

# Fernbrook Farm



Fernbrook Farm

**Location:** Marrangaroo, Lithgow

**Manager:** Garry and Julie Roberts

**Farm produce:** Cattle and sheep

**Size of farm:** 36 hectares (90 acres)

**Website:** [airbnb.com.au/rooms/28593164](https://airbnb.com.au/rooms/28593164)

## Why I decided to diversify into agritourism

I (Garry) inherited my farm when I was in my 30s, and then realised the property is too small to make a living from farming.

***“We had family and friends visit us on the farm, enjoying BBQs and staying overnight, and they loved it.”***

Considering their positive feedback, six years ago we decided to turn a heritage cottage on our property into a short stay accommodation to rent to guests.

## Agritourism offering



### Accommodation

- One-bedroom 1880s cottage (stays include breakfast)
- Self-sufficient camping
- Vintage caravan ‘glamping’

Guests enjoy the farm animals (cattle, sheep, alpacas and chickens), and wildlife (wombats, wallabies, platypus and trout), as well as bushwalking.



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## How I started and grew my agritourism business

Firstly, I talked with other farmers who had farmstays to learn from them.

### *“Then I created a business plan for the accommodations.”*

Because I had done small business courses, I had the knowledge of how to develop a plan.

I used the support of my accountant who did financial analysis for me, figuring out pricing, the break-even point (how many bookings I would need each month to cover my costs), the timeframe to pay back the renovation costs, potential income scenarios based on different levels of occupancy, income tax implications, and setting up GST tax payments.

For the cottage conversion we got development approval from Council to add a bathroom and kitchen extension. Due to the historic nature of the cottage and its proximity to a pristine creek, the bathroom has a low-impact, environmentally-friendly chemical toilet and a hand-held shower.

We found getting approval as a farm stay accommodation had fewer requirements than approval as a bed and breakfast accommodation, which required us to add a commercial kitchen (separate from our home's kitchen) to prepare breakfast for guests.

Later we added a campsite by the creek, with a bush kitchen in an existing shed. The campsite can host 30-40 people, and we book it as a closed campsite, meaning one group books the entire use of all of it.

Later we added a glamping experience in a vintage 1940s caravan.

## Agritourism success

Our accommodation gets discovered by guests via Airbnb, Booking.com, and Hipcamp. Many camping guests discover us by seeing our Google Business Profile on Google Maps which shows that we are close to a National Park that they want to visit.

Year round we achieve around 80% occupancy. This high occupancy is probably due to our location, being close to Sydney, Bathurst, and National Parks.

### *“Our accommodation gives me a good lifestyle that we enjoy – I could ramp up the business to earn more money but I’m happy with how it ticks along, and the income that we get from it.”*

I joined the local tourism organisation called Seven Valleys Tourism (which is facilitated by Council) to support visitation to our region, and to collaborate with others in tourism. I find it valuable to attend its networking sessions for the local tourism industry. At those meetings, I get to know owners of other accommodations and attractions, and we end up recommending each other to visitors.

## Benefits of agritourism for me

- The accommodation provides another income stream which helps pay for the farm's upkeep: fences, fodder and so on.
- I enjoy interacting with guests – this is a nice part of the agritourism business.
- I have an on-site butchery, and I sell its products to guests, for example, BBQ packs which they cook up for dinner.



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## Advice for farmers looking to diversify into agritourism

### ONLY OFFER AGRITOURISM IF IT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

Tourism is a people business – how you treat guests makes a real difference to their experience. They come to our farm because they want an experience – they can stay in a motel if they just want a place to sleep. If you aren't a people-friendly kind of person, you'll likely feel cranky about what guests do on your property.

You can set up your business in a way where you don't have to have interactions with guests, such as by providing clear instructions in a booking confirmation email and having a key safe where they can pick up the keys to their accommodation. However, when you talk with guests, and they have a good experience with you, they write higher reviews. High reviews leads to more bookings and more income.

### BE UNIQUE

***"Identify what you have to offer that is unique and a hook that will attract people."***

For us, it's the unique heritage character of our cottage and slab sheds, the creek and wildlife, and the setting as well as that there is no internet and no noise, so guests can really escape here. Our farm's story – its history – also appeals to guests.

### DON'T OVERCAPITALISE

Make sure you can get a return on your investment, but at the same time, make sure what you offer is nice enough to attract guests.

### KNOW LOCAL TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

Go visit local tourist attractions, experiences, and places to eat so when your guests ask for recommendations on nice local places to eat, or places to visit, you can provide good advice. I also recommend they visit the Seven Valleys Visitor Information Centre but it's also important to be able to answer their questions, and that they will have a great time at the places you recommend.



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