

# Agritourism

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## 2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

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**Purpose:** To describe the unique challenges and opportunities related to agritourism, defined as activities that link agricultural production with tourism to attract visitors to a farm or other agricultural business for the purpose of entertainment and/or education, while generating income for the agricultural business.

## What's at Stake?

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Agritourism can offer valuable opportunities for farms and other agricultural businesses to generate diversified, multi-season income, while offering memorable and educational farm-based experiences for visitors. Through activities and entertainment, like farm stays, pick-your-own, corn mazes, and festivals, agritourism in New Hampshire provides residents and tourists meaningful opportunities to connect with the state's rural heritage and learn about food sources, animal care, and other aspects of farm management.

## Current Conditions

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Agritourism is a relatively newly-defined industry; research, support networks, and knowledge of best practices are still emerging, but existing data reveals economic opportunities, as well as limitations. Since a wide variety of enterprises can be considered agritourism operations through varying contextual definitions, it can be difficult to quantify agritourism businesses and their economic and social impacts. The 2002 USDA Census of Agriculture was the first to include agritourism data. The most recent census in 2022 reported a modest increase in agritourism in New Hampshire, with 156 farms that collectively generated \$4.54 million in agritourism income.

Economic forecasts predict that visitor interest in agritourism will continue to grow in the next decade. However, agritourism is not necessarily a clear or easy path for income generation in that it requires diversified knowledge spanning agriculture, finance, hospitality, marketing, visitor safety, and more. State and local laws and regulations may limit the feasibility and eligibility of some agritourism business plans.

With support and direction in navigating these realities, agritourism has the potential to provide a crucial additional revenue stream for New Hampshire farms, while increasing food and agricultural literacy for

residents and tourists. However, while growth in New Hampshire's agritourism industry could yield many positive benefits for farms and communities, it should be noted that in the broader context of the state's food system, more farms engaging in agritourism could be an indicator that the farm's primary agricultural activities are no longer economically sustainable on their own.

Assessing agritourism in New Hampshire begins with understanding how it is defined and regulated. "Agritourism" has varying definitions depending upon geography and context, which can have legal and/or operational implications. In New Hampshire law, RSA 21:34-a addresses agritourism and defines it as a marketing activity to support agricultural and farming operations. Thus, agritourism activities must be "accessory uses to the primary farm operation." Assuming accessory use only, RSA 674:32-d defines that a municipality cannot prohibit agritourism.

However, agritourism, as defined in RSA 21:34-a, may be made subject to applicable special exceptions, building permits, site plan review, or other local land use board approvals in accordance with the provisions of RSA 674:32-c, II and III, and may be regulated to prevent traffic and parking from adversely impacting adjacent property, streets and sidewalks, or public safety.

# Challenges and Opportunities

## CHALLENGES

- Agritourism often takes farmers outside of their professional comfort zone, requiring knowledge of hospitality, new product development, and visitor management. Educational opportunities may be expensive, time consuming, and/or geographically prohibitive, and thus unfeasible for many farmers.
- Comprehensive business planning and community relations are integral to the successful execution of a farmer's vision for their business. Business plans must take into account all stakeholders and potential impacts, as well as local and state ordinances and regulations.

**AGRITOURISM IN NEW ENGLAND, 2022**

State	Number of Farms	Percent of Total Farms	Value of Sales	Percent of Total Sales
VT	323	4.9%	\$4.67M	0.5%
MA	340	4.8%	\$23.55M	3.9%
RI	46	4.4%	\$2.29M	2.5%
CT	206	4.1%	\$13.73M	1.9%
NH	156	4.0%	\$4.54M	1.8%
ME	241	3.4%	\$12.15M	1.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,312</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>\$60.94M</b>	<b>1.6%</b>

SOURCE: USDA Census of Agriculture, Table 7: Income from Farm-Related Sources.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- New Hampshire's physical and cultural landscapes are ever-changing, and consumer preferences do not stay static over time. The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will conduct an agricultural census in 2027, which should provide useful comparison points when considered in tandem to other data sources, such as qualitative surveys of agritourism operators. These data points can help inform policies and programs and identify needed resources for agritourism operators.
- The older ages of most New Hampshire agritourism operators suggests that there is opportunity to expand sector engagement from young people, fostering the next generation of farmer-operators and bringing new ideas and perspectives to the industry.
- A growing state reputation for agritourism may strengthen cross-promotional opportunities. Recent New Hampshire tourism marketing has heavily featured outdoor recreation and has created channels for agritourism promotion. There are opportunities for agritourism operators to collectively demonstrate the appeal and impact of agricultural traditions in the local economy and broader tourism market. Multi-organizational partnerships and events, such as fairs and festivals, could be effective tools for highlighting agritourism on a regional level.

# Recommendations

- **Increase support for business planning and evaluation of agritourism activities.** Organizations, such as the NH Farm Bureau, UNH Extension, and the Small Business Development Center, can work to expand business assistance resources for farms engaged in, or considering, agritourism throughout business development and life cycle stages. Engaging municipal and county leaders in education and awareness can position them to better support agritourism sector development in their regions. Tracking statewide participation levels and economic data can help inform strategies to engage people of color, young people, and others who have commonly been under-represented in agritourism management.

- **Clarify state and local laws, ordinances, and definitions.** Many New Hampshire agritourism operators and prospective operators have expressed that laws and guidelines could be more clearly articulated (for example, “accessory uses,” as stated in RSA 21:34-a) to avoid differing interpretations and legal gray areas. Clarifications may help reduce business inefficiencies and conflicts at the local level. Educational resources that explain the respective roles of state and local authorities in agritourism matters could contribute to easier business roadmaps.
- **Encourage knowledge sharing amongst agritourism operators.** Support experience-based knowledge sharing and documentation through online and in-person forums for agritourism operators, leveraging the notion that operators can be collaborators in the continued development of agritourism in the state, rather than competitors. Such approaches can also help level the playing field of resources available to different sizes and types of operators.
- **Increase the marketing of agritourism to locals.** Resident patronage of agritourism helps businesses position themselves as community assets, improving resilience to seasonal visitation fluctuations and helping mitigate town-level conflicts regarding agritourism business development or expansion. Tourism organizations, like the NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs’ Division of Travel and Tourism Development, Granite State Ambassadors, and regional tourism groups and chambers of commerce, can strategically generate campaigns and maps/guides to reach residents in addition to tourists.
- **Create an agritourism-focused university position to serve both current and future operators.** Fund and hire one full-time equivalent (FTE) agritourism-focused teaching and research position. This could be a joint appointment within the University of New Hampshire’s College of Life Sciences and Agriculture that engages with UNH Extension’s Community & Economic Development and Food & Agriculture teams and can serve as a statewide point person.

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This brief was developed through a participatory process led by the NH Food Alliance, a program of the University of New Hampshire. The brief content is comprised of the opinions, perspectives, and information gathered by the authors and participants, and does not necessarily represent those of the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food or the NH Food Alliance.

For more information, including references and opportunities to get involved, visit the 2025 NH Food and Agriculture Strategic Plan web page on [nhfoodalliance.org](https://nhfoodalliance.org) or scan the QR code on the inside front cover of the print version.