

# Supporting agritourism through Local Government planning schemes

## Guidance for Local Government



## What is agritourism?

Agritourism is a form of immersive tourism that connects people to agricultural products or produce, delivered on farming land through a direct “hands on” experience. Agritourism can be made up of a variety of elements including:

- combining tourism and agriculture into a product or service, such as “paddock to plate” dining
- products or services that attract members of the public to visit farms, such as events or accommodation
- providing recreation, entertainment and or educational experiences related to an agriculture enterprise.

Agritourism ventures can vary in scale and may include a wide range of experiences including winery visits, farm stays, retreats and camping, food experiences through cafes and farmgate stalls, and activities such as self-fruit picking, education, animal interactions, recreational fishing and nature-based experiences.

## Why is agritourism important?

Agritourism offers a variety of economic benefits to local communities by creating jobs, diversifying income for farmers, and attracting visitors towards local businesses and services.

By offering unique local experiences like farm stays, local food tastings and events, agritourism provides opportunities to strengthen community identity through showcasing local knowledge and events, promotes sustainable environmental practices and support for agricultural uses. Agritourism may also help to address social isolation by encouraging connections across businesses, communities and visitors in regional areas.

While regulating agritourism, like other land uses, can be important to identify and manage impacts for local communities, the environment and existing agricultural operations, overregulation may be a disincentive and deter entrepreneurs from starting, innovating or expanding agritourism ventures because of costs, time, complexities and uncertainty.

Local Government planning schemes play an important role in encouraging agritourism in the right places.

### Case study: Scenic Rim Eat Local Month 2024

- **Activities:** farm tours, workshops, master classes, local produce markets
- **Events and Attendance:** Over 100 events held in June 2024, attracting 12,993 visitors, mostly from outside the region
- **Economic Impact:**
  - \$1.72 million contributed to the local economy (49% increase from 2023).
  - 20% increase in average overnight spending and 29% increase in day-tripper spending
- **Media Reach:** 4.8 million people reached through media coverage, valued at \$3.9 million in regional promotion
- **Visitor Feedback:** 93% of surveyed visitors said the event enhanced the Scenic Rim's appeal
- **New Experiences:** 60% of program experiences were presented for the first time
- **Local Business Participation:** Over 90 local businesses involved

## How can planning schemes support agritourism?

The State Planning Policy (SPP) supports opportunities for increased agricultural investment and diversification including value-adding activities such as farm gate sales and agritourism in appropriate locations and where agricultural productivity is not reduced. Regional plans may also identify specific important values that can influence where agritourism is supported.

Local Governments are encouraged to consider where agritourism may benefit local communities and how this can be supported. The SPP and relevant regional plans should be considered and appropriately integrated into the local planning framework. These elements should suit communities' unique needs, including the appropriate mix of land uses, scale and location of development, and how impacts are appropriately managed and mitigated.

### Strategic framework

The strategic framework of a planning scheme can be used to promote agritourism by specifying when and where agritourism is encouraged, to guide the use of zones and overlays and matters that warrant impact assessment for large-scale agritourism development. The strategic framework may also provide a strategic basis for merits-based assessment to support agritourism projects where impacts can be managed appropriately.

The strategic framework should be informed by comprehensive community consultation, particularly seeking views of tourism operators and agricultural producers in the region to capture their aspirations and identify key tourism areas.

## Land use definitions

'Agritourism' is not a defined land use term under the *Planning Regulation 2017*. Agritourism could encompass a range of defined land uses such as tourist accommodation, nature-based tourism, short-term accommodation, food and drink outlet, shop, educational establishment or tourist attraction. It is a matter for the proponent to determine the agritourism offerings they wish to provide.

Local Government may consider providing more clarity about different agritourism ventures by providing defined activity groups in planning schemes, or including administrative terms, or providing examples of agritourism activities that meet the relevant land use definitions.



### Defined Activity groups

Activity groups can be used by Local Government to classify different types of uses that a Local Government considers to be agritourism in their planning schemes. These groups can be used to apply consistent requirements or category of assessment to land uses. For example, an agritourism activity group could include:

- tourism accommodation
- short-term accommodation
- food and drink outlet
- shop
- educational establishment
- tourist attraction

As an example, the 'agritourism' activity group could then be listed in the category of assessment table and made accepted development where the combined Gross Floor Area (GFA) of the uses does not exceed a certain size, such as 100m<sup>2</sup>.

### Land use examples

Planning schemes may also provide greater certainty that specific agritourism uses are land uses as defined in the Planning Regulation by including examples in the definition section of their planning scheme. For example:

- the definition of 'short term accommodation' may include 'farm stay' or 'glamping'
- the definition of 'home-based business' may include a 'farm stay bed and breakfast' (with limited guests)
- the definition of 'winery' may include 'cellar door'
- the definition of 'food and drink' may include a 'farm to plate dining experience'
- the definition of 'shop' may include 'farm gate stall'.

