

# Fact Sheet

## HOW TO PROVIDE GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR AGRITOURISM OPERATIONS

### 1 CUSTOMER SERVICE IS #1

Agritourism is considered retail for the purposes of your local code, zoning and planning rules and regulations. As such, remember that the customer is #1 and you always want to provide them with the best experiences. Good attitude is #1!

### 2 CUSTOMER FOCUS

Being customer focused is putting your customer's needs first. You can do this in several ways:

- Implement a "mystery customer" program": Ask friends or community members to come and act as a customer and ask for honest feedback on customer service, experiences, etc...
- Create a customer loyalty program: providing a value for customers to come back regularly will pay dividends

### 3 TRAINING ON CUSTOMER SERVICE

The easiest way to ensure great customer service is to train your staff on how to provide it. This can include the following topics:

- Rules Enforcement
- Education about Farm (i.e. how to pick/cut/harvest products)
- Situation De-escalation between customers

How can you do this? Consider starting each season with a training where you act as a customer and run through typical scenarios that might occur on the farm.

### 4 PETS ON THE FARM

We all love our dogs, cats, or other pets. But an agritourism operation is not a place for animals -- unless they are a service animal. Some customers can be demanding when it comes to their pets joining them wherever they go, including at your agritourism operation.

The best way to address this in a non-confrontational way is to have clear signage posted in multiple places indicating that your farm is open to service animals only. If you are providing hot food items at your operation you can also find signage that indicates that pets may be a violation of Health Department rules and regulations.

Some agritourism farms have also implemented a "pet friendly area" on their farm with success. There are strong risk management implications for allowing pets on your farm so it may be worth a conversation with your insurance agency.

## 5 WHERE & HOW TO HARVEST CROPS

Operation of any type of u-pick/u-cut farm comes with challenges in harvesting. Customers may not follow protocol for proper harvest, decide they do not want what they harvested, or even try to leave without paying. Having a protocol, and/or training, addressing this will help your staff feel more comfortable should this occur.

This should include:

- Signage with easy-to-read directions and use of images for proper harvest
- Signage describing pricing and quantities
- Staff stationed in these locations to not only answer questions but also help triage any potential issues.

Providing good information and being willing and able to answer questions from questions will help you provide great customer service because being clear is being kind.

## 6 ON-FARM EXPERIENCES

The integration of value-added experiences, such as classes or workshops, can be a great income generator for your operation. But it's important to have protocols in place for payments to hold spots, inclement weather policies, and no call/no show policies.
This could include:

- Use of technology, such as eventbrite, or other event planning software
- Prominently displayed policies at both your farm and on your farm website or social media in event listing
- Training staff on engaging with customers when something happens -- such as a weather event or someone requests a refund but violated a policy

## 8 AREAS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Just because you are an agritourism farm, it does NOT mean that all areas of your farm are open to the public. In order to manage customer expectations, having your staff be clear when customers enter the farm as to which areas are open and why (safety, etc...) will manage that potential challenge.

- Clear, and frequent, signage indicating which areas are open to the public and not
- Positioning staff in areas of the farm that may transition to areas not open to the public
- When staff welcome customers explaining the areas of the farm open to the public and what activities are available

## 9 OWNER BURNOUT

Operating an agritourism operation, and engaging with the public on a regular basis, can create burnout.

- Take a Break --Giving your staff the time to reset mentally and physically is paramount to providing good customer service!
- Spread the Wealth -- make sure you aren't the only one working. You can be in all places of your farm so strategically place staff where you need them to manage customers.
- Don't Take It Personally -- this is hard! But just remember, before someone got here they might have gotten into a fight, got cut off in traffic, or any other number of things. Your job is just to smile and welcome!

# Additional Resources:

- Cornell Cooperative Extension Agritourism Webpage: https://cals.cornell.edu/cornell-cooperative-extension/work-teams/agritourism
- Cornell Cooperative Extension Agritourism YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/@cceagritourism
- National Agricultural Law Center: https://nationalaglawcenter.org/research-by-topic/agritourism-2/
- NY Safety in Agricultural Tourism Act: https://agriculture.ny.gov/news/state-agriculture-commissioner-releases-guidance-safety-agricultural-tourism-act
- Cornell Ag Workforce Development Program: https://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/
- NYS Department of Labor: https://dol.ny.gov/agriculture-labor-program
- I LOVE NY: https://www.iloveny.com/