

February 7, 2020

Oregon Board of Agriculture
Chair Boyer
635 Capitol St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Boyer, Vice-Chair Hallock, and members of the board,

On behalf of the Steering Committee of the Oregon Agritourism Workgroup, we respectfully request **that the State Board of Agriculture not adopt the Oregon Department of Agriculture Agritourism Resolution in its current form, rather that the Board allows time to work with a set of key stakeholders to review and amend the resolution.** We, the Oregon Agritourism Workgroup, understand that the Board of Agriculture is considering resolution 310 related to agritourism at its Board meeting on February 13.

Since the adoption of the original resolution, the needs of farmers and the legislative landscape have changed and the members of the Oregon Agritourism Workgroup feel that the resolution does not address key issues that farmers are facing today and that more work needs to be done at the policy level to fully recognize the importance of agritourism.

We are specifically asking that a small set of the Oregon Agritourism Workgroup, and other relevant organizations, agencies and businesses, have an opportunity provide meaningful input into the resolution update process.

The Steering Committee of the Oregon Agritourism Workgroup established a list of priorities for 2019-2021. An important part of these priorities is to "Create Clarity in Statute and Administrative Rules"; we have attached the full set of priorities to this letter. The Board's Agritourism Resolution would appear to fall under this priority as the resolution outlines the ODA Boards' direction and policy priorities of the department.

We appreciate your consideration of our request.

Respectfully,

Members of the Oregon Agritourism Working Group Steering Committee

Members that agreed to sign onto this letter include:

- Farm Stay USA
- Friends of Family Farmers
- Leaping Lamb Farm
- Oregon Horse Council
- Oregon Farmers Markets Association
- Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory
- Rural Development Initiatives
- Workhorse Workshops

2019-2021 Oregon Agritourism Development Priorities

This document serves as the set of Oregon Agritourism Development Priorities as discussed to and agreed upon by the Oregon Agritourism Working Group Steering Committee on its November 1, 2019 meeting.

In considering the priorities for the year(s), we acknowledge that the demand for agritourism continues to grow. Consumers from Oregon and beyond are increasingly seeking opportunities to learn more about farming, have on-farm and farm-to-table experiences, and build connections to rural communities and small towns. At the same time farmers are seeking to diversify their income streams and engage a younger generation of farmers (as the average age of farmers is 60) and are turning to direct-to-consumer sales and paid on-farm experiences.

While the demand increases and work to support business and visitor experience development grows, we realize that we need significantly more resources and leadership to truly advance this important economic niche that will support longevity of Oregon farms and ranches. As demonstrated by other states successful efforts to bolster farm-direct sales and on-farm experiences, Oregon requires equal or greater participation by the agricultural agencies, representative organizations, and associated stakeholders than tourism led stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

The Oregon Agritourism Network was initiated in 2014 and formalized in 2015 by Travel Oregon in partnership and a 26-person leadership team to cultivate Oregon's agritourism potential and advance Oregon's agriculture, fishing, food and beverage industries. During this time Travel Oregon provided leadership and convened industry groups and operators to advance jointly developed priorities, including the development of the Oregon Agritourism Handbook and facilitating industry events around the state to build support for agritourism. In 2018 Travel Oregon hosted a convening that launched a new Steering Committee who agreed to serve for one-year and focus on accomplishing a revised set of focus areas (Appendix A) and renamed the full effort to the Oregon Agritourism Working Group.

On July 25, 2019 Travel Oregon hosted a meeting called the 'Oregon Agritourism Coordination and Strategy' meeting in Cascade Locks with approximately 60 people representing agencies, associations, and operators that support agritourism in Oregon. The goals of the meeting included networking, building support for agritourism in Oregon, and providing input on the strategies to move the work forward in the future. At this meeting members of the Steering Committee presented the progress made over the past year and Travel Oregon facilitated a work session with stakeholders to help inform and guide work for the coming year. Travel Oregon also agreed to provide leadership and convening to advance this work for an additional year.

SETTING PRIORITIES

The strategy below lays out a first cut strategic approach to institutionally advancing agritourism, producer-direct sales and on-farm (and fishery) experiences in Oregon. It starts with work that Travel Oregon will lead regardless of whether we manage a coordinated Working Group; the document then identifies draft priorities that require a next level of leadership, partnership and resources from the agricultural community and beyond.

TRAVEL OREGON PRIORITIES

The following are projects that Travel Oregon currently plans to lead during the 2019-21 biennium.

