



GLYNWOOD

CULTIVATING A VIBRANT HUDSON VALLEY

From “Agri-tainment” to Engagement: A New Era of Agritourism for the Hudson Valley

Lead author: Katharine Millonzi, co-authored with Glynwood

THE POTENTIAL FOR AGRITOURISM IN THE HUDSON VALLEY

The practice of visiting farms can be considered a convergence of the agriculture and tourism industries: farm tours or “stays,” in which guests partake in the products and activities of their host. Well-established in Europe (the *agriturismo* sector in Italy has been protected under government policy since 1985), agritourism is not formally entrenched in the U.S. as an industry or pastime, despite an obvious surge of interest nationwide in all things locavore. Therefore, now is an opportune time for an examination of the potential for Hudson Valley farms and their communities to usher in a new era of agritourism.

The Hudson Valley is renowned for its landscapes, natural beauty and agricultural heritage, and its longstanding reputation as a pastoral retreat from urban life. Add to this an impressive and growing roster of reputable, award-winning restaurants and chefs in this region, and the Hudson Valley holds tremendous potential as a world-class destination for integrated food and farm experiences. As interest in a regional food system continues to grow, visitors are increasingly drawn to experience this place through its agriculture and cuisine.

Agritourism remains generally underdeveloped in the U.S., yet the notable successes of Napa Valley and Vermont in this sector suggest that an exciting market does exist. While both regions participate in various forms of agritourism, a single, official organization responsible for growing the sector does not yet exist. Even without a unifying “brand,” these regions have nonetheless succeeded in defining themselves by their food and farming culture.

In this context, the Hudson Valley has untapped potential to be a premier food and farming destination and a leader in agritourism. This paper describes how the paradigm for agritourism in the Hudson Valley is shifting away from “agri-tainment,” e.g. corn mazes and hayrides, to more participatory experiences that are directly related to the actual work of food production. However, there remains a need to better develop these experiences for visitors and to identify opportunities for farmers.

The development of a more participatory form of agritourism could be supported further. Increased and improved on-farm experiences would contribute to the Hudson Valley’s agricultural viability and regional identity, while benefitting farmers, visitors and the local community alike. The further development and successful marketing of agritourism experiences would:

- Allow farms to diversify and increase revenue
- Act as a form of regional economic development
- Create substantive urban-rural linkages
- Attract monetary investment in farms
- Strengthen the connection between sustainable food production and regional ecosystems for visitors
- Bolster the Hudson Valley’s identity as a food and farming region

DEFINING AGRITOURISM

For the purposes of this paper, agritourism is defined as a suite of on-farm enterprises that include one or more of the following:

Traditional

- Entertainment (harvest festivals, barn dances, etc.)
- Direct sales (u-pick operations, roadside stands, farm market stores)
- Outdoor recreation (fishing, hunting, wildlife study, horseback riding)

Emerging

- Educational experiences (traditional skills workshops/classes)
- Hospitality services (farmstays, guided tours)
- Social events and weddings (venue rental)
- Culinary events (farm dinners, tasting events)

APPROACH

Glynwood, an agricultural nonprofit whose mission is to support farming in the Hudson Valley, commissioned a survey of farm operations with the goal of:

1. Creating a snapshot of agritourism offerings in the Hudson Valley
2. Identifying opportunities and needs for the development of creative agritourism endeavors in the Hudson Valley
3. Expanding a general understanding of how the rising cultural enthusiasm for food tourism can be galvanized into real and positive outcomes for farmers, visitors and the region as a whole

A total of 100 farms in the region were surveyed including 18 orchards, three berry farms, seven dairy farms/creameries, seven maple producers, 13 wine/spirits/beer/cider producers, 17 vegetable producers and 34 mixed product operations.

All were asked to describe their agritourism offerings, scale of their operations, investments specific to agritourism, expenses, percentage of overall revenue from agritourism, number of visitors and characteristics of those visitors, marketing approach, intentions for growth, rewards and challenges, support needed for their business, and other concerns and suggestions. Several farms also participated in more in-depth interviews.

In addition to the survey and interview-based investigation, Glynwood hosted a forum for representatives from both farming and tourism to discuss the developments necessary for Hudson Valley agritourism to actualize its potential.

