



**Alternative Agriculture Enterprise Agritourism Success Story**

**Whinery's Flying W Guest Ranch  
Authentic "Old West" Dude Ranch**

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Administrative Assistant and Student

**Ron Dahlgren**  
Senior Radio/Television Producer

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**Introduction**

Some Oklahoma farmers are looking at agriculture with a new perspective. Increased production costs and declining commodity markets are prompting agriculture producers to look for alternative enterprises to supplement farming income. One alternative being tested by Oklahoma producers to subsidize traditional farming operations is agritourism.

Agritourism is the intersection of agriculture and tourism. It allows farmers and ranchers to earn higher profits by replacing or supplementing traditional farm operations with innovative on-farm and on-ranch activities that are often attractive to visitors and tourists.

According to the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA), agritourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry. This includes visits to working farms, ranches, wineries, roadside stands, and agricultural industries.

In order to assist producers who are seeking to diversify their operations through agritourism activities, the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) at Oklahoma State University (OSU), the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department (OTRD), and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry (ODAFF) have developed a cooperative agritourism program for Oklahoma. A media team, including Ron Dahlgren, OSU Agricultural Communications Services Senior Radio/Television Producer, traveled the state interviewing successful agritourism enterprises. These materials will be used for establishment and promotion of Oklahoma Agritourism.

The information below is part of an interview with Don Whinery, owner of the Flying W Guest Ranch. The ranch consisted of 7,000 acres before a portion was sold to develop a guest ranch. This working cattle ranch allows visitors a step back in time to enjoy the beautiful Oklahoma scenery on horseback or ride in a buckboard pulled by draft horses. The Flying W Ranch was the site of the largest buffalo kill by Plains Indians more than 2,300 years ago. Guests can experience an authentic old west dude ranch at Whinery's Flying W Guest Ranch.

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets  
are also available on our website at:  
<http://osufacts.okstate.edu>

**Interview with Don Whinery**  
Flying W Guest Ranch  
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Telephone: 580-225-5515  
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Photo courtesy of Flying W Guest Ranch

*The following information is from Don Whinery's interview.*

**What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprise?**

It began as survival. I felt a beautiful ranch had something to offer people who wanted to enjoy the West. Developing the ranch into an agritourism enterprise was by accident.

**How did you make the transition?**

Consumers and guests have guided us with their requests which started with trail rides. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist's attacks on our nation, people wanted to get back to basics; to experience life the way it used to be — simple. They requested opportunities to live what their grandparents and great-grandparents had experienced.

**What is your primary target audience?**

Prospective clients are anyone who loves the west. Our primary audience is from the East Coast, the European Market, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Germany, Iceland, Ukraine, and

South America. It is not uncommon for people to pay for the experience of riding fence.

**How do you obtain financing?**

It was primarily by personal funding and later by bank financing.

**How did you acquire information?**

The Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department has been a great source of knowledge, as well as other entrepreneurs.

**How do you market your services?**

It has been advantageous to co-market our operation with other agritourism businesses in the area. We have a web page on the Internet and advertise with bus tour companies. Our goal is to make western Oklahoma a destination point, instead of a pass through point.

**What went wrong, and why? How did you correct the situation?**

It is not easy juggling a working ranch and guest ranch. Working eighteen hour days, seven days a week leaves little time off.

**What went right, and why? How did you build on your success?**

Guests are given the opportunity to provide valuable feedback. Most people going on bus tours are senior citizens. Their needs are assessed and accommodations made.

Senior citizens enjoy giving advice about driving a team or riding the range. I enjoy meeting these people and value the comments.

**How do you handle liability concerns?**

It is hard to obtain liability insurance because there is no history base. I am working with OTRD and the Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner to establish a general liability policy. This would allow beginning operators to get adequate coverage.

**What would be the most important advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?**

Talk to the Agritourism Director at ODAFF.

**Where do you plan to go from here?**

We plan to build an entire working Old West town designed to accommodate movie productions, complete with buildings equipped for sound and camera props.

Guests will be able to participate in shooting sports, trail rides, and portray Old West characters. We offer costumes for old time photos, i.e. gambler, school marm, cowboy, gun-fighter, and so forth. There's something available for ages 8 to 80.

Asarsaparilla saloon will offer family entertainment and a huge outdoor playground will allow little cowboys and cowgirls to experience Oklahoma's red dirt.

A General Store has been purchased and moved from Branson, Missouri to a location on the ranch. More than three thousand original artifacts from the 1880s to 1920s came with the store.

The town includes a 1920s church with original pews which will be available for cowboy weddings.

