Strengthening visitor experiences of farming and land management in England’s National Parks

A report to VisitEngland

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019 the English National Parks Experience Collection (ENPEC) was launched, following support from the Discover England Fund. The collection contains 72 bookable day-visit experiences in the National Parks. While they cover an array of exciting ways to enjoy a rich and varied cultural and natural heritage, the number of experiences involving farmers and land managers is relatively limited. This may be seen as a missed opportunity, given the importance of the latter in shaping the landscape of the National Parks and for their potential engagement with visitors to support their work in delivering sustainable land management.

The purpose of this report, commissioned by VisitEngland on behalf of the English National Parks, is: “to identify and advise on how farmers and land managers in National Parks could become more involved in delivering authentic experiences for visitors in future, supported by the ENPEC framework and in other ways”.

New policy on the environment and agriculture in England and a consideration of the implications in National Parks points to the importance of ‘public access to, and enjoyment of, the countryside and better understanding of the environment’ as a public good, that can be delivered by farmers and land managers. It also sets out many ways in which the delivery of visitor experiences can contribute to a wide range of benefits. Based on the policy assessment, this report presents four objectives for expanding the engagement of farmers and land managers in delivering visitor experiences, related to: farm incomes; National Park environments; visitor awareness and fulfilment; and tourism performance.

The report then looks at some of the issues involved in engaging farmers and land managers in providing visitor experiences and the challenges that need to be addressed. This is based on considering the experience from the establishment of the ENPEC and on opinions expressed by consultees in the National Parks.

Further assessment of the research material on international markets used to inform the development of the ENPEC, together with data from surveys of visitors to National Parks, was only able to provide a limited amount of additional insights into market potential for farm and land-based visitor experiences. The relatively high percentage of overseas visitors responding positively to related themes such as exploring villages and rural areas, trying food and drink specialities and taking short country walks, was looked at further, noting that they scored more highly than participation in specific outdoor activities or wildlife watching. Evidence on the importance of providing experiences that are authentic and involve engaging with local people was seen as very relevant.

The core of the report is the presentation of case studies, identified from an extensive web search and contact with international experts in rural and sustainable tourism. The case studies are from Latvia, New Zealand, Italy, Costa Rica, USA, Germany and Ireland. They are predominantly related to the provision of visits to working farms, based on pre-purchased bookable packages and programmes, accessed through tour operators but also directly. One study considers forest-based experiences. The case studies look at the nature of the experiences offered and the development and support processes. Key lessons and take-aways are listed at the end of each case study.

Based on the situation assessment and informed by the case studies, a set of conclusions is presented in the form of insights for consideration, under the following four headings:
**Objectives met and benefits obtained**
The case studies show how all four of the objectives identified in this report can be well met in practice. Providing visitor experiences can make a crucial contribution to livelihoods and securing succession for family members on the farm. However, often social benefits from engaging with visitors are more highly valued by farmers and land managers than economic ones. Visitor response tends to be very positive. Crucially the case studies show how providing visitor experiences can lead to more sustainable land management through direct and indirect influences.

**Potential markets and considerations for marketing**
The case studies show how farm and land-based experiences can appeal to a wide range of domestic and international markets, accessed via tour operators or independently. A trend to a greater interest in learning experiences is detected, with more specialist markets particularly interested in sustainability issues. The case studies also illustrate certain points about meeting tour operator requirements and some specific opportunities for reaching independent travellers.

**Farm and land-based visitor experiences – concepts and components**
A common and very successful visitor experience has been found to be centred on visiting a genuine working farm and engaging with the people who live and work there. Various creative experiences can also be developed around food and drink related to farming. While the above may provide the core, it is important and possible to differentiate the offers, for example through the type of agriculture, including forestry/woodland, hand-on experiences, and the educational dimension. The case studies also point to various key operational factors to address and to the need to consider the overall itinerary offered by the tour operators, including linking visits to different farms and to other sites.

