



Town of Essex

**AGRITOURISM
TOOLKIT**

essex

A young tree with dense green foliage stands in a grassy field. The background is a soft-focus landscape of more trees and a bright sky. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. A quote is centered over the tree.

*“By establishing an agritourism experience,
you’ll be entering a high-priority industry,
identified by the Town of Essex.”*

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Who is this Toolkit For?

This toolkit has been designed with both new and existing agricultural businesses in mind:

- **EXISTING BUSINESS OWNERS** who are interested in growing their revenues by investing in an agritourism experience.
- **NEW AND PROSPECTIVE BUSINESS OWNERS** considering agritourism.
- **EXISTING AGRITOURISM PROFESSIONALS** who want to learn more about experience development, storytelling, marketing, rules and regulations, and the important role of agritourism in the broader Food Tourism Value Chain.

INTRODUCTION

This toolkit was produced by the Town of Essex to facilitate the growth of the local agritourism industry. Its purpose is to provide existing and aspiring agritourism business owners in the Town of Essex with resources to develop new and improved agritourism experiences, that meet or exceed visitor expectations.

Using best practices, real-world examples, helpful worksheets, and reference to other resources, this Toolkit covers the key topics you will need to understand, and help you develop and market your agritourism experience.

How is the Town of Essex Committed to Agritourism Development?

Agritourism has long been identified by the Town of Essex as an opportunity for growth, diversification, and resiliency in the agricultural industry. With input and engagement from local stakeholders and industry partners, the Town of Essex put a process in motion to develop a comprehensive strategy to grow the agritourism industry. This culminated in a Forum on Agritourism hosted by the Town of Essex in February 2021, and the release of the Town of Essex Agritourism Development Strategy in March 2021. This strategy laid out specific immediate, short-term, and medium-term actions that the Town of Essex is now undertaking to support the growth of the community's agritourism industry.

What does Agritourism Development Entail?

There are a number of things to consider when developing your agritourism experience, such as:

- Working within the rules and regulations
- Identifying the assets and experiences you have to offer
- Understanding the processes for developing agritourism experiences
- Learning to tell compelling stories online and onsite
- Identifying your target markets, how to reach them, and how to present yourself
- Getting to know the support networks that are available to you

TAKE
ACTION

This toolkit offers an array of resources to help you develop your agritourism experience. If you need help getting started, or you're looking for advice, resources, or support on any aspect of your agritourism business, contact the Town of Essex Economic Development Department at ecdev@essex.ca

UNDERSTANDING AGRITOURISM



What is Agritourism?

In the Province of Ontario and the Town of Essex, agritourism use means those farm-related tourism uses that promote the enjoyment, education or activities related to the farm operation. Examples include:

- Farm Stays/On-Farm Bed & Breakfast
- Farm Markets Selling Local Products
- Winery Tour and Tasting Experience
- Farm-to-Table Café or Restaurant
- Pick-your-Own/U-Pick Experience
- Cheese Shop and Factory Tour Experience
- Butcher/Charcuterie Featuring Locally-Raised Meats
- Craft Brewery or Cidery Featuring Farm-Grown Ingredients
- Harvest Tour Experience Featuring Hay Rides and Corn Maze
- An On-Farm Cooking Class Using Locally-Grown Ingredients

How Agritourism Relates to Food Tourism

To understand the full range of opportunities that are possible through agritourism, it is important to put it into context in the broader tourism industry. Agritourism is a subset of food tourism, which includes the active pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences. Agritourism experiences contribute to food tourism by connecting what is being grown and produced in an area to what is being prepared and enjoyed by locals.

Food tourism, with agritourism as a key component, can play a significant role in preserving local heritage while building on existing tourism assets and driving innovation. By increasing visitor demand for local food and drink, food tourism contributes to the long-term sustainability of local agriculture, food systems, communities, and culture.

Agritourism in the Food Tourism Value Chain

In addition to thinking of agritourism in the context of food tourism, it is important to think of it as part of the broader Food Tourism Value Chain. The Food Tourism Value Chain includes a network of business categories, some of which you may not have previously considered to be related to food tourism.

Visitor-facing businesses that have the potential to contribute to and benefit from the development of food tourism include accommodation; attraction; beverage producer; cooking school; farmers' market; festival or event; grower, producer, or artisan; restaurant; retailer; tour operator and technology/media companies.



This concept is called a value chain, since it explains how businesses and communities can increase their competitive advantage by working in collaboration to deliver a combined value to the customer that is beyond their individual ability. This allows for operators to focus on what they do best while benefiting from the increased efficiency and effectiveness of working as a collective. Visitor experiences are enriched with each layer of value they receive while exploring a destination. This means that agritourism and food tourism businesses can work together to deliver multi-sensory, high-quality experiences that exceed the expectations of visitors.



When establishing an agritourism experience, it is important to consider that you will be part of a robust ecosystem of businesses in your community that can mutually-benefit through networking and collaboration.

Agritourism and Sustainability

Sustainable tourism has become a prominent trend globally. Visitors are seeking out experiences and destinations that allow them to travel more sustainably and participate in sustainable activities. Agritourism is well-suited to embracing sustainable tourism because it helps to maintain ecological processes and biodiversity of a place while also conserving local heritage and traditions, ensuring long-term economic viability of agricultural operations, and providing socio-economic benefits to residents. Agritourism experiences can benefit from highlighting these connections to their visitors, and by providing visitors to participate in sustainable agricultural practices.

Agritourism and Indigenous Reconciliation

Agritourism can play an important role in Indigenous reconciliation. Fundamentally, agritourism is about connecting visitors to the history, heritage, culture, land, and agricultural practices of a place. Recognizing Indigenous contributions to the land and history of a place are fundamental parts of this. It is important to spend time educating yourself into the Indigenous history of the place where you're located.

OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE THROUGH PLANNING RULES AND REGULATIONS

Why it is Crucial to Understand the Planning Rules and Regulations

Before you start developing your agritourism experience, it is essential that you understand the planning rules and regulations that apply to agritourism in Ontario, and in your specific region.