The results suggest that a strong opportunity exists to harness the new wave of interest in well-designed farm experiences and excursions, as does the need to develop a corresponding brand of participatory tourism that is focused on the Hudson Valley's regional food identity.

FINDINGS

A new form of agritourism is emerging.

Successful operations in the survey pointed to the changing nature of agritourism in the Hudson Valley and across the U.S. that is distinct in tone, aesthetic and quality. Agritourism offerings in the region thus far have an entertainment quality that is, in part, a legacy from 19th century recuperative prescriptions for “getting away to the country.” This paradigm, a passive, “hands-off” approach to on-farm vacationing, uses the farm as backdrop for, but not necessarily the content of, the experience. Examples include bird shoots, harvest festivals, fun rides, petting zoos and corn mazes. In most cases, visitors have not been exposed to, or included in, the working core of the farm where their visit is taking place.

The “new agritourism” is an entrepreneurial mix of hospitality, education and agriculture. This type of operation is marked by an approach that synchronizes a craft-oriented aesthetic of sustainable agriculture with tourism. This aesthetic reflects simplicity, authenticity and abundance, and mirrors environmental values and land stewardship. Of the interview pool, over 60% of farms that offer experiences for guests are on ecologically-managed properties.

The interviews also illustrated a desire for a more hands-on experience. Visitors consistently reported that they come to farms looking to engage their senses. The public perception of agritourism is shifting away from entertainment (“agri-tainment” or ‘hay-cation’) towards one that achieves relaxation and rejuvenation through participation. The new clientele want to enjoy, be involved in and learn about what is happening at a particular locale. This also provides an opportunity to help create a distinctive “story of place” for the Hudson Valley region. Multiple on-farm experiences could be presented within the context of a narrative that communicates the region's overall character and identity, which could ultimately expand economic opportunities in this sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Agritourism in the Hudson Valley requires a new wave of coordinated support from both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors. Farmer-friendly strategies that connect the food and travel sectors are needed in order to encourage consumer demand for local products and support for farmers as they launch and expand agriculture businesses. Parameters for quality and style, as well as economic leadership, are needed in this new field.

To successfully meet the demand for first-hand farm experiences, farms require assistance with the following services:

1. Place-based product development, marketing and branding
2. Funding for agritourism ventures
3. Technical support and networking

Place-Based Product Development, Marketing and Branding

In order to develop a world-renowned agritourism economy, the Hudson Valley needs coordination in the development and marketing of regional products and experiences. The variety of place-based foods in the Hudson Valley is impressive, yet also poses a marketing challenge different from other successful agritourism regions in the country that focus on a single product, such as wine from the Napa Valley.

Surveyed farms reported marketing assistance as their top request. With broad support, a coordinated marketing approach could extend recreation and culture in the Hudson Valley beyond art and theatre to include food. The opportunity lies in building a new, centralized and visible identity for the Hudson Valley that synthesizes the tourism, culinary and agriculture industries. This identity should promote regional signature dishes, products, personalities, experiences and events that champion the distinctive style and character of the region.

EXAMPLE #1

Sprout Creek Farm, LaGrange, NY

Sprout Creek Farm, established in 1982, is a center for “education, farming, community building and spiritual growth, where the land, the animals and the seasons are the teachers.” They promote themselves as a place of work, peace, intellectual inquiry and experiential learning, and a home to a community of people, plants and animals. Sprout Creek produces farmstead cheese from the milk of their cows and goats. Their year-long educational programs, which include day and overnight programs for boys and girls between the ages of 10-18, an Institute for Social and Environmental Awareness, and parent-child weekends, encourage creativity and ingenuity through the discovery of the value and rewards of real work in a nurturing and supportive environment. Sprout Creek offers a farmstay via a three-bedroom cottage for rent. Visitors can arrange to have private catering and are free to participate in farm activities as they wish.



sproutcreekfarm.org

Actions

1. Catalyze the development of a strong regional identity for food and agriculture in the Hudson Valley with a contemporary aesthetic that communicates quality, attracts visitors and engages new audiences. Compare other regional models for applicable strategies.
2. Develop a marketing strategy based on this identity that makes use of web-based platforms, and may include a criteria-based program recognizing regional businesses that support Hudson Valley farms and food.
3. Offer direct technical assistance to individual farms to develop their branding/visuals/marketing.

