

The Big Event: Hosting a Festival on Your California Farm

A Practical Guide



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Hosting a Festival on Your California Farm

Celebrating the harvest is an ancient farm tradition, a time for family and friends to enjoy good food, drink, music and dance after the hard work of bringing in seasonal crops. In our urbanizing world, hosting a festival on the farm can be a way for farmers to bring in additional income while sharing enjoyable rural experiences with city and suburban people and with their own communities.

Farm festivals are not only harvest festivals. Festivals can be one day or can last for a month. They can celebrate blossoms, art, wine, cheese, beer, bees, flowers, specific crops, seasons or harvests. They can be on one farm or multiple farms. One family or a whole community can organize a festival. This guide will help you set your goals and start organizing a festival to show-case your crops or your region, share the fun, educate your visitors and bring additional revenue to your farm or community.

This guide will not attempt to teach management of large entertainment events with multiple concessions and attractions, many employees and many thousands of visitors. To learn from successful organizers of these larger events, consider joining the North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA). Some resources for planning corn mazes and pumpkin patches are at the end of this guide. This guide also does not include festival marketing advice.

To prepare this guide, we interviewed organizers of five California farm festivals of different styles, ages and sizes. The guide shares some of their experiences and advice, guidance from other sources, and links to resources for more information.



Interviewed for this guide:

Rebekah Riley Bastedo, Oak Glen Apple Blossom Festival, San Bernardino County

Rebekah Riley Bastedo is wedding and events coordinator at her family farm, Rileys at Los Rios Rancho, as well as coordinator of the Apple Blossom Festival for the 15 – 25 member Oak Glen Apple Growers Association. The association is about one hundred years old and the festival is about fifty years old. The April festival involves events on the various farms of the group, attracting several thousand visitors each festival day.

Bob Nash, Nash Ranch Pumpkin Festival, Shasta County

Bob and Mary Nash started in 1991. Bob says, “We were at first not intending to grow pumpkins for sale, but we put a sign out on the road and about ten people stopped by. The second weekend, we invited the neighbor kids to bring their pony and offer pony rides for 50 cents. We had no idea there was a demand for this kind of thing. The next year we did it intentionally and put up signs and such. We have not missed a year since then. Each year gets bigger than the last. We bill ourselves as the quiet pumpkin patch. We don’t try to be a carnival”



Sack races at the Hoes Down Harvest Festival

Cindy Lashbrook, The Pick and Gather Festival at Riverdance Farm, Merced County

The Pick and Gather, organized primarily by farmer Cindy Lashbrook and her family, is the weekend after Memorial Day. Activities include organic blueberry and cherry U-Pick, an educational River Fair, musical entertainment, food and drink vendors, artists and craft vendors, a petting zoo, children's activities, hay rides, and usually a chance to swim or play in the river and to camp overnight in the orchard. Attendance at this fifteen year old festival ranges from 600 to 1200 visitors.

Alexis Koefoed, Solano Yolo Lavender Weekend

Alexis Koefoed of Soul Food Farm and Rose Loveall of Morningsun Herb Farm organized this festival for the first time in 2019 as a heart-felt collaboration amongst six women lavender farmers of Solano and Yolo counties. Each farm organized their own activities and collected a separate \$5 entrance fee. All the farms promoted the trail together. Activities included workshops, vendors, food, drink and peace and quiet. Daily attendance at the 2-day event ranged from about 100 at the most remote farm to as many as 1,000 at the busiest farm.

Dru Rivers, The Hoes Down Harvest Festival at Full Belly Farm, Yolo county

Dru Rivers of Full Belly Farm has been one of the main organizers of this large festival for more than thirty years. The Hoes Down Harvest Festival has always been a community effort, drawing on the volunteer energy of Capay Valley farmers and community members for planning, donations from food to equipment to art and wine, and the efforts of about 400 volunteers. In 2017, there were about 6,000 people at the festival, but the current goal is to cap attendance at about 4,000 while still raising \$80,000 to donate to local agricultural organizations. Activities include workshops, tours, music, a circus, camping, food, drink, dancing and lots of children's activities.



Campers preparing for an overnight stay at the Hoes Down Harvest Festival, Full Belly Farm

Can you do this?

Basics of permits and regulations for a farm festival

Zoning: Are farm festival events allowed in your zoning?

As with most questions about zoning and permits, the usual answer is “It depends”

Farm events, including festivals, may not be allowed under the zoning code. In part, the event may be considered commercial rather than agricultural, or farm events may not be included at all in the definition of agriculture. Although the exclusion of farm events from zoning codes may be an oversight, it might also be intentional. Rural, suburban and urban residents alike may want to exclude the increased traffic, noise, and parking problems that accompany many on-farm events. (Farm Commons, 2014)

Some California counties or cities allow farmers to offer agritourism activities, including farm festivals, “by right” within agricultural zoning, or may require a low-cost “administrative permit.” Some counties allow educational and promotional activities related to agriculture “by right”, but require more expensive permits for events involving entertainment and carnival-type attractions. If your festival is only once a year or once a season, it may be a “Temporary Event” or a “Community Event” for permitting purposes. If a non-profit or agricultural organization sponsors the festival, permitting may be easier or less costly than for a commercial farm.

