

Agritourism Series

Hospitality and Customer Service

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In an agritourism business, happy and satisfied customers are the key to business survival and success. How customers perceive the value experienced while visiting your operation is important for two reasons. First, it may encourage them to come back. It is often easier and less expensive to generate repeat business than attract new customers. Second, you want your customers to tell others about their visit. Word of mouth is one of the most effective marketing tools that exists, so you want to present the best possible image of your farm and enterprise.

That First and Last Impression

Customer service begins before a customer arrives and ends long after the customer leaves. It may start with a phone call or visit to your web site. It may include updates after the visit to share upcoming events or new products and services you are offering. Good customer service doesn't just happen.



It takes appropriate planning. Below are some suggestions for creating a good first and last impression:

- Make locating your facility easy with good maps, signage to your farm and easy-to-follow directions posted on your web site.
- At the entrance, consider having a welcome sign. At the exit have a sign that says, "Thank you. Come back."
- Visitors should be treated as guests and extended a welcoming hospitality. Either you or someone with good people skills should be in the forefront to extend the best customer service possible.
- Train your employees about the importance of quality service and make sure they know your expectations regarding how they present themselves and treat your customers.
- Bus tours give you a good opportunity to visit with the entire group. You can visit with them before they depart from the bus, share with them what they're going to see and warmly welcome them to your farm.
- Hospitality starts with the first greeting. Immediately welcome customers with a friendly greeting. Smile and use positive body language.
- Be courteous and polite to customers and coworkers. Treat each customer as a special guest or VIP.

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- Listen to customers. Use the name of the customer when possible.
- If you are leading a tour of the farm, develop an enthusiastic verbal presentation that can be modified to fit different interests and backgrounds of the audience.
- Whenever possible, make a part of your farm tour an interactive, hands-on experience.
- Have safe, organized, hands-on opportunities for children.

Educating Your Visitors

Visitors are looking for a quality experience, and they have come to have fun. Educating them about your operation is also important. Here are things you can do to enhance a visitor's experience:

- View the operation through the eyes of your visitors, and enlist the help of friends who are unfamiliar with farming to help you. What may be obvious to you may be unknown to your guests. Point out the obvious and explain the reasons behind specific practices.
- Many visitors will be very inquisitive about products and practices they observe. Remember, there are no silly questions! Answer every question thoughtfully and with enthusiasm. Make sure that all staff members are knowledgeable about the operation and prepared to answer questions.
- Provide your visitors with unique things to do and see, separating you from your competitors.
- Offer things to buy. People like to shop, and they like to buy things that remind them of their experiences. Providing customers opportunities to purchase items from you adds value to their experience and increases your bottom line. Make sure that products and services are priced appropriately and that prices are easily visible to customers.



Facilities

Keep your site attractive, orderly and clean. Think about the needs of your customers. Have adequate garbage receptacles. Be sure restrooms are clean. Make sure you have areas where visitors can rest comfortably. Keep a list of activities, services and phone numbers guests may need, such as other local attractions (restaurants, hotels/motels, art galleries, museums, fairs, community events, craft shops, parks, etc.) and emergency facilities (local hospitals, doctors' offices, auto repair shops, etc.).

Evaluating Your Customer Service

Customer service is an ongoing process. It is important to evaluate your business and customer perceptions about your business on a regular basis.

- Ask customers for feedback or suggestions, possibly including the use of a short survey about their experience at your enterprise.
- Review customer comments and complaints.
- Keep detailed records and monitor sales and inventory data.
- Hire a secret shopper to visit your operation and report on the customer service experience.

Conclusion

Customers are the lifeblood of your business. The happier your customers are, the more successful your business will be. Effective customer service requires that you consider the needs, wants and expectations of your customers and do your best to meet them.

This fact sheet is one of a series of Extension publications to help you determine if agritourism is right for you or improve an existing enterprise. For more information about agritourism, visit our web site at <http://www.uaex.edu> or the Arkansas Agritourism Initiative web site at <http://www.arkagritourism.org>.

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