Conclusion 43



“Agritourism takes many different forms; at its core, agritourism is about bringing visitors to farms and ranches for a meaningful experience that connects people with where food is grown.”

Executive Summary

Agritourism is an important economic diversification and development initiative for agricultural producers, as well as for rural communities more broadly. Agritourism takes many different forms; at its core, agritourism is about bringing visitors to farms and ranches for a meaningful experience that connects people with where food is grown. Alberta is already home to agritourism operators, an industry association (Agritourism Alberta), and provincial government initiatives that promote the sector (Open Farm Days). This context illustrates that agritourism is not a new industry in Alberta. However, as Alberta's population grows, and corresponding demand for regional tourism options increases, it is timely to review the current Alberta context to identify and address barriers to the continued growth of the agritourism sector.





> “Greater consistency, backed by legislation, in risk communication also helps establish clear expectations regarding public access and reinforces the distinction between inherent agricultural risks and operator negligence.”

This report reflects the work of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta's (RMA) Agritourism Working Group. The Working Group was brought together by RMA to build a common understanding of the industry in Alberta, learn lessons from other jurisdictions, hear from industry and municipal stakeholders, and develop recommendations that can help the Government of Alberta reduce red tape and promote the agritourism sector. While the Working Group's primary mandate is to explore recommendations for the Government of Alberta, the foundational documents also include direction for the group to explore potential opportunities for municipalities to support sector growth through local promotional efforts and streamlining local regulatory and development processes. Together, the Working Group met and engaged with stakeholders throughout spring and summer of 2026.

Working group members represent:

1. The RMA
2. The Government of Alberta
3. Agritourism Alberta
4. An agritourism operator
5. RMA member municipalities

The committee identified five key themes:

1. Risk
2. Regulatory barriers and challenges
3. Education and promotion
4. Operator support
5. Identifying and leveraging partnerships



These themes are used to frame six recommendations, some of which relate to multiple themes. The recommendations represent the next phase of work, that requires action by the Government of Alberta. The six recommendations are:

1. Establish a provincial definition of "agritourism" to support development of promotional materials, policy development, and capacity-building supports

A lack of a commonly understood agritourism definition in Alberta creates challenges for both the sector itself and related stakeholders in relation to targeting policy development, promotions, etc. Agritourism activities often exist in a grey area between traditional agriculture production and tourism-related commercial enterprises, resulting in varying interpretations of what constitutes agritourism and how it should be regulated and promoted. This ambiguity can affect everything from land use planning and permitting decisions, to insurance coverage, risk assessment, taxation, and access to support programs.

2. Enhance liability protection for agritourism operators through standardized signage and risk communication materials, backed by legislation

Agritourism operators face challenges obtaining adequate and affordable insurance for their operations. Operators, visitors, municipalities, and insurers all benefit from adequate awareness of the risks associated with visiting working farms and ranches. Consistent communication materials, including signage, can help improve awareness of visitor responsibilities, support operator risk management efforts, and contribute to a more predictable environment for insurers and regulators. Greater consistency, backed by legislation, in risk communication also helps establish clear expectations regarding public access and reinforces the distinction between inherent agricultural risks and operator negligence.

3. Seek opportunities to develop municipal policies and approval processes to encourage agritourism development at the local level

Rural municipalities are strong champions of the agriculture industry and drivers of economic development. However, similar to the provincial regulatory context, some municipal land use planning and development approval processes are not designed to accommodate the addition of agritourism on existing agricultural properties. This recommendation is intended to spur collaboration between rural municipalities (potentially through RMA) and the agritourism sector to develop best practices as to how rural municipalities can support agritourism locally through their planning and development approaches.

4. Promote agritourism through an official public awareness and marketing campaign

Despite growing presence across Alberta, agritourism remains relatively unknown to many residents and visitors. Increased awareness through strategic and collaborative campaigns can help showcase the diversity of experiences available on Alberta farms and ranches, while strengthening public appreciation for agriculture and rural communities. Improved visibility can also highlight agritourism's contribution to local economies, agricultural diversification, and destination development.

RMA is looking forward to continuing to advance these recommendations collaboratively with the Government of Alberta, industry representatives, and other stakeholders who see the benefit of creating new opportunities for economic development in rural Alberta. This work represents a significant opportunity for multiple ministries to work together with RMA to advance an industry that brings economic development to rural communities.

5. Implement a centralized agritourism operator hub to support sector access to data, regulatory information, best practices, and other resources

Information for agritourism operators is often spread across numerous government departments, industry organizations, funding programs, and support agencies. This can make it difficult to identify requirements, resources, and opportunities. A centralized hub would improve access to information and provide a single point of reference for operators exploring or expanding agritourism activities.

6. Coordinate a multi-stakeholder agritourism advisory committee to action the report recommendations and continue to drive long-term sector growth and evolution

The opportunities and challenges facing the agritourism sector cannot be addressed by any one organization or ministry. Advancing agritourism in Alberta will require continued collaboration among agricultural producers, municipalities, industry organizations, tourism partners, insurers, and relevant provincial ministries to ensure that efforts remain responsive to emerging needs and growth.

While this report is the final deliverable of the Working Group, it is not the end of RMA's role in advocating for changes to enable the agritourism sector. RMA is looking forward to continuing to advance these recommendations collaboratively with the Government of Alberta, industry representatives, and other stakeholders who see the benefit of creating new opportunities for economic development in rural Alberta. This work represents a significant opportunity for multiple ministries to work together with RMA to advance an industry that brings economic development to rural communities.



“Agritourism supports local economic development, strengthens the viability of agricultural operations, and showcases the overall charm of rural communities. Agritourism creates opportunities for producers to diversify their income while providing visitors with authentic experiences that connect them to Alberta’s agricultural heritage and food systems.”