Whether festivals are allowed or permitted, they usually involve selling food and drink to customers, so are also regulated by the county Environmental Health Department. Most counties have a process for applying for a permit to hold a temporary event or a community event, such as a farm festival, even when allowed by zoning codes. To learn more, contact your city or county planning department, county Environmental Health Department, or your local agritourism association, if one exists in your region.

Some examples of permits required:

- **Oak Glen Apple Blossom Festival** – The association does not need a permit for the event; each participant business is responsible for their own. Rileys at Los Rios Rancho has a Conditional Use Permit that allows up to 700 people for ticketed events and up to 5,000 people at a time on the property. The family obtained this permit in 1994, saying it was not very difficult to obtain because the farm is 300 acres.
- **Hoes Down Harvest Festival** - The whole event is non-profit, sponsored by the Ecological Farming Association. Organizers get a one-day non-profit temporary event permit from the Environmental Health Department (EHD). Regulators used to visit and check all the food service booths. Now organizers follow a checklist provided by the EHD. Additional permits:
 - A one-day alcohol permit from the ABC as a non-profit organization.
 - A one-day Farmers' Market Permit from the Ag Commissioner for a farmers' market that includes many of the farmers from the Capay Valley. There is no fee for this permit.
- **Nash Ranch Pumpkin Festival** - No permits are needed. "This is not a carnival. We have no permanent structures – only portable sheds and we set up a big tent. The vendors deal with any health department issues themselves," says Bob Nash
- **Solano Yolo Lavender Weekend** - Each farm handled permitting independently. The Yolo County farm got a temporary event permit. The Solano County farms discovered that if the event was called a "festival," the permit would cost several thousand dollars, so the farms called their event a "Lavender Weekend" rather than a festival in their marketing. Each farm had food and/or drink vendors or offered food and/or drinks to visitors. Each farm needed a temporary event permit from the county Environmental Health Department for food or drinks served.

Planning your festival

Your mission and goals - Why are you planning this festival and what do you hope for in return?

Your farm or organization's mission and your goals for your festival will help you establish the target attendees, the ambience, the date, the activities and the price for your event. A festival will usually encompass several goals at the same time, including both social goals and financial goals.

Some social reasons for farm festivals:

"The **Solano Yolo Lavender Trail** is a heart-felt collaboration amongst the women lavender farmers of Solano and Yolo Counties. We are excited about creating a regional Lavender Trail to bring people to the region and to encourage other farmers to grow lavender." – *Alexis Koefoed*

"The **Hoes Down Harvest Festival** is dedicated to honoring and promoting the knowledge of agri-



cultural arts and sustainable rural living through inspiration and education."

– *Hoes Down Harvest Festival mission*

"The purpose of the **Oak Glen Apple Blossom Festival** is to include all the businesses in Oak Glen in a regional promotion. Specifically, the seasonal festivals are to help people understand seasonality as part of farming, to educate people about agriculture, and to increase off-season business for the apple growers and other businesses in their community."

– *Rebekah Bastedo*

What are your goals for number of attendees and financial returns?

Numbers will guide your planning, including the number of attendees desired or expected and the revenue goal for the event. Here are some different financial and attendance goals and statistics:

For the first year, our goal was to establish the trail and get the word out, to create a framework for 2020. We didn't know how many people to expect. Each farm was prepared for a few hundred people and each got about 150 people a day, which was manageable. Financially, this first year was not a success. We broke even. "This was a test and we thought after the event, this is a good direction for us to take."

– Alexis Koefoed, *Solano Yolo Lavender Trail*

I'd like to double the current attendance of about 600 in order to break even so all the U-Pick proceeds can go to farm expenses not festival expenses.

– Cindy Lashbrook, *Riverdance Farms*

One of our major goals is fundraising. We're hoping to net about \$80,000 this year for non-profit organizations that work in agriculture and have missions aligned with ours, with total attendance about 4,000 people or less. We have a goal of raising about \$40,000 in sponsorships.

– Dru Rivers, *Hoes Down Harvest Festival*

The planning teams: It takes a team to plan a festival.

Some examples of planning teams:

Neighbors Rose Loveall of Morningsun Herb Farm and Alexis of Soul Food Farm had discussed the possibility of a lavender trail for ten years. They visited the National Lavender Growers Association and the Oregon Lavender Festival to learn how others did lavender festivals. A year before the lavender weekend, Rose and Alexis reached out to other farmers who grow lavender in the region. Six farmers agreed to plan the **Solano Yolo Lavender Trail**. All six were on the planning committee, meeting weekly by phone and occasionally in person.

