

Survey Development

In 2001, under a previous project, a comprehensive survey was conducted to identify and catalogue agritourism businesses in the province of British Columbia. Part of this original survey asked agritourism operators to identify challenges or constraints negatively affecting their business. A challenge that was consistently identified by those surveyed was the regulatory issue. Building from the previous survey, this project sought to identify those critical regulations that are impediments to the industry and to get a general sense of the time and cost to agri-tourism operators to comply with the regulations. In consultation with industry analysts and MAFF's statistics office, a questionnaire was designed with the hope of shedding more light on the regulatory environment for operators. Please see Appendix B for a sample of the survey.

A major consideration during the design phase of the survey questionnaire concerned the nature of the data sought by this survey. While a strictly quantitative survey is less subjective and more easily translated into conclusions that are telling of the larger population, this type of data is not as descriptive or revealing of the full story. Qualitative data, which allows case studies to emerge and an in-depth investigation of the whole issue, may be preferable given the smaller sample size and the complexity of the information being sought. Hoping to get the best of both worlds, the survey design includes both qualitative and quantitative questions. The operators were encouraged to provide as many comments as they wished as well as checking-off provided responses to each question.

The survey questionnaire itself had thirteen questions and was designed to take an operator approximately 30 minutes to fill out. Operators were given the choice of responding to the survey either on the telephone, in-person where feasible, or by fax and mail. The questionnaire format and flow of the survey was for operators to:

- Identify which regulations applied to their agritourism business, which were a challenge, and what the cost of compliance was for each;
- Identify who helped them to understand the regulations, how often they interacted with government about the regulations, and whether they understood the general logic behind the regulations;

- Compare the time and money spent on complying with regulations to other business activities, if they ever had to close their business for regulatory reasons and what effect this had on their business;
- State why they operate an agri-tourism business, identify what resources they would find useful to better understand the regulations and provide any additional comments or suggestions for government on the issue of regulations.

The questionnaire was field-tested with an operator and necessary adjustments were made before proceeding with surveying the rest of the population.

Survey Sample Selection

Due to time and resource constraints, not all agritourism businesses catalogued under the previous project were again survey participants for regulatory information. Rather, a sample of the larger population was selected. Tourism BC divides the province into six separate regions: Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands, Vancouver Coast and Mountains, Cariboo-Chilcotin, Thompson – Okanagan, the Rockies, and Northern BC. Samples of three to five operators from each of the regions were surveyed. Given that municipal regulations represent over 30% of the total relevant regulations and given that over 154 municipalities and 27 regional districts exist across the province, not every issue or restraint is identifiable with such a small sample size. With a cross-section of the entire province however, it was anticipated that many of the major issues would surface despite the sample size. Survey participants, in part because of the geographical diversity and in part by design, have a wide range of agritourism businesses, which allowed more regulatory disparities to arise.

Data Collection Method and Field Procedures

The survey followed two separate collection methods, again due to time and resource constraints. In-person and on-site surveys were possible for those businesses in a close proximity to Victoria. Those businesses spanning the province and at too great of distance for car travel were performed by mail and/or over the telephone based on the operators preference. In both cases, print copies of the questionnaire were available to those surveyed so that they were able to follow along with the surveyor. Additionally, the operators being surveyed had the opportunity to provide comments on all of the questions.

Populations Not Surveyed

It is important to recognize that while this survey provides MAFF and the industry with information about agri-tourism operators, some data is unavoidably missing. Those surveyed, while expressing frustration and financial losses because of regulatory restrictions, are nonetheless still in operation. On the other hand, there is likely another group of agritourism operators or general farmers, who, possibly due to regulatory restrictions, are either no longer in business, were discouraged before beginning, or are operating less visibly and as a result were not surveyed. Having no knowledge of the opinions and experiences of this group places certain limitations on the scope of conclusions to be drawn.