

# Summary takeaways from Montana Agritourism Summer 2023 Interviews:

1. Biggest takeaway that people have had is building relationships with others doing something similar or something completely different, and in either case, it's inspirational. The group has been eye-opening for how diverse agriculture actually is in Montana.
2. Insurance came up in almost every conversation, but, Susan also correctly pointed out that she is not hearing anyone say that it's a complete and utter barrier. As much as we talk about it, no one is saying they can't do Agritourism until they get the insurance figured out. I would love to chat about this in person, because I have some thoughts as to why that is.
3. Another thing almost everyone wanted discussed more in the sessions was a definition of Agritourism. Everyone either said this, or they wanted more definitions around the term, or they were grateful for the work we had already done in defining it (the Turners, perhaps the most established Agritourism leaders, said they didn't even realize that's what they're mostly doing until the first meeting where we did talk about definitions). **It may be worth spending some time in October working on a definition that the group can live with. Maybe a good activity would be have people break into small groups and come up with a definition for "Agritourism," then come together and pick one and work it out, being careful to list out who all might be excluded from that definition** (e.g. Susan pointed out she wasn't sure what Baisch's is doing counts as Agritourism if there isn't an educational component, so that might be something we discuss as a group). Then have groups break out again and discuss what a mission for the MT Agritourism Association might look like. Even just starting with bullet points of what needs to be stated outright for the group to have a clear focus and goal.
4. Some, not all, but some, of the fellows are still struggling with using social media to get the word out about what they're doing. A few suggested this could be a good topic for the conference, but they feel it's been covered enough in our meetings. Otherwise, for the most part, it sounds like folks have the people they want coming to their place, aside from like the Barkleys, who don't yet have Agritourism up and running, and Tienna's wedding thing, which probably just needs a wedding to happen there.
5. Communication among agricultural professionals varies by demographic, as we would expect, but by and large, **radio** is the best way to get the word out. A sustained podcast about MT Agritourism would certainly have some interest, but it would need to be something quick that was well-maintained for the long-haul. Radio ads would not be so effective, but local radio interviews should certainly be a part of the campaign to announce the association, the conference, and how people can find resources about starting and building sustainable Agritourism.

1. Extension is a valued resource, but not as trusted or as highly valued as Farm Bureau and Farmers Union.
2. Word of mouth, face-to-face, especially at fairs and functions, is still the number one way people get information. This makes me think that once we have a website, giving our fellows business cards with the site on them and our logo might be a really great thing for them to start handing them out to folks in their community.
3. Many fellows want more connection between the professionals doing similar things across the state, especially for marketing purposes, so for example, Tamara and I talked about the Montana Cut Flower Growers Association, but how cool it would be if people could see a map of all the flower farms they could actually tour across the state. Hailey mentioned this in a couple different formats, even list all the Agritourism things you can do with a drop-down menu you can select what you're looking for, then see all the places you can attend a farm-to-table dinner in September, or everywhere you can see sheep in the pasture, etc. to help visitors to the state plan a whole tour around Agritourism. It would be very cool to have this work in conjunction with the parks somehow, so people aren't just going to the parks, but can see all the places they could stop on their drive across Montana to Glacier and get local food and products.
4. Seeing what different people are doing in different places, when framed properly, can help Agritourism professionals or people wanting to branch into agritourism see what assets they actually do have. For example, it came up a lot with the Barkleys and the Canans and Tamara to a slightly lesser extent that the incredibly rural nature of their site is actually an asset that they had been seeing as a drawback. But people from even "rural" Ohio would pay good money to experience a place where they can actually see stars and disappear from cell service for a few days. They just have to think about what they're doing differently from what the Turners are able to offer. And vice versa. The Turners sometimes think about the drawbacks to being right in the city and their limited space, but there are obvious benefits to being in the middle of Missoula with a dense population able to support small-scale agriculture year-round.

Ideas for the conference:

- Lots of breakout groups so that people can really workshop what's going to work for them.
- Lots of workshops more than panels so that people can work on what they need.
- Social Media
- Telling your Story
- Grant Writing
- Business Planning
- Insurance
- General Marketing
- On-site education

- Use this first conference as a time to gather information on what the association needs to do. What is even needed in order to make Agritourism really happen in Montana
- Legal help, from insurance to wills to policy (someone from a hunting or fishing outfitting company...maybe the llama people?)
- Entertainment to get folks to loosen up a bit
- Farm tours! (YES, let's talk to Bodhi, Alpacas of MT, Amaltheia (I think they do F-T things?), 4 Daughters Farm, Gallatin Valley Botanical/Rocky Creek Farm, many others we could surely get on board)

Other takeaways that are not immediately important for the Fall Seminar or planning of the association, but that I found really interesting from a research standpoint:

1. Connecting with human beings is how everything gets done, from selling ears of sweet corn to building a network of flower farmers, there is no silver bullet to communication, because there is no one size fits all. People want to know where their food comes from, and people want to know where their information comes from. They want to know who they're doing business with. There is such a glut of available information out there, that in these tight-knit communities, the most trusted information is what your neighbor knows based on their own experience, second only to what you know based on your own experience.
2. Almost all the fellows mentioned that a goal with engaging visitors is education. That's encouraging and exciting. These producers and professionals want people to know where their food comes from. Again, human connection. As much as there is the pioneer spirit in the West, and as romanticized as that may be for folks on the coasts, and as strong as we hear those tensions between people watching Yellowstone and wanting that experience, there is a real desire to capitalize on that romanticization, not just for profit, but as a vessel for educating people about food systems.
3. The sense of competition among producers may be a barrier to forming a strong association like this, but I don't really think so. It came up a few times, but mostly, it sounds like that was the attitude in the past, and that now, producers, especially producers interested in Agritourism, understand that being connected and supporting one another's work is an important part of making Montana Agritourism a functional sector of the economy, and that rising tide will lift all boats. When marketing the association, we may need to drive this point home for some folks, that we are stronger together, that being part of the association means you have advocates for what you're doing across the state, so that when someone is passing through Glendive on their way to Glacier, they might hear from their lunch server that they should really check out a farm outside of Missoula.
4. This group is really wonderful and has the potential to do some incredible work across the state. The very cool thing for me about Agritourism is also that people will

take home the lessons about where their food comes from, so the education that happens on a ranch in Glendale goes back to Pennsylvania where people can seek out their local farms close to home. It can bring in revenue for our state, help keep small family farms small and sustainable, and have a ripple effect to other places in the world where people will start to support their local producers more as part of this larger, global movement.

The Turners also really want everyone to go to Italy next summer :) I'm 1000% on board with that plan!