The entire planning committee for the **Hoes Down Harvest Festival** is about 20 people from the Capay Valley, mostly farmers. The management team is four women. One is the coordinator who gets paid a stipend for this work. The full committee starts in January, meeting monthly through July and then more often, planning for the October festival.

The planning team for the **Pick and Gather at Riverdance Farm** includes farm owners Cindy Lashbrook and her husband, Cindy's two grown children, and a local artist who books the entertainment and manages the stage.

Rebekah Bastedo forms a volunteer committee with several other members of the Oak Glen Apple Growers Association in January for the April **Oak Glen Apple Blossom Festival**. They solicit other association members to participate, trying for at least twelve different business participants in the event.



First task: set the date.

The date should be consistent.

The Apple Blossom Festival is held on the third weekend in April. The seasonal festivals help people understand seasonality, educate people about agriculture, and increase off-season business for the apple growers and other businesses.

The Pick and Gather at Riverdance Farms is the weekend after Memorial Day. This weekend is when the organic blueberries and cherries are usually both ready for harvest.

The Hoes Down Harvest Festival is always the first weekend in October, after the worst heat of summer and usually before the rain.

A Sample Planning Timeline

One year to six months before the event

- Check in with planning committee. Do we want to do this again?
- Decide what activities you'd like to offer & begin research or planning
- Research permits and regulatory hurdles (including ADA requirements)
- Create budget, decide on gate and activity prices
- Solicit and confirm sponsorships and partnerships
- Create marketing plan
- Create festival layout map
- Create emergency preparedness plan

Six months to three months before the event

- Line up staff, activity leaders and volunteers
- Line up, contract with entertainment
- Finalize food and drink service plan (in house or vendors)
- Call for and confirm vendors
- Solicit contest entrants
- Order tee shirts, caps and marketing collateral
- Solicit donations for fundraising activities
- Finalize permits, insurance and regulatory compliance
- Secure access to tents, tables, chairs, sound system and other needed equipment
- Inspect site, fences, paths and equipment for safety and needed repairs; do those repairs
- Plant for festival needs: "If we want a green pasture, we plant in June for October. We plant pumpkins to be sold and carved at the festival.", says Dru Rivers of Full Belly Farm (for corn maze planning timeline, see links at the end of this guide)
- Set up event website, Facebook event and ticket sales options
- Begin marketing in earnest

Three months to the day before the event

- Clear, plant, mow parking area and paths
- Paint, print or repair signs as needed
- Train staff & volunteers, assign duties
- Assemble all equipment and supplies, store securely
- Rent porta-potties, hand-wash stations and any other needed equipment
- Promote like crazy through all possible channels
- Finalize ticket sales and cash handling system
- Finalize security plan, emergency plan, on-site communication plan
- Clean and tidy entire farm – post "off limits" signs if needed
- Set up tents, chairs, signs, parking area, lights, sound, etc.
- Everything else!

"After months of organizing effort, another 400 volunteers show up for the festival to be part of what has become well-managed organized chaos. From a farming point of view, you watch the total transformation of a working farm to an event facility and back in a weekend. On Friday the volunteers arrive and set everything up – the tents, the tables, the stages and everything else. On Saturday, thousands of people arrive for the festival and many stay for Sunday tours and classes. On Sunday afternoon, the clean-up crew takes it all down. On Monday, Full Belly is back to work as a working farm."

– Gwenael Engelskirchen, former Hoes Down Harvest Festival coordinator



Managing Liability

Liability exposure will always be present when there are employees or guests on the farm. There are many types of liability exposure. It is best to talk with your insurance carrier early in your planning to make sure you are covered for all these types of exposure:

- **Premises Liability:** Property owner fails to protect people from potentially hazardous conditions. Customer is injured on property or “premises.” Examples: slip and fall, equipment usage, contact with animals
- **Product Liability:** Customer is injured by a product that was prepared and/or served to them. Examples: foreign object in food, becoming ill after consuming food
- **Property Damage:** Customer’s property is damaged by business/employee. Examples: employee hits a customer’s car in the parking lot
- **Personal Liability:** Customer suffers inadvertent personal harm from a service provided by a business. Examples: employee spills hot beverage on a customer and it causes a burn
- **Employees:** Vicarious liability: landowner responsible for his/her own actions and for those of people acting on the landowner’s behalf (employees and independent contractors).
- **Alcohol Liability:** Where food is being sold for money, insurance companies will most likely require an endorsement that covers both food and alcohol consumption Contact your insurance company for more details and information on endorsements that they may require.



There is no single strategy for effectively reducing your exposure to risk. Approach liability management holistically, as a program or series of activities. Add “layers” of protection that demonstrate a proactive, responsible, and comprehensive approach to farm safety.

Keep your farm safe for visitors and employees!

