



## Agritourism Safety and Liability: Implementing Best Risk Management Practices for Farms Open to the Public

As consumer demand for local food and farm experiences has increased in recent years, more farms are opening their barns, fields, and homes to visitors. Agritourism includes many kinds of experiences, such as overnight farm stays, hay rides, corn mazes, and use of farm land for hiking, hunting, snowmobiling and other recreational activities. Agritourism also includes direct sales, such as farmstands and u-pick, as well as educational programs for school children, seniors, and other groups of visitors, often involving demonstrations and workshops around specific topics and skills.

Hosting visitors on farms provides rich educational opportunities for consumers, supplemental income for farms, and public support for agriculture; however, it comes with risks to visitors and farms. Surveys of producers in Vermont and throughout the country routinely identify safety concerns and liability insurance expenses as barriers for opening farms to visitors.

In response to the increased consumer demand for local food and farm experiences, and the accompanying concerns regarding safety and liability, a team of

educators led by **Lisa Chase** of **University of Vermont Extension** developed a project to provide training in implementing best risk management practices for farms that are open to the public.

In order for an agritourism operation to be successful, producers need to maintain a safe environment for visitors throughout their farms. They also need to purchase adequate liability insurance, develop a protocol for responding to emergencies, understand the benefits and limitations of release agreements and waivers, and train their staff in all of the above.

To address these challenges, the project provided training and resources on agritourism safety and liability for 159 farmers and service providers in **Vermont and nearby states**. The project team hosted workshops and followed up with farms to conduct safety assessments. Of the 112 farms that participated, 37 farms implemented best risk management practices, including 29 that posted safety signage for visitors about hand washing and other safety measures; 21 that obtained or improved liability coverage; and 27 that established or improved hand washing stations, among other best practices implemented.

As new food safety, water quality, and zoning regulations are enacted, additional education and training will be required. More operations are getting into agritourism every year, and it is critical that farmers understand the importance of implementing and maintaining best practices for risk management.



*“We developed a lot of safety signage, increased handwashing stations, partnered with UVM to offer a tractor safety course to staff, [and] put up safety fencing around [our] site.”*

- Vermont Farmer





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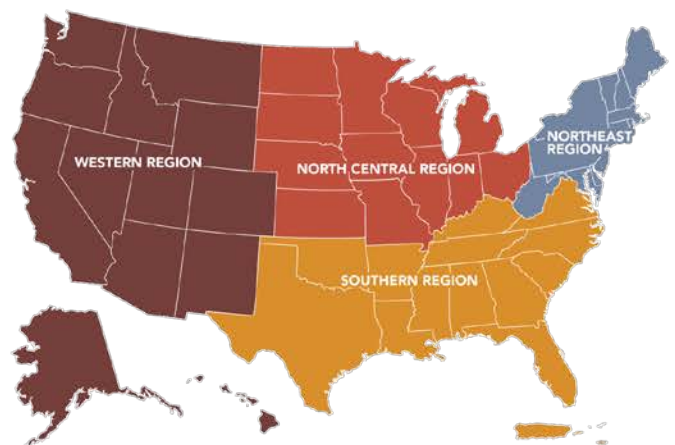
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## “Educating America’s farmers and ranchers to manage the unique risks of producing food for the world’s table.”

**Extension Risk Management Education (ERME)** is delivered through four regional centers that provide grant funding and leadership within their regions.

Projects are producer-focused, results-based and encourage public-private partnerships. Funded projects must identify targeted results that will help producers manage risk and then describe how the project will measure those results.

Extension Risk Management Education has funded innovative programs that have generated tangible results for producers in every state. ERME is committed to funding results, providing transparent accountability, and encouraging collaboration. View the accomplishments of all funded projects on our website.  
<http://ExtensionRME.org>



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