



# Placemaking in the Pasture

*Strategies for growing agritourism in the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region*

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## BACKGROUND

As the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region (WMR) develops the region's first growth plan, *Plan20-50*, it has the opportunity to innovatively address challenges facing its municipalities. The region is facing increased urbanization, which threatens agricultural land surrounding the City of Winnipeg. It is also entering an era where resiliency to climate change, economic shocks, and future pandemics is increasingly important. Developing a strategy to strengthen the region's agritourism sector could produce outcomes that tackle some of these issues while contributing to the WMR's objectives.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What opportunities and risks are associated with growing the agritourism sector in the WMR?

What barriers do producers encounter in offering agritourism goods and services in the WMR?

What lessons can be learned from agritourism strategies in other jurisdictions?

What policies and tools can planners utilize to facilitate the growth of agritourism in the WMR?

# Methods

## POLICY ANALYSIS

Provincial Land Use Policies and the nine development plans in the WMR were scanned to gain an understanding of the regulatory framework

## PRECEDENT ANALYSIS

Ontario's agritourism strategies were examined at the provincial, regional, and municipal scale to identify best practices

## INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 participants, including 6 academics, 5 actors from Ontario, 5 producers, 5 planners, 2 food policy representatives and an economic development representative

# Context

Agriculture is an economic driver for both the province and the region. However, the number of farms is decreasing, while the average size of farms is increasing, which points to farm consolidation. As farmers move into retirement, there will be a turnover of farmland assets in the future. In the WMR, this land faces the threat of encroaching development due to its proximity to the City of Winnipeg. Agritourism presents an opportunity to improve the viability of farms to reduce the loss of farmland while producing co-benefits. The WMR has conducted a regional tourism study that suggests there is potential to develop this sector, noting that broadly, there is an increased demand for agritourism concepts, and a wide range of agritourism assets in the region, but lack a strategy linking them together.

# Policy Analysis

## PROVINCIAL LAND USE POLICIES

Provincial Land Use Policies recommend that municipalities encourage producers to diversify through agritourism to supplement their incomes.

## MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

While a number of development plans included goals or objectives of supporting and strengthening the agricultural sector, and some noted the importance of diversification, only Springfield's development plan explicitly permitted agritourism. The plans also put an emphasis on maintaining the integrity of agricultural land uses. As a result, producers may lack clarity on whether agritourism uses are permitted.

# Precedent Analysis

## POLICY CLARIFICATION

Ontario's Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has published guidelines on permitted uses in prime agricultural areas that offer policy clarification.

## SYSTEMS APPROACH

The Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) regional plan identifies an agricultural system and agri-food network that allows decision-makers to take a systems approach.

## COLLABORATION

The GGH enables farmers through interdisciplinary committees that highlight agricultural perspectives, and organizations that offer leadership and platforms for collaboration

# Opportunities

Interview participants saw agritourism as a way to capitalize on a growing consumer interest in local food and business. Agritourism also presents an opportunity to showcase Manitoba's agricultural roots and identity that it has maintained to this day. Farms in the WMR benefit from close proximity to the City of Winnipeg, from which they can draw visitors. This proximity has also resulted in land fragmentation around the City, creating smaller parcels suitable for agritourism uses.

*"We don't want the zoning bylaw to be so permissive that it opens up loopholes for uses that really are not agriculturally related"*

## Barriers

Participants saw a lack of infrastructure, a lack of leadership, and red tape as barriers to growing the agritourism sector. Participants mentioned that the growth of agritourism may necessitate additional infrastructure, as many roads are gravel and can't accommodate the influx of traffic. Producers shared stories of the difficulties in getting their operation off the ground, particularly in navigating a complicated policy landscape. And, participants felt that there was a lack of leadership in facilitating and promoting agritourism in the region.

*"[Agritourism] is one of the ways that farms can resist the pressure to consolidate and in many cases, to discontinue operations"*

## Risks

Participants identified start-up costs, possible liabilities, and conflicts with adjacent land uses, like noise and odor concerns as potential risks associated with agritourism. It was also noted that agritourism may threaten the integrity of prime agricultural land by introducing commercial activity into areas with high-capability soils.

## Benefits

Benefits identified by participants included community-building, education, engaging new farmers, farm sustainability, resiliency, and economic development. Agritourism was considered a way of educating people about rural lifestyles, food and the environment, makes farming more accessible, can provide career opportunities to a new generation of farmers, and improve the viability of farms and food security, among other benefits.

## MARKET RESEARCH

Because of the risks associated with agritourism, participants saw value in gaining a better understanding of the market, and assets in the region. It is recommended that the WMR update its inventory of assets, and explore additional precedents to identify best practices, with specific attention to those that address the risks and barriers present in the region.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

Participants observed that informal networks were important in sharing knowledge and building capacity in the agritourism sector. It is recommended that the Province provide funding that supports associations in hosting a forum for operators to meet, exchange ideas, and share experiences with agritourism. The WMR can supplement this by creating an online portal to streamline approval processes and a toolkit to assist agritourism operators with getting their business started.

## POLICY

In learning from the experiences in Ontario, having a clear definition of permitted uses in prime agricultural areas can offer guidance to municipalities and operators. Explicitly permitting agritourism with conditions can clear up confusion, while maintaining the integrity of high-capability soils. In developing these policies, it is important that they are consistent across levels of government and municipalities.

## LINKAGES

Participants recognized linkages between agritourism operations and among complementary attractions as a means of promoting economic development within rural communities. Regional Tourism Organizations can facilitate this by developing route-based tourism. This approach packages destinations together, and may involve the creation of a regional themed trail, or sample itineraries that offer ideas on how visitors can spend a day or a weekend in a certain region.

## MARKETING

Aggregate promotion of the agritourism assets is an important component of showcasing the region's agricultural identity. Agritourism marketing strategies could include TV advertisement or print materials that promote these destinations, as well as wayfinding tools, like maps and signage to assist potential customers in locating agritourism attractions.