- *Conduct routine safety inspections.*
- *Create a farm safety plan detailing hazard mitigation strategies/plans of operation.*
- *Hold employee trainings.*
- *Have appropriate communication with farm visitors.*
- *Develop a response plan for emergencies.*
- *Use hazard/incident report forms for anyone that gets injured on the property.*

For more on managing your liability, visit the UC Cooperative Extension Foothill Farming Risk Management website: https://ucanr.edu/sites/placervevadasmallfarms/Farm_Business_Planning/FBP_Risk_Management/Risk_Management/

Activities, attractions and other festival elements

The activities of a farm festival can be simple or complicated, but most festivals will include some or all of the following elements:

- Food and drink
- Entertainment or things to do
- Education
- Vendors
- Relaxation and enjoyment of nature
- Tours and hay rides
- U-Pick and/or product sales
- Sponsors and community collaboration

Here are some rules, examples and suggestions for many of the elements of your festival:



Food and drink

Food served to customers usually cannot be prepared in the home kitchen, here are your options:

- Invite licensed caterers or licensed operators of mobile food facilities (food trucks) to sell food at your event.
- Serve food prepared off the farm in a licensed commercial kitchen or on the farm in a temporary food facility as permitted by county Environmental Health Departments (EHD).
 - All food vendors who do not operate mobile food facilities (food trucks) will generally need to prepare and serve food from a temporary food facility, an enclosed covered tent, although cooking facilities such as a barbeque grill can be next to the tent.
 - At the festival site, you will need hand washing and utensil washing set up and restroom facilities for the food handlers.
 - You will need to start this process early, as there is usually a number of weeks required prior to your event for obtaining Temporary Food Facility authorization.
 - An example, from Sacramento County, of a [Temporary Food Facility Operator's Packet](#)
 - The permitting process and fees varies county by county, although the basic food safety requirements for food handling are the same across the state.
- Serve food prepared in a licensed commercial kitchen on the farm – this is a facility that has been approved by the building department and permitted as a food facility by the county EHD.

Serving alcohol

Offering wines, beers or hard ciders at your festival require a permit from the state department of [Alcoholic Beverage Control \(ABC\)](#). You have two options:

- **Non-profit sponsored events:** the non-profit obtains a special event policy for the event. [Form 221, Instructions for Form 221](#). Cost: \$50 - \$100 per day, per dispensing point; maximum 12 events per year per non-profit.
- **Private events:** the farm/host must hire a caterer with correct licensing from ABC. [Caterer's Permit Information](#) for on-sale alcohol sales, or the host can obtain a one-day permit from ABC.
 - [Form 218, Instructions for Form 2018](#).
 - [Common ABC License Types and their Basic Privileges](#)
 - Sellers Permit is required, Obtain from [CA Dept. of Tax & Fee administration](#).

- In both cases, the certificate holder must obtain prior approval from the local law enforcement agency. Sometimes security personnel on site will be required for alcohol sales.



Some examples of festival food and drink service:

Every weekend, a local youth group organizes and staffs a food booth, with parents usually helping out. Groups include FFA and an eighth grade class raising funds for a trip to Washington DC. The groups cook and serve hot food, such as pulled pork sandwiches or tamales. Each group handles their own health department permitting, and keeps their proceeds. – *Bob Nash, Nash Ranch Pumpkin Festival*

We went to a commercial kitchen to make lemonade and cookies to sell at our event, and contracted with a commercial producer to make ice cream for us to sell on site to guests. We sold our own lemonade, cookies and ice cream. We also sold bottled water. Some of the other farms on the Solano Yolo Lavender Trail brought in vendors for food and drink. Next year, we're considering bringing in a food truck or two as vendors.

– *Alexis Koefoed, Soul Food Farm*

We have a restaurant on site, so visitors are encouraged to eat there. Some of the other farms bring in food vendors. We also produce hard apple cider and sell our cider under our wine growers license

– *Rebekah Bastedo, Rileys at Los Rios Rancho*

All the food is prepared in-house, with a huge crew of volunteers and a few paid staff. We have no food vendors at the Hoes Down Harvest Festival. Most of the food and beer is donated. We start early soliciting food donations from local farms and businesses in our network. – *Dru Rivers, Full Belly Farm*

Entertainment and activities

Most festivals include entertainment of some kind, as well as other activities to engage customers and generate extra revenue. Musical entertainers often need to be booked many months in advance, and can be a big addition to any festival. Here are some other activities offered by farm festival organizers:

Activities organized by the Oak Glen Association for the Apple Blossom Festival include:



Oak Glen Apple Blossom Court 2018

- **A Taste of Town fundraiser event** – This is a one night event that features the five local restaurants offering sampler plates of their food at one of the member farms, followed by a square dance with a live band. The ticket price is \$21. Last year 150 people bought tickets. The restaurants donate the food and service. The funds help support the organization.
- **Wagon ride tours** through the orchard to look at the blossoms, ending up at the farm store.
- **A treasure hunt** to encourage visitors to visit multiple farms. To be included in this additional brochure and activity, farms and other businesses each pay \$35. Each farm or business promotes activities in the brochure, and stamps the card of each visitor. Customers have to visit and get stamped at five or more farms or businesses to be entered in a raffle drawing.
- **The Apple Blossom Queen contest** – This is the biggest draw. It is a scholarship pageant for 13 to 18 year old girls. This pageant started in the 1960s as a beauty pageant. In the 1980's, Rebekah's mother, Shelli Riley, revised the contest into a talent contest in which contestants had to give a speech, bake a pie and drive a tractor. The competitive events are a huge part of the festival. Each event is held on a different farm. Contestants are sponsored by local businesses to help with their costumes and other expenses.