Guests typically stay one to two days, but with the in-

volvement of surrounding attractions, this could evolve into more two to three day stays. Sayre, Elk City, and Cheyenne offer visitors the opportunity to visit historical museums, the site of the Battle of the Washita where General Custer killed Chief Black Kettle, and the National Park Service.

When the town is fully operational, it should employ 40 to 50 people, giving a tremendous economic impact to the area. The longer people stay in the area, the more this impact increases.

**Are you willing to share your information?**

Yes.

*This concludes the interview and information provided by Mr. Don Whinery.*

**Benefits of Agritourism**

The transition to alternative enterprises is happening at a favorable time. People from both urban and rural communities are seeking entertainment and recreation from local farmers and ranchers who support the conservation of natural resources. Children and adults want opportunities to engage in interactive educational outdoor activities plus tourists interested in farm culture and heritage want to better understand agriculture.

Increased income for farm families and added visitor attraction sites for communities are two major benefits of agritourism. A farm and its natural resources provide great opportunities for alternative enterprises through agritourism and is a viable option for community economic development.

Tourism brings non-local dollars into communities to be spent at gift shops, restaurants, motels, gas stations, and convenience stores. This translates into profits, salaries, and tax revenues for local economies.

Promoting agritourism is smart for the whole community. It encourages communities to support good infrastructure, creates positive attitudes towards visitors, inspires clean environments, combines a good retail mix, increases local tourism organizations, focuses on coordination of activities, and promotes good hospitality

The Oklahoma Agritourism Steering Committee, an interagency between Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry, Oklahoma Department of Tourism and Recreation, and the Department of Wildlife Conservation points out that agritourism combines two of the state's top industries: agriculture (\$7 billion annually) and tourism (\$4.5 billion annually). By combining the two industries, the potential for growth is phenomenal.

According to a study by the TIA of America, nearly two-thirds of all U.S. adults, or 87 million individuals, have taken a trip to a rural destination within the past three years.

Travel and tourism is a \$4.5 billion industry in Oklahoma that generates more than 70,700 jobs, according to OTRD. It also generates nearly \$760.4 million in tax revenue for federal, state, and local governments.

It is easy to understand why the combination of agriculture and tourism, with its focus on rural and economic development, has begun to pique the interest of many Oklahoma producers. For many farming operations, making profits depends on diversifying operations which include services and products designed for tourists.

## Assistance Available for Agritourism

To encourage rural and economic development, the ODAFF implemented the Oklahoma Agriculture Enhancement and Diversification Program. This is designed to develop or improve uses for agriculture products, expand the state's production of value-added products, and encourage diversified farming. This program has been tremendously successful at helping producers throughout rural Oklahoma increase income and create jobs in their communities. In addition to diversifying Oklahoma's agriculture industry, the program has also been used for producers who want to enter the agritourism business.

The Oklahoma State Legislature also recognized the need to assist with rural diversification. House Bill 1680, effective January 1, 2006, was designed to spur investments and create new farming operations in rural Oklahoma. It increases the maximum amount of tax credit for investment in certain agricultural cooperatives and helps landowners with the costs of starting agritourism ventures.

Several government agencies have joined forces to help land owners assess their natural resources and provide

information to farmers and ranchers identifying alternative agricultural enterprises and agritourism opportunities.

ODAFF established a special Agritourism Division to help agriculture producers identify opportunities in agritourism. Information on business plan development, marketing options, tourism expansion, and resource assessment is available in the Oklahoma Agritourism Resource Manual listed on their website.

Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service specialists assist potential entrepreneurs and rural communities considering the agritourism industry. Professionals in each county provide educational programs, strategic planning, and information on economic diversification. Check the list below for a resource near you.

Sources: Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry, Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Travel Industry Association of America

**Table 1. Resource List.**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Contact</i>	<i>Phone</i>	<i>Web Site</i>
OK Agritourism/ODAFF	Abby Cash	(405) 522-5652	<a href="http://www.oklahomaagritourism.com">www.oklahomaagritourism.com</a>
OSU/OCES	County Extension Directors		<a href="http://countyext.okstate.edu/">http://countyext.okstate.edu/</a>
OSU/Rural Development	Mike Woods Stan Ralstin Jack Frye	(405) 744-9837 (580) 237-7677 (580) 332-4100	<a href="http://www.rd.okstate.edu">www.rd.okstate.edu</a>
OTRD	Barbie Elder	(405) 230-8409	<a href="http://www.oklatourism.gov">www.oklatourism.gov</a>

## **The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service** ***Bringing the University to You!***

The Cooperative Extension Service is the largest, most successful informal educational organization in the world. It is a nationwide system funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state, and local governments that delivers information to help people help themselves through the land-grant university system.

Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; family and consumer sciences; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and research-based information.
- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
- More than a million volunteers help multiply the impact of the Extension professional staff.
- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.

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