Introduction

Agritourism supports local economic development, strengthens the viability of agricultural operations, and showcases the overall charm of rural communities. Agritourism creates opportunities for producers to diversify their income while providing visitors with authentic experiences that connect them to Alberta's agricultural heritage and food systems. This sector includes a diverse mix of experiences that allow visitors to connect with different agricultural sub-sectors.

Some activities commonly associated with agritourism in Alberta include:

1. **Farm and ranch experiences**
   Examples: horseback riding, tours, demonstrations, displays, mazes, farm animal interactions, wildlife viewing, and sleigh/wagon rides
2. **U-Pick and harvest experiences**
   Examples: flower/fruit/vegetable picking, fibre from livestock and festivals
3. **Farm stays and accommodation**
   Examples: glamping, bed and breakfasts, and guest cabins
4. **Food and culinary experiences**
   Examples: farm-to-table dinners, tasting experiences, cooking classes, and brewery tours/tastings
5. **Agricultural retail and direct marketing**
   Examples: on-farm markets and sales of value-added products
6. **Events and entertainment**
   Examples: photography opportunities, and seasonal celebrations

Agriculture employs more than **66,000 people** in Alberta and contributed **$9.8 billion in GDP** in 2024.

Agritourism has emerged as an important diversification strategy for producers in the province and in aligning with and advancing the GOA's goals for tourism development.



A 2026 Agritourism Alberta survey reported that **42% of agritourism operations created new paying jobs.**

For many agricultural producers, agritourism can offer an additional revenue stream that can improve business resilience. Agritourism activities can allow producers to build value from their operations while also building stronger relationships with different types of consumers. Increased visitor activity on the farm can also generate increased business across other establishments in the community, including hospitality and goods and services offered by other agricultural/agritourism operators. Agritourism can contribute to job creation, encourage entrepreneurship, and help retain residents by supporting a more diversified rural economy. A 2026 Agritourism Alberta survey reported that 42% of agritourism operations created new paying jobs.

Successful agritourism operations can enhance a municipality's identity as a destination. It supports local agricultural products, landscapes, culture, and history, all while fostering a greater understanding of the overall agricultural industry. Many municipalities are exploring how they can support agritourism development while balancing land use considerations, public safety, infrastructure capacity, and the long-term preservation of agricultural land. Understanding these opportunities and challenges is essential for municipalities seeking to encourage sustainable growth and maximize benefits for producers and visitors.



Agritourism in Alberta

Agriculture is core to the identity of rural Alberta and represents a significant contribution to not only Alberta's overall GDP but also provides an anchor of employment and community locally. Agriculture employs more than 66,000 people in Alberta and contributed $9.8 billion in GDP in 2024. Agritourism has emerged as an important diversification strategy for producers in the province and in aligning with and advancing the GOA's goals for tourism development. **Alberta is well-positioned to support the growth of agritourism in rural areas, because the province's varied geography and existing national and international reputation as a tourism destination creates opportunities for a wide range of visitor experiences.** This diversity allows rural communities to develop tourism offerings that reflect their unique local strengths.

Agritourism Alberta

Agritourism Alberta (formerly Alberta Farm Fresh Producers Association) is the province's leading industry association representing farms and ranches that engage in direct-to-consumer marketing and agritourism activities. The organization has supported producers through advocacy, education, networking, marketing, and business development initiatives for over 40 years, with the goal of strengthening farm viability and connecting consumers with local food and agricultural experiences.

Agritourism Alberta focuses on much more than just individual farm businesses. The association promotes agritourism as a tool for strengthening rural communities, attracting visitors, supporting local food systems, and creating economic opportunities across the province. For rural municipalities, Agritourism Alberta serves as an important partner and source of industry expertise on farm diversification, destination development, and economic growth in rural Alberta.

Open Farm Days

Alberta Open Farm Days, operated by the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies, is one of Alberta's main agritourism initiatives. It is a province-wide annual event where farms, ranches, food producers, breweries, orchards, and other agricultural businesses open their operations to the public for tours, demonstrations, educational activities, and food experiences. For one weekend each year, participating operations welcome visitors to experience agritourism firsthand.

The program aims to:

1. Increase public awareness of agriculture and food production
2. Connect urban residents with rural communities
3. Promote local food and agricultural products
4. Encourage agritourism development
5. Generate economic activity for farms, ranches, and surrounding communities

Open Farm Days functions as an incubator for agricultural tourism and rural sustainability that brings people together through educational and hands-on agricultural experiences.

Since launching in 2013, Open Farm Days has attracted more than 235,000 visitors to over 1,200 farms and ranches. It has generated more than $1.7 million in direct on-farm sales. As this report does not reflect data from Open Farm Days 2026, these numbers are expected to continue to grow. Open Farm Days provides a practical example of how agritourism contributes to rural economic development by showcasing the diversity of Alberta agriculture, increasing rural visitation, and demonstrating demand for agricultural experiences.

Since launching in 2013, Open Farm Days has attracted more than **235,000 visitors** to over **1,200 farms and ranches.** It has generated more than **$1.7 million in on-farm economic impact**...



Agritourism Across Canada

Many provinces throughout Canada have begun to realize the opportunities and benefits related to supporting agritourism. While many provinces across Canada have general tourism strategies and strong agricultural sectors, British Columbia and Ontario notably both serve as leaders in the agritourism space. Therefore, the analysis here focuses on their resources and findings.

British Columbia

British Columbia's approach to agritourism demonstrates the value of a coordinated framework for agritourism development. Permitted agritourism activities are outlined through the Agricultural Land Reserve system, helping to reduce regulatory uncertainty for operators. The province also provides a clear understanding of agritourism development through the Farm Diversification Through Agritourism Guidebook and the corresponding Farm Tourism Guide. These guides provide comprehensive information for agritourism operators interested in expanding or diversifying their operations to include an agritourism component. There is also guidance provided on how agritourism operators can effectively work with their municipality.