Nash Ranch Pumpkin Festival activities include:

- **A corn maze**, with a little bit of haunting on Friday and Saturday evenings. We run the corn maze, with a ticket price of \$5. On Friday and Saturday evenings, we pay 3 or 4 people to keep watch and do a little scaring. We train the actors on when to be scary and when to go easy.
- **Bounce house** – We have a large obstacle course type jumpy pillow thing, and a smaller one for the little kids. It's best to keep the bigger kids separate from the little ones. We charge \$3.00 and it has paid for itself multiple times. We staff this with one or two people.
- **Haunted house** is contracted out to another private individual who sets it up and recruits and organizes actors to do the haunting. People come out looking for the opportunity to participate, and bring their own costumes. The organizer has no problem recruiting staff for this. The haunted house is a separate ticket, costing \$17 per person. The organizer splits the take with the farm on a percentage basis and also donates some of the proceeds to local community organizations. What makes the haunted house work is that the individuals involved had been doing it at their own house for years, and were very experienced when they started at the farm. They have had to go to an online ticket system for the haunted house as it usually sells out now.
- **Petting zoo** – 4H club brings animals and runs the petting zoo. The group charges \$1.00 per person and gets to keep the proceeds.



Actor in the Nash Ranch Pumpkin Festival Corn Maze

Education – because people want to learn!

Rileys at Los Rios partners with the Wild Lands Conservancy non-profit organization. This group provides education at the festival and invites artists to display their work. Throughout the year, the Wild Lands Conservancy organizes tours of the farm for school-children.

The **Pick and Gather at Riverdance Farms** involves local scientists from UC Cooperative Extension, Master Gardeners, the Resource Conservation District and other groups in organizing the educational River Fair, and offers free information booths to local non-profit organizations.

The **Hoes Down Harvest Festival** offers multiple free workshops and farm tours as part of programming on the main festival day, Saturday. On Sunday, Full Belly Farm and other local farms offer more extensive workshops and tours as additional ticketed activities.

Some of the lavender farms on the **Solano Yolo Lavender Trail** offered ticketed workshops with pre-sales online, with workshop tickets including admission to the farm.



Farm Tour at the Hoes Down Harvest Festival

Relaxation and enjoyment of nature

Farmers sometimes forget that simply getting out of town and into the natural world can be a treat to urban and suburban visitors. A chance to play in the river or see the night sky from an orchard campsite is a much appreciated part of a farm festival experience for many.



Festival attendees in the river - Hoes Down Festival

Many Solano Yolo Lavender Trail visitors had intended to visit all the farms on the trail, but people ended up visiting one or two of the farms and staying.

“People stayed longer than expected. People tapped into the peace and quiet and simplicity of the event. People stayed for hours. They sat on hay bales, ate ice cream, drank lemonade, and the kids jumped around. It doesn’t have to be elaborate. The simplicity of it seemed to capture people,” - Alexis Koefoed

wholesale, and is also part of the farm’s education program. “To me they’re integrated,” says Lashbrook

Tours or Hay Rides – some guides for these activities:

Conducting farm and ranch tours
Hay ride safety tips

U-Pick and/or product sales

The Pick and Gather Festival is important to the U-Pick operation at Riverdance Farms. “They go hand in hand,” says farm owner Cindy Lashbrook. “People come for the U-Pick fruit, but there needs to be some sort of event to encourage more to come.” Lashbrook cannot count on being able to sell all her fruit without the U-Pick operation. U-Pick fruit sold retail brings in a little more money than fruit sold



Sponsors and Collaboration

Many farm festivals are organized by agritourism associations, agricultural associations, or loosely organized groups of regional farms. Those organized by an individual farm family often find that sharing fundraising opportunities with local non-profit organizations, particularly those involved in agriculture, creates a stronger and more popular festival.

The Hoes Down Harvest Festival is sponsored by the Ecological Farming Association, organized and managed by many of Full Belly Farm’s neighbor Capay Valley farmers, and also involves multiple agricultural and community organizations as participants and proceed recipients. “We do a lot of “community partnering”. People who help us out get donations. For example, 4H runs a petting zoo, and they get

Get as many local community organizations as possible involved as partners. Do that by offering them money so they are committed and don't complain about the event.

– Dru Rivers, Hoes Down Harvest Festival

donations to the club. The sponsoring non-profit, Ecological Farm Association, pays for the insurance. EcoFarm board members do a lot. They come on the day of the festival, set up a general info booth. In addition, they do a lot of office support, publicity and mailings. In exchange, they get a lot of the proceeds from the event. The volunteer Fire Department is on site for the whole time, with a fire truck, ambulance and a first aid station. They receive a donation of part of the proceeds in exchange.

