

Questions and Answers from the Agritourism Twilight Q&A: Operating During the COVID-19 Pandemic Webinar

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FOREWORD

A webinar titled Agritourism Twilight Q&A: *Operating During the COVID-19 Pandemic* was held on August 6, 2020 in response to a large number of questions received by the Center for Profitable Agriculture and Tennessee Department of Agriculture staff on the subject. Topics discussed included the current market situation, developing your plan, liability considerations, cleaning and sanitation, communicating with customers, and resources from the State of Tennessee. Amy Ladd from Lucky Ladd Farms also shared her experiences from operating through the summer and plans for fall. A total of 60 people registered for the session with 28 devices logging in the live webinar (in some cases, multiple people were participating from one device). The [recording](#) of the webinar and [slides](#) are available online. A fact sheet was developed with links to [additional resources](#). This fact sheet provides suggestions, information or resources for many of the questions posed before or during the session.

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CONTENTS

- 1) [Can farms open to the public?](#)
- 2) [Will online ticketing be necessary?](#)
- 3) [Should we open corn boxes? Offer hayrides?](#)
- 4) [What requirements do we need to follow for our concessions?](#)
- 5) [Are food vendors or food trucks allowed?](#)
- 6) [Should public restrooms be made available during Covid-19?](#)
- 7) [How do we encourage social distancing?](#)
- 8) [How do we properly clean and sanitize?](#)
- 9) [How do you sanitize raw/unfinished wood?](#)
- 10) [What products do we use to clean and sanitize? Do the products have to be CDC approved?](#)
- 11) [Where do we purchase cleaning products and supplies?](#)
- 12) [Does it help to have participants in agritourism activities sign a waiver?](#)
- 13) [What types of additional expenses are we likely to experience?](#)
- 14) [What should we expect for attendance?](#)
- 15) [Has any further research come to light on the zoonotic possibility of cross contamination from humans to our farm species?](#)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1) Can farms open to the public?

Attractions and venues are currently allowed to open in Tennessee. Businesses have a duty of care to maintain premises that are reasonably safe. Employee and customer trust are vital. Operators should institute protocols and practices to follow [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC), [Tennessee Pledge](#) and local guidelines, recommendations and requirements. IAPPA has released [reopening guidance](#) for the global attractions industry that may also be helpful.

It will be imperative for operators to plan, communicate, implement and track/record procedures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. These procedures may include employee health screening, employee training, cleaning/disinfecting/sanitizing plans, handwashing and/or sanitizing stations, methods to reduce contact and implement social distancing, communication strategies, and incident response plan in the event of exposure or positive cases. Check out a fact sheet developed with links to [additional resources](#).

Agritourism operators will need to regularly monitor and adjust as recommendations and requirements continue to change. For example, some counties have mask mandates in place currently, while other counties do not.

2) Will online ticketing be necessary?

Online ticketing may provide several benefits to agritourism operations in the midst of COVID-19. Requiring customers to pre-purchase timed tickets enables operators to stagger arrival times of customers to prevent lines at admission gates and may help spread people out across the property. Operators can limit the number of tickets sold to control capacity and better enable social distancing. Pre-sales of tickets reduces contact with cashiers at admissions and may assist in determining how many staff are needed each day.

There are several online ticketing vendors used by agritourism operators including:

- [TicketSpice](#)
- [Checkfront](#)
- [Farm Pass](#)
- [Interactive Ticketing](#)
- [Yapsody](#)
- [FareHarbor](#)

3) Should we open corn boxes? Offer hayrides?

Agritourism operators should evaluate each activity/attraction to determine if they can be opened safely following cleaning, social distancing and other guidelines to reasonably reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Operators should also consider customer perceptions of the safety of each activity. Corn boxes may be an attraction that would be difficult to clean and keep clean. In a survey of customers, one producer found nearly 60% of customer respondents were uncomfortable with letting their children play in a corn pit due to COVID-19.

Hayrides may be more farm/situation specific. Farms with larger wagons may be able to accommodate hayrides with safety protocol in place such as the wearing of masks, seating families or small groups together, social distancing from other parties, and sanitizing high touch areas between hayrides.

4) What requirements do we need to follow for our concessions?