Determining which rules and regulations apply to you, and as a result what permissions you might need, starts with understanding the three different uses that are permitted in Prime Agriculture Areas in Ontario. These regulations come from the Government of Ontario, but municipalities can control certain things.

Most of the rules respecting agritourism relate to the amount of space that an agritourism operation can use, and whether an operation is limited to only using products sourced from their farm or area. When it comes to rules and regulations, you'll want to pay attention to:

- The amount of space on your property that can be used for your agritourism experience (this could be a percentage of your property, or a specific maximum square footage)
- The number of parking spaces that you must provide for your agritourism experience
- Whether you can use a portion of existing buildings or construct any new buildings
- Building height limitations
- Minimum distance setbacks from a street or yards
- The number of persons employed in your agritourism experience

How These Rules and Regulations Create Opportunities

These regulations are important because they ensure that agricultural operations and lands are protected, while also enabling farm operators to diversify their revenue streams, create new employment opportunities for residents, participate in emerging industries (like agritourism), and build resilience into your business model and the local economy.

Working with the Building and Planning Department

This section will give you a top-to-bottom overview of what you need to know to start addressing the planning rules and regulations involved in your agritourism business. It is also important to note that the specifics of these rules and regulations are subject to change. To ensure you are following the most up-to-date rules and regulations, contact the Town of Essex Planning Department. They are an invaluable resource when it comes to putting your agritourism business ideas into practice.

Town of Essex Planning Department

519-776-7336 ext 1128
essexplanning@essex.ca

When developing your agritourism experience, the Town of Essex Planning Department will be one of your most important resources.

Understanding the 3 Uses Permitted in Prime Agriculture Areas

There are three different types of uses permitted in Prime Agriculture Areas in Ontario: Agricultural Uses, Agriculture-Related Uses, and On-Farm Diversified Uses. Most agritourism activities fall under Agriculture-Related Uses or On-Farm Diversified Uses.

For complete details on the three permitted uses, you can consult the Government of Ontario's Guidelines on Permitted Use in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas.



Kranicz Orchards, Harrow

Agricultural Uses

Agricultural Uses includes growing crops and raising livestock. Also included in this category are greenhouses, nurseries, Christmas tree farming, aquaculture, and horse farming (including stable and indoor or outdoor riding arena/tracks),

Value-added activities are not considered Agricultural Uses, and retail activities are only permitted in limited cases.

The Agricultural Uses category allows value-retaining activities such as storage, grading, drying, washing, sorting and simple (bulk) packaging, but only for the farm's own commodities. Value-retaining activities also includes minimal amounts of processing to make a product saleable, such as grading eggs, evaporating maple syrup and extracting honey, but again, only for the farm's own commodities.

Examples of agritourism opportunities which may be available through Agricultural Uses:



Farm-gate retail stand selling products grown on your farm.



Pick-your-own / U-pick fruit or berry experience (not featuring any products not grown on your farm).



The Little Cider Company, Harrow

Agriculture-Related Uses

Agriculture-Related Uses includes commercial and industrial activities that support agriculture and benefit from being in close proximity to farm operations. The key feature of Agriculture-Related Uses is that activities in this category must be directly related to farm operations in the area. This means that any retail activities or value-added activities must be limited to farm products or inputs that are grown in the area. The Government of Ontario's meaning for "in the area" is flexible, and not based on a specific distance or any regional or municipal boundaries. It is based on how far a farmer would reasonably be expected to travel for a particular commodity or service within their region. (Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas, p. 13)

In most situations, there are no space restrictions on Agriculture-Related Uses, provided that the activities do not hinder surrounding agricultural operations. There are some Agriculture-Related Uses which may be subject to space restrictions in the Town of Essex, so it is important that you connect with your Planning Department.

Examples of agritourism opportunities which may be available through Agriculture-Related Uses :



Retailing of farm products grown in your area.



Greenhouses for retailing plants grown in your area.



Winery using fruit or honey primarily from farms in your area (including tasting and retailing).



Small-scale microbrewery or distillery (only if main inputs are agricultural products grown in your area).



Pick-your-own / U-pick fruit or berry experience featuring products from other farms in your area.

On-Farm Diversified Uses

On-Farm Diversified Uses includes a broader range of activities than Agricultural Uses and Agriculture-Related Uses, but these activities must be limited in scale and must be operated in combination with an agricultural use. On-Farm Diversified Uses have space restrictions because they must always be secondary activities, ensuring Agricultural Uses remain the dominant uses of the farm property.

Examples of agritourism opportunities which may be available through On-Farm Diversified Uses:



Fruit stands and other small produce and crafts outlets.



Cheese factory or shop.



Small scale nursery.



Horse trail rides and equine events.



Farm stays, Bed and breakfasts.



Antique shop.



Hayrides, Corn mazes, Haunted barns.



Café, small restaurant, ice cream shop.



Butcher Shop / Charcuterie processing and selling meat from animals raised in your area



Small scale brewery, cidery or meadery using primarily fruit or honey produced locally with tastings and retailing



The Walnut Grove Bed & Breakfast, Harrow



Start the process of working with planning rules and regulations and connecting with the planning department using Worksheet 2.



Oxley Estate Winery, Harrow

DEVELOPING YOUR AGRITOURISM EXPERIENCES

Elements of Great Tourism Experiences

Agritourism experiences are consumable activities that can connect people to what is being grown, raised, or produced in an area. Experiences can be purchasable or time bound. When possible, experiences should promote the uniqueness of the business or location. Elements of great tourism experiences can also include:

- **Personal Interactions:** Making the visitor to feel welcomed and connected to the people behind the business
- **Storytelling:** Connecting the visitor to the business's story, the history of the place, and helping the visitor relate on a personal or emotional level
- **Education:** Teaching visitors about how a product is produced and commercialized
- **Engagement:** Capturing visitors' attention and creating memories through educational and enjoyable content
- **Immersion:** Bringing visitors physically into agricultural or production processes or giving demonstrations
- **Hands-On Activities:** Giving visitors the chance to engage directly in hands-on activities
- **Tasting Opportunities:** Providing opportunities to taste products grown, raised, or produced on-site
- **Local Products:** Allowing visitors to further connect to a place by purchasing products grown, raised, or produced on-site or locally
- **Inspiration:** Offering visitors new or different perspectives that might change the way they think about things

Elevating Your Experience Through Multisensory Elements

How Multisensory Experiences Add Value

Agritourism experiences are by nature multisensory, but by actively focusing on sensory components early in the development stage, you can ensure that you provide your visitors with a more immersive, enriching experience. Multisensory experiences are more memorable to visitors and provide them with a greater awareness of their surroundings. Through multisensory engagement, you can also provide your visitors with greater value, and ensure that they are getting an experience that they would not be able to find anywhere else.