The Pick and Gather at Riverdance Farms involves local scientists from UC Cooperative Extension, Master Gardeners, the Resource Conservation District in organizing the educational River Fair. Lashbrook also partners with another farm to bring in a petting zoo and children's activities and with a non-profit organization for beer sales and volunteers. However, she would like to engage with a sponsoring non-profit organization to manage the overall festival, hopefully a group that can pull in more vendors and more visitors, do more promotion and perhaps offer free tickets to community families.

Nash Farm Pumpkin Festival cuts down on staffing and permitting tasks by partnering with local non-profit organizations to run food concessions and parking/gate fee collection and by having no alcohol sales. The Nash's are able to concentrate on selling pumpkins and running their corn maze and limited attractions by contracting the haunted house operation to an experienced organizer who then manages the actors and other haunted house staff for a split of the entrance fees.

Festival logistics and safety: some considerations

- Parking
- Accessibility, ADA compliance
- Emergency preparedness
- Staffing
- Drinking water
- Dust control
- Security

Parking

Farm festivals usually park visitors on a field or meadow used for other purposes during off-festival seasons. Parking areas must be relatively flat and firm, mowed, clearly signed and staffed during busy times to ensure safety and best use of the space. The number of parking spaces needed depends on the number of guests expected and the number of hours guests are expected to stay.

“We count cars, not people. We count about 700 cars a day on weekends, averaging 4 people/car. Mid-week and earlier in the month is much slower. We can park 400 cars at a time. The cost is \$4 per car for parking/gate fee. Youth groups staff the entrance and collect the fee, splitting this with the farm. This helps with staffing needs.”

– Bob Nash, Nash Ranch Pumpkin Festival

“We need room for about 1,000 – 1,500 cars for an expected attendance of 4,000 people.”

– Dru Rivers, Hoes Down Harvest Festival

Preparing the parking lot:

“The land that will be parking is rotated with tomatoes or melons. Then we put in a quick little cover crop. For the parking lot, the ground has to be leveled, watered and have something alive on it. We try to have a cover crop there, watered and mowed.”

– Dru Rivers



Accessibility for all – Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance

The ADA is a federal law that prohibits discrimination and ensures folks with a range of abilities can participate fully in American life. This law affects farmers, too. If a farm offers events open to the public, the farm may need to provide access for disabled individuals. For example, a person in a wheelchair may not be able to roll from the parking lot to the site if the ground is deeply rutted. If more accessible routes can be easily installed, the law may require it. The ADA does not require that every individual feature be fully accessible, and it does not require that business owners completely remodel at great expense. Exactly what a farm should do to satisfy the ADA depends on when the farm began operations, the nature of the event, and the cost of retrofitting facilities. For example, installing a wide walkway with fine gravel may be rather affordable. With such uncertain requirements, the starting point is recognizing that the ADA may apply to on farm events if they are open to the public and doing more research.

At a minimum, farmers should check to see that folks in wheelchairs are not prevented from attending the event or using a restroom. Installing smooth, wide pathways accomplishes this goal. (At the same time, this is a good practice to avoid injuries from people who are not disabled, as well.) Farms should also rent at least one handicapped accessible restroom facility, especially if no other handicapped accessible restrooms exist on the farm. To avoid ADA issues, the farmer might do some extra research to see what else may be required. Options include searching online for the Department of Justice's guide for small businesses, titled "ADA Guide for Small Businesses." Farmers might also call the Department of Justice's toll-free hotline at 800-514-0301. The Small Business Administration (SBA) also helps businesses understand how to comply with the ADA; they have offices throughout every state. Find one near you at www.sba.gov. (Farm Commons)

Another useful guide for outdoor activities: USDA's [Accessibility Guidebook for Outdoor Recreation and Trails](#)

Some accommodations for people with disabilities made by festival organizers:

- Handicapped accessible porta-potties with signs saying "Only for people with disabilities".
- Handicapped parking area, a Kaboda for transport to and from the parking area, and a 4-wheeler roaming around to assist people with mobility problems
- Paved and easy access to shop and other activities



Emergency preparedness – because emergencies WILL happen

Emergency preparedness is, as defined by the National Fire Protections Association, "Activities, tasks, programs, and systems developed and implemented prior to an emergency that are used to support the prevention of, mitigation of, response to and recovery from emergencies." An Emergency Preparedness Plan needs to be in place before your guests arrive. Here is a useful resource:

[Agritourism Ready: A One Stop Shop](#) website for preparing your emergency management plan, created by Ohio State University Extension

The Hoes Down Harvest Festival takes these steps, among others, for emergency preparedness: Fire engine on the farm, with Volunteer Fire Dept. crew staffing first aid station. Second emergency access road if needed. Evacuation plan. Walkie-talkies carried by super-volunteers and organizers to stay in touch with each other. Food safety training for kitchen crew and volunteers

Staffing

Important note: California labor laws do not allow volunteers to do work that replaces paid staff when working for a commercial business, including a farm festival that benefits a farm. However, volunteers can work for a non-profit organization on projects contributing to the organization's purpose. For this reason, many farmers work with non-profit organizations in planning festivals.

