

# Agritourism for Agricultural Advocacy

By Carissa McNamara, Wild Horse Lavender

My husband and I are multi-generational farmers and were trained, “old school,” using “traditional,” methods of agriculture. We raised cattle, alfalfa, and cutting horses. We were taught to throw as much into the ground as we could get away with and hold maximum yield as our personal agrarian maxims. “Fence-line to fence-line,” is how we were raised. Input equaled output...until it didn't.



Ten years ago, the generational gap, “traditional” practice gap, and knowledge gap was noticeable. The ground was tired, we were tired, and there were fewer and fewer of us at the coffee shop in the morning. Not to mention, finding summer help on the farm became non-existent.

We and our fellow farmers and ranchers were getting older, and there were no young farmers to replace us, or youth willing to work the summers. The question of the hour became, “How do we get youth and community involved in the farm to preserve our agricultural way of life?”

Intuitively, we knew it was going to take a different crop. If we hold a tour on, “Cattle and Alfalfa,” it brings our own folks to the field. We had to change our audience. We wanted to reach those consuming our food, and interested in where their food comes from. “What about Lavender?” I said before we even knew if it was a perennial or annual. “You’d better do some research,” my husband said, and the rest is history.

We didn't know what we were creating the first few years. We just knew we needed more folks besides us at the advocacy table. As the years have pressed forward we have become more intentional with the farm and what we would like to see for the future.

Now, the farm is a platform for advocacy. Our future and that of our children, literally relies on our ability to produce food, and we are most interested in educating folks on how that food is produced, and the spiritual connection we have to that food. Our son has also taught us that



Sustainable Agriculture  
Research & Education

life isn't just about food. It is about beauty. A year ago, he said, "When you guys die, I might turn this whole place into a flower farm, that is why you can't sell the tractor." We laughed and said, "we can help you plant a few flowers now."

Twenty years ago, we only planted what we "used." What our son and the flowers have taught us, is that there is an entire history of crops that thousands of years ago had use. We now plant to tell ancient stories of where cultivation began. We plant rows of Red Garnet Amaranth so that we can teach youth that 8,000 years ago this was a very important grain crop to the Aztecs, and that the Spanish outlawed the grain to gain control of the region. We also plant Dahlias, another Aztec favorite, whose tubers are edible. Another Aztec favorite are Zinnias. We learned that if you want to instill children with the love of gardening, there is no better way than to have them grow Zinnias. Whether you are in an apartment in Boston or D.C., or messing around in Grandma's garden, Zinnias will create a soft spot for both tenacity and beauty. We also plant Sunflowers a crop that Native Americans domesticated long before corn. We plant Blue Globe Thistle because they have it planted at Mount Vernon and some of our fondest memories are visiting the farms and homes of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.



Now, as you walk through our gardens you will find species that all tell a story, are drought tolerant, and also have substantial historical meaning. And of course, everything is medicinal.

Our call to others as you grow agritourism on your own farms, is to be intentional. The history of agriculture, and its significance in the future are an essential thread connecting us all. Hone your story, then create what you want to share.

What is so unique about the farm is we never need to cut and paste, or use AI, to create. We simply need to marvel in it, and then share.



More Information: [www.wildhorselavender.com](http://www.wildhorselavender.com)

Email Us: [wildhorselavender@gmail.com](mailto:wildhorselavender@gmail.com)

MT Agritourism: [www.montanaagritourism.com](http://www.montanaagritourism.com)