Hawksview Honey, Harrow

Elements of Multisensory Experiences

A basic multisensory experience should feature elements that engage the five cardinal senses:
Sight, Sound, Smell, Touch, Taste

A more advanced multisensory experience can be developed using the
Head, Heart, Hands, Stomach model:



HEAD

Providing stimulation that encourages the customer to think and reflect



HEART

Providing opportunities for critical reflection and connecting with the emotions



HANDS

Helping visitors to actively engage or participate in hands-on activities



STOMACH

Meeting needs like hunger and/or incorporating tastes

Key Stages of the Visitor Journey

When developing your experience, it is important to consider the stages that your visitors will go through. This will help you ensure that you provide your visitors with meaningful engagement from beginning to end and incorporate key elements like storytelling throughout their journey. Consider the following stages of a visitor journey and how they will unfold in the experience you provide:

Pre-arrival

How will visitors connect with your business prior to arrival, and how will they be engaged and prepared for their experience?

Arrival

Who will visitors connect with at the start of their experience, and where will the connection occur?

Greeting

How are you making your visitors feel welcomed?

Opportunity to Purchase

Will visitors be presented with products to purchase at the end of their experience, and can you provide visitors with the opportunity to purchase products online after the experience? Could you also sell products from other local businesses?

Actual Experience

How many steps there are in your experience? How can you incorporate storytelling and multisensory elements into each step?

Orientation

How will you explain the flow of the experience, and information visitors will need to know in advance if they are moving between spaces?

Referrals

Are there other local experiences or partner businesses where you could refer your visitors?

Departure

How can you communicate to your visitors following the experience, and to stay connected with your business (e.g. social media, email, website)? How can you prompt visitors to leave an online review?

Incorporating Foodways and Tastes of Place into Your Agritourism Experience

When developing any agritourism experience, it is important to understand the concepts of “foodways” and “tastes of place”. By incorporating these concepts into your experience, you can richly convey the history and culture of your community.

Foodways

Food and drink are innately linked to the history, heritage, culture, and geography of place. All these aspects lead back to the people of the place, how their culture has evolved, how they’ve shaped the landscape, their traditions, and livelihoods. This relationship is called “foodways”.

Foodways address who, what, where, when, why, and how food becomes part of the fabric of a community. They shed light on the physical, social, cultural, economic, and spiritual factors that inform their experience of food. When foodways are the foundation for food tourism and agritourism development, food and drink products and experiences have more integrity and can become manifestations of local traditions. As such, food tourism can play an important role in preserving rural heritage. Foodways should be the focus and foundation of food tourism and agritourism development.

Tastes of Place

“Tastes of place” are memorable experiences that bring to life the story behind the food and drink of a specific geographic area (i.e. its foodways). The natural, material, and intangible elements, such as hospitality, that contribute to the experience of food and drink in an area are also part of its taste of place. There is no singular taste of place for a region - instead, each destination should be seen as a rich tapestry of tastes that woven together, are its unique taste of place.

“Food tourism and agritourism experiences have more integrity when they provide tastes of place that draw from the foodways of an area.”



Developing an Accessible Agritourism Destination

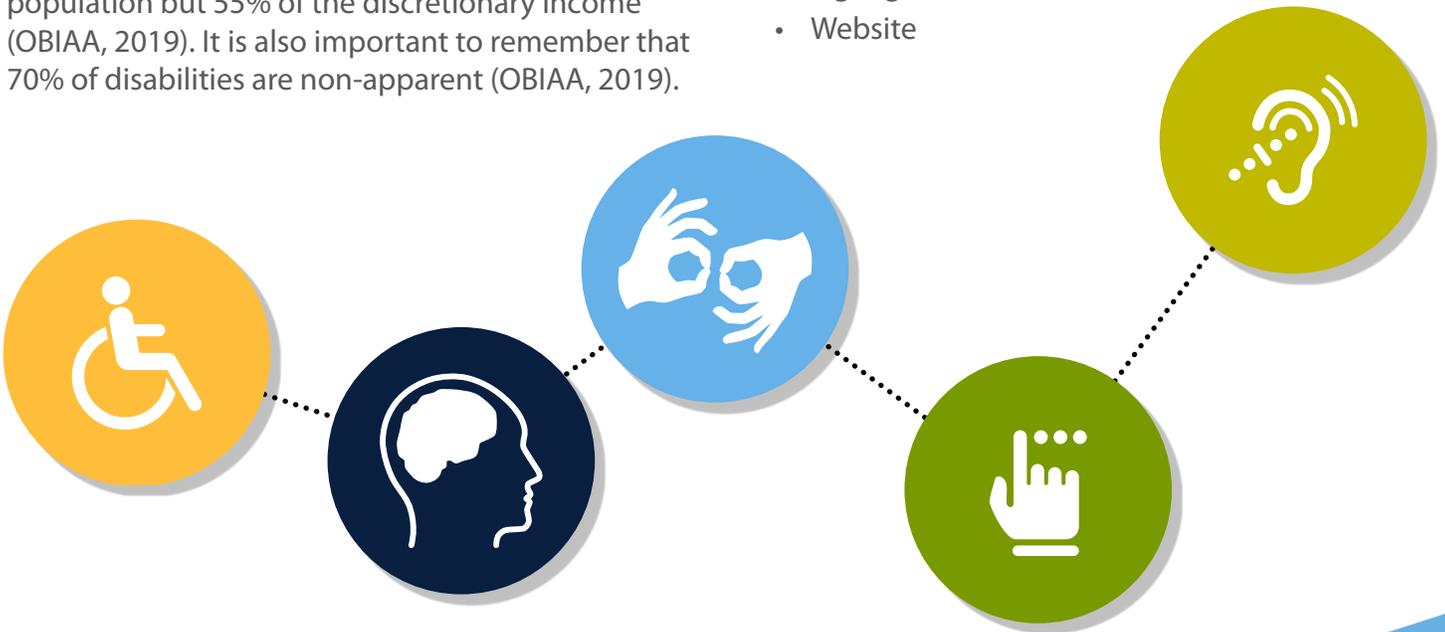
Like all other businesses in Ontario, agritourism businesses in Ontario must comply with requirements for accessibility standards under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. These standards include Customer Service, Employment, Information and Communications, Transportation, and Design of Public Spaces (DOPS).