Some staffing stories:

Paid staff for the festival is about six people, mostly those managing the food booths. About 300 – 400 volunteers do most of the work – many returning each year to do the same jobs. In addition, the festival depends on about 25 “super volunteers” who stay for two or three days and put their heart and soul into the festival.
– *Dru Rivers, Hoes Down Harvest Festival*

We staff the full festival with ten people. (not counting vendors, non-profits running food concessions, parking fee collection, etc.) In bad weather, we can run it with just family. Staffing is no problem; we have a wait list. We have contacts with the college up the street. We prefer college students to high school kids on a general basis. We have two people who come out and manage the operation on weekdays, as we are busy with our regular jobs.
– *Bob Nash, Nash Ranch Pumpkin Festival*

Our farm is staffed year round. For the festival, all staff are scheduled to work – usually 20 to 30 paid staff. – *Rebekah Bastedo, Riley's at Los Rios Rancho*

About ten people were needed to staff the festival event at Soul Food Farm. Parking required three people each day. Other tasks included staffing the entrance table and food and drink booths and helping with workshops and classes.
– *Alexis Koefoed, Solano Yolo Lavender Weekend*



Drinking water

Your customers will be thirsty. Many consider access to water to be a human right. At the very least, a farm festival should have drinking water available for sale at an affordable price. Many festival organizers believe that free access to fresh water is part of taking care of their guests and provide water stations with disposable cups. Many encourage guests to bring refillable bottles.

The Hoes Down Harvest Festival contracts with US Pure Water to set up a free filtered drinking water station – in exchange for publicity of their brand.



Dust control

Crowds of people and vehicles tend to kick up dust. To deal with this problem, two of the farmers interviewed had different solutions. For the **Pick and Gather Festival**, Riverdance Farms uses a water truck driven around the festival grounds all day, sprinkling water to keep down dust on the paths.

Hoes Down Harvest Festival volunteers spread straw mulch over the active central area. Farm owners make sure that there are plenty of green, watered, and mowed meadows for guests to sit on.

Security

Security needs may depend on the number of people attending your festival and whether you are serving or selling alcohol. Here are comments on security from some festival organizers:

Three or four people, local farmers, do “karma patrol”. They are trained at intervention and willing to stay up all night, watching for mischief such as unruly teen-agers or others engaged in bad behavior. – *Dru Rivers, Hoes Down Harvest Festival*

We have no trouble. The festival includes a non-profit organization selling beer. The county used to require us to hire two security people while the alcohol was being sold, but now the sheriff has dropped that requirement as there has been no problem for many years.

– *Cindy Lashbrook, Riverdance Farms*

We focus on selling pumpkins. The neighbor down the street does more festival activities and needs much more staff than we do. We don’t serve any beer, although our neighbor does. We don’t have any trouble. – *Bob Nash, Nash Ranch Pumpkin Festival*

Building a Budget

Once you know the costs of the elements of your festival, start assembling a budget that accounts for all the costs of putting on your festival: insurance, permits, labor (including yours), rentals, marketing/advertising expenses, entertainment, contracted help, food and supplies. You could also factor in the wear and tear the event will have on your buildings, driveways and other infrastructure.

There will always be discrepancies between your projected and actual budgets. The important thing is to remember to log everything – from the hours you spend soliciting vendors and painting signs to the wages paid to your staff. Sound record keeping will help you know if you’re losing or earning money and how you can adjust spending or prices to make an event profitable or to at least break even.

For your planning purposes, a sample budget tem-

plate is included as Appendix A, at the end of this guide. An excel version of this budget template, with formulas already entered, is available for download here: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/agritourism/activities/Events/> To use this budget form, adjust the line items to fit your needs and enter numbers that fit your operation into all the yellow-colored squares. As you adjust the numbers in the yellow squares, you will see the bottom line shift.



Some final advice:

Start small and grow into it. Most importantly, don’t go into debt. – *Bob Nash*

Do some research about common themes and challenges other groups or individual farms face in doing a similar event to what you are planning or considering. Work collaboratively with other farms. You don’t have to do it all alone. – *Alexis Koefoed*

Be prepared for a ton of work. Any event like this is an act of God in terms of weather. You’re a bit at the mercy of the weather, so consider that when selecting your date and planning. Get as many local community organizations as possible involved as partners. Do that by offering them money so they are committed and don’t complain about the event. – *Dru Rivers*

Try to show potential farm participants how it can benefit them if you want them to be involved. Create clear objectives and be clear about what you need from people and where you need their help and participation. – *Rebekah Bastedo*

Appendix A: Budget Template for a Farm Festival

This is suggested budget template for a farm festival. An excel version of this budget template, with formulas entered, is available for download on this page: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/agritourism/activities/Events/>. To use this budget form in Excel, adjust the line items to fit your needs and enter numbers that fit your operation into the yellow squares. Watch the bottom line shift.