Packaging and Marketing Experiences

Travel Oregon in collaboration with local community leaders including regional and local destination management organizations (RDMOs and DMOs), will identify and package excellent on-farm, foraging and fishery visitor experiences and related experiences including farmers markets, farm-to-table culinary opportunities, and highlighting Oregon's amazing locally grown and crafted beverages. Specifically, in order to uplift these experiences, Travel Oregon will continue to offer the Oregon Food Trails program as an organizing activation and marketing platform. Travel Oregon will work collaboratively with its partners to package these opportunities into products ready for the tourism marketplace. Related work may include business-to-business networking and training sessions.

Business and Operator Technical Assistance – Travel Oregon currently leads a set of business development and assistance offerings for agricultural producers to start, grow or improve their on-farm offerings. In an ideal state, we believe that these services could be offered in tandem with agents, such as OSU Extension Agents and Regional Solutions Officers. Projects currently include:

- Oregon Agritourism Handbook – an on-line tool that provides basic information related to state law, local codes, and operating requirements for on-farm experiences and direct sales. Additional information is available through links and resources available in the handbook
- One-on-one Technical Assistance – operators can submit an on-line request and Travel Oregon's contractor Plate + Pitchfork will spend up to two hours on the phone, doing research and following up to support their navigation and development of agritourism businesses.
- Sales-ready Itineraries – the travel and trade industry consume visitor-ready packages that may be sold to a global marketplace. Travel Oregon will work with R/DMOs to package on-farm, direct sales and special culinary experiences and sell them at global sales events and trade shows.

Business Trainings:

- [Oregon Tourism Studios: Culinary and Agritourism](#) – community-based workshops where Travel Oregon and partner agencies provide training and assistance to advance culinary and agritourism in regions across Oregon.
- [Food Trail Business Engagement Workshop](#) – Travel Oregon’s Oregon Food Trail Program [link] requires that businesses participate in a Business Engagement Workshop to support operator readiness and create connectivity among operators to support improved visitor experience.
- [Rural Tourism Conference](#) – this new rural-focused platform delivers practical and applicable education, collaboration and networking opportunities that support Oregon’s destination management organizations, businesses and industry partners that work in rural tourism communities.

AGRITOURISM PRIORITIES THAT REQUIRE ADDITIONAL LEADERSHIP

Coordination of the Agritourism Working Group

Travel Oregon has already agreed to dedicate staff and contractor time to help improve coordination and build support for agritourism among state agencies and organizations for one additional year and will extend that through June 2021. We acknowledge that to be most successful in this endeavor, the efforts by tourism agencies must be executed hand-in-hand with the agricultural community. We are calling upon agriculture-based agencies and associations to participate in equal measure to co-convene the coordination and action plans and will evaluate the progress in both June 2020 and June 2021.

We are calling for agriculture agencies and associations to provide leadership and coordination to compliment Travel Oregon’s role. This would include co-convening and staffing the Working Group and helping lead projects to accomplish key goals. Without additional levels of leadership from the agricultural community and industry, the Coordination tasks will be re-evaluated and possibly discontinued.

Support Counties to Follow Best Practices

Oregon’s 36 counties each have unique demands and challenges, and it’s not a surprise that agritourism policies and procedures are not implemented uniformly county by county. However, a handful of counties have created clear definitions of acceptable uses as well as clear processes for operators, potential operators, and policy makers and enforcers to follow that have helped reduce non-compliance and confusion. It is our goal to encourage counties statewide to utilize these existing best practices.

Create Clarity in Statute and Administrative Rules

In order to advance agritourism in Oregon there are both modest and more complex changes that can be made to both Oregon Revised Statutes and Oregon Administrative Rules. For example, currently agritourism activities are governed by a collage of statutory language that is often open to interpretation at a county level. Additionally, some of the agritourism functions are regulated by individual agencies – for instance a bed & breakfast is established under a land use code, but the actual definition of what a bed & breakfast facility is falls under the domain of the Oregon Health Authority. Creating a definition of agritourism and its various functions as well as establishing agritourism as an acceptable farm use under clearly defined circumstance would serve both farms and communities by creating consistency among ag sectors, standards of acceptability and a reduction on conflict.

Business Development and Technical Assistance

Currently this work is being done in bits and pieces by a variety of entities including Travel Oregon, Community Colleges, OSU Small Farms and OSU Extension and Trade Associations. Participants in the work session held in July 2019 made it clear they would like to see one hub for this information and assistance that would include educational opportunities, a financial support system, production support and technology assistance.

Economic Impact Study

The development of a statewide agritourism economic impact study has been a priority for multiple years. The goal is to have the tourism and agriculture industries collaboratively fund and execute this project.

APPENDIX A

OREGON AGRITOURISM PARTNERS – 2018-19 STEERING COMMITTEE PURPOSE STATEMENT

The Oregon Agritourism Steering Committee will serve for one year to develop an action plan for advancing agritourism in Oregon and lead its implementation. While the definition of agritourism is broad, this Steering Committee will focus on barriers and solutions that include experiencing the local landscape where food, clothing and shelter is produced, foraged, and caught, and the meeting the people behind this work.

