



Farm-Stay Tourism on your Small Forestland for Supplemental Income: A Brief Introduction to the Concept for Landowners in the Pacific Northwest

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Overview

This document provides a brief overview on how small forestland owners might generate supplemental income by offering tourists a chance to stay overnight on their land. In Europe it is quite common to be able to stay overnight on working farms, forests, and ranches. This tradition is commonly referred to as a farm-stay. Farm-stays are rarer in the United States, but they are growing in popularity as a means to generate supplemental income for family farms. Farm-stays can range from a simple room in someone's home, to a separate cabin on the property, to something more akin to a bed and breakfast. This factsheet is intended to provide a brief overview of what a farm-stay might look like for forestland owners, some of the benefits of such an enterprise, and things to consider when establishing a farm-stay operation.

Benefits of Farm-Stays

Farm-stays can offer a significant source of on-farm income for forestland owners, who might otherwise need to find off-farm employment. Farm-stays can help rural economies and communities by creating jobs associated with farm-stays and by boosting business and tourism in the local community. In addition to providing an additional source of income to landowners, the benefits of farm-stays include preserving the heritage and culture of forestry, farming, family traditions, and land stewardship; protecting small forestland owners from losing their land and workforce; building understanding and strengthening the connections between urban and rural residents; educating the public about the environment and forest resources; and protecting open space, wildlife habitat, and land, water and air quality. Landowners may also receive the added benefit of extra labor if guests are allowed to, and are willing, to help with safe forest farm activities.

Is there a Market for Farm-Stays?

Tourism in Oregon and Washington ranks as one of the largest industries in the Pacific Northwest. For example, tourism is Washington's third largest industry with revenues exceeding \$15 billion in 2010¹. The demand for nature-based tourism is growing. As the proportion of Americans living in urban areas



Photos from Leaping Lamb Farm, Alsea, OR.

Farm-Stay Example: Leaping Lamb Farm, Alsea, OR

Scotty and Greg Jones established their farm-stay at Leaping Lamb Farm in Alsea, OR about 5 years ago. They grow hay and pasture-raised lamb for sale on their 60 acres. They added a farm-stay to their operation to supplement the negative cash flow as small producers, and have experienced high demand and steady income. They have a single, 700 sq. ft. cabin that sleeps up to 6 people. They provide a continental breakfast, but leave lunch and dinner up to the guests (the cabin includes a kitchen). Guests have the option of helping with farm chores (e.g., collecting eggs, feeding the sheep, brushing the donkey) or simply relaxing. Their farm-stay operation currently nets about \$18,000 per year.

¹ Dean Runyan Associates. 2011. Washington State travel impacts, 1991-2010. Prepared for the Washington State Department of Commerce, Tourism Office. January 2011.

increases, there is growing demand for rural retreats. Leisure time for most Americans is decreasing, and people are taking shorter vacations that are closer to home.² The growing popularity of U-pick farms, pumpkin patches and corn mazes are testimony to the growing demand among urbanites to reconnect with the land. A weekend away at a nearby forest farm is an attractive tourist option. Recreational opportunities are endless and might include gathering berries, mushrooms, truffles or other edible or medicinal plants, or decorative forest products; camping; hiking; fishing; hunting; biking; swimming; making decorative wreaths from products collected in the forest; bird-watching or simply relaxing with a glass of wine. Some guests might enjoy helping with farm chores, such as feeding livestock, collecting eggs, or shearing sheep.



Harvesting wild huckleberries can be an enjoyable recreational activity.

How do I know if a Farm-Stay will work for me?

Establishing a successful farm-stay will require not only having an aesthetically pleasing place that will attract tourists, but hosts who are comfortable talking and interacting with their guests. You will need to consider how much of the work you and your family want to take on (cleaning, cooking, education, reservations), the scale at which you wish to operate (camp-sites, cabins, or bed-and-breakfast-style accommodations), and whether you will be hiring employees. Other considerations include how much you want and need to invest in building or improving structures for guests, zoning regulations, liability insurance, and marketing.

Steps to get started

Do some simple research on the web to find examples to help stimulate ideas about what you think is possible; begin to outline your ideas; possibly contact a local extension agent to share your idea for feedback and to get advice on other people you will want to speak with and how to best do so, for example, the county zoning office). The FarmStay US website (<http://www.farmstayus.com/>) has resources for farmers interested in starting farm-stays (including a list of important considerations), in addition to listing over 950 registered homestays in the U.S. Washington State University Extension has a publication on agritourism, including farm-stays (<http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb2020/eb2020.pdf>). The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture recently published a how-to manual on farm-stays, available free for download (<http://www.misa.umn.edu/Publications/FarmstayManual/index.htm>).

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² Beus, Curtis. 2008. Agritourism: Cultivating Tourists on the Farm. Pullman: Washington State University Extension. 32 p.