

Barcoos Barn Farmstay



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Location: Perthville, Bathurst

Manager: Elaine Harmer

Farm produce: Sheep, cattle, hay, and silage

Note: This agritourism business recently closed after 18 years when Elaine retired.

How we started in agritourism and its benefits for our farm

I started by offering bed and breakfast accommodation in half of our home (separated from the half we live in). Using our home meant we didn't have to invest in a building to start in agritourism.

Guests wanted to also see the animals and tour the farm so that became part of our offering.

The business grew quickly due to referrals and repeat visitors which came because I offered a personalised experience.

"Agritourism provided us with a good income, and enabled me to meet and enjoy a variety of people."

Agritourism offering



Accommodation

- Two two-bedroom cottages
- A five-bedroom farmhouse
- Caravan and camping sites (powered and unpowered)



Farm experiences

Available to general public, not only to overnight guests, on weekends and school holidays:

- Farm activities: feeding chickens, collecting eggs, and interacting with farm animals: sheepdogs, a pig, interesting varieties of chickens, horses, cows, ducks, a donkey and alpacas.
- Pony rides, and riding in a horse and sulky cart.



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Planning approval from Council

For the bed and breakfast, I got a food safety license from Council so I could serve breakfast to guests.

Around nine years ago, I developed our camping offering further, and also added four cabins, using the support of a planning consultant. I found the approval process difficult and frustrating. This was prior to new planning legislation being introduced that aims to make it easier for farmers to develop on-farm agritourism.

Risk management

To manage biosecurity and other risks, we had a sign on our gate that stated entry was not permitted without a booking.

We had public liability insurance, and an insurance that cost \$4,500 per year for our pony and sulky rides.

Our animals were all calm and well-trained, which was very important when allowing children to interact with them. Parents didn't use common sense around animals to ensure their children's safety, even after listening to our safety induction. I found it stressful when parents let their children do unsafe things.

Learnings

Working weekends

The agritourism business meant we were always working on weekends and holidays.

Guests not following instructions

Though we allowed pet dogs on a lead onto the farm, parents would do things like put their dog's lead in their three-year-old child's hand, and the dog would get loose, or they wouldn't understand why our farm dogs were off-leash while their dog wasn't allowed to be.

Inefficiency

My own inefficiency with technology meant I spent a lot of time managing bookings. Getting training on computers and marketing would have helped my business.

Running the business alone

I would have found running the business together with my husband easier (having two of us run the agritourism business), but he was busy full time with farming.

Support we received

"Bathurst Region Tourism was very supportive of our business, including bringing journalists and travel agents to our farmstay for them to write about it or sell it to their customers."

Destination Central West organised tour groups and school groups to visit, and I attended a tourism development training they ran.

Advice to farmers considering agritourism

Two things worked very well in our agritourism offering:

- Enabling guests, including children, to interact with animals rather than to only see them from afar (such as from behind a fence).
- We'd drive guests around farm in an enclosed trailer with mesh sides (which kept guests safe), and talk about our sheep farming, and answer their questions.