### Administrative terms and ancillary uses

Local Government can make administrative terms for planning schemes to provide certainty about how they define different agritourism activities. These terms may clarify that the agritourism activities should be ancillary or subordinate to existing rural uses such as primary production or farming operations. This means that agritourism operations should be of a function and scale that do not have an impact on existing rural uses.

For example, an administrative term for a farm gate stall may be provided that specifies that any produce sold must predominantly come from onsite. A shop could be accepted development in the rural zone provided that it is used for agritourism as defined in the local government's administrative terms.

## Categories of development and assessment

Agritourism uses can range from smaller scale and low impact ventures such as roadside stalls/camping to large scale activities involving multiple offerings such as events, accommodation, leisure and recreation.

Planning schemes can facilitate agritourism projects by specifying categories of development and assessment for different uses, depending on scale, impact and location.

When determining categories of assessment for agritourism uses, Local Government may wish to consider:

- Previous development applications and compliance issues for agritourism type experiences. Reviewing development applications that have been approved, or refused, the grounds for the decision and, where approved, any conditions of the approval, or compliance issues arising or not eventuating, can help determine relevant assessment considerations and thresholds.
- If in a rural zone, the agricultural focus or viability has shifted, the rural zoning may need to be changed to enable a different range of uses and activities in an area.
- The amenity impacts of existing rural uses. As noise, dust, odours and lighting are all impacts that can occur as a result of rural uses, it may be appropriate to allow similar impacts to occur as part of an onsite-agritourism use.
- Talking to local tourism and agricultural operators to understand their aspirations and experiences they would like to promote. This type of analysis may indicate what a level of regulation will achieve, whether it is appropriate for managing the level of risk and impacts, and whether current provisions facilitate agritourism as intended.



An option for low impact and low risk development may be to provide that agritourism development is 'accepted subject to requirements', meaning farmers can experiment with agritourism business ventures without needing a development approval.

Thresholds can also be used to limit the scale of use and assessment benchmarks can be included through nominated codes for different agritourism ventures to mitigate any foreseen impacts. Thresholds could be established for patron capacity and to ensure access and parking provisions are acceptable to protect the amenity of local residents.

Examples of agritourism type uses that could be accepted/code assessable development include:

| Development                                                                                    | Accepted development requirements                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Code assessable development                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Recreational activities or educational/farm tours                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No more than 20 persons at one time up to a maximum frequency of 20 times per annum; and</li> <li>Operates only between the hours of 7.00am and 6.00pm, up to 5 days per week.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where not meeting accepted development requirements and/or</li> <li>No more than one 100 persons at one time up to a maximum frequency of 100 times per annum; and</li> <li>Operates only between the hours of 7.00am and 6.00pm, up to 7 days per week.</li> </ul> |
| Functions and events                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to but not exceeding 20 persons at one time; and</li> <li>Up to but not exceeding twelve functions or events per annum.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where not meeting accepted development requirements and/or</li> <li>up to but not exceeding 50 persons at one time;</li> <li>Up to but not exceeding 24 functions or events per annum.</li> </ul>                                                                   |
| A winery, café or restaurant such as a cellar door                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has a seating capacity of up to but not exceeding 20 persons; and</li> <li>Gross floor area does not exceed 60m<sup>2</sup>; and</li> <li>Operates only between the hours of 7.00am and 6.00pm, up to 5 days per week; and</li> <li>Is situated no closer than 20 metres from an external property boundary or 40 metres from a sensitive use (whichever is greater).</li> </ul>                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where not meeting accepted development requirements; and/or</li> <li>Has a seating capacity not exceeding 50 persons; and/or</li> <li>Gross floor area exceeding 60m<sup>2</sup>.</li> </ul>                                                                        |
| A shop such as a farm gate stall                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gross floor area does not exceed 60m<sup>2</sup>; and</li> <li>Operates only between the hours of 7.00am and 6.00pm, up to 5 days per week; and</li> <li>Is situated no closer than 20 metres from an external property boundary or 40 metres from a sensitive use (whichever is greater).</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where not meeting accepted development requirements; and/or</li> <li>Gross floor area exceeds 60m<sup>2</sup> and/or</li> <li>Operates outside the hours of 7.00am and 6.00pm, up to 7 days per week.</li> </ul>                                                    |
| Short term accommodation, nature based tourism or tourist park such as a farm stay or glamping | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involving the use of all or part an existing dwelling(s); or</li> <li>Up to but not exceeding 5 self-contained cabins; or</li> <li>Up to but not exceeding 5 tent / camping sites; and</li> <li>Is situated no closer than 10 metres from an external property boundary or 30 metres from a sensitive use (whichever is the greater).</li> <li>Providing accommodation guests do not stay for a continuous period of longer than 10 days.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where not meeting accepted development requirements; and/or</li> <li>Not exceeding 20 self-contained cabins; or</li> <li>Not exceeding 20 tent / camping sites.</li> </ul>                                                                                          |

## Overlays

Overlays play an important role in identifying constraints, opportunities or features of land that require specific consideration, for example, a bushfire or flood overlay. However, these may add unnecessary requirements for small scale or low risk agriculture offerings such as a farm gate stall or cellar door.