Funding for Agritourism Ventures

There are many farms in the Hudson Valley that embody the will and the spirit to be a successful agritourism operator. They already possess high-quality products, but little to no startup capital investment currently exists to directly support those that need infrastructure upgrades. Often a farm needs brick-and-mortar funding to renovate an existing structure on their property so it can better accommodate guests.

Agritourism entrepreneurs in the Hudson Valley are generally drawing upon bank business loans or private financial resources to start their businesses. On average, initial investments are \$44,000, and were generally recouped within two-to-five seasons, making this a good “slow money” investment.

Actions

1. Pilot a case study of successful agritourism initiatives to provide farmers with financial information, including investment outlay and benefits.
2. Explore and develop funding strategies for agritourism enterprises.

Technical Support and Networking

There is a great need for auxiliary support services for agritourism management and development, such as farmstay business and hospitality management consulting services that provide farms with the requisite industry standards to succeed.

EXAMPLE #2**Kinderhook FarmStay,
Ghent, NY**

A pioneer and leading example of American farmstay, Kinderhook Farm offers visitors a unique opportunity to experience rural life on a beautiful twelve hundred acre working farm two and a half hours north of NYC, just north of Hudson, NY. FarmStay visitors, who stay in either a renovated barn or farmhouse, can choose to be as relaxed or as active in farm life as they like. There are also many local activities to explore—kayaking, hiking, swimming, antiques, theater, music and art galleries. Visitors gain an understanding of the relationship between the food they eat and how it is grown. The farm is dedicated to the practices of sustainable farming, responsible land stewardship and the welfare of their animals. The farm has a store selling their meat, eggs and other products.



kinderhookfarmstay.com

The majority of farms interviewed indicated their willingness to participate in a professional agritourism network. Such a group could help raise industry professionalism and standards, while offering services and information that farmers need.

Potential roles for a regional agritourism alliance include:

- Sharing best practices and establishing quality controls
- Training, such as event production and hospitality management, to enable the farming community to achieve tourism excellence
- Development of related business skills, with information to support profitability of agritourism ventures (for example: document and share return-on-investment for various agritourism enterprises, create visitor profiles that will help businesses to identify viable niche opportunities)
- Collective marketing and resources for regional promotion
- Coordination of support agencies and services
- Increasing the awareness and support for agritourism amongst state and county governments

Actions

1. Conduct further research to define market demand and services needed.
2. Create a regional network of agritourism peers.
3. Engage with other national agritourism entities to learn from their work or explore how they can support efforts in the Hudson Valley.

EXAMPLE #3

Madava Farms/Crown Maple, Dover Plains, NY

Located near Poughkeepsie, Madava is a maple producer that offers popular guided tasting tours each season and a farm café. The educational and well-run tours illuminate the miles-long path Crown Maple® Syrup makes in a single day from tree to barrel. By packaging the syrup into glass bottles with striking labels, Madava is a strong example of the impact of good branding, even for a familiar, traditional regional product.



crownmaple.com

GENERAL SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

What are the current agritourism offerings in the region?

At present, Hudson Valley agritourism focuses primarily on tours and tastings throughout the growing season, which generally runs from May to October. Of the 100 farms surveyed, 30% have farm stands, 20% are Pick-Your-Own (PYO), 10% offer guided tastings and 50% offer tours. The most accessible types of agritourism activities available to the public involve direct marketing of produce: PYO orchards or roadside farm stands are popular venues for family outings.

PYO, the most frequent type of direct on-farm experiences, serves to attract outside revenue and experiential tourists into a community, but may not generate a significant or lasting relationship between farm and visitor. Wineries and tasting rooms offer a unique and favorable revenue stream; repeat customers for these ventures are low, but indirect sales from brand exposure is high.

In general, on-farm culinary education and classes are underrepresented. Farm dinners are increasingly popular, though the sophisticated marketing required to sell full tables is often a deterrent to producing one-off events. Also popular are seasonal craft classes, such as cider making, canning and farmstay packages, which often include cooking classes. Most farms open to the public offer a farm store, and most of these curate the store with a variety of local products beyond their own. Farmstays, increasingly in demand, generate between \$10K-\$30K annually per farm. Most farmstays in the Hudson Valley are located on meat or dairy farms and are available for nightly or weekly accommodation (on average: \$150 per night or \$1500 per week).

