



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

Capitol Update By Senator Howard Marklein July 31, 2015

Agri-tourism: Seeing, Touching and Tasting Where Food Comes From

Fewer than one percent of the population of the United States live on farms. Many Wisconsinites are more than four generations removed from farm life. While we in the 17th Senate District are blessed to be surrounded by a strong agricultural heritage, there are many people in our communities who do not fully understand *from* where their food comes, the work involved in daily farm life and how their favorite products are produced. Agri-tourism is the answer.

Agri-tourism is a unique intersection of agriculture and tourism. It includes experiences such as the autumn corn maze and pumpkin patch visit, picking apples at an orchard, tasting wine at a vineyard, feeding goats and shearing sheep, purchasing handmade sausages at the meat market, picking strawberries, meeting an Emu and more.

In Wisconsin, agri-tourism includes the full life cycle of agriculture. From activities on the farm involving crops and animals to production facilities and restaurants, agri-tourism gives visitors the opportunity to see, touch, taste and sometimes work in one of our state's most important industries.

The Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association boasts more than 150 members, many of whom are in the 17th Senate District. Our local members include several farms, vineyards, cheese producers, meat processors and a historical site that shares the history of agriculture in Wisconsin. Local members open their farms and their businesses to visitors in an effort to provide quality experiences and products to those who may not otherwise spend time on a farm.

During the 2013-2014 Legislative Session, State Representative Travis Tranel (R-Cuba City) authored Assembly Bill (AB) 746, passed as Act 269, which added liability protections for agri-tourism businesses so that visitors could continue to participate in the full experience of each location while protecting the providers from liability. Visitors to agri-tourism businesses are often new to farm settings and may not fully understand the inherent risks of agriculture. Day-to-day operations on a working farm involve unique equipment, unpredictable animals and the everyday hazards of the natural world.

Act 269 provides agri-tourism providers with immunity from civil liability for any injury or death resulting from inherent risks as long as a sign is posted in accordance with the statute. Providers received specific guidance in the law to help them comply and protect their visitors without diluting the experience.

According to Kyle Vesperman at Vesperman Farms in Lancaster, Act 269 encouraged his family to make significant investments into their agri-tourism business this summer as they enter the 13th year of agri-tourism business on their farm.

Vesperman Farms is adding a 6,600 square foot building with a commercial kitchen, dining facilities and retail space to enhance the visitor experience and offer more to their guests. On a busy weekend in the fall, they welcome 3,000 people to their farm to experience a pumpkin patch, corn maze, animal interactions and delicious food products like caramel apples, pies and more.

Vesperman said that visitors come out to see the farm, get close to animals and walk through the fields to find their pumpkins, all of which include inherent risks. “The agri-tourism bill gave us some protection to keep offering these fun experiences without so much risk to our business. We couldn’t offer the same experience without this safety cushion,” Vesperman said. “We make every effort to create a safe environment for our guests, but animals can be unpredictable and walking in a field is a new experience for some people. We can’t protect everyone from everything without diluting the experience.”

Experiences are the lifeblood of agri-tourism. If you are looking for a fun – and often delicious – experience for your family, visit the Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association website for a listing of active members, festivals and events throughout the state: www.visitdairyland.com.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.

###