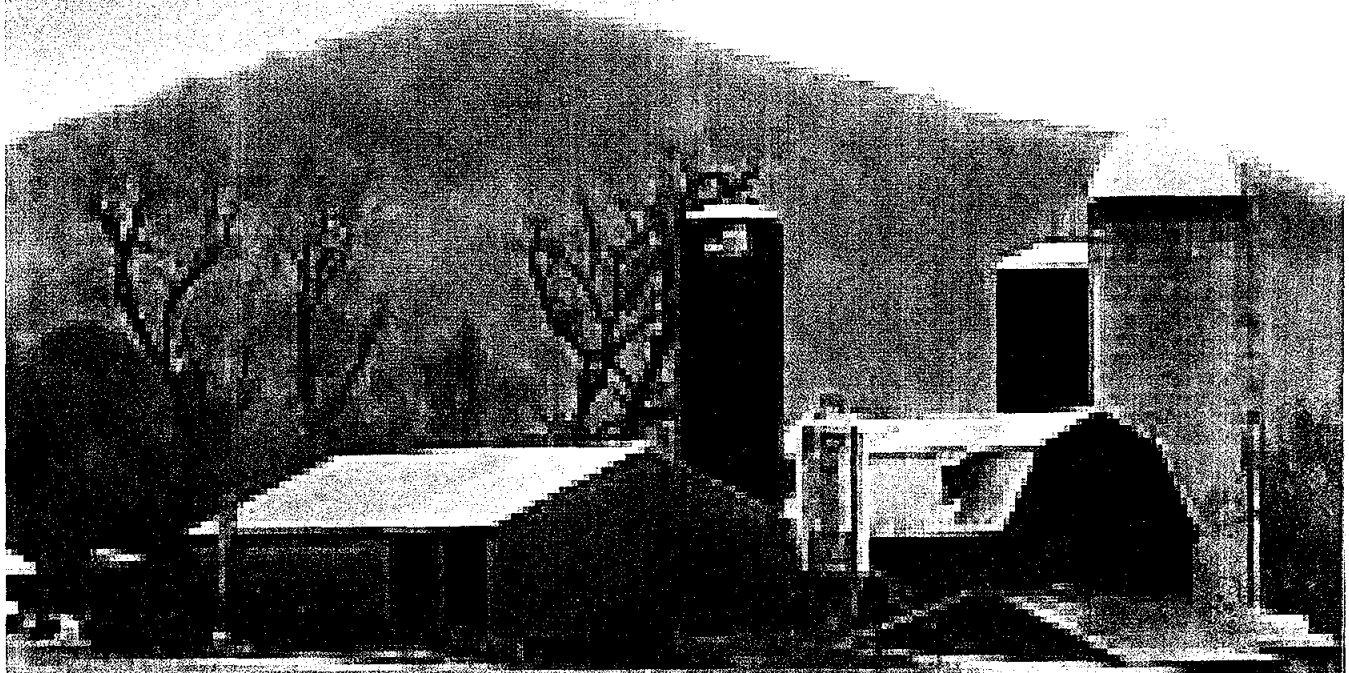


# **Agri-tourism:**

## **A Vacation to Rural America**



**8<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> Grade General  
Agriculture**

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Have you ever dreamed of the perfect getaway? The islands of the Caribbean, backpacking through Europe, and the beaches of Australia are a few of the many common attractions considered to be an ideal break from everyday life. Many people have their own idea of a dream vacation. However, whether we know it or not, you don't even have to leave Oklahoma to experience a great vacation.

More and more people in urban and rural areas alike are visiting the farmland and small-towns of the United States. This type of tourism that is continuing to grow in popularity is aptly named Agri-tourism. Touring agricultural sites and farms is nothing new. Although when most people think of travel destinations, a farm or rural area may not be the first place that comes to mind.

Just what exactly does agri-tourism consist of? The answer is just about any agriculture related activity you can imagine. Agri-tourism can involve anything from hands-on education of how a farm is operated, to amusement events such as cornfield mazes or hunting trips. The possibilities are endless, and farmers all across America are taking advantage of these new opportunities.