**Engaging farmers and land managers and providing support**
A number of opportunities are identified for strengthening the level of participation of farmers and land managers in providing visitor experiences and in achieving successful results. These address key challenges such as limited time availability and lack of confidence and skills. Considerations, illustrate by the case studies, include working with farmers with previous engagement with visitors, encouraging involvement in ‘taster’ events, and helping farmers to work together to deliver programmes. The key role of local tourism professionals, such as group handlers and guides, is explored and examples are given of the delivery of business advice and support, through member associations, teaching bodies and tour operators themselves. Finally, the opportunity for National Parks to identify visitor experience providers as ‘partners’, linked to the park brand, is identified.

A final section of the report addresses how the above considerations can be reflected in action. It is suggested that this needs to be planned and carried out at a National Park level, while being focused on individual farms and landholdings and supported through national coordination and initiatives. Components of the assessment of opportunities within the National Parks area outlined, providing the basis for plans and action, and to inform the inclusion of visitor experiences as an possible option within integrated farm plans.

The ENPEC is seen as a highly valuable stimulant and promotional vehicle for visitor experiences. A number of specific ways in which it, and successor initiatives, should reflect the findings of the study are outlined. Finally, some recommendations are made for further research.
1 Introduction

The three-year £40million Discover England Fund was announced by Government in 2015 and has been administered by VisitBritain/VisitEngland. Its purpose is to ensure that England stays competitive in the rapidly growing global tourism industry, by offering world-class English tourism products to the right customers at the right time.

The Fund has been delivered through competitive bids that meet identified criteria. There have been four rounds of applications. In Years 2/3, grants were awarded for 12 large-scale collaborative projects to be delivered over the two-year period 2017-2019, that will create a step-change in bookable English tourism product for international consumers.

One of these large-scale projects was to ‘Make Great Memories in England’s National Parks’, awarded to the network of National Parks and led by the Peak District National Park Authority. Following an intense period of product development in each of the nine parks involved, a consolidated and branded portfolio of visitor offers was launched in January 2019 under the title “The English National Park Experience Collection” (ENPEC). This contains 72 packaged and bookable day visit ‘experiences’, typically lasting between four and eight hours and involving visits to one or multiple sites in the National Park, providing immersive activities alongside food and other services. The number of experiences (i.e. inclusive programmes) amount to between six and ten per park. A small amount of visitor accommodation, suited to working with the travel trade, is also listed in each National Park.

It has become apparent that few of the ENPEC experiences are focussed on farms or with land managers or conservation organisations. This has been seen as a missed opportunity. There are many reasons why it is timely for there to be more engagement between farmers (and other land managers) and visitors to National Parks. Not least is the changing approach to the funding of agriculture and the need for increased awareness of the significant role that farmers and land managers play in maintaining the fabric of England’s countryside at a time of change. These issues are discussed later in the report.

Given this situation, the National Parks approached VisitEngland for funding for this study, whose purpose is: 

to identify and advise on how farmers and land managers in National Parks could become more involved in delivering authentic experiences for visitors in future, supported by the ENPEC framework and in other ways.

The work undertaken has followed that prescribed in the brief. It has involved:

- Consultation with a few individuals in the National Parks on the establishment of the ENPEC experiences, engagement with farmers, and future funding of farming and land management.
- Perusal of previous research and extraction of further relevant findings on market interests.
- Identification and investigation of relevant international examples of the delivery of farm and land-based experiences, based on personal contacts, trade show attendance and web searches.
- Writing up the examples in the form of case studies with learnings and take-aways identified.
- Analysis of the issues, findings and lessons arising from the research and consultation, with an identification of key considerations and recommendations for future research.
It is important to note that this is a limited study, undertaken as necessary in a short timeframe. Therefore, it has not been possible to undertake a comprehensive study of the farming and tourism relationships in the National Parks nor to carry out a comprehensive assessment and identification of international best practice. This study simply seeks to throw some light on issues and opportunities.
2 Policy context and strategic objectives

As this study has been partly stimulated by the advent of new funding mechanisms for farming and the implications for National Parks, it is important to start with a consideration of the policy context. This should guide our understanding of the purpose of stimulating more engagement in tourism experiences by farmers and land managers, the benefits sought for them, the National Parks and society in general, and the implications for product development and market segmentation.