Beyond the legal requirements, prioritizing accessibility can also contribute to the greater success of your agritourism experience. Ensuring that your business is accessible and communicates its accessibility can drastically expand your potential market. More than half (53%) people in Ontario either have a disability or are related to someone who has a disability (OBIAA, 2019). Furthermore, aging baby boomers account for 33% of the population but 55% of the discretionary income (OBIAA, 2019). It is also important to remember that 70% of disabilities are non-apparent (OBIAA, 2019).

Research has found that visitors with disabilities bring more people with them when they travel than the average person, are willing to spend more money, and make more frequent or longer stays at destinations that are accessible (WTTC, 2021).

Important factors to consider regarding the accessibility when developing your agritourism business, include:

- Customer Service and Training
- Entrances
- Building Design
- Space and Layout
- Lighting
- Signage
- Website



The Ontario BIA Association offers three general features of an accessible business:

1. Welcoming and friendly staff who have had accessibility training.
2. Easy to access information on the accessibility of the business's space, products, and services.
3. Accessibility considerations given to the design and layout.

More information about accessibility requirements, and tools to help you make your business more accessible can be found in the Resources and Supports section of this toolkit.

HOW TO ENHANCE YOUR AGRITOURISM EXPERIENCE WITH STORYTELLING

Why It's Important to Tell Your Story

Storytelling is a fundamental part of your tourism experience. It is crucial for both attracting and immersing visitors in your experience. Tourists value experiences, connections, and memories. Storytelling is one of your greatest tools because it allows you to provide an experience that is multidimensional, make an emotional connection with your visitors, and create a lasting bond between you and your visitors.

Sources for Your Story

Your story can come from several sources, and might include:

- **The story of yourself or your family:** Who you are, where you're from, how you got to where you are now, why you do what you do, why it's important to you
- **The story of your product:** What you grow, what you make, how it relates to you, your family, or your community
- **The story of your property:** The history of the property, what you do there, what has been done there in the past, how it relates to your community
- **The story of your community:** The history of your community, what has happened there, how does it relate to the experience you provide



Crafting Your Story: The 4 Ps of Storytelling

When crafting your story, it can be helpful to follow the 4 Ps: Plot, Purpose, People and Place.

Plot: Every good story brings the receiver on a journey and is made up of a beginning, middle, and end. When crafting your story, think about how you can take your visitors on a journey. This will often be the story of how a product is made, or it could be the history of your community, family, or property.

Purpose: Be precise about what your story should mean to your visitors, and how your story connects to your product and the visitor experience. Stories are the thread that you use to tie all the elements of the experience together.

People: Your story should be relatable. It should easily connect with facets of someone's life. Your people - whether it's you, your staff, your partners, your suppliers - make up a community. Weaving their stories into your own makes your story more robust and personal. It is also your most powerful tool for making a personal connection with your visitors.

Place: Place is uniquely important in the world of tourism. This is where a tourist's experience happens. Consider what is unique about your location and how it relates to the history and culture of your community.



Colio Estate Winery, Harrow

Where and When to Tell Your Story

Storytelling can take many different forms and occur in many different places. The more storytelling touch points you have, the more likely that it will be remembered by your visitors. For example, storytelling can take place through your brand, your staff, on your decor, menu, or product labels, or on your website or social media channels.

Online Storytelling vs. On-site Storytelling

There are some important differences between online storytelling and on-site storytelling:

- **Online storytelling** is important for getting people to come to your experience. It takes place on your website and social media channels but can also take place on external platforms like review services or destination marketing organization websites.
- **On-site storytelling** is an actual part of the experience that you provide to your visitors. It is important for creating a bond between your visitors and your experience or product. Your online storytelling should help convey what people will be able to experience onsite (without giving it all away).

Storytelling Throughout Your Space

Storytelling elements can also be incorporated into your experience's space through décor, objects, and materials:

- Menus featuring stories or local products
- Chalkboard messages
- Postcards, pamphlets, placements
- Maps showing your location or where you source products from
- Photo walls featuring people involved in your business
- Retail sections featuring local products
- Decor that illustrates your history and your community's history
- Decals on doors or windows (e.g. certifications and memberships)





Viewpointe Estate Winery, Colchester

MARKETING YOUR AGRITOURISM EXPERIENCE

Target Markets

One of the first steps in marketing your agritourism experience is identifying the market segments you should target. By understanding the profiles of your most likely agritourism visitors, you can be more effective at developing and marketing your destination.

Explorer Quotients

Destination Canada's Explorer Quotients (EQ) profiles are a helpful resource for identifying and understanding target markets. The EQ profiles provide detailed information for 7 target segments in the Canadian market, as well as several segments that Destination Canada is targeting internationally. The following table lists the agritourism activities that are appealing (or unappealing) to each segment.

