



## News Release

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# Agritourism makes east Gippsland a trip-magnet

Farmstays and food-based tourism could boost the eastern Victorian economy ... and a free public session in Sale next week will discuss ways to do it.

Beefing-up agritourism will need some organisational grunt and a fundamental farmer rethink, according to a regional agribusiness group.

“We need to marry to form a strong association between accommodation providers, food growers and processors,” said Alex Arbuthnot AM, chair of Agribusiness Gippsland.

“And we need to learn from other regions. For example, the farmer who offered their best-quality produce at the farm-gate rather than the seconds, and tripled his sales.”

Agribusiness Gippsland last year helped the Canberra-based Bureau of Rural Science (BRS) stage a focus group in Sale that attracted participants across eastern Gippsland. People came from Lakes Entrance to Licola, making the session the best-attended nationally.

BRS has now released its report and the findings will be discussed at a free public forum at Sale on February 17.

Members of the public interested in developing regional agritourism are invited to the morning session and lunch provided by Wellington Shire Council.

“Agritourism offers a lot to small landholders,” Mr Arbuthnot said. The BRS report notes that most of the agritourism businesses encountered were family run (88%).”

The other important points were:

- The average property size was 60ha, indicating that small, diversified farms are key contenders for agritourism and food tourism activities
- More than half of the online survey respondents (56%) said their agritourism business returned a profit in 2008/09.
- A total of 21% said agritourism comprised more than 90% of income.
- Most agritourism operators were more than 50 years old, and women were generally more represented as agritourism business owners and managers than in general farming.

“While there were some long-established businesses among the respondents, there were also plenty of newcomers represented, with the average time of business operation being nine years,” Mr Arbuthnot added.

The public session to be held on February 17 will examine what has worked in other parts of Australia, notably at Orange and in the Hawkesbury region of NSW.

Wellington Shire’s General Manager Development, Paul Holton, said. “We have a very useful insight into what other regions of Australia have done to woo food tourism. This report really uncovers what is required to change a region into an attractive area for tourists interested in experiencing farming and food production first-hand.”

The Sale session features Graham Morris of Tom’s Cap Winery discussing what gives his enterprise its point of difference. Daryl Baker from the Wellington Shire planning department will also explain the role council can play in helping you establish your agritourism venture.

“The report frequently refers to the need for qualifications in agritourism and we also hope this session will tease out that thought,” Mr Arbuthnot said.

The session will run from 11:30am to 1pm at the Wellington Shire Council offices (70 Foster St., Sale) and will include lunch. Those who wish to stay later and network are welcome to do so. To book, phone Will Oakley on 5142 3615 before February 15.

Agribusiness Gippsland is a not-for-profit group led by a volunteer board that has worked since 1997 to boost regional agriculture and agribusiness. Visit <http://agribusinessgippsland.com.au>

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