Ontario

Ontario demonstrates how agritourism can be integrated into rural economic development and tourism strategies. The province recognizes municipalities as key partners in supporting the agritourism sector and encourages municipal governments to engage with agritourism operators to support broader tourism growth.

Agritourism Ontario serves as an industry association that advocates for agritourism operators, promotes best practices, and supports business development. Agritourism Ontario worked with the Government of Ontario to create the Growing Agritourism Act, which removes barriers to investment for agritourism operators across Ontario, the first legislation of its kind in Canada.

Insurance, liability, and regulatory uncertainty have historically posed significant challenges for agritourism operators in Ontario. Prior to the introduction of Ontario's agritourism liability legislation, many operators faced rising insurance costs and, in some cases, were unable to obtain coverage at all. Insurers often struggled to assess agritourism because it did not fit neatly into either traditional agricultural or commercial business categories, creating uncertainty for both operators and insurance providers.

Rather than regulating insurance prices, the objective of the *Act* was to improve certainty within the marketplace so operators could access coverage more easily and reduce exposure to frivolous lawsuits associated with the inherent risks of agricultural activities. A key component of the legislation was the establishment of a clear legal definition of agritourism, which stakeholders indicated improved consistency for insurers, operators, and regulators.

Agritourism Ontario worked extensively with operators, brokers, policymakers, and the public to improve understanding of what agritourism is and how risk should be managed. Standardized warning signage formed part of this approach, with legislation specifying consistent language, formatting, and placement requirements.

Agritourism Ontario is undertaking research to better quantify the sector's contributions to GDP, employment, tax revenues, and broader economic activity. The objective is to provide concrete data on the sector's current impact, future growth potential, key opportunities, and ongoing challenges, helping to inform future policy and industry decisions.



RMA Advocacy

In Spring 2023, RMA members passed Resolution 8-23S: Provincial Review of Agribusiness and Agritourism. This resolution calls for the GOA and municipalities to work together to create a more supportive and coordinated framework, because the current rules and policies are not always clear, consistent, or well-suited to support agritourism across the province. An additional resolution guiding RMA's advocacy for the sector is 9-26S: Access to Liability Insurance for Agritourism Operators. Resolutions 9-26S calls for the GOA to address the challenges faced by Alberta's agritourism sector in accessing adequate liability insurance.

In addition to Resolution 8-23S, RMA has a long history of advocating for the agricultural sector as an economic driver and key rural industry. This takes many forms, although recent examples include advocating for improved and long-term access to strychnine for producers, exemptions for producers from carbon levy policies, and initiatives that would encourage more veterinarians to take up practice in rural areas. While these are not the focus of this report, they are included to demonstrate RMA's interest in promoting and supporting a viable agricultural sector, as well as the multi-faceted nature of the sector itself.

Agritourism Strategy Report

The primary purpose of this report is to examine agritourism through an economic development lens. While agritourism is often discussed as a land use, regulatory, or agricultural issue, rural municipalities and their residents are increasingly interested in its broader economic benefits. Agritourism can help diversify farm income, attract visitors to rural areas, support local businesses, create employment opportunities, and strengthen community identity. As municipalities look for opportunities to expand and diversify their local economies, agritourism represents a form of value-added agricultural activity that can generate economic benefits on the farm and throughout the surrounding region.

This report will serve as a practical resource for governments, municipalities, industry organizations, agritourism operators, and visitors seeking to support the responsible growth of agritourism in Alberta. A collaborative approach is necessary to ensure a more resilient sector and stronger agriculture and tourism industries as farmers build more prosperous rural communities.





“By leveraging existing agricultural assets, agritourism creates opportunities for coordinated leadership among government, industry, and tourism partners while encouraging investment in distinctive visitor experiences that showcase Alberta's landscapes, food systems, farming traditions, and overall rural culture.”

Sustainability of the Agritourism Sector

Agritourism as a Long-Term Rural Economic Development Opportunity

Agritourism has the potential to become a substantial component of Alberta's rural economy. By creating opportunities for agricultural producers to diversify their operations, agritourism supports farm viability and broader economic benefits to surrounding communities. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the sector requires recognizing agritourism as more than a tourism activity, and Alberta is well-positioned to capitalize on its agricultural strengths and transform them into lasting economic development opportunities.



Supporting Alberta's Tourism Growth Objectives

In February 2024, the GOA released Higher Ground: A Tourism Sector Strategy, which intends to take a holistic and sustainable approach to diversified economic growth. This strategy commits to growing Alberta's visitor economy to $25 billion in annual expenditures by 2035 with the goal of making Alberta the premier place to invest, visit, work, and live.

The Tourism Sector Strategy outlines five key pillars to support this initiative:

1. Align leadership to drive coordinated growth across government, Travel Alberta, and industry.
2. Attract investment into the development of unique products, experiences and destinations that enable our province to shine.
3. Address workforce needs to build operational capacity.
4. Expand access to and within the province.
5. Uphold commitments to partner with Indigenous tourism operators to expand their offerings.

Agritourism is a piece of the solution to achieving Alberta's broader tourism, economic development, agricultural diversification, and rural prosperity goals...

By aligning agritourism development with the Tourism Sector Strategy, Alberta can maximize the economic and community benefits generated by both sectors while supporting the long-term sustainability of rural communities and agricultural operations.

Although this document does not identify agritourism as a component of the strategy, the sector is uniquely positioned to advance all five of these pillars. By leveraging existing agricultural assets, agritourism creates opportunities for coordinated leadership among government, industry, and tourism partners while encouraging investment in distinctive visitor experiences that showcase Alberta's landscapes, food systems, farming traditions, and overall rural culture. The sector also contributes to workforce development by creating new employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in rural communities, helping to attract, retain, and engage the next generation of agricultural producers and tourism operators. Agritourism also supports the province's objective of expanding tourism activity beyond traditional destinations by encouraging visitors to explore rural and emerging regions throughout Alberta. Through partnerships enhanced partnerships, agritourism can further strengthen Alberta's tourism offerings while creating shared economic benefits. Agritourism is a piece of the solution to achieving Alberta's broader tourism, economic development, agricultural diversification, and rural prosperity goals. Agritourism speaks to the goals of the Tourism Sector Strategy by providing tourism opportunities outside of the Rocky Mountains and major cities. By aligning agritourism development with the Tourism Sector Strategy, Alberta can maximize the economic and community benefits generated by both sectors while supporting the long-term sustainability of rural communities and agricultural operations.