Table 1: Appealing and Unappealing Agritourism Activities for Canadian EQ Segments

EQ Segment	Size of Canadian Market	Agritourism Activities*
Gentle Explorers	25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dining at restaurants offering local ingredients ✓ Wildlife viewing – land-based animals & bird watching ✓ Food related factory tours ✗ Participating in vocational learning
Personal History Explorers	13%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wildlife viewing – land-based animals & bird watching ✓ Dining at restaurants offering local ingredients ✓ Attending farmers’ markets ✓ Seeing autumn leaves ✗ Participating in vocational learning
Authentic Experiencers	12%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wildlife viewing – land-based animals & bird watching ✓ Visiting small towns, villages ✓ Dining at restaurants offering local ingredients ✓ Visiting well-known historic sites and buildings
Free Spirits	12%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wildlife viewing – land-based animals & bird watching ✓ Dining at restaurants offering local ingredients ✗ Farm stays
No Hassle Travelers	10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dining at restaurants offering local ingredients ✓ Wildlife viewing – land-based animals & bird watching
Cultural Explorers	9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Attending farmers’ markets ✓ Dining at restaurants offering local ingredients ✓ Wildlife viewing – land-based animals & bird watching ✓ Visiting small towns, villages ✓ Food related factory tours
Rejuvenators	5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wildlife viewing – land-based animals & bird watching ✓ Seeing autumn leaves ✗ Farm stays

*Agritourism activities among the segment’s 10 most appealing activities are denoted with a ✓; those among the 3 least appealing activities are denoted with a ✗ sign. For each segment, activities are ordered based on which are the most appealing to that group.

Destination Canada has several resources available to help you start working with target markets and get a deeper understanding of who you should target and how.

They provide additional information about each EQ segment, including:

- Demographics, including: gender, education, employment, income, and age group
- Most appealing and least appealing activities
- Favoured information sources for trip planning
- Average duration, composition and spend on most recent trip
- Social and travel values

Get started with Destination Canada's Explorer Quotients

Resources: Destination Canada EQ Toolkit & Destination Canada EQ Profiles



Additional Information on Target Markets

The Town of Essex Agritourism Development Strategy outlines additional information on the characteristics that define agritourists in Canada, and their motivations.

Characteristics of Agritourists in Canada:

- Mostly urban, residing close to the farm visited
- Highly educated
- In their early 40's, with a small family (average of 3 family members)
- Earning average national income
- Travelling independently instead of as part of a group
- Predominantly domestic travelers
- Cares about the environmental quality

Motivations for Participating in Agritourism:

- Searching for authentic experiences (e.g., participation in farm activities, traditional setting)
- Wanting to explore their region
- Seeking to engage with family, learning, and relaxing
- Seeking experiential, life-enriching vacations that involve culture, nature, the outdoors, and learning
- Valuing experiential travel (e.g., participation, eating, purchasing)
- Looking to engage with tradition and receive a rural welcome
- Seeking the chance to experience interaction with a farmer



Recognizing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

People seeking agritourism experiences are often urban dwellers who value diversity and are looking to visit places that are welcoming and inclusive. Not only are they looking for a variety of things to do, see, and taste, they want to hear from different types of people and perspectives. You should share and celebrate any meaningful efforts that you are undertaking to help make your farm an equitable and inclusive place, and celebrate all the people who make our local food systems possible.

Online Marketing & Presence

It is crucial that you develop your online presence, particularly across three channels: website, social media, review sites. Your marketing activities should be undertaken consistently across all your channels.

Website

- Include basic information about your business, including hours of operation, contact information, your address, and details about how to visit you.
- Include an “About” page, which tells a story about you and your business, and describes why someone should come to visit you.
- Talk about points of differentiation. What makes your business special?
- Include photos, not just of your products, but of the farm, your store or stand, or the experience you offer. Help visitors imagine themselves at your farm.
- Include links to your social media handles. Some websites may allow you to add a “gallery” of photos that automatically updates, if connected to your social media (e.g., Instagram) accounts.
- Think about how often you want to update your website - try to have more of an evergreen website and utilize your social media accounts for sharing smaller updates.
- Search engine optimization (SEO) is important – think about the keywords visitors may use, in searching for your business and use them in your website copy, descriptions, and photo tags
- Advertise business certifications (as applicable), e.g., the Safe Travels Stamp.

Social Media

- Hashtags and location tags are important ways of being discovered.
- Consider sharing user generated content (which helps build trust).
- Link to your partners’ accounts, so that they can find and share your posts.
- Include key information in your social media bio, so that people know what your business is and what you do.
- Unless you are the brand, focus on the business when using your social media.

Review Sites

- Claim the Google listing for your business. This allows you to control some of the information shared in Google search results and allows you to respond to customer reviews.
- Claim your business TripAdvisor listing, and plan to check and respond to reviews in a timely manner.



“Paglione Estate Winery is a superb example of an agricultural business in the Town of Essex that has combined local products with community culture and storytelling to create an immersive agritourism experience.”

LOCAL INSPIRATION

Paglione Estate Winery, Town of Essex

Nestled in the heart of EPIC Wine Country in the Town of Essex, Paglione Estate Winery gives visitors the opportunity to taste Paglione’s seven unique vintages, along with wood-fired pizza that is hand-made and freshly baked with local ingredients. They also offer a variety of creamy Italian gelato. Paglione Estate Winery was supported by the Town of Essex in developing their agritourism experience through the Colchester Community Improvement Plan.



Here is what Paglione Estate Winery's Sandra Paglione has said about the opportunities available through agritourism in the Town of Essex:

Why did you choose to invest in agritourism?

Visitors to the region and local guests alike have a strong desire to learn more about the stories and people behind the products they love - how they are made/grown, to experience the lifestyle, and to have an immersive experience. We choose to continually invest because it creates that 360-degree immersive experience that increases guest engagement with our products, business, and story. The guest experience is more holistic and everything we offer anchors back to our concept (Italian-inspired winery small batch, old-world style winemaking, and culinary offerings) and tells our story.

What is the main benefit you have seen for your business since launching an agritourism experience?

We have created an experience not just a place to drink and dine. Guests visit us and stay longer, spend more, and develop an emotional connection with the brand/offering. We see more return/loyal guests and get more requests to host special events and celebrations. I think it also helps to generate more of an awareness of how bountiful the region is, the environmental aspect, nature, and the beauty and diversity of Essex County.

How did the Community Improvement Plan funding you received help you to enhance a current agritourism experience or develop a new experience?

"The CIP funding helped us with our roadside signage and grounds beautification so that we could better communicate our offerings and continue to enhance our grounds and patio area. It also helped us prepare an area where we could offer a more immersive tasting experience in front of the vineyard, near our newly revamped manufacturing area, or host private events outdoors, and helped us with our onsite guest accommodation."