Income		Entrance or parking fee per person (or car)		
		# of paying attendees (or cars)		
		Gross income from gate fees		0
		Total camping or lodging income		
		Total vendor fee income		
		Sponsorships, grants		
		Corn maze entrance fee income		
		Workshop fee income		
		Petting zoo fee income		
		Bounce house fee income		
		Prepared food and drink sales income		
		Merchandise sales income		
		Farm product sales income		
		total income		0
Expenses				
	Bank charges	Credit card fees		
	Communications	Internet/Website cost		
		Paid advertising (including social media)		
		Walkie-talkies		
		Telephone		
		Printing brochures, fliers, posters		
		Postage, shipping		
		Signs, banners		
	Staff or contract labor	Festival coordinator, organizer		
		Publicity, marketing		
		Farm clean-up, event set-up, tear-down		
		Hay Wagon drivers, tour guides		
		Security		
		Parking lot staff		
		Ticket sales, attraction staff		
		Food, drink, product sales staff		
		Stage manager & staff		
		Performer, entertainer fees		
	Equipment rental	Tents, tables, chairs		
		Portable toilets, hand washing		
		Generator		
		Bounce house, other attractions		
		Straw bales		

Budget Template - Farm Festival

		Sound system		
	Equipment purchased	Tents, tables, chairs, etc (amortized over 5 years, so list 20% of purchase cost)		
		Wagons, stage, jump pillow, etc. (amortized over 5 years, so list 20% of purchase cost)		
	Supplies	Disposable plates, utensils, cleaning supplies, etc		
	Permits	Event permit, fees		
		Alcohol permit		
	Facility	Wear and tear on infrastructure		
	Cost of goods sold	Food expense		
		Drinks expense		
		Farm products expense (estimated at 60% of farm product sales income)	0	
		Merchandise expense		
	Other expenses	Repairs & Maintenance-Site		
		Utilities/Water/Garbage		
		Insurance		
		Travel		
		Other		
		total expenses		0
		net income		0



Resources

California Agritourism website by University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (UC SAREP) - <https://ucanr.edu/sites/agritourism/>

Agritourism – Regulations & Other Considerations – from the UCCE Agriculture Ombudsman - <https://ucanr.edu/sites/CESonomaAgOmbuds/Agritourism/>

UC Cooperative Extension Foothill Farming Risk Management website - https://ucanr.edu/sites/placernevadas-mallfarms/Farm_Business_Planning/FBP_Risk_Management/Risk_Management/

Event Management Training Toolkit for Managers of Rural Iowa Fairs, Festivals and Events by Iowa State University Extension - <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/15219>

Host Safer, More Legally Secure On-Farm Events, by Farm Commons - <https://farmcommons.org/resources/host-safer-more-legally-secure-farm-events>

Vermont Agritourism Guides by the Vermont Agritourism Collaborative - <http://www.uvm.edu/vtagritourism/>

Extension Training for Agritourism Development by Rutgers University New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station - <http://agritourism.rutgers.edu/training/modules.html>

Integrating Safety into Agritourism - a website created by the National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety, including walk-throughs, checklists and resources to implement safety best practices - <https://safeagritourism.org/>

Agritourism Ready: A One Stop Shop website for preparing your emergency management plan, created by Ohio State University Extension - <https://u.osu.edu/agritourismready/>

Cutting out the Corn Maze, by Tuttle Orchards, Indiana - <https://www.indianapolisorchard.com/cutting-corn-maze-make-maze/>

Master the Maize: The Increasingly Big Business of Corn Mazes, by Andy Wright, Modern Farmer - <https://modernfarmer.com/2013/09/corn-maze-farmers-income/>

Evaluating the Financial Potential of an Entertainment Farming/Farm Tourism Business from the University of Georgia Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development - <https://athenaeum.libs.uga.edu/bitstream/handle/10724/18782/CR-08-11.pdf?sequence=1>

North American Farmers’ Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA) - Trade association for agritourism operators and farmers engaged in direct marketing - <https://www.farmersinspired.com/>



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1. Zoning and Americans with Disabilities Act discussions are from [Host Safer, More Legally Secure On-Farm Events](https://farmcommons.org/resources/host-safer-more-legally-secure-farm-events), by Farm Commons - <https://farmcommons.org/resources/host-safer-more-legally-secure-farm-events>
2. “Managing Liability” is from from Rutgers University Extension, “Agritourism Liability” - <http://agritourism.rutgers.edu/training/modules.html>
3. ”Food and Drink” and “Serving Alcohol” sections are based on information compiled by the University of California Cooperative Extension Sonoma County: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/CESonomaAgOmbuds/Agritourism>

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