

Valley View Flower Farm & Garden



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Location: Oberon

Owners: Jaclyn and Michael Burns

Farm produce: Flowers and cattle

Size of farm: 120 hectares (300 acres)
($\frac{1}{4}$ acre for the flower farm)

Website: valleyviewflowerfarm.com.au

Agritourism offering



Farm tours



Pick your own (PYO) flowers

Why I decided to diversify into tourism

Our 300-acre farm has been in my husband's family since 1865.

"It's too small to make a full time living from as a sheep or cattle farm, so we considered how we could use the farm to earn extra income."

For a while, my husband grew potatoes and sold them at farmers' markets which was popular (people still ask for his spuds), however, it was too labour intensive for our needs as we both have full-time off-farm jobs.

With my passion for gardening and growing, we then considered creating a 'pick your own' flower farm and garden for people to come and visit.



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How and when I started my agritourism business

The agritourism part of my business is still in development and will be launched soon. Three years ago I turned a quarter acre section of a former potato field close to our house that has 360-degree views into a flower farm. I set up raised beds with perennial and annual flower planning, and established paths and landscaping to make it attractive as well as practical for garden-loving visitors, including visitors with mobility and visual disability (in line with Australian disability legislation).

The flower farm is considered in the industry a “micro flower farm” and it’s an ongoing work in progress, as money and time allows. Sustainability is a big consideration for us, not just environmental sustainability, but also developing an undertaking that is both physically and financially sustainable. As such, the establishment of the infrastructure and developing the plantings has been measured.

At this stage, I am content to start small, and test, trial and learn what types of agritourism offerings suit my family and the time I have available outside of my full-time job.

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Our agritourism offering

For agritourism, I intend to host small groups of up to 15 guests on farm tours where I will teach them about growing flowers sustainably in Oberon’s challenging climate, how to grow naturally in harmony with the seasons, and how to pick for maximum vase life, before letting them pick their own flowers from the field. We will be building a patio with a pergola for shade where guests will then be able to put together bouquets from their flowers, and we have an existing toilet on site for them too. There is also 1.5 acres of garden around the house that our guests will be able to wander around.

Because the flower farm is physically quite close to our home, I want to have the intimacy of smaller groups and not a free for all of many visitors at once. The way I will manage limiting groups to 15 guests is through ticket sales, where only limited numbers of tickets will be available for each time slot on those weekends when I will open for you-pick experiences. By limiting the numbers, I can also focus on the events being an intimate experience where attendees can have unlimited access to me to ask questions and talk all things flowers.

Perhaps in the future I will also offer workshops, such as wreath making. As I don’t have a building on my property for hosting workshops, I may do this in partnership with another farmer that does have a workshop or function venue on their farm.

I also have other revenue streams from the flowers, including selling bouquets at farmers markets and through select retail shops, and making dried flower wreaths.



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Planning approval – my development doesn’t need approval

My day job is being a planning consultant. Previously I worked for a Council as a Planning Officer. Due to my familiarity with the planning legislation, I looked for a way to have an agritourism business that didn’t require planning approval, but would still be compliant with the state planning legislation as exempt development (that is, exempt from requiring approval from Council so long as certain conditions are met).

The conditions an exempt development have to meet are quite easy to comply with so long as no structures are included (a pergola is a minor structure which is also [exempt development](#)). I checked to see I met all the ‘Farm experience premises’ conditions for my farm tours, and could demonstrate that I meet all of those conditions to Council if I needed to. (The conditions are listed [here](#).)

“Staying within the exempt development conditions enables me to start small with tourism in a way that has lower up front costs.”

Advice for farmers looking to diversify into agritourism

YOUR AGRITOURISM OFFERING

Use your strengths

Think about your strengths and what your farm has to offer. Look around and see what others are doing in your region and how you can complement their existing offering.

For example, very close to my farm is Mayfield Garden, which is the largest privately-owned cool-climate garden in the southern hemisphere. So, I know people are visiting our region who are interested in plants, flowers, and gardens, so I hope to add another 'garden' destination to their tour of our region, albeit on a smaller scale.

PLANNING APPROVALS

How to check your development is compliant when it doesn't need approval

If you want to undertake exempt development, draw up a table with each of the conditions you must meet in Column 1, and outlining how your agritourism offering will meet each condition in Column 2. This way you always have evidence to show that your development was compliant with the legislation at the time that you developed it (and therefore legal).

One of the conditions you must meet is a certain set back distance of your agritourism offering from your neighbour's property. You can use the state government's SIX Maps (Spatial Information eXchange Maps) to see an aerial overlay over your property of lot boundaries with a measuring tool so you can accurately measure the distance from your boundary.

Consider a variety of options

As a planning consultant I receive lots of requests from farmers asking about the compliance requirements of converting a farm shed into a wedding venue. This is quite complex and therefore will most likely require development approval (a DA).

It can be worth finding out about agritourism developments that don't require approval if certain conditions are met (exempt development), or those that are eligible for fast track approval if certain conditions are met (complying development). (Learn about these here.)

There might be an option that meets the needs of your family just as well (such as your family's need for additional income from your farm) but is less expensive, time consuming and frustrating to get approval for.

Be upfront with planners

Always be honest, and put all your cards on the table when talking with a Council Planning Officer or with a planning consultant. Let them know exactly what you are thinking about doing on your property so they can guide you and help you, as well as keep the public safe (which is the purpose of planning requirements).

Keep evidence of your development's compliance

Print out the relevant clause in the NSW Planning Legislation that relates to your development as it changes from time to time and you want to be able to demonstrate you were compliant with the legislation at a certain date and time.

BUSINESS SUPPORT

Tap into the support available from the tourism industry

I wish I had connected in with the support of the tourism industry back when my you-pick flower farm was just a seed of an idea: my Council's tourism manager, the manager of the local visitor centre, the industry development officer at Destination Central West (which is the regional tourism organisation) and Destination NSW (the state tourism organisation). Destination NSW has free training resources on its website, such as on marketing, and on experience development to meet the needs of a particular target market.

An example of why is that the manager of the local visitor centre let me know about the different types of people that tend to visit our region at different times of year, so I can consider what types of experiences I will offer to meet their needs. For example, families tend to visit our region around Christmas time, so if I offer a Christmas experience at that time of year, it should be family-friendly and focused more on local families as guests as opposed to visitors as visitor numbers drop over Christmas time.

Tap into the support available for businesses

BizHQ in Bathurst has been a fantastic business development resource. I wouldn't have thought I could run two businesses (my planning consultancy and an agritourism business) without their advice and reassurance that I'm on the right track.



Department of Primary Industries
and Regional Development

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