The action plan will advance the priorities established at July 10th meeting as amended by the Steering Committee. They are:

1. **Improve inter-agency and organizational coordination** to support the sustainable development of agritourism including. *Action steps:*
 - a. Develop a scan of the roles and activities of agencies and organizations working on agritourism
 - b. Develop a process to improve collaboration both among state agencies and association organizations; build support for increased resources for both agencies and organizations to lead on agritourism.
2. **Build a better understanding and increase support for agritourism in Oregon.** *Action steps:*
 - a. Develop a communications strategy aimed at educating county and regional agencies and policy makers about the benefits of agritourism, the associated activities that are currently permissible, challenges to running successful operations, and solutions to these challenges.
 - b. Gather economic impact data and trends to bolster this work.
3. **Support agritourism business** to improve current, establish new and expand existing operations. *Action steps:*
 - a. Provide operators with opportunities to network, learn and gain assistance with business planning from other operators and resources providers.
 - b. Offer technical assistance to establishing and running successful agritourism businesses so that they can effectively navigate and comply with laws, codes and permitting requirements.
4. Explore, and improve as needed, **statewide and county-level policy issues and structural barriers and solutions** to growing a robust agritourism economy in Oregon. *Action steps include:*
 - a. Advocate for codes and rules that support agritourism while maintaining integrity for agricultural lands and respecting key farming activities; build on the communication strategy (2.a.).
 - b. Establish a set of best practices to support counties in bringing their codes to current standards.
 - c. Encourage counties to set up an easy-to-understand, transparent and streamlined process for businesses and operators to legally operate their agritourism business.

DEFINING AGRITOURISM

Agricultural Tourism, or agritourism, is the name of the sector that integrates agricultural enterprises with the travel and recreational sectors of our economy. Agritourism covers a wide variety of recreational, educational and other leisure activities and services, based on the location of the enterprise, physical and human resources. Agritourism offers consumers unique leisure, educational and recreation experiences that they value and are willing to pay for. The wide range of activities covered under agritourism can be placed into three categories:

1. **Activities that take place directly on the farm, ranch or other agricultural site:**
 - Farm or ranch work experience (roundup, branding, haying, fencing, calving, etc.)
 - U-pick operations for harvesting fruits, vegetables, Christmas trees
 - Farm Stands
 - Guided tour of farm or ranch operation
 - Hay rides and horseback riding
 - Farm Stays
 - Stay at a dude ranch
 - Special events such as weddings, retreats, family reunions, meetings
 - Farm to table events
 - Corn mazes, wagon rides, children's camps
 - Seeing and feeding farm animals
 - Hunting, fishing, crabbing and clamming, either guided or unguided
 - Educational tours and activities
 - Photography and painting
 - Bird-watching and wildlife viewing
 - Active recreation

2. **Activities that are operated by agricultural producers, that tend to be food-based and that may or may not take place on the farm, ranch or other agricultural site:**
 - Harvest and food festivals
 - Farmers markets
 - Winery and cidery tours and tastings
 - Microbrewery visits
 - Visits to food processing sites that make cheese, baked goods, jam or cider, for example

3. **Activities that celebrate agricultural heritage and history, and that may or may not take place at the site of the enterprise:**
 - Barn dances, hoedowns, square dancing
 - Visits to historical museums and sites that describe agricultural history, pioneer treks and settlements, farm machinery
 - Rodeos, stock shows, county fairs or other events showcasing the ag industry

Culinary Tourism is defined as “the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences” and thus there is a significant intersection with agritourism. The Steering Committee acknowledges, however, that there are numerous visitor-worthy agricultural experiences in Oregon that are not edible.

Additionally, there are working definitions of agritourism in both Oregon Revised Statutes and DLCD model code that should inform any work the committee pursues in advancing statewide policy. Those definitions are:

1. Agritourism activity means an activity carried out on a farm or ranch that allows members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment or educational purposes, to view or enjoy rural activities, including farming, wineries, ranching and historical, cultural or harvest-your-own activities or natural activities and attractions. An activity is an agritourism activity whether or not the participant paid to participate in the activity.
2. Agritourism: A common, farm-dependent activity that promotes agriculture, any income from which is incidental and subordinate to a working farm. Such uses may include hay rides, corn mazes and other similar uses that are directly related to on-site agriculture. Any assembly of persons shall be for the purpose of taking part in agriculturally-based activities such as animal or crop care, tasting farm products or learning about farm or ranch operations. Agritourism may include farm-to-plate meals. Except for small, farm-themed parties, regularly occurring celebratory gatherings, weddings, parties or similar uses are not agritourism.