By integrating agritourism into destination planning, regional tourism strategies, and visitor marketing efforts, communities can leverage existing agricultural assets to create new tourism opportunities with relatively low barriers to entry compared to developing entirely new attractions.

As Alberta continues to grow its tourism economy, agritourism can serve as both a tourism development tool and an economic diversification strategy, helping rural communities attract visitors, support local businesses, strengthen farm viability, and showcase the unique agricultural experiences that define much of the province's identity.

Alignment with Tourism Development Zones

Travel Alberta's Tourism Development Zones are a long-term destination development framework intended to support the growth of Alberta's visitor economy and help achieve the province's tourism expansion goals. The Tourism Development Zones focus on building new tourism destinations by taking a regional approach identifying areas of the province with shared tourism assets, experiences, infrastructure, and opportunities. Agritourism speaks to these goals directly. These zones are built around the idea that successful tourism destinations require coordinated planning, investment, product development, marketing, workforce capacity, and infrastructure. By identifying unique strengths and opportunities within each region, the framework helps guide future tourism development efforts and supports the creation of experiences that encourage visitors to travel throughout Alberta, stay longer, and spend more within local communities.

Agritourism represents a practical mechanism for advancing the Tourism Development Zones framework while supporting broader rural economic development objectives. By integrating agritourism into destination planning, regional tourism strategies, and visitor marketing efforts, communities can leverage existing agricultural assets to create new tourism opportunities with relatively low barriers to entry compared to developing entirely new attractions. As Alberta continues to grow its tourism economy, agritourism can serve as both a tourism development tool and an economic diversification strategy, helping rural communities attract visitors, support local businesses, strengthen farm viability, and showcase the unique agricultural experiences that define much of the province's identity.

Alignment with the Economic Development in Rural Areas Plan

In December 2022, the GOA published the Economic Development in Rural Alberta Plan (EDRAP), which is a long-term strategy for ensuring rural Albertans have economic opportunities where they live.

By helping producers generate additional income, attracting visitors to rural communities, supporting local businesses, and creating opportunities for partnership and investment, agritourism advances many of the economic development outcomes EDRAP seeks to achieve. Additionally, agritourism provides additional employment opportunities that can serve to retain or attract young people to the industry and farming in general, providing a link to the next generation of farmers and ranchers. Therefore, agritourism can be viewed not only as a tourism initiative, but also as a practical economic development tool that contributes to the long-term sustainability, resilience, and prosperity of rural Alberta.

Additionally, agritourism provides additional employment opportunities that can serve to retain or attract young people to the industry and farming in general, providing a link to the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

EDRAP is organized around five strategic directions:

1. Economic development-enabling infrastructure
2. Rural business supports and entrepreneurship
3. Support for labour force and skills development
4. Marketing and promoting rural tourism
5. Rural economic development capacity building



Building a Sustainable Agritourism Sector

Maintaining momentum on growing agritourism will require ongoing collaboration, information sharing, and engagement among stakeholders to ensure Alberta remains responsive to changing market conditions, emerging best practices, and the practical realities faced by operators and municipalities. Continued dialogue will help maintain alignment between provincial, municipal, and industry priorities while supporting informed decision-making and coordinated action. Building on the relationships and knowledge developed through the Agritourism Strategy Working Group will be essential to ensuring that agritourism remains a viable and sustainable contributor to rural economic development.

By integrating agritourism into broader tourism, agriculture, and economic development initiatives, fostering partnerships across sectors, and continuing the collaborative approach established through the Working Group, Alberta can position agritourism as a lasting driver of farm diversification, tourism growth, and rural prosperity. In doing so, the province can support the development of a sector that not only generates economic benefits but also celebrates and preserves the unique agricultural landscapes, communities, and experiences that define rural Alberta.





“Agritourism is an opportunity to ensure a sustainable future for ranching and farming for future generations of Albertans.”

Agritourism Strategy Working Group

Setting the Stage

In July 2025, RMA met with the Honourable Joseph Schow, former Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration, to discuss issues of importance to RMA and its members. One of the RMA's main priorities for discussion in this meeting was the creation of an agritourism strategy that aligns with province's broader economic tourism goals. RMA framed an agritourism strategy as an opportunity for RMA and the GOA to collaborate to contribute to fulfilling the Economic Development in Rural Alberta Plan (EDRAP) goal of "supporting Alberta's rural visitor economy to ensure rural and Indigenous communities are strong and vibrant with opportunities for employment and economic diversification." RMA emphasized that for the project to be successful, it would require participation from rural municipalities, industry groups, and the Government of Alberta.

This proposal was supported by Alberta Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration during this meeting and RMA created a project plan and Terms of Reference (TOR) for the "Agritourism Strategy Working Group." Alberta Tourism and Sport was designated by the GOA as their formal representative to the Working Group.



Mandate

The Agritourism Strategy Working Group was established to support the development of a comprehensive provincial strategy for agritourism that facilitates the sector's responsible growth, promotion, and long-term sustainability in Alberta. The Working Group provided a forum to identify opportunities for greater policy alignment, improved regulatory coordination, and enhanced economic development outcomes. Through collaboration and engagement, the Working Group examined existing challenges and opportunities within the sector, developed solutions to address barriers to growth, and explored ways to strengthen Alberta's agritourism industry while supporting the interests of rural municipalities, agricultural producers, visitors, and other stakeholders.