Statistics show that Agri-tourism has already been extremely profitable, and has potential to do even more. A study composed by the Travel Industry Association of America reveals that the number of American adults that have traveled to the rural United States within the past three years is at 62 percent. Eighty-six percent of these 86.8 million people were traveling for leisure purposes.

How can something so common for those of us that have grown up on a farm be so exciting to others? Different interests offer different causes for the enthusiasm about agri-tourism. Believe it or not, there are many people my age in rural Oklahoma that haven't even touched an animal larger than a cat or dog. For this reason, petting zoos and educational programs for youth are very popular. But young people aren't the only ones that have often been sheltered from farms or ranches. There are thousands of adults who have never traveled outside urban areas that would love to experience what you and I may take for granted everyday.

There are many farmers and ranchers who are interested in adding tourism to their list of farm services, but are not quite sure where to begin. First, one must assess how much support they plan to receive from tourism. It is very common for agri-tourism to serve as a supplementary enterprise, and is only operated occasionally. For instance, a cattle rancher may invite

tourists to visit his ranch and learn about cattle once a month. On the other hand, there are many people that have chosen tourism and recreation to be their primary source of income. Bed and Breakfasts, dude ranches, and farm stays are mostly examples of primary enterprises.

Once you decide how agri-tourism fits into your plan of business, you're ready to learn what and how to begin. It's important to choose an activity that is unique to the area. Perhaps taking a tour of area farms involved in agri-tourism would assist in finding ideas for your own farm. Being consumer-minded and considering what activity would interest you and others is a practice that should help your farm succeed. You ultimately must evaluate how you and your family could accommodate guests to your own household.

There are many that still have doubts about whether or not their farm could be a success. How, in a rural area, can I sell to consumers what they may interact with on a daily basis? Just ask Robert Haney of Boswell, Oklahoma. When it comes to agri-tourism, Robert seems to do it all. On a farm that started three years ago with just a cedar sawmill, that same farm now includes a pumpkin patch, petting zoo, hayrides and more. Robert has invited several area elementary schools to his farm, but has just as many adult customers as he does children. He plans to quadruple in size and add a

pick your own fruit and vegetable field this year. In a matter of two weeks, Robert's farm has been known to attract approximately six to seven thousand visitors. By adding a twist to his farming activities, Robert makes ordinary rural life exciting and fun.

People like Robert Haney are living proof that agri-tourism in any area can be successful when you utilize the resources that you are given. But the benefits go farther than simply boosting your income. By taking the risk of facing some disadvantages, you may in turn receive numerous benefits that go beyond making money. Including agri-tourism to your farm can allow you to share challenges and fulfillments that you experience every day. Also, you develop important personal and communication skills by interacting with other people.

With its central location and farming and cowboy heritage, Oklahoma has become an ideal location for agri-tourism development. It's no wonder that tourism accounts for 3.5 billion dollars of the state's annual income. But one of Oklahoma's most well known and leading industries is agriculture, which generates 7 billion dollars a year. Adding those two industries together could create an endless amount of opportunities for Oklahoma.

George Washington once said, "I know of no pursuit in which more real and important services can be rendered to any country than by

improving its agriculture...” One of the best things about agri-tourism is that it offers farmers an alternative source of income and boosts rural development. The interest Americans have for agriculture not only gives producers more revenue, it also gives them a sense of pride. So remember, the next time you’re looking for a great vacation, the answer just might be a farm or ranch right here in the great state of Oklahoma.

Thank you

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# Speaker Certification

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## State Public Speaking Career Development Event Oklahoma FFA Association

I hereby certify that I meet all the eligibility requirements for participation in the state FFA public speaking event for the current year as set forth by the State Executive Committee and State Staff.

My speech entitled AGRI TOURISM: A VACATION TO RURAL AMERICA  
in the 8-10 GENERAL AGRICULTURE division is the result of my own effort and ability. It is understood that I am encouraged to utilize all available training facilities of my local school in developing my speaking abilities and that I may obtain facts and working data from any source. However, when information from other sources is used, such as direct quotes or phrases, specific dates, figures, or other materials, it must be marked in "quotes" in the manuscript and identified in the bibliography at the end of the manuscript. Failure to do so represents plagiarism and will automatically lead to my disqualification.

3-24-05

Date

Mason Jones  
Participant's Full Signature

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