

# AAC Letter Regarding Recommended Updates to the Agritourism Guidelines

August 14, 2023

San Mateo County Planning and Building Department  
455 County Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Redwood City, California 94063

Re: Recommended Updates to the Agritourism Guidelines

Dear San Mateo County Planning and Building Department:

The Agricultural Advisory Committee (“the AAC”) has concluded a review of the existing Agritourism Guidelines in order to make recommended updates to the agricultural tourism activities allowed in San Mateo County. This review and subsequent recommendations were conducted at the request of farmers and ranchers in the County of San Mateo who are seeking additional measures to increase the economic viability of their agricultural operations.

The AAC is committed to maintaining the existing goals of the Agritourism Guidelines, especially that all agritourism uses are secondary and supplemental to existing agricultural uses of the land. Additionally, the AAC is making these recommendations with the goal of expanding the permitted uses under the Agritourism Guidelines; please note that these recommendations are not made to limit the existing agritourism uses and activities that require a permit in any way.

The existing Agritourism Guidelines were originally developed to support the direct farm to consumer sales of pumpkins during the Halloween season and Christmas trees during the December holiday season, allowing two 45-day agritourism permits per year designed for these two crops. However, there are many more crops and agricultural products produced across San Mateo County that could be supported through an expansion of allowed agritourism activities.

As such, the AAC formally recommends the following updates to the Agritourism Guidelines:

- **Recommendation #1: Expand Consecutive Day Events**
  - Expand the timing of allowed consecutive day events from two 45-day events to two 60-day events.
  - Allow multiple timing options for permitted consecutive day events, such as:
    - One 120-day event;
    - Two 60-day events;
    - Three 40-day events; or
    - Twelve 10-day events (to be capped at 12 events per year, or the equivalent of one event per month).
  - Consider adding set-up and breakdown days in permit timing.
  - Consider more flexibility in consecutive day timing because local tourism mostly occurs on weekends, even for consecutive day events that run through the weekdays.

- **Recommendation #2: Allow Non-Consecutive Day Events**
  - Increase permitted event options by allowing non-consecutive day events, in addition to consecutive day event options.
  - Since most tourism occurs on the weekend, allow weekend-only event permitting option from May through December with the option of up to 64 permitted event days. Across those eight months, there are 32 weekends, which would total 64 potential permitted weekend event days – roughly the equivalent of one 60-day consecutive day agritourism event.
  - Allow one agritourism application per year that would permit non-consecutive weekend events of the same type, to reduce the administrative burden on farmers for these non-consecutive day events.
  - Other related recommendations discussed included:
    - Limit the frequency to two 60 non-consecutive day events; or
    - Have a total number of non-consecutive event days allowed per year, to be used at the operator/permit holder’s discretion.
  
- **Recommendation #3: Expand Frequency of Allowed Farm Dinners**
  - Expand the allowed number of farm dinners from 12 per year to allow 48 to 60 farm dinners annually.
  - The baseline of 48 farm dinners per year would allow two farm dinners per weekend for six months per year, while the 60 farm dinners per year would be consistent with the 60-day consecutive or non-consecutive permitted events recommended above.
  
- **Recommendation #4: Remove ‘Recreational/Educational’ Descriptor from Other Types of Allowed Agritourism Activities**
  - Increase flexibility for allowed potential agritourism events by updating the language regarding the other types of allowed agritourism events detailed in the existing guidelines.
  - Specifically, change the wording of other types of allowed agritourism activities to read: “Other (types of) ~~recreational/educational~~ agritourism activities (not detailed above are) subject to review and approval of the CDD.”

We also recommend conducting educational outreach regarding any updates made to the Agritourism Guidelines once they are finalized. This will ensure the San Mateo County agricultural community is aware of the expanded uses and flexibility allowed by updated guidelines. We also recommend partnering with the Agricultural Ombudsman to conduct this outreach across the County.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and collaboration in making these recommended updates to expand the economic viability of agricultural operations in the County. We look forward to working together to finalize and implement the updated Agritourism Guidelines.

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Signed,

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Lauren Silberman, Committee Secretary, on behalf of the Agricultural Advisory Committee

*This letter was finalized and approved at the AAC meeting held on August 14, 2023 with the following voting results:*

*AYES: \_\_\_\_ NAYS: \_\_\_\_ RECUSALS: \_\_\_\_ ABSENT: \_\_\_\_*