

# Is Agritourism Right for Your Shellfish Mariculture Operation?

*This document provides an introduction to shellfish mariculture agritourism and is written for shellfish growers.*

## What is agritourism and its relationship to shellfish mariculture?

Agritourism includes any activities that welcome people onto your operation for education or recreation.<sup>1</sup> Land-based agritourism farms provide activities such as hayrides during the fall, strawberry u-pick sites in the spring, and sales of local farm goods year-round. Tourism opportunities related to shellfish farming could involve a motorized boat ride or kayak excursion to visit your operation, providing shellfish samples or selling oysters or clams at your location, as well as educational programs that inform the public of the environmental benefits of shellfish. Here, we share some tips from agritourism operations that can be applied to shellfish mariculture.

## Agritourism: What are the Economic & Societal Benefits?

### Economic

- Additional revenue may be available to operations engaged in agritourism, particularly small operations
- Creates opportunities to sustain revenues when your operation is limited by disasters or lower harvest <sup>2</sup>

### Societal

- Educate visitors about mariculture
- Share & preserve heritage
- Provide high quality local products
- Connect producers & local community
- Conserve natural resources & ecosystems
- Revitalize local economies <sup>2</sup>

Visits to operations also play an important intermediary role in future purchasing decisions of visitors. Visitors to an operation are more likely to support North Carolina producers and spend up to 10% more on local food. <sup>3</sup>

## Creating Successful Tours for Your Operation

Quality customer service is a priority for your visitors. Use this [TOOL](#) to develop a customer service plan so you are prepared to respond, recover and improve customer service on your operation. <sup>4</sup>

**Pricing** is an important element to consider. You will need to determine an acceptable price point for your target market. A boat tour experience could be priced as high as a typical charter fishing trip in your area, whereas a shorter land-based experience is more affordable and family-friendly. <sup>5</sup>

Providing visitors with an **authentic experience** makes your operation memorable. Visitors are seeking out education on mariculture, hands-on activities, connection to their environment, and fun.<sup>1</sup>

## Agritourism Checklist:

*Is Agritourism Right for You and Your Business?*

Answer the questions below. Check the box if the answer is yes.

*If any boxes are left unchecked, it's important to consider if agritourism is right for your business.*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you enjoy entertaining guests or having visitors?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you like crowds?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can you create a warm, safe, & inviting atmosphere for people visiting your operation?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can you manage the additional business responsibilities (e.g., marketing, employee management, customer relations)?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you willing to create the ideal "experience" for your customers?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you willing to work and "entertain" visitors on weekends, evenings, and holidays, when they are most often available to come to your operation?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you thought about what "success" will look like for your operation offerings?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you have a friend, family member, or business advisor with whom you can talk about goals and how a new venture might affect your operations?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can you take the time to look at your farm from an outsider's perspective and make changes so that it is more accommodating of visitors?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you willing to keep detailed income and expense records for each type of event offered?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you interested in exploring new marketing techniques and resources to help you communicate your agritourism offerings?

Figure 1. Agritourism Checklist<sup>6</sup>

## Other Resources for Starting Agritourism Operations

*Click name for more information.*

- NC Agritourism Network Association: <https://nc-ana.org/resources>
- NC State Agritourism: <https://tourism.ces.ncsu.edu/agritourism/>

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1. Rozier Rich, S., S. Xu, C. Barbieri, and C. Gil Arroyo. 2012. *Agritourism, Farm Visits, Agro-tourism: Oh my! Do Farmers, Residents, and Extension Faculty Speak the Same Language?* AG-768. North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Raleigh, NC.

2. Xu, S., C. Barbieri, S. Rozier Rich, E. Seekamp, and D. Morais. 2014. *How Beneficial Is Agritourism? North Carolina Farmers and Residents Respond.* AG-797. North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Raleigh, NC.

3. Brune, S., Knollenberg, W., Barbieri, C., Stevenson, K., Reilly, C., Strand, R. & Driscoll, L. 2021. *Cultivating Local Foods Consumers: Using Agritourism to Promote Local Foods.* AG-894. North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Raleigh, NC.

4. Leeds, R. & Barret, E. 2021. *Awesome Customer Service Handout.* The Ohio State University Extension Service, Columbus, OH.

5. Knollenberg, W., Barbieri, C., Yeager, E., & Harrison, J., 2023. *Visitor Profiles Inform the Development of Oyster Tourism in North Carolina.* NC Sea Grant, Raleigh, NC. AG-950. North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Raleigh, NC.

6. The Farm-Based Education Network, Shelburne Farms, University of Vermont Extension. 2018. *A Guide to Successful Agritourism Enterprises.* University of Vermont Extension, Burlington, VT.