While ENPEC provides the framework for developing and promoting visitor experiences, it is seen, alongside the Discover England Fund as a whole, as an evolving model that can seek to reach new markets and support different approaches. Considerations and recommendations arising from this study need to reflect the best ways of addressing the policy objectives, strategic considerations and practical issues identified, considering the role of an evolving ENPEC within a wider framework of support.

2.1 Environment policy and National Parks

The Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan launched in 2018 provides a comprehensive roadmap to a ‘Green Future’. Many of the broad policy areas are relevant to farming and land management in National Parks, including using and managing land sustainably, recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes, and connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing. The plan emphasises the importance of National Parks, heralding the Review of National Parks and AONBs, due to report in 2019. The plan points to the 8-point Plan for England’s National Parks (2016), which will be expanded upon in the review.

While the awaited review of National Parks may set alternative priorities, it is important to consider that most of the 8-points in the 2016 plan have relevance to farm based tourism in parks:

- Connecting young people with nature – with implications for educational visits to farms
- Creating thriving natural environments – pursuing integrated and sustainable land management
- Driving growth in (international) tourism – promoting parks as world-class destinations. The Plan points to DEF (leading to ENPEC), but also sets targets for increasing annual visitors from 90m to 100m, which will be largely domestic visitors
- Promoting the best of British food from National Parks, which will be known for, and visited as, great food destinations
- Encouraging more diverse visitors to ‘everyone’s National Parks’
- Enhancing people’s involvement in the historic environment and natural beauty of National Parks
- Delivering health and wellbeing through visits to National Parks.

2.2 Policy and funding for farming and land management in National Parks

The Agriculture Bill published in 2018 sets out a new approach to funding post Brexit, based on a new Environmental Land Management Scheme that pays farmers and land managers for the provision of public goods. The Bill recognises that public access to, and enjoyment of, the countryside and better understanding of the environment are public goods and payments may be made to support them. Likewise, support may be provided for maintenance, restoration and
enhancement of both cultural heritage and natural heritage, as well as various other functions to protect or improve the environment and mitigate and adapt to climate change.

National Parks England has welcomed the publication of the Bill, while pointing out that certain areas require clarification, such as payments for enhancing landscape and for public engagement (within the definition for public enjoyment and understanding). Attention is also drawn to the potential role of National Park Authorities as delivery agents and the need to provide funding for rural development post Brexit.

Much of the response of National Parks England reflects its 2017 paper *Farming in the English National Parks*, which is drawn to the attention of government. This set out a vision for the National Parks of England: “to be recognised and celebrated as living, working landscapes where sustainable farming systems deliver a wide range of public benefits and the farmers and land managers doing this work are fairly rewarded for these services.” It called for “farmers to be effective stewards and custodians of National Parks, harnessing their expertise so that the environment and cultural heritage is as much a part of their farm business as high quality food production”.

The paper estimates that the agriculture, fishing and forestry sectors account for around 10% of employment in English National Parks. Most significantly, it recognises that farming contributes through the management of landscape, culture and tradition to the wider visitor economy, which is worth in excess of £4bn per annum.

The economic challenges facing farm holdings in national parks are underlined. Less Favoured Area grazing livestock farms account for 54% of holdings across the parks network. 72% of farms are under 100ha, with 33% under 20ha. Public investment in farming is essential, equating to over 90% of farm business income for LFA grazing livestock farms and 70% for lowland grazing livestock farms. Despite this investment, many farmers in National Parks only just break even and this is not sustainable in the medium to long term.