What is the benefit to farms offering agritourism activities?

Generally speaking, agritourism allows entrepreneurial farmers to diversify their operations, spread financial risk, and, in many cases, keep land in production. Farms polled estimated that, on average, hospitality-based activities generated 15% of total farm revenue, although most farms did not track direct tourism revenue separately. Once up and running, an average farmstay in the Hudson Valley generates a third of a farm's total revenue.

Farmers also consider the non-financial benefits of agritourism integral to the overall viability of their enterprise. All farms interviewed stated that the agritourism component of their business was vital to exposure, promotion and marketing. A broader base of support better positions farms to seek funding, develop local business collaborations and strengthen technical support for on-farm staff and products. Although the farm itself is the destination, revenue from agritourism extends out to other businesses in a farm's local economy.

Who are these agritourists? Where are they coming from and how many are estimated to be visiting agritourism destinations?

According to a State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry market analysis of agritourism statewide, more than 50% of farm customers come from the home county of the business. However, most Hudson Valley farmers surveyed for this paper directly reported that the majority of their customers come from NYC or other nearby urban centers, underscoring the important relationship between NYC and the Hudson Valley.

The farms interviewed reported an average of 1,500 visitors per season, however PYO visitor numbers skewed the average higher. Farmstays draw a lower number of tourists, but it should be noted that there are currently limited farmstays available and they are operating at close to 100% occupancy rate in the high season.

In Italy or France, the idea of an agritourism holiday is deeply ingrained in the collective cultural consciousness, yet the concept is generally unfamiliar to most Americans who, over the course of the last century, have experienced an increasing disconnect between farming and non-farming families. Deprived of a connection to the land and their food, a new breed of tourists is emerging, one looking for participatory, sensory-based experiences of unique, natural and craft-focused places. Current agritourists, as a demographic, are generally middle-to upper-class in economic standing, and many are already engaged with agriculture on some consumer level, whether they are eating organic food, support a CSA or participate in the Slow Food movement.

What is the economic impact of agritourism in the region?

General tourism in the Hudson Valley generates \$3.15 billion annually, providing \$207 million in local tax revenue. NY state and county tourism agencies are not required to collect data on agritourism, or even bed and breakfast occupancy rates.

While detailed statistics on agritourism have not traditionally been captured by the National Agricultural Statistics Service, the Census of Agriculture, conducted every four years by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), does compile numbers of farms “with receipts from agritourism and recreational services” and those corresponding income figures. The most recent Census of Agriculture, conducted in 2012, shows that across the twelve counties bordering the Hudson River, there was a total of 208 farms with agritourism/recreational income, and a combined regional total of \$7,456,000 in farm income from those activities.

USDA Census of Agriculture (2012)

COUNTY	FARMS WITH INCOME FROM AGRITOURISM & RECREATIONAL SERVICES	INCOME FROM AGRITOURISM & RECREATIONAL SERVICES
ORANGE	46	\$2,362,000
ULSTER	26	\$1,109,000
ALBANY	17	\$989,000
RENSSELAER	17	\$961,000
WASHINGTON	22	\$700,000
SARATOGA	18	\$547,000
DUTCHESS	29	\$264,000
GREENE	12	\$174,000
ROCKLAND	3	\$170,000
COLUMBIA	12	\$150,000
PUTNAM	3	\$30,000
WESTCHESTER	3	(not published)
TOTAL	208	\$7,456,000

Thinking more broadly about the emerging culinary tourism market, of which agritourism is one significant component, we get a sense of the potential revenue to be captured through the creation of a cohesive, regional, food-focused tourism marketing campaign for the Hudson Valley, and the possibility of a regional culinary tourism entity behind it. In a 2013 study by the World Food Travel Association, nearly 30% of survey respondents reported that they choose touristic destinations based on the availability of local activities related to food and drink. “Over half (51%) of all respondents said they travel to learn about or enjoy unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences, and nearly two-thirds (61%) are interested in taking a trip to a destination within the U.S. to engage in culinary activities within the next year.” Of the five destinations within the U.S. most closely associated with culinary tourism in this study, NYC garnered the top slot with 46% of responses. With such easy proximity to NYC, the Hudson Valley—its farmers, chefs and food system generally—is well positioned to benefit from the massive culinary tourism market that already exists just beyond its margins.