Composition and Meeting Structure

The Agritourism Working Group consisted of the following members, all of which contributed to identifying collaborative and holistic solutions to support the agritourism industry in Alberta:

1. Gene Hrabec, RMA District 5 Director (Chair)
2. Miranda Rosin, Director of Tourism Strategy and Policy, Alberta Tourism and Sport
3. Scott Klassen, Reeve, Wheatland County
4. Deanna Stang, Councillor, Sturgeon County
5. Debbie Oyarzun, County Manager, County of Barrhead
6. Beth Cash, Director, Economic Developers Alberta
7. Tam Andersen, President, Agritourism Alberta

The Agritourism Strategy Working Group met five times between February and August 2026 to share perspectives, identify knowledge gaps, meet with relevant subject matter experts, and identify solutions to barriers impacting the agritourism sector.

The following organizations presented to the Working Group to share best practices, identify risk management approaches, suggest considerations, and provide overall support.

Delegations

As part of the research and analysis process, the Working Group heard from several delegations with expertise and/or a direct interest in the agritourism sector. The table below provides a summary of these delegations.

NAME OF DELEGATION	DELEGATION FOCUS	WHAT WAS LEARNED
RMA Insurance Tributary Public Risk	Early in the process, the Working Group identified access to insurance for agritourism operators as a challenge.	◆ There is room for improved risk management by agritourism operators. ◆ There is a role for public in understanding risks of visiting a working farm. ◆ Consistent approaches may increase willingness of private insurers to provide service.
Alberta Health Services	The Working Group identified that agritourism operators often face challenges navigating the various food-related regulatory requirements and programs.	◆ AHS inspectors and agritourism operators have opportunity to pursue a more standardized approach, which would lead to consistency in decision making. ◆ There is an opportunity to share existing AHS resources with agritourism operators.
Indigenous Tourism Alberta (ITA)	ITA has evolved from an organization focused on building membership and sector awareness into a structured, membership-driven organization that supports tourism operators at various stages of development.	◆ Successful tourism sectors are built through marketing and promotion, education, mentorship, strategic partnerships, and the development of unique visitor experiences that generate measurable economic benefits.
Agritourism Ontario and Ontario Member of Provincial Parliament	Ontario's Growing Agritourism Act provides liability protection for agritourism operators by creating a safer environment for both agritourism operators and visitors through risk awareness, which has become a key element of the Agritourism Strategy Working Group.	◆ Ontario legislation sought an education-based approach to agritourism insurance. ◆ Work is underway in Ontario to quantify the economic value of agritourism.
Alberta Municipal Affairs (MA)	Building safety codes fall under MA's jurisdiction. When an agricultural building is repurposed for agritourism, the safety requirements increase.	◆ There are currently no provisions within the building code system that allow for a transitional compliance period or automatic grandfathering of existing agricultural structures. ◆ Agritourism building conversions are highly case-specific and do not lend themselves well to a one-size-fits-all regulatory solution.



“...Making progress in relation to these themes will help create a more supportive environment for agritourism development, while also ensuring that growth occurs in a safe and sustainable way.”

Taking Alberta's Agritourism Sector to the Next Level

Through Working Group discussions, stakeholder engagement, research, and jurisdictional reviews, five core themes emerged as significant factors influencing the growth and long-term success of agritourism in Alberta:

1. Risk
2. Regulatory barriers and challenges
3. Education and promotion
4. Operator support
5. Identifying and leveraging partnerships

While each theme affects agritourism differently, they are closely interconnected and collectively influence the ability of agricultural producers to diversify their operations, attract visitors, expand their business, and contribute to their local economy. Making progress in relation to these themes will help create a more supportive environment for agritourism development, while also ensuring that growth occurs in a safe and sustainable way.



Theme 1: Risk

Stakeholders from the insurance industry and agritourism sector, alongside municipalities, repeatedly identified liability exposure and challenges in accessing insurance as significant risks to the growth and viability of agritourism. Unlike traditional farming activities, agritourism involves public access to and use of agricultural properties, creating additional considerations related to visitor safety, public access, property use, and potential legal liability. As a result, many operators face challenges obtaining affordable and appropriate insurance coverage, while insurers often struggle to consistently evaluate risks associated with diverse agritourism activities. These represent the dual nature of the risk challenge: changes may be required from the insurance industry itself for agritourism operators to access adequate and affordable insurance while recognizing there are opportunities for operators to identify, plan for, and mitigate risk in more consistent ways.

The importance of this issue is reflected in RMA Resolution 9-26S: Access to Liability Insurance for Agritourism Operators, which highlights concerns regarding the availability and affordability of liability insurance for agritourism businesses. It also identifies that Ontario's *Growing Agritourism Act* can be a relevant example of how legislation could address this issue in Alberta. Working Group discussions reinforced these concerns, as participants noted that some operators experience significant increases in premiums after introducing visitor-focused activities, while others encounter challenges in securing general farm and home liability coverage while also holding agritourism insurance. This speaks to the challenge for agritourism operators obtaining adequate and affordable coverage.

Agritourism is not always properly understood by insurers, regulators, and the public. Because agritourism intersects agriculture and tourism, many of the activities and associated risks do not fit neatly within traditional insurance categories. This lack of consistency can create uncertainty for agritourism operators and insurers when assessing risk, determining appropriate coverage, or evaluating liability exposure.