Operators should develop and implement plans at a minimum to follow [CDC](#) and [Tennessee Pledge](#) guidelines for food service/restaurants and any local department of health requirements or suggestions. Guidelines include health screening of employees, increased employee hygiene practices, wearing of face coverings by employees, implementation of social distancing and cleaning and sanitation protocol.

The Tennessee Pledge guidelines recommend all food handlers complete [ServSafe COVID-19 training](#). ServSafe is offering free trainings for reopening and additional modules specific to takeout and delivery. Trainings are offered via brief videos in both English and Spanish. The trainings discuss symptoms of COVID-19, methods to stay healthy, and methods to keep guests safe. Those who complete the trainings are able to download a Record of Training. The [National Restaurant Association](#) has additional information and resources for the restaurant industry that could be helpful.

5) Are food vendors or food trucks allowed?

There are currently no state-wide restrictions in Tennessee preventing food service, food service vendors or food trucks. Operators should consult with local government resources and health department to determine if local restrictions are in place. Operators should require that vendors follow local, state and CDC recommendations for restaurants/food service at a minimum.

6) Should public restrooms be made available during Covid-19?

Public restrooms should be open if operations are open to customers beyond curbside pick-up or quick transactions. Restrooms should be stocked with hand soap, single-use paper towels for drying and no-touch trash cans. Hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol content may be provided. It may be helpful to display signs reminding patrons to properly wash/sanitize hands. Operators should be sure to restock, clean and disinfect restrooms regularly and keep and maintain records of restocking and cleaning efforts. Operators should remind customers to incorporate social distancing in restroom facilities, which may require limiting the number of people in a restroom at once. Operators may request that customers wear masks inside facilities including restrooms.

7) How do we encourage social distancing?

There are several methods to help encourage social distancing including:

- Post signage reminding people to social distance.
- Place some physical indicators in areas where lines may form – markings on the ground/floor, ropes with ribbons or signs at 6 feet intervals, etc.
- For indoor spaces, consider one-way traffic, spreading out displays and limiting the number of people in a space at one time.

8) How do we properly clean and sanitize?

It is important to begin with an understanding of basic terminology:

- Cleaning – removes dust, debris, and dirt from a surface by scrubbing, washing and rinsing
- Sanitizing – reduces the bacteria identified on the product's label on surfaces
- Disinfecting – destroys or inactivates both bacteria and viruses identified on product's label on hard, nonporous surfaces
- Disinfectants are the only products approved by EPA to kill viruses on hard surfaces

Start with cleaning using a detergent, soap and water. (A dirty surface cannot be sanitized or disinfected.) Use a disinfectant or sanitizer according to label instructions which includes appropriate use sites/surface types, precautionary statements for the protection of the person using the product, specific concentration, minimum wet contact time, and in some cases, rinsing, especially on food contact surfaces.

6 Steps for Safe & Effective Disinfectant Use

Step 1: Check that your product is EPA-approved
Find the EPA registration number on the product. Then, check to see if it is on EPA's list of approved disinfectants at: epa.gov/listn

Step 2: Read the directions
Follow the product's directions. Check "use sites" and "surface types" to see where you can use the product. Read the "precautionary statements."

Step 3: Pre-clean the surface
Make sure to wash the surface with soap and water if the directions mention pre-cleaning or if the surface is visibly dirty.

Step 4: Follow the contact time
You can find the contact time in the directions. The surface should remain wet the whole time to ensure the product is effective.

Step 5: Wear gloves and wash your hands
For disposable gloves, discard them after each cleaning. For reusable gloves, dedicate a pair to disinfecting COVID-19. Wash your hands after removing the gloves.

Step 6: Lock it up
Keep lids tightly closed and store out of reach of children.

Six Steps for Safe and Effective Disinfectant Use Poster available for download and printing.

A single chemical product may have different instructions for use as a surface sanitizer and disinfectant. Use the sanitizer instructions for direct food contact surfaces and the disinfectant instructions for non-food, high touch surfaces. ALWAYS follow the concentration and contact time instructions on the product's label EXACTLY! Higher concentrations are not more effective and can even be less effective (as is the case for bleach) and/or damaging to surfaces and people's skin.

The CDC provides recommendations for [cleaning and disinfecting](#) facilities.

