



Alternative Agriculture Enterprise Agritourism Success Story

**The Orient Lodge
Deer & Turkey Hunts,
Grass Fed Beef, & Hay Rides**

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Introduction

Some 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 Bill Cornelsen, owner of The Orient Lodge. The 4,500 acre Cornelsen Ranch, purchased in 1941, is located on the Cimarron River in Major County and is noted for its abundance of quail, turkey, and deer.

The Orient Lodge offers some of northwest Oklahoma's finest hunting opportunities. An abundance of turkey and deer provide excellent experiences for both novice and experienced hunters.

Named after the Kansas City, Mexico, and Orient Railroad, the lodge is located close to Fairview, Oklahoma which was once a division point of the railroad and is rich in railroad history.

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

Interview with Bill Cornelsen
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Photo courtesy of Orient Lodge

The following information is from Bill Cornelsen's interview.

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

Prompted by a visit to The Farm near San Antonio, Texas, my wife and I decided to pursue our dream. The Farm offers a rural setting for companies, schools, and churches to host group parties and picnics, and for visitors to hand feed cattle, sheep, and goats. They also offer musical entertainment, a swimming pool, and an RV park. My wife was so impressed that we formulated the idea of turning our ranch into a hunting lodge and country club.

How did you make the transition?

We formed an LLC corporation, and began focusing on wild game hunts. We concentrate on deer and turkey, which unlike quail, do not require dogs. Hunting surveys are conducted prior to season, so game can be located and are readily accessible for the hunt.

What is your primary target audience?

Turkey hunters are primarily from Oklahoma. However, deer hunters come from Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Texas. It is easier to market the lodge to out of state hunters since local clientele are not apt to pay for these services.

How do you obtain financing?

We pay as we go, which allows for work in progress. At this time we are building a new home on the ranch. When it is complete, we will begin establishing the entertainment aspect. We have a hay ride route designed and plan to build an observation tower with a view of Fairview and the Gloss Mountains.

How did you acquire information?

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation Agricultural Division have been tremendous sources of information. I also attended seminars at the OSU Food and Agricultural Products Research and Technology Center to acquire information about marketing meat from our grass fed beef.

How do you market your services?

It has been tough getting started. However, we feel our location, 35 miles from Enid, and 2½ hours from Tulsa or Wichita is a positive asset.

We attend hunting shows in Florida and emphasize the fact we are an owner operated ranch, not an outfitter. A website was developed but little business has resulted from it. The website primarily serves as an aid.

We plan to develop cooperative cross marketing with other businesses. Emphasis will be on marketing this area as a destination point, rather than a pass through. Other local attractions are: Gloss Mountain Park, Indian Creek Village Winery, Heritage Manor Bed and Breakfast, and the Sod House. The concept is to focus on our uniqueness and market the positive issues.

What went wrong? and Why? How did you correct the situation?

Most things are going well. Two hunting trips have been donated, but we did not receive the benefits expected. We feel blessed that overall, everything is working well.

What went right? and Why? How did you build on your success?

An abundance of wild game and all 4,500 acres in one location are great assets. The fact several large deer have been killed resulted in word of mouth promotion. Game that is killed may be processed locally and delivery arranged. We also help our hunters with trophy mounts.

How do you handle liability concerns?

Our local insurance agent handles liability coverage.

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

We utilize the knowledge of our ranch foreman, Corey Ratzlaff. He provides the hunting expertise and is in charge of guiding.

During hunting season, the cattle operation takes a backseat. We also run goats and sheep. An added benefit is goats eat cedar trees which serve as natural eradication.

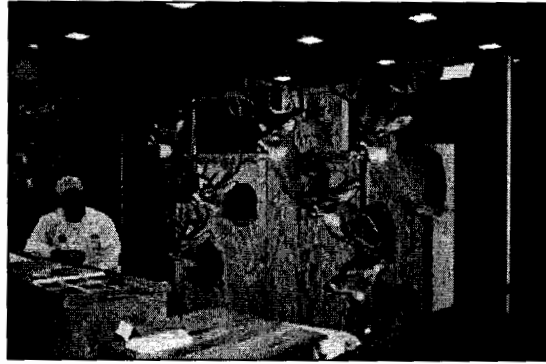


Photo courtesy of Orient Lodge

Where do you plan to go from here?

We are in a good position to pursue additional agritourism opportunities, i.e. wildlife observation, group events, and recreational activities. Plant and wildlife diversity on the ranch gives endless opportunities.

Are you willing to share your information for the promotion of Agritourism?

Yes.

This concludes the interview and information provided by Mr. Cornelsen.

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 the community 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, that include services and products designed for tourists.

Assistance Available for Agritourism

To encourage rural and economic development, 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 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 landowners 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	www.oklahomaagritourism.com
OSU/OCES	County Extension Directors		http://countyext.okstate.edu/
OSU/Rural Development	Mike Woods Stan Ralstin Jack Frye	(405) 744-9837 (580) 237-7677 (580) 332-4100	www.rd.okstate.edu
OTRD	Barbie Elder	(405) 230-8409	www.oklatourism.gov

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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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert E. Whitson, Director of Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President, Dean, and Director of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of \$1.35 per copy. 0706 GH.