



Let's talk Agritourism

Jane Eckert, a national speaker, author and agritourism expert, is principal of Eckert AgriMarketing (www.eckertagrimarketing.com), a firm that helps farmers develop their operations into tourist destinations, and CEO of **RuralBounty.com**, a consumer based directory of agritourism farms in North America. *Kansas Living* visited with Eckert about the basics.

KL: What is agritourism?

Eckert: In simple terms, agritourism is the crossroads of tourism and agriculture: when the public visits working farms, ranches or wineries to buy products, enjoy entertainment, participate in outdoor activities, shop in a country store, eat a meal or make overnight stays.

KL: Who are agritourists? Is there a recognizable profile?

Eckert: People of all ages are agritourists. Based on the offerings of the farm or ranch, activities can range in age that spread over generations.

KFB Legal Foundation attorney Mike Irvin offers tips for farmers interested in agritourism (see page 22).

KL: Does location matter?

Eckert: Location matters based on the business you select. For example, if you would like to offer hunting, a wide, open area in the country is far more ideal than just 10 minutes from the city. With that being said, people will travel a distance if they want to experience what you have to offer or you can give them an experience they cannot get anywhere else.

KL: What are some of the common activities you see in agritourism?

Eckert: Some common activities you see in agritourism are pumpkin patches, corn mazes, ranch experiences with animals, unique hunting environments and wineries.

KL: What do you see as being unique to Kansas?

Eckert: Kansas has always been recognized for its vast prairie. Developing unique experiences pertaining to the prairie, such as incorporating Laura Ingalls Wilder, prairie storytelling, stage coach rides, sod home visits, burning of the prairie grass or even western

music by a campfire, will help people understand the unique opportunity of Kansas. The more unique and authentic you make these activities, the more the public will enjoy them.

KL: For the farmer: Why should I get involved?

Eckert: Farmers should get involved because agritourism is a means to supplement family income. Agritourism is also a means to attract the family's younger generations and this unique business enterprise will make those generations more interested to return to the family farm.

KL: For a farmer interested in exploring this option, what's the first step?

Eckert: The first step would be to contact the Kansas Department of Commerce. The state of Kansas published a book titled *Growing Agritourism in Kansas: A Starter Manual for Farmers and Ranchers*. There are copies available to purchase for \$15 (which includes tax and shipping). If you would like a copy, contact Sarah Larison, the agritourism program manager, at (785) 296-8132. Before you begin, sit down and talk with your family to identify your personal interests and how you can incorporate your land assets into a new business enterprise.

KL: How long before we set up the bleachers on the side of the wheat field and charge admission to watch the combines?

Eckert: People will pay to participate in a unique and special experience if it is something they have never done before. Kansans have even charged people for rock climbing up a silo and moving cattle along the range. Sitting on bleachers and watching a combine might become a possibility.