There may be opportunities to include tailored requirements in overlays to make low impact and scale activities accepted development subject to conditions, or subject to code assessment. This could include requiring the proponent to develop specific risk mitigation requirements, plans or procedures.

For example, while more stringent requirements may exist for a new habitable short-term accommodation to establish in a bushfire or flood overlay to reduce the risk that visitors unfamiliar with the area and evacuation routes will be harm's way, a cellar door can easily be closed during a flood event and designed to be easily restored after a flood event. A short-term accommodation farm stay may be appropriate in a bushfire overlay area providing there is a robust event operations plan that ensures the farm host is always nearby and responsible for overseeing the safety of the visitors.

## Assessment benchmarks

Local Governments may consider including additional assessment benchmarks for agritourism uses in existing codes such as a 'rural uses code' or 'rural zone code' or even provide a specific code for tourism or agritourism development to ensure that the scale and impacts from agritourism activities can be appropriately regulated including the management of potential waste, traffic and noise impacts.

This might include providing proportional benchmarks for:

- a site's location (on major tourist road routes larger scale agritourism might be supported)
- amenity impacts (noise, dust, lighting, traffic)
- built form appearance and typology (can existing buildings be repurposed?)
- how agritourism is associated with and ancillary to an existing agricultural use
- infrastructure such as roads, car parking and sewerage (can reduced requirements be specified for small scale operations?)
- separation from existing rural activities (can reduced boundary setbacks be provided to allow for greater separation from primary agricultural use on site?).

For example, the Scenic Rim Regional Council include an acceptable outcome for tourist accommodation sites in a rural zone in their tourism code, that cabins have a maximum Gross Floor Area (GFA) of 100m<sup>2</sup>. This allows Councils to promote development that is small scale and compatible with existing character and amenity.

## Amending planning schemes

Local Governments seeking to amend planning schemes to facilitate agritourism into their planning schemes are encouraged to use the streamlined amendment process under section 18 of the *Planning Act 2016*. This reduces the amendment process to as little as three months. The tailored process for plan-making supports Local Governments in co-designing a plan-making process that is flexible and responsive to the unique local context and communities within their Local Government areas.

## Case study – Lockyer Valley Regional Council

The *Lockyer Valley Planning Scheme 2024* (the planning scheme) specifies categories of assessment for different uses as well as includes specific agritourism policy in their strategic framework to facilitate agritourism development. These policies signal Council's intention to encourage agritourism that aligns with the region's agricultural strengths, helping to attract visitors and stimulate the local economy.

### Making agritourism uses accepted or code assessable development

The Lockyer Valley Regional Council's planning scheme specifies the below uses that may make up an agritourism project as accepted development, or code assessable development, where certain requirements are met in the table of assessment for the Rural zone. Uses that may be accepted subject to requirements or code assessable development in the Rural zone are Nature-based tourism, Roadside stall, Short-term accommodation and Tourist park.

The planning scheme also includes the Tourism Uses code, that provides accepted development requirements and assessment benchmarks for code assessable development for the above uses, specific to agritourism operations.

**Figure 1.1** below is an excerpt from the Categories of development and assessment in a Rural zone – Material change of use. The figure highlights examples of requirements that can be used to specify when development is accepted or code assessable and how codes can be used.

| Use          | Categories of development and assessment                                                 | Assessment benchmarks for assessable development and requirements for Accepted development |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tourist park | Accepted development                                                                     |                                                                                            |
|              | If—                                                                                      |                                                                                            |
|              | a. no more than 5 caravan or tent <a href="#">sites</a> on a lot more than 10 hectares;  | <a href="#">Tourism uses code</a>                                                          |
|              | b. no more than 20 people at any given time.                                             | <a href="#">Building design code</a><br><a href="#">Transport, access and parking code</a> |
|              | Code assessment                                                                          |                                                                                            |
|              | If—                                                                                      |                                                                                            |
|              | not accepted development;                                                                | <a href="#">Rural zone code</a>                                                            |
|              | a. no more than 15 caravan or tent <a href="#">sites</a> on a lot more than 10 hectares; | <a href="#">Tourism uses code</a>                                                          |
|              | b. no more than 50 people at any given time.                                             | <a href="#">Works codes</a>                                                                |

### Supporting agritourism through the strategic framework

The planning scheme includes specific policy relating to agritourism in the strategic framework. This means that applicants have more certainty when developing agritourism projects about what Local Government will consider in their assessment and how they can design their projects to respond to relevant regional matters.