9) How do you sanitize wood surfaces?

The CDC does not recommend cleaning and disinfection of wooden surfaces

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>).

10) What products do we use to clean and sanitize? Do the products have to be approved?

Products used for disinfecting should be chosen from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) [List N](#) for effectiveness against SARS-CoV-2. Operators can download the entire list or use the "new List N Tool" to search for information on a specific product by its registration number. (Do not look for the product name. Search by the EPA Registration Number that can be found on the label of a product.) The list provides specific information for each product include formulation type, type of surfaces the product may be used on, why the product is included on the list, and directions on how to use the product in order to kill SARS-CoV-2, including the appropriate contact time.

Disinfecting bleach is a readily available product that may be used for disinfection if used properly. Agritourism operators and staff should take care in rinsing bleach or choosing another product in places where bleach may come in contact with employee and guest clothing.

11) Where do we purchase cleaning products and supplies?

Cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment are in short supply. Operators should order supplies as soon as possible. Many products are backordered for significant periods of time. Products may be found at box stores, restaurant supply companies and janitorial supply companies such as:

- Grainger
- Uline
- Sysco
- Gordon Food Service
- Webstaurant.com
- Restaurantsupplier.com
- Ecolab
- Waxie
- Amazonbusiness.com
- CORECHEM (Knoxville)

12) Does it help to have participants in agritourism activities sign a waiver?

Waivers may be helpful in providing a warning of risks to consumers, however, they do not prevent someone from suing and are not often enforced in court. Waivers do not protect in the event of gross negligence or willful misconduct.

The Tennessee COVID-19 Recovery Act was signed by Governor Bill Lee in August 2020 and provides additional liability protection to businesses related to COVID-19 transmission. A business could still be sued, however, can still be held liable in cases of gross negligence or willful misconduct.

Businesses still have a duty of care to maintain premises that are reasonably safe. Operators should put protocols in place to follow applicable public health guidance (at a minimum) and keep records of how those protocols are followed.

Operators should discuss their liability risk due to COVID-19 with their attorneys and insurance providers. If an operator chooses to utilize a waiver, the language should be drafted by an attorney.

13) What types of additional expenses are we likely to experience?

Operators should plan for increased operational costs. Costs of supplies and products purchased in the past for cleaning, concessions, etc. have increased significantly since the onset of COVID-19 in the

United States. Additional costs may also be incurred as businesses implement strategies to maintain the health and safety of employees and guests including:

- Staff time to develop protocols, clean, keep records, cross train for important tasks, communicate with guests, etc.
- Increased hand washing/hand sanitizing stations and supplies (soap, sanitizer, single use paper towels, trash cans and liners, etc.)
- Signage – new rules/protocols, social distancing, hand washing, etc.
- Online ticketing systems (although many allow fees to be passed on to customers)
- Cleaning supplies

14) What should we expect for attendance?

It is difficult to predict how much attendance numbers will be impacted by COVID-19. It may depend a great deal on the number of positive cases and government requirements in specific locations. Individual operation protocols and communications with potential customers may also be important factors. Some additional factors that may impact attendance include:

- Operators will need to limit attendance in order to ensure social distancing, provide staff time and space to clean and sanitize, and provide for a safe, enjoyable experience for guests. The Tennessee Pledge asks businesses to limit capacity in buildings to 50 percent or less.
- Government guidelines recommend schools refrain from taking field trips.
- At-risk and cautious customers may choose not to visit.
- More people are participating in at-home virtual learning or homeschooling, which may increase demand from these groups during the week.
- Families may be looking for “safe” outings and find comfort in traditional/normal activities.

The Nashville Zoo recently disclosed they expect 2020 attendance to be 28 percent of 2019 (from 1,266,764 in 2019 to an estimated 360,000 for 2020). Note the zoo is located in Davidson County, which has had some of the most restrictive measures related to COVID-19 in place.

15) Has any further research come to light on the zoonotic possibility of cross contamination from humans to our farm species?

The Centers for Disease Control provides the following explanation at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html>:

At this time, there is no evidence that animals play a significant role in spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. Based on the limited information available to date, the risk of animals spreading COVID-19 to people is considered to be low. We are still learning about this virus, but it appears that it can spread from people to animals in some situations.

