

You've heard the term, "sustainable agriculture," but do you know what it means? Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) suggests that sustainable agriculture has three broad goals: (1) profit over the long term, (2) stewardship of our nation's land, air and water and (3) quality of life for farmers, ranchers and their communities.

There are many ways to accomplish these goals and agritourism embodies all three. The latest edition of **The New American Farmer** shares how farmers and ranchers across the United States are practicing sustainable agriculture. Many are choosing to use agritourism to accomplish their goals.

Agritourism is a business operation on a working farm, ranch or agricultural enterprise that offers educational and fun experiences for visitors while generating supplemental income for the owner. Visitors participate in friendly "discovery" and learning activities in natural or agricultural settings.

Agritourism operations tell the agriculture story, showing people who are "new to the farm" where our food and fiber come from. Today, most families are at least three generations removed from the family farm and without agritourism tours these generations will not understand or appreciate where their food and fiber comes from.

Agritourism operations have spread throughout the United States and farmers in Louisiana have been opening their doors to friends, family and guests for generations, but have not called it "agritourism." I grew up on a farm and approached my dad once about offering tours and overnight stays to friends and family in exchange for money. My dad could not conceive of the idea because he thought his role was to share agriculture with others at no cost.

Today, my dad's generation has given way to a new generation that inherited the family farm and rather than sell it are offering opportunities for people to be part of the farm life and experience a life that begins early in the morning and ends late in the afternoon. These experiences include baling hay, feeding the cows, picking up eggs, fishing in the pond, riding horses and harvesting vegetables from the field.

Countless vacationers are seeking this "working vacation." People have seen the monuments, ridden the thrill rides at amusement parks, played on the beach and gazed at expansive mountain ranges, but until now they haven't planted crops in the fields or milked the cows.

Realizing the potential and interest in agritourism, the Louisiana Legislature in 2008 passed an agritourism limited liability law to provide protection for farmers, ranchers and other agricultural operators who choose to offer agritourism activities to guests. This law is administered by the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry who certifies operations. Certifications are granted following approval of a plan of operation that is reviewed by the LSU AgCenter. The plan is completed by agritourism applicants and the reviewer checks for use of best management practices to prevent accidents and injuries while visitors are in the agricultural setting. There is no cost for certification from either agency.

To learn more about how you can engage in sustainable agriculture, visit our webpage, www.lsuagcenter.com/agritourism or contact Dora Ann Hatch, Agritourism Coordinator with the LSU AgCenter to learn more.