Examples of specific agritourism policy requirements in the strategic framework may include:

- that it builds upon the clean and green identity of the region and does not prejudice the productive potential of rural land
- farm trails and agritourism opportunities that increases the resilience of the region's agricultural and tourism businesses will be supported
- support tourism in the rural uplands that:
  - provides boutique and low scale short-term accommodation and facilities that contribute to widening the range of tourism experiences in the region and
  - increases the growth of creative and boutique industries and recreation activities that provide and increase economic diversity and resilience of existing farming operations.

## Initiatives outside the planning framework

### Incentivising strategies

Local Governments may adopt incentivising strategies to encourage proponents, especially small or family-owned businesses, to diversify into agritourism, for example:

- economic strategy development identifying areas of activity
- streamlined assessment processes
- localised marketing and tourism campaigns
- capitalising on state and federal government tourism initiatives such as the Queensland State Government's 'Holiday Highway' program that supports regional tourism from Gold Coast to Cairns
- clustering activity to amplify the existence of similar operators nearby and minimise impacts
- education and capacity building
- infrastructure funding to support increased agritourism in desired areas
- establishing pooled improvement funding schemes to support agritourism hub economic development
- lowering financial barriers (waiving or reducing development assessment fees or infrastructure charges)
- regular monitoring and review.



#### Case study - Far North Queensland

Marketing organisation Tourism Tropical North Queensland showcases the Tropical North by promoting campaigns in partnerships with Local Governments in the north. This includes campaigns and events such as:

- Drive North Queensland (Partnered with the Townsville, Mackay, Issac, Cairns, Whitsundays Councils)
- Cairns Unearthed (Supported by the Cairns Regional Council)
- Feast of the Senses (Sponsored by the Cassowary Coast Regional Council).

Campaigns are not only aimed at showcasing their region as an agritourism destination but helps creates opportunities for producers and makers. Local Government initiatives can help build industry capability through regional narratives that help align agritourism with economic and regional strategies.

## How can planning officers advise proponents in preparing a development application?

### Pre-lodgement

Some proponents have difficulty navigating the planning framework to understand the specific requirements and constraints related to their agritourism development.

Local Governments may assist by encouraging proponents to engage in pre-lodgement discussions and by providing clear and specific advice. Early engagement allows proponents and Local Government to discuss:

- the proposed development and relevant land use definitions
- categories of development assessment

- the impact of overlays and how they can be avoided, or how specific considerations and requirements in overlays can be responded to including responding to hazards such as bushfire, flood, or environmental protection
- other relevant planning scheme provisions
- potential challenges to address, such as traffic, noise, safety, waste and maintaining local amenity
- any additional information or studies that may be required in accompanying a development application.

This proactive approach helps proponents better understand the planning framework process, Local Government planning officers to understand the development proposal, and ensures their applications are well-prepared and aligned with local planning objectives.

## Supporting material and guidance

Local Government may support proponents by offering resources such as checklists, guidelines, or examples of successful agritourism applications. These tools can help proponents anticipate and address common issues, such as preparing traffic management plans for increased visitor numbers or environmental management plans to protect natural resources.

Where appropriate, Local Governments may facilitate connections between proponents and other agencies, such as State Government departments or referral agencies, to ensure all relevant requirements are addressed.

Encouraging proponents to engage with the local community early in the process can also help identify and resolve potential concerns, building support for the project and reducing the risk of objections during the formal assessment phase.

## State Assessment Referral Agency (SARA)

A development application for agritourism may warrant assessment by SARA if the development affects a matter of state interest under the Planning Regulation 2017, typically for proximity to a State-controlled road or clearing native vegetation. To support applicants, Local Governments should provide guidance to assist in streamlining assessment and consider avoiding implications that may prolong assessment timeframes. Guidance examples include:

- proximity to State-controlled road: providing access via a local road rather than developing access on a State-controlled road
- clearing native vegetation: avoid vegetation clearing of concern or significant vegetation or consider developing in areas with no mapped vegetation
- works in proximity to waterways and avoiding possible waterway barrier works.

Applicants should consider utilising the free pre-lodgement advice SARA offers to navigate the development assessment requirements efficiently and effectively.

## Further information

### Destination 2045

<https://destination2045.detsi.qld.gov.au/>

### Guidance for planning schemes

<https://www.planning.qld.gov.au/planning-framework/plan-making/local-planning/assisting-local-government>