

Safety and Risk Management in Agricultural Tourism

Agricultural tourism can be a mutually beneficial exchange between agriculturists and urban residents. It can help agriculturists learn more about urban concerns, while enabling urban residents to learn about farming and enjoy nature. It can also increase farm income if a fee is charged for farm visits or if products are sold to visitors. However, farm visits imply risks and potential liability to farm owners, should accidents occur that result in injuries to visitors. There is a need, therefore, to pursue prudent risk management strategies to minimize your liability exposure.

Safety is your first priority when entertaining visitors to your farm or ranch or when consumers visit your operation to participate in picking or other farming experiences, including farm tours.

Your visitors' safety is largely your responsibility. Review the following suggestions as a guide to assessing your own farm or nature tourism operation for potential hazards and to prepare for a safe, enjoyable visit to your farm, ranch or nature operation.

Managing and Reducing Risks

One essential tool to manage risk is liability insurance. Before hosting groups of visitors or planning a public event, check with your insurance agent about the adequacy of your liability coverage. An event insurance rider may be necessary.

Identify the specific areas that guests will visit; the activities in which they will participate, how they will be supervised, the safety precautions you will take and any rules you will need to post. For some activities (horseback riding, for example) a "hold harmless agreement" may be a good idea. A "hold harmless" agreement indicates that the visitor is willing to assume responsibility for certain risks. It does not, however, totally absolve you of a certain level of responsibility for the health and safety of your visitors.

Plan for Emergencies. Keep a well stocked first-aid kit handy. Be sure knowledgeable people are on staff that have CPR and first-aid skills. Develop an emergency plan for dealing with natural disasters such as floods and fires.

Suggest that visitors wear appropriate clothing such as closed-toed shoes (tennis shoes or boots, but not sandals). Long pants are recommended for certain activities.

When you brief visitors, explain that you operate a working production facility. As such, certain hazards come with the territory (uneven ground, insects, climate, farm odors) and visitors must accept those risks and exercise reasonable caution.

Clearly demarcate "off-limit" areas and specifically designated public areas. Rope off or block access to other areas.



PHOTO/Ken Hammond for USDA

Youth help clean up an abandoned chalk mine which was turned into an educational, recreational, and tourist attraction at Scotia, NE.

Facilities and Equipment

Parking: Do you have adequate space for the expected number of vehicles?

Buses: If buses must park away from your farm, plan for a drop-off and loading area.

Bathrooms: Do you have clean, well stocked, public restrooms in good operation? If you are expecting a large number of visitors, consider renting portable units.

Security: Depending on the event, you may want to employ additional help to ensure that guests do not put themselves or your farm operation at risk.

Ladders: Store ladders away from trees and public spaces to eliminate the temptation to climb. This is particularly important with regard to young people.

Tractors and Equipment: Park tractors and equipment within eyesight (if desired), but away from the visitors' area. Agricultural equipment fascinates people; however, the tractor often becomes a climbing object for children (even when they are supervised by adults). Discuss tractor safety and instill respect for your equipment. Never allow visitors to drive farm equipment.

Pest Management Materials: Pesticides, herbicides and other farm management products should be safely stored, in a secure location, preferably away from public view.

Shops and repair facilities are among the most hazardous places on the farm and should generally be off-limits to the public. Close the doors and/or place a rope across the entrance with a "Do Not Enter" sign. Have farm personnel check these areas often.

Livestock and Animals

General concepts: All interactions between animals and guests should be supervised by farm staff. Animals will behave differently around a crowd of people. They should be penned or confined for viewing, with limited, controlled access for petting. Carefully select your most healthy, "user-friendly" animals for public interaction, but remember that animal well-being comes first. Give adequate attention to odor, ventilation, manure, fly and pest control in the visitor area.

Pets: Ensure that only very friendly, social dogs will be near the public. However, warn visitors of a puppy's sharp teeth. Even friendly dogs can do damage.

Cats and kittens: Be wary of their sharp claws and teeth.

Small livestock: Goats and sheep are generally more widely used as petting animals. As ruminants with no top front teeth, they can be hand fed more safely than a horse with top teeth. Also, they are smaller and lighter if they step on a child's foot.

Poultry: Geese can be very aggressive. Chickens, ducks and other poultry may be fed. However, to limit the stress on the animals, be careful to rotate them.

Cattle and calves: Restrain any cow that will be handled, preferably in a grooming chute. Calves should be controlled. Hand milking is not recommended.

Horses and ponies: Warn visitors that animals may bite. Horse and pony riding requires special rules and insurance. Consult your agent.