John R. Park Homestead

John R. Park Homestead is an agricultural and living history museum in the Town of Essex that combines traditional baking methods with industrial equipment demonstrations and breathtaking views of the lake. Visitors are given the opportunity to explore the Classical Revival home, built in 1842, and taste baking from the kitchen fireplace. The destination also features themed events and festivals, including the Maple Festival in March, Lost Arts Festival in August, and Harvest and Horses Festival in October. One of the things that makes John R. Park Homestead stand out is that it has made its experiences as accessible as possible.



Here is what John R. Park Homestead's Kris Ives has said about the opportunities available through agritourism in the Town of Essex:

It is clear that accessibility is important to John R. Park. What are some things you have done to make the property and on-site experiences as accessible as possible?

- Built a new, fully accessible Conservation Centre nearest the parking lot to welcome all guests and to support them in their visit/experience to the JRPH.
- Tar and chip accessible parking spaces and main paths to the new Conservation Centre (increased accessible pathways/surfaces are planned, but not yet installed).
- Historic buildings, where interior access is utilized in programming, have wooden or earthen ramps for access to the interior;
- Photo album of the 2nd floor of the historic house (that does not have an elevator or stair lift)

Follow accessibility guidelines in our exhibit text, corporate communications, website, and more.

What are some of the on-site experiences you offer and what are the main benefits you have seen for your business since launching these experiences?

The Homestead, since the museum opened in 1978, has always had some sort of foodways program (sample baking from the fire; help to churn butter; make hand-cranked ice cream; pick raspberries in the garden; cider pressing; sausage stuffing; smoked meat demonstrations, etc.) We offer other types of experiences, too: workshops in basket making, blacksmithing, print making, textile weaving, etc. many with agricultural roots.

There are many benefits to offering 'experiences' for visitors, of course; the benefits to the business can include:

- Increased visitor engagement and satisfaction (memories made, too)
- Connection with the site that lasts beyond when they leave
- Knowledge sharing and meeting of our other organizational goals and strategic plan objectives
- Increased gift shop sales (if items in the shop reflect experiences had on the tour – ex. Cookbook, item made by blacksmith, etc.
- Attract new audience (ex. young couples with no children for date night experiences)
- Increase partnerships as we reach out to others and ask them to work with us on developing/providing these experiences

What advice would you give to other businesses who are considering adding an agritourism component to their business?

Do your homework; why do your current visitors come to your site? What are you already doing well and how could you enhance that with experiences? What resources/expertise can you draw from to develop these? What is unique to your site/business that you can build upon? Be bold. Don't be afraid to develop and try new things. Start small and build the program up, learning from successes and challenges. Find and work with local experts/partners/other agribusinesses. Do it!



John R. Park Homestead is an excellent example of an agritourism business in the Town of Essex that prioritizes the accessibility of its experiences and incorporates traditional foodways with into its experiences.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

Town of Essex Resources

- Economic Development Department <https://www.essex.ca/en/economic-development/index.aspx>
- Planning Department <https://www.essex.ca/en/build/planning.aspx>
- Community Improvement Plan <https://www.essex.ca/en/economic-development/business-resources/community-improvement-plan.aspx>
- Agritourism Development Strategy <https://www.essex.ca/en/economic-development/business-resources/agritourism-strategy.aspx>

If your agritourism business is located in Colchester or on County Road 50, you may be eligible for funding supports through the Town of Essex Colchester County Road 50 Community Improvement Plan. If you are located within the boundaries of the CIP, connect with the Town of Essex Economic Development Department for more information.

Tourism Resources and Networks

- Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island (TWEPI) <https://visitwindsoressex.com/>
- Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation (SWOTC) <https://www.swotc.ca/>
- Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) <https://www.tiaontario.ca/>
- Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC) <https://tiac-aitc.ca/>

General Business Resources

- Town of Essex Economic Development <https://www.essex.ca/en/economic-development/index.aspx>
- Invest Windsor Essex <https://www.investwindsoressex.com/en/how-we-help/small-business-and-entrepreneurship.aspx>
- Community Futures Essex County <https://cfessexcounty.ca/>

Agricultural Business Resources

- OMAFRA Agricultural Business Management <http://omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/agbusdev.html#information>
- Farm Management Canada <https://fmc-gac.com/>

Labour, Skills, and Workforce Development Resources

- Workforce Windsor-Essex <https://www.workforcewindsoressex.com/resources/>
- Tourism Skillsnet Ontario <https://tourismskillsnet.ca/regional/windsor-essex/>
- Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC) <https://otec.org/>
- Tourism HR Canada <https://tourismhr.ca/>
- Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council <https://cahrc-ccrha.ca/>
- Ontario Living Wage Network <https://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/>

Insurance and Risk

- TIAO Insurance Resources <https://www.tiaontario.ca/cpages/commercial-insurance>

Accessibility Resources

- TIAO Accessible Tourism Resources <https://www.tiaontario.ca/cpages/accessibletourism>
- OBIAA Accessibility Tools and Reports <https://obiaa.com/projects/accessibility/tools-reports-pdfs/>
- WTTTC Inclusive & Accessible Travel Guidelines <https://wttc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2021/Inclusive%20Accessible%20Travel.pdf>
- Access Now: Discover Accessible Places <https://accessnow.com/>

Sustainability Resources

- Global Sustainable Tourism Council <https://www.gstcouncil.org/>
- UNWTO Sustainable Development <https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development>

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resources

- TIAO Building Inclusive Tourism Resources <https://www.tiaontario.ca/cpages/diversity-equity-inclusion>
- CCDI Toolkits <https://ccdi.ca/toolkits/>

Popular Agritourism Events and Festivals in the Town of Essex and Region

- Harrow Fair, Labour Day Weekends <https://harrowfair.com/>

Other Helpful Resources

- OntarioCulinary.com <https://ontarioculinary.com/>
- FEAST ON® <https://www.culinarytourismalliance.com/feast-on>
- Culinary Tourism Alliance <https://www.culinarytourismalliance.com/food-tourism-101>
- Destination Ontario <https://destinationontario.com/en-ca>
- Ontario Craft Brewers <https://www.ontariocraftbrewers.com/>
- Wine Country Ontario <https://winecountryontario.ca/>
- Savour Ontario <https://savourontario.milk.org/>
- Ocean Wise <https://ocean.org/>
- Restaurants Canada <https://www.restaurantscanada.org/>
- Terego RV Network <https://www.terego.ca/en>
- Farm Fresh Ontario <https://farmfreshontario.com/>





WORKSHEET 1: The Food Tourism Value Chain

Map your local Food Tourism Value Chain to identify where your business fits in and opportunities for collaboration and business development.