The paper outlines a new system of integrated, place-based delivery that focuses on the outcomes that society seeks from the National Parks, including support schemes for farmers who meet certain obligations tailored to the needs of each park. Key aspects of this with a particular bearing on the relationship between visitors/tourism and farmers and land managers include:

- Providing business advice to farmers in producing an integrated farm plan, linking the economy and the environment.
- Promoting the support scheme through public engagement and relations work, notably in ensuring that the 90m visitors to National Parks understand the role of farmers in managing the parks to the benefit of all and building a renewed relationship between those who manage the landscape and those who come to enjoy it. This should lead to greater public understanding and support for the policy.
- Developing a National Park brand to be used by farmers to signify their role in contributing to the landscape. This could be used in developing the National Park food economy, supporting local food chains and enhancing a sense of place for both consumers and producers, including visitors to the National Parks.
- Establishing collaboration and networks/clusters between farmers.
- Providing opportunities to integrate private sector payments for public goods alongside public payments.
- Supporting community-led local development programmes.
- Supporting innovation and learning, with input from research institutions.
2.3 Tourism policy

There is no overarching policy for tourism in England. Current priorities for the sector are articulated in the Tourism Sector Deal bid document, submitted to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) on behalf of the tourism industry. This emphasises the size of the sector (contributing £127bn or 9% of GDP) and its predicted growth of 3.8% p.a. to 2025. However, it warns of fierce global competition in the sector, pointing to the need for innovation, investment in infrastructure and integrated planning. Unrivalled heritage and landscapes are seen as key assets for tourism in England.

The Sector Deal has four main themes: boosting productivity (notably by extending the tourism season); improving skills and recruitment; improving connectivity, including within England; and developing local destinations through a programme of support for tourism zones. It is not clear how the latter concept may relate to National Parks.

There is an ongoing emphasis on spreading international tourism spending beyond London and raising awareness of the many destinations and opportunities throughout England. Delivering outstanding visitor experiences that are readily accessible through the travel trade remains a priority. In this, the Discover England Fund is a major vehicle, both in delivering policy and in shaping it through the application of research and learning. An extension of the approach in future may see more emphasis on the regions and on a strategic assessment of market potential, including possible work within domestic markets. The strong relationship established with England National Parks should provide a good basis for further engagement in future.

At a global level, international tourism policy foresees ongoing growth. However, there is an increasing emphasis on improving the quality of visitor experiences and addressing negative impacts of the sector, with a new focus on destination management as distinct from marketing. Principles of sustainable tourism, addressing the current and future needs of visitors, tourism businesses, host communities and the environment, are being more widely articulated and applied, not least in national parks and protected areas, and are increasingly recognised by private sector businesses including tour operators.

2.4 Strategic objectives

Reflecting the above context, we propose that the following four objectives are identified for expanding the engagement of farmers and land managers in delivering visitor experiences, considering the needs and position of farmers, National Parks and VisitEngland:

1) FARM INCOMES: To strengthen and diversify the income base for farming families, to enable them to remain on their holdings with a stable future in farming.

2) NATIONAL PARK ENVIRONMENTS: To encourage and support farmers and land managers in pursuing sustainable management of the land, maintaining and where necessary enhancing the landscape quality of the National Parks and the natural and cultural heritage and assets of their holdings.

3) VISITOR AWARENESS AND FULFILMENT: To provide visitors to National Parks with new access opportunities, an enjoyable and fulfilling experience, enhanced awareness of the special qualities of the Park, and a greater understanding of the role and challenges faced by farmers and others in delivering sustainable land management.
4) TOURISM PERFORMANCE: To enhance the appeal of National Parks and rural England as an attractive destination for international and domestic visitors, increasing the level of tourism income and its geographic and seasonal spread, including within rural communities.

It is very important to appreciate that the above four objectives are mutually supportive and should be pursued together.

National Park objectives for the environment, maintaining heritage landscapes, biodiversity and natural assets depend on farming practices that keep the land in good heart. This is strongly affected by the routes taken by individual farmers to secure sufficient levels of farm income. Alternatives need to be found to increasing the intensity of production which can lead to overstocking and soil degradation. Income from tourism can provide part of the answer, especially where this in turn can be seen to be dependent on providing a quality environment appreciated by visitors.

The new approach to the funding of farming raises the importance placed on delivering public goods, including **access, enjoyment and understanding of the environment and the maintenance of heritage assets**. It also suggests that the delivery of these, and other public goods, needs to be looked at, and supported, on a farm by farm basis, within an integrated farm plan, alongside the production of food and fibre and other diversified income.

The development of tourism packages and programmes on farms further strengthens the visibility and awareness of the role of farmers in maintaining assets and providing access, enjoyment and understanding.

An interesting situation arises from the fact that provision of the above public goods can also, through tourism, be a source of direct earned income for the farmers and land managers. This raises the issue of combining private payments alongside public payments for the provision of these public goods – a possibility that is identified in the 2017 paper on Farming in the English National Parks. Consideration will need to be given to how these funding streams are balanced. The implications for funding of farming will need careful handling. It is important to bear in mind that it is simply not possible for all farmers to earn significant income from visitors and this should not be seen as an automatic substitute for public support.
3 Engaging farmers and land managers in visitor experiences

Having identified the objectives, this section looks at how farmers and land managers could become more engaged in delivering tourism experiences and some of the issues and challenges involved. It is based on consultation with people engaged in policy, tourism and farming support in National Parks and more general knowledge and experience from elsewhere. The issues are further addressed at the end of the report, in the form of future considerations and recommendations, informed by the case studies.

3.1 A context of farmer involvement with visitors

Farmers and land managers have been involved with visitors to National Parks and have earned income from them for many decades. Even in the 18th century, visitors to the Lake District were responding to farmed landscapes and spending money in the local economy to the benefit of farmers in the supply chain. It is important to see ENPEC in this context, in order to help farmers to understand the approach and to avoid giving them a distorted picture.

Different types of existing farm/land-based tourism business and visitor engagement include:

- Accommodation – farm B&B, self-catering (barn conversions), camping, caravans, glamping etc.
- Food and catering – specialist producers, observing production, gate sales, farm shops, cafes
- Farm parks, attractions, visitor centres, rare breed farms etc. – regularly open to casual visitors
- Activity centres or single activities, e.g. horse-riding, archery, mountain biking
- Access: maintenance of rights of way, parking, picnic areas, self-guided trails (walking/cycling)
- Tours and guided visits – to farms, woodland, natural sites
- Educational visits, e.g. for schools or adult groups
- Events – organised events, occasional open days, commercial venue provision, eg weddings
- Supply of local produce for sale in local shops and use in tourism and hospitality venues

The above provide an important part of the context for a new product development approach. All of the above types of business and activity can be seen to contribute to one or more of the four objectives set out in the previous chapter. Some of these traditional forms of farm tourism may well be expected to deliver a far higher or more stable level of diversified income to farmers, or involve interaction with higher volumes of visitors, than new and more experimental forms of inclusive experiential packages.

It is clear from consultation that working with farmers who already have some existing engagement with tourism businesses and visitors is seen as one of the main starting points or ‘ways in’ to creating inclusive experiential packages. This is considered in more detail later.

3.2 Applying the ENPEC model and approach

The ENPEC approach requires an additional dimension. It is about delivering quality experiences that meet all the four objectives (farm income, park environments, visitor awareness and tourism performance) together. The five criteria for ENPEC experiences require that they should:

- be motivators for the target (international) consumer segments
- be extra-ordinary, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the ordinary, everyday life of rural England
• incorporate and build on the best known and most iconic aspects of the National Parks
• be deeply rooted in the landscape, character and spirit of place of the National Park
• be full of character and help visitors connect with the generations of people who have lived, worked and played in these landscapes.

The ENPEC material further says that experiences should be active, immersive and participative. They should be delivered by local people who know the National Park well. They should be formulated as inclusive packages, bookable in advance through the travel trade and (currently) aimed at the German and Australian markets.

These ENPEC requirements, coupled with the four objectives set out in this report, point to the development of products that:
• Are very focussed on the people themselves, the farmers and land managers, their stories and every-day activities. There should be direct interaction between them and visitors.
• Are