Post a "Please wash your hands after handling animals" sign.

Provide hand washing facilities, hand wipes or sanitizing hand cleaner in a convenient area.

Lagoons and Ponds

Water is of special concern because of its attraction to children. Make sure that no visitor will be near water (secure with temporary fencing, cones and/or ropes). Do not trust parents to watch their children.

Hayrack Rides

Hayrack rides are popular with farm visitors, but safety precautions need to be taken. Also, additional insurance may be necessary for this activity. Establish a maximum rider load that provides safe seating for all occupants.

Insist that participants follow the rules (no smoking, stay seated, legs away from wheels). The tractor speed should be no faster than an adult can jog. If there are problems, stop immediately.

Check your route regularly for potholes, irrigation flooding and other hazards that may change daily.

Urban Agriculture



Caring for Animals When Gone

Livestock are a very serious responsibility. They are dependent upon you for their care. When you are gone for any extended period of time, they

must still be cared for on a regular basis. Your animals should be looked in on daily to insure that they are in good health. Automatic feeders and waterers can break. Daily proper nutrition is very important to the overall health of the animal.

Therefore, when you are away, get a reliable person you can trust to serve as relief chore person. Find a person who is familiar with the care of livestock. This ensures your animals are getting the proper nutrition they require and are in good health. It also enables you to relax and not worry while you are gone.

Provide your relief chore

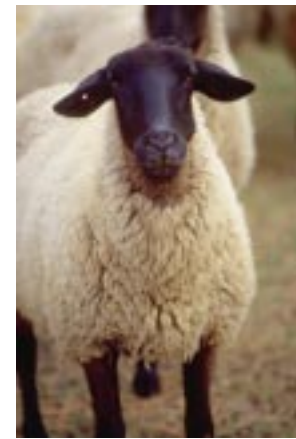
person with phone numbers (i.e., police, fire and local veterinarian) in case of an emergency. Include a detailed description of what animals

need, specific feed and other chores to be done.

There is much automation involved in many livestock buildings today. It would be wise to have at least a minimal inventory of common repair parts. Add information on how to get help for any repair items

needed while you are away. It's also a good idea to give your relief chore person the number where you can be reached.

Remember, your animals are dependent on you for food, shelter and health care even though you are away. Providing them with a reliable person helps ensure they will be healthy when you return. (DJ)



PHOTO/UNL JAMR

State's Rural Population is Growing

The latest U.S. census data shows some encouraging trends in rural Nebraska's population. Many rural counties rebounded from previous population losses during the 1980's or showed slower rates of decline during the 1990's.

The future of Nebraska's rural communities looked bleak after the 1990 Census data was released. Findings showed rural Nebraska's population declined by 50,000 during the 1980's. However, 2000 census data shows rural Nebraska's population grew by 20,000 during the 1990's.

Several counties that lost population during the 1980's grew during the 1990's. For example, the populations of

Loup and Gosper counties declined 20.5% and 9.9% during the 1980's, but grew 4.2% and 11.2% in the 1990's. Overall, less than 5% of rural counties gained population in the 1980's, but nearly 40% gained in the 1990's.

Fifty-three of Nebraska's 87 rural counties lost population in both decades, but the rate of decline slowed during the 1990's. For example, Frontier County lost 15% of its population in the 1980's, but only 0.1% during the 1990's.

Whether or not the trends of the 1990's will continue is unknown. If these general trends do continue, the historic concern over population loss in rural Nebraska should decrease. (DJ)

July/August UNL Programs and Events of Interest

- July 18 **"Bonsai How-To,"** Gary Gabelhouse, bonsai expert, 234 Keim Hall, 7-8:30 pm. Call 472-2679 to pre-register.
- July 24 **Hosta collection tour.** Dr. Gary Jones, hosta plant breeder, Maxwell arboretum gazebo East Campus, 12:20-12:50 pm. Call 472-2679
- Aug. 7 **Tour of Old Rose Collection** near The Porch, presenter TBA, The Porch East Campus, 12:20-12:50 pm. Call 472-2679
- Aug. 10 **"Weed Identification,"** Laurence Ballard, UNL Nursery Supervisor, Maxwell Arboretum gazebo East Campus, 10-11:30 am. Call 472-2679
- Aug. 22 **"The Art of Nature: The Nature of Avian Art,"** Dr. Paul A. Johnsgard, Prof. of Biological Sciences, Nebraska Union, 14th & R St., 7-8:30 pm. Call 472-2679 to pre-register.