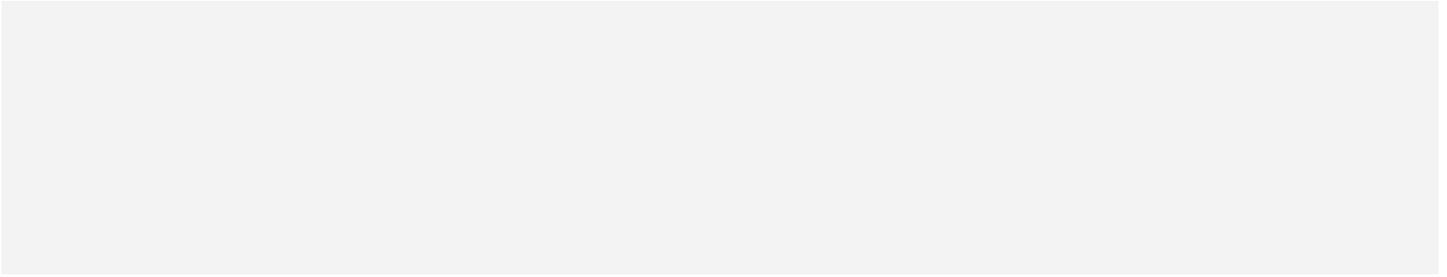
Step 1: Map your local value chain

Start by placing your own business under the appropriate category then put the names of other businesses you know in your community across the other categories. You will likely find that in some categories you can identify several businesses, and for others you can't identify any.

