



# A Brief History of Agritourism, Internationally and in the United States

## INTERNATIONAL AGRITOURISM

Excerpted with permission from Chapter 2, Colorado Cultural, Heritage and Agritourism Strategic Plan, 2013

“As populations increase and the cost of land and labor sky-rockets, farmers and ranchers across the U.S. are following the lead of Europe, Australia and New Zealand, turning to agritourism as one way to diversity their revenue. In Italy, this business is termed “Agriturismo,” and in Britain, Australia and New Zealand it is known as “farm stay holidays.”

As small-scale farming became less profitable in Italy in the 1950s to 1970s, farms were abandoned when farmers left to search for work in larger towns and cities. An agriturismo law was passed in 1985 to regulate and encourage Italian farm stays. Estimates place today’s number of agriturismo locations in Italy between 9,000 and 20,000, and their success has led many other European Union countries to enact similar national policies to help increase farm income and create jobs in rural communities. There are three types of agriturismo classifications in Italy: one that provides light meals or self-service snacks; one that offers full-service meals; and one that provides farm holidays that include meals, lodging and other activities. In Italy, agriturismo farmers are also allowed to sell value-added farm products including locally produced wines, olive oils, pasta, prepared meats, cheeses, jellies and jams, honey, baked goods and crafts.

One subset of farm stay holidays currently attracting many young travelers is called WWOOFing. This acronym has variously meant “Working Weekends on Organic Farms,” “Willing Workers on Organic Farms” and, most recently, “World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms.” WWOOF was established in the fall of 1971 when a secretary in London organized a working weekend at a farm as an affordable way to get to spend time in the British countryside. Currently,

there are 1,634 WWOOF farms located in 43 different countries, and the numbers are growing.”

## AGRITOURISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Excerpted with permission from Considerations for Agritainment Enterprise in Georgia, 2002 and the Colorado Cultural, Heritage and Agritourism Plan

“Agritourism and entertainment farming enterprises have an extensive history in the United States. Farm-related recreation and tourism can be traced back to the late 1800s, when families visited farming relatives in an attempt to escape from a city’s summer heat. Visiting the country became even more popular with the widespread use of the automobile in the 1920s. Rural recreation gained interest again in the 1930s and 1940s from folks seeking an escape from the stresses of the Great Depression and World War II. These demands for rural recreation led to widespread interest in horseback riding, farm petting zoos and farm nostalgia during the 1960s and 1970s. Farm vacations, bed and breakfasts, and commercial farm tours were popularized in the 1980s and 1990s.

The demand for a slower-paced farm experience, once supplied by rural family members, seems to be somewhat difficult to satisfy today because of the four- and five-generation gap between farming and non-farming citizens.” (Georgia)

“Today, with fewer farmers producing more food, people have become disconnected from the sources of their food. Agritourism offers a new way to fulfill the desire to reshape this food/source connection. This past decade has seen tremendous growth in the number of statewide agritourism programs in the United States.” (Colorado)