Beyond insurance, there are also opportunities for the sector to standardize its approach to risk identification, mitigation, and management. Consistency and clarity are important components of effective risk management within the agritourism sector, and both are lacking in the current sector environment. Use of common terminology, shared definitions, standardized risk management practices, and consistent communication regarding inherent risks associated with agritourism would be immensely valuable for insurers to reduce uncertainty and help establish clearer expectations regarding liability and responsibility. The *Growing Agritourism Act* was frequently referenced as an example of how a more standardized approach to agritourism operational practices can address liability and insurance concerns. Ontario's approach provided greater clarity around agritourism activities by establishing definitions, standardized signage, and consistent risk communication measures related to the inherent risks of agricultural operations. This framework helped create a more predictable operating environment for operators, insurers, legal professionals, and visitors by clearly distinguishing between the inherent risks associated with agritourism. The legislation was not intended to eliminate operator responsibility or protect against negligence, but to distinguish between unavoidable risks associated with agricultural activities and situations where an operator has failed to meet their obligations.

There is a strong relationship between insurance accessibility, public safety, regulatory certainty, and economic development. Addressing risk-related challenges is not solely an insurance issue, but also a matter of creating a shared understanding of agritourism and establishing consistency in approaches to managing inherent risks. As agritourism continues to grow in Alberta, risk and liability considerations will remain a central factor influencing the sector's ability to attract investment, support farm diversification, and contribute to rural economic development.

Regulatory consistency, predictability, and clarity while maintaining safety standards and regulatory oversight are needed to protect the public and support responsible sector growth.

Theme 2: Regulatory Barriers and Challenges

There is a high level of uncertainty for agritourism operators in relation to navigating various regulatory requirements overseen by multiple ministries or entities.

Operators often face challenges understanding how existing regulations apply to agritourism activities, particularly when farm operations expand to include public access or visitor-focused experiences. Many operators are not fully aware of what may trigger additional safety requirements (such as fire protection, electrical upgrades, occupancy requirements, or accessibility standards). As a result, requirements are sometimes encountered later in the development process, creating uncertainty regarding project scope, timelines, and costs.

The Agritourism Strategy Working Group identified that regulatory interpretation and exercising of local autonomy on land use and development decisions can vary across municipalities and agencies, creating an approval process that is dependent on multiple factors based on the location of the agritourism operation. Planning decisions may differ between jurisdictions leading to uncertainty for operators seeking approvals or guidance.

There are many complexities in navigating the numerous government departments and agencies involved in agritourism. Agritourism activities often intersect with multiple regulatory areas, including land use planning, safety and building codes, public health, tourism, agriculture, and environmental considerations. Existing frameworks do not clearly define where agritourism activities fit, creating uncertainty for operators trying to understand their obligations. Agritourism's cross-Ministry nature makes regulatory coordination an ongoing challenge and an important consideration in understanding the barriers faced by agritourism operators.

Discussions on regulatory barriers and challenges reflected a common desire for greater consistency, predictability, and clarity while maintaining safety standards and regulatory oversight necessary to protect the public and support responsible sector growth.

Theme 3: Education and Promotion

Awareness and understanding of agritourism vary considerably among operators, government agencies, industry partners, municipalities, and the public, which can limit recognition of its overall economic potential and broader community benefits. The limited availability of sector-specific data and performance metrics further contributes to this challenge, making it difficult to quantify agritourism's contributions, demonstrate its value and communicate its significance. As a result, agritourism is often underrepresented within broader conversations related to agriculture, tourism, and rural development.

Education and promotion play an important role in the success of agritourism because it increases awareness of available experiences, strengthens understanding of the sector, and helps connect visitors with rural communities. Many potential visitors are unaware of the range of agritourism opportunities available to them, from farm tours and U-pick operations to ranch experiences, farm-to-table events, educational programs, and on-farm accommodations. Effective promotion helps raise the profile of these experiences, making it easier for visitors to discover and access agritourism destinations. Increased awareness can also encourage greater participation by helping visitors understand what agritourism is and what they can expect when visiting a working farm or ranch. Educational materials, visitor information, itineraries, and promotional campaigns can help reduce uncertainty, improve visitor confidence, and foster a greater appreciation for agriculture and rural life. This is particularly important for urban residents who may have limited exposure to different agricultural operations. Greater public awareness can also strengthen support for agritourism among governments, industry partners, and municipalities by demonstrating the role the sector plays in farm diversification, tourism development, and rural economic growth.

Collectively, these factors influence public awareness, visitor participation, and the sector's ability to establish itself as a recognized contributor to Alberta's agricultural and tourism industries.

There is a strong relationship between insurance accessibility, public safety, regulatory certainty, and economic development. Addressing risk-related challenges is not solely an insurance issue, but also a matter of creating a shared understanding of agritourism and establishing consistency in approaches to managing inherent risks. As agritourism continues to grow in Alberta, risk and liability considerations will remain a central factor influencing the sector's ability to attract investment, support farm diversification, and contribute to rural economic development.

Addressing risk-related challenges is not solely an insurance issue, but also a matter of creating a shared understanding of agritourism and establishing consistency in approaches to managing inherent risks.

As agritourism continues to grow in Alberta, risk and liability considerations will remain a central factor influencing the sector's ability to attract investment, support farm diversification, and contribute to rural economic development.

Theme 4: Operator Capacity-Building and Access to Information

Agritourism businesses must often develop expertise in visitor services, marketing, risk management, regulatory compliance, and business planning. Agritourism operators must consider these competencies from a novel perspective while continuing to manage their primary farming or ranching activities. This can create challenges for operators seeking to diversify their operations. To address this challenge, agritourism operators require both capacity building and access to information.

Agritourism operators are already skilled in the practice of managing an agricultural business. Many of the tools to succeed in agritourism already exist; however, what is needed are bridging resources that will assist operators in translating their skills to a related, but new industry. This will need to include a blend of tourism, marketing, risk management, and other skills that build on existing knowledge.

Agritourism operators also need a centralized and trusted source of information they can rely on to answer their questions about regulatory requirements, best practices, municipal requirements, and any other legal obligations they have. This resource should take the same approach as capacity building; provide clear information that builds on the strengths already present with agricultural business operators seeking to expand and diversify their operation.

There is a need for greater certainty and clarity regarding agritourism's role within Alberta's agricultural landscape. The absence of a clearly defined and widely understood framework for agritourism can make it more difficult for operators to understand how to navigate and succeed in the sector. Existing entrepreneurial and business support programs often focus on either traditional agriculture or commercial business development and may not fully address the unique circumstances of agritourism operators. As a result, operators can experience challenges identifying the information, training, and resources most relevant to their business model.

Theme 5: Identifying and Leveraging Partnerships

Agritourism clearly intersects with multiple sectors and relies on a broad network of organizations, agencies, and stakeholders to provide different forms of expertise, resources, funding opportunities, and regulatory oversight. Successful agritourism development often depends on the ability of operators and communities to navigate and connect with a range of partners, rather than working within a single framework. Collaboration between operators, municipalities, industry associations, tourism organizations, agricultural organizations, and provincial and federal governments are all essential to the overall success of the sector. Partnerships are also incredibly important for building awareness, sharing knowledge, and supporting coordinated approaches to agritourism development. There is an opportunity for Agritourism Alberta to leverage the lessons learned by Indigenous Tourism Alberta and adapt them for the agritourism industry. The continued growth and development of agritourism depends on strong relationships, effective coordination, and support from relevant organizations.



“Collaboration between operators, municipalities, industry associations, tourism organizations, agricultural organizations, and provincial and federal governments are all essential to the overall success of the sector.”

Recommendations

The key themes identified by the Agritourism Strategy Working Group provide the foundation for the recommendations presented in this report. The recommendations are intended to improve clarity, reduce barriers, strengthen support networks, and encourage collaboration among different groups, while maintaining a strong focus on public safety, agricultural viability, and local decision-making.

Overall, these recommendations support uniquely rural approaches to a distinctly rural sector.



RECOMMENDATION 1:

Establish a provincial definition of "agritourism" to support development of promotional materials, policy development, and capacity-building supports

Context and Rationale

In some ways, agritourism is a straightforward concept based around providing the public an opportunity to experience agriculture and rural life, while providing an additional revenue stream for producers and broader economic benefits. At a deeper level, however, uncertainty exists among government and stakeholders as to what specific activities are considered agritourism, whether agritourism is strictly related on-farm activities or rural tourism more broadly, and the degree of commercialization of experiences required to label an activity as agritourism. Building mutual clarity on these questions matters for the growth of the sector; agritourism activities often exist in a grey area between traditional agriculture production and tourism-related commercial enterprises, resulting in varying interpretations of what constitutes agritourism and how it should be regulated. This ambiguity can affect everything from land use planning and permitting decisions, to insurance coverage, risk assessment, taxation, industry promotion and access to support programs.

As agritourism continues to evolve as a tool for farm diversification and rural economic development, the absence of a clearly recognized definition can limit sector growth by creating inconsistent expectations and approval processes across regions. A commonly accepted provincial definition would establish a shared understanding of agritourism among government, municipalities, industry organizations, insurers, and operators, providing a strong foundation for improvements to the sector. A clear definition would also help distinguish agritourism from other commercial or recreational activities occurring on agricultural land, recognizing it as a legitimate value-added agricultural activity that contributes to farm viability, tourism development, and the economic sustainability of rural Alberta.

A commonly accepted definition would provide a foundation for policy development, risk assessment, land use planning, insurance underwriting, and sector support programs, while also helping to distinguish agritourism as a uniquely rural sector in Alberta. Some work is already underway by the Global Agritourism Network that may be useful in this endeavour. This would take the form of both underpinning regulatory changes while building a common understanding across the Government of Alberta, operators, and other stakeholders.

Target

Government of Alberta, Agritourism Alberta

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Enhance liability protection for agritourism operators through standardized signage and risk communication materials, backed by legislation

Context and Rationale

Agritourism operators face challenges obtaining adequate and affordable insurance for their operations. The need for reform has been identified by RMA members through Resolution 9-26S: Access to Liability Insurance for Agritourism Operators. Operators, visitors, municipalities, and insurers all benefit when there is a common understanding of the inherent risks associated with visiting working farms and ranches. Consistent communication materials, including signs at agritourism sites, can help improve awareness of visitor responsibilities, support operator risk management efforts, and contribute to a more predictable environment for insurers and regulators. Greater consistency in risk communication also helps establish clear expectations regarding public access and reinforces the distinction between inherent agricultural risks and operator negligence. This approach must be backed by legislation that enables the signage to limit the liability of agritourism operators operating in a reasonable manner. This legislation should include the definition referenced in Recommendation 1 to clarify which operations the signage rules apply to and serve as a reference point for any future legislation or regulation that is specific to agritourism.

Through the Growing Agritourism Act, Ontario demonstrated the benefits of a standardized framework that includes legislated warning sign requirements and consistent language related to the inherent risks of agritourism. These measures have improved clarity for operators, visitors, insurers, and legal professionals by creating a shared understanding of the risks associated with working agricultural environments. The framework was designed to acknowledge that visitors assume inherent risks when participating in agritourism activities, while maintaining operator responsibility to manage hazards and avoid negligence. This consistency has provided greater certainty within the insurance market, which has contributed to a more predictable operating environment for agritourism businesses.

Ontario's legislative approach links the usage of risk communication materials with access to agritourism-specific insurance rates and products. While this recommendation does not specifically call for an exact replication of the *Growing Agritourism Act* in Alberta, developing and encouraging the use of risk communication materials, backed by legislative reform, represents an important step towards increasing eligibility of insurance protection to the sector.

Target

Government of Alberta, Agritourism Alberta

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Seek opportunities to develop municipal policies and approval processes to encourage agritourism development at the local level

Context and Rationale

Rural municipalities regulate land use through a variety of tools, including statutory plans that define where certain uses are appropriate and through development permits. Agritourism operations intersect with these planning and development decisions in multiple ways depending upon existing zoning and permitted use rules. While municipalities must continue to make land use decisions in a manner that reflects local conditions, priorities, and in alignment with existing provincial and federal legislation, there are likely opportunities for municipalities to collaborate with the agritourism sector to identify best practices to align land use planning and development processes with supporting agritourism sector growth.