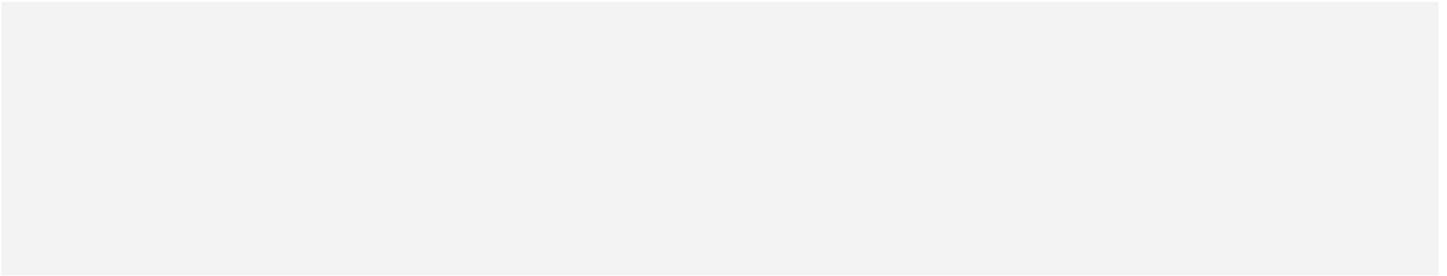
Growers, Producers and Suppliers

Restaurants

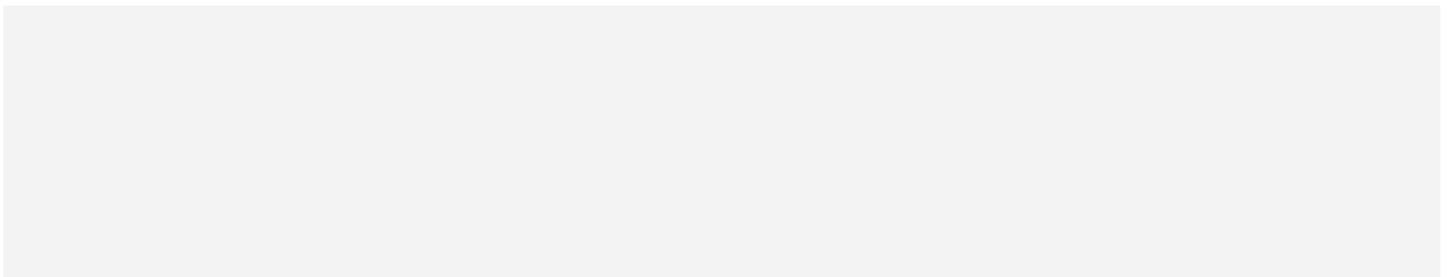
Accommodations



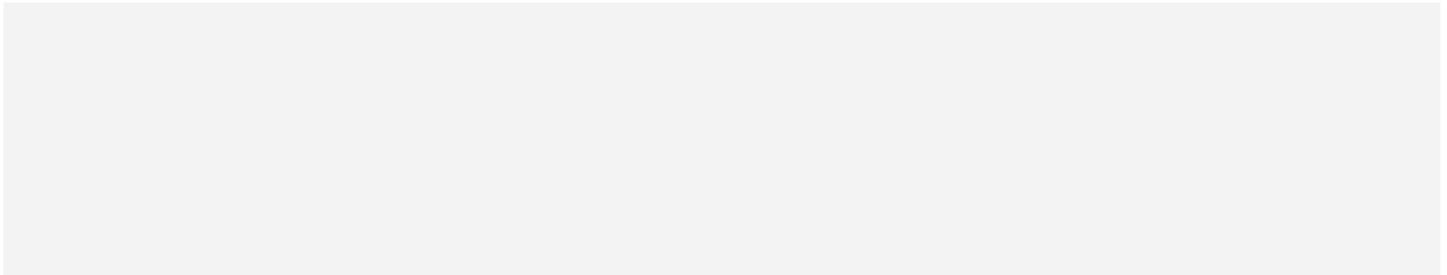
Beverage Producers



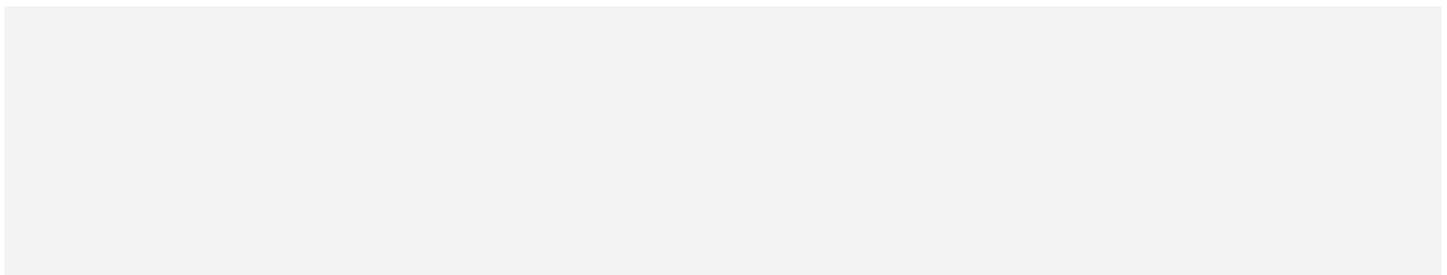
Attractions



Cooking Schools



Markets



Festivals and Events

Retailers

Tour Operators

Technology and Media

Step 2: Identify gaps and opportunities

Once you've mapped out local businesses, identify market gaps and development opportunities by asking yourself:

1. Are there any businesses in the Food Tourism Value Chain that you could work with to create a greater visitor experience? This could include referrals, cross-promotion or selling each other's products.
2. Are there any gaps in your Food Tourism Value Chain that your experience could fill?
3. What are the strengths of the Food Tourism Value Chain in your community that can offer visitors something unique?



WORKSHEET 2: **Planning Requirements Checklist**

This worksheet will help you and your planning department determine whether you have covered all the necessary planning requirements to move ahead with developing your experience.

Step 1: Answer the questions below with as much detail as you can.

Describe the agritourism experience you want to develop in a few sentences:

If you are selling products as a part of your agritourism business, check the category that applies and provide a description:

- Exclusively grown or produced on your property: _____
- Limited to products sourced from your area: _____
- Include products sourced from beyond your area: _____
- Describe if or how your agritourism experience will interrupt any existing agricultural operations:

If your property is in a Prime Agriculture Area, determine which of the 3 permitted uses your agritourism experience would qualify as:

- Agricultural Use
- Agriculture-Related Use
- On-Farm Diversified Use

Define the use for any existing farm buildings, or new buildings:

- I plan to utilize an existing building
 - Percentage of the building's space will the agritourism experience use: ____%
 - I plan to construct a new building
 - Describe the location, size, and use:
-
- Number parking spaces required:

Is your agritourism experience permitted by:

- The Official Plan
- Zoning bylaw
- It is unclear

Will you need to secure any of the following permissions before developing your agritourism experience:

- Official plan amendment
- Zoning bylaw amendment
- Minor variance
- Unknown

Step 2: Share your high-level plan with the planning department

Once you've completed the checklist, contact the Town of Essex Planning Department to confirm your plans, or seek guidance on the missing information.

Town of Essex Planning Department

519-776-7336 ext 1128
essexplanning@essex.ca



WORKSHEET 3: **Craft Your Story**

This worksheet contains questions that will help you start crafting your story.

Remember: Your story should be relatable, and you should seek to connect with your visitors on a personal and emotional level. The best way to do this is by focusing on the people behind the experience, and the community where you're located. As much as possible, you should also emphasize what is special or unique about your experience.

Step 1: Brainstorm storylines

- Who are you, your family, and your employees?
- What inspired you, or your predecessors, to start the business?
- What experiences or challenges in your past led you to do what you're doing today?
- Why are you passionate about your business, what you do or what you make?
- What values best represent you, your business, and its history?
- What are your employees passionate about, what makes them different from the employees of other businesses?
- What do you love about your community or your region?
- Why did you, or your predecessors, choose to locate there?
- What connects you, your employees, and your business to your community or your region or the community?
- Do you collaborate with other local businesses, or carry other local products?
- Are there any local traditions that you celebrate?
- What makes your experience unique?
- What is special about what you produce? About the farming region?

Step 2: Identify good online and offline storytelling moments

Think back to the visitor journey as visitors learn about your business through their research, read through your website, book the experience, live it, and remember it. Where are the key storytelling moments and what do you want to share with them in those moments?

Step 3: Piece your story together using the 4 Ps

- Plot (what is your story about?)
- People (who are the heroes of your story?)
- Purpose (what is the experience all about?)
- Place (what's unique about your destination?)



WORKSHEET 4: Agritourism Readiness Checklist

This checklist will help you determine whether you are prepared to launch your agritourism experience.

Defining your Agritourism Experience

- I have a clear idea of what the agritourism experience will be, the value proposition to my visitors, unique selling points, and how it will tie in to my community's history and culture
- I have determined how the agritourism experience fits into my community's Food Tourism Value Chain
- I have identified any local businesses that I could potentially partner with
- I have connected with my local Economic Development department to go over my idea and identify any opportunities for support

Planning Rules and Regulations

- I have connected with my local Planning Department to go over my proposed agritourism experience
- I have determined which of the 3 permitted uses my agritourism experience falls under: Agricultural Use, Agriculture-Related Use, On-Farm Diversified Use
- I have worked directly with my local Planning Department to confirm my agritourism experience is allowed under the permitted uses, and has all required planning approvals, permits etc.

Experience Development

- I have incorporated elements that enhance the visitor experience (e.g personal interactions, education, immersion, and hands on activities)
- I have provided opportunities for visitors to purchase local products
- I have identified the key stages that visitors will go through in their journey
- I have elevated the visitor experience through multisensory engagement
- I have ensured that the visitor experience is as accessible as possible

Storytelling

- I have crafted my story
- I have incorporated storytelling into the experience

Marketing

- I have identified my ideal target markets
- I have determined appealing activities, motivating factors, and possible marketing strategies to reach the target audience
- I have developed my online presence

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