As the local land use authority, municipalities currently utilize different rules to govern planning and development decisions to align with local priorities and balance multiple land uses. The intent of this recommendation is not to create a universal standard approach for municipalities to follow. Rather, individual municipalities should explore ways to streamline their processes to allow for agritourism opportunities to grow where it makes sense in that municipality and reduce barriers to potential operators. This process will be unique in each municipality depending on the current rules governing agritourism, the broader land use zoning rules, and the overall economic development goals of that municipality. To support a thorough review of municipal processes, there is potential for Agritourism Alberta to develop education materials that frame agritourism as an extension of agriculture.

Target

Rural municipalities, Agritourism Alberta

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Promote agritourism through an official public awareness and marketing campaign

Context and Rationale

Despite growing presence across Alberta, agritourism remains relatively unknown to many residents and visitors. Increased awareness can help showcase the diversity of experiences available on Alberta farms and ranches, while strengthening public appreciation for agriculture and rural communities. This expanded awareness can be achieved through two parallel processes: marketing the industry to visitors and the public and conducting an awareness campaign targeted at decision makers.

A marketing campaign increases visibility for the sector with Albertans, visitors, and those planning trips. A marketing campaign can also help bridge the gap between urban and rural Alberta by creating opportunities for residents to better understand where their food comes from and the realities of agricultural production An investment in promoting the prominence of the sector among visitors certainly benefits agritourism operators, but as this report has established, it has the added benefit of contributing to regional economic development and supporting the Government of Alberta's tourism goals.

At the same time, a parallel awareness campaign will highlight agritourism's contribution to local economies, agricultural diversification, and destination development. By increasing awareness among decision-makers, agritourism can become more firmly recognized as a contributor to both Alberta's tourism industry and its rural economic development objectives.. As interest in experiential tourism and rural experiences continues to grow, increased promotion of agritourism can encourage visitor participation, support local businesses, and help position Alberta's rural communities and farms as unique destinations.

Target

Travel Alberta, Agritourism Alberta, Government of Alberta

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Implement a centralized agritourism operator hub to support sector access to data, regulatory information, best practices, and other resources

Context and Rationale

Information for agritourism operators is often spread across numerous government departments, industry organizations, funding programs, and support agencies. This can make it difficult to identify requirements, resources, and opportunities. A challenge frequently identified by the Working Group was a lack of data on agritourism's economic contribution and the evolution of the sector. A centralized hub, designed for agritourism operators, that includes provincial agri-tourism data, regulatory requirements, best practices, and other information to support effective operations would have the benefit of demonstrating the value of the sector, highlighting trends within the industry, and serve as a data source to inform continual improvement in provincial policy and regulatory development.

A centralized hub would improve access to information, provide a single point of reference for operators exploring or expanding agritourism activities, and provide access to relevant data on the sector to both operators and the GOA. This operator hub would address how agritourism businesses face unique challenges that are not always addressed through typical support programs currently available. It would help improve sector-specific knowledge, training, and business development resources relevant to agritourism. Support for the hub, development of resources, and data collection methodology would require capacity building and funding support from the Government of Alberta.

Target

Agritourism Alberta, Government of Alberta

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Coordinate a multi-stakeholder agritourism advisory committee to action the report recommendations and continue to drive long-term sector growth and evolution

Context and Rationale

The opportunities and challenges facing the agritourism sector cannot be addressed by any one organization or ministry. The issues identified throughout the Agritourism Strategy Working Group process are closely interconnected and will continue to evolve as both the industry and regulatory environment mature. Advancing agritourism in Alberta will require continued collaboration among agricultural producers, municipalities, industry organizations, tourism partners, insurers, and relevant provincial ministries to ensure that efforts remain responsive to emerging needs and growth.

The Agritourism Strategy Working Group was an important first step in bringing diverse perspectives together. Through engagement with multiple different municipalities, stakeholders, and GOA ministries, the Working Group helped identify common opportunities, challenges, and priorities for the sector. The discussions showed that many of the barriers facing agritourism require ongoing cooperation to be addressed effectively. The Working Group process also highlighted the value of creating a forum where stakeholders can share information, build relationships, and develop a common understanding of agritourism's role within Alberta's economy. The work initiated through the Agritourism Strategy Working Group should be leveraged as the start of an ongoing conversation about the future of agritourism in Alberta. Continued engagement among key stakeholders will be essential to monitoring sector growth, identifying emerging issues, and maintaining momentum on the themes identified throughout this process.

Target

Agritourism Alberta, Government of Alberta, RMA, municipalities



> Agritourism provides a unique opportunity for visitors to support and engage with agricultural producers, contributing to a greater understanding of Alberta's agricultural heritage for visitors while providing an important economic development opportunity for operators.

Conclusion

Agritourism provides a unique opportunity for visitors to support and engage with agricultural producers, contributing to a greater understanding of Alberta's agricultural heritage for visitors while providing an important economic development opportunity for operators. The sector exists at the intersection of Alberta's productive and culturally significant agricultural industry and Alberta's storied tourism industry. While significant opportunities exist, the sector is facing barriers to growth. This Working Group set out to understand the current context of agritourism in Alberta, understand the challenges, and develop clear and actionable recommendations.

The recommendations developed represent an important pathways towards enabling the agritourism industry in Alberta. A multi-sector approach is necessary to ensure that barriers are removed and the sector is empowered to grow itself while maintaining important safety considerations for visitors. Doing so will support farm viability, promote economic development, and align with the Government of Alberta's tourism goals. RMA is looking forward to continuing to work with the Government of Alberta on the implementation of the recommendations, creating more opportunities for agritourism operators to grow success.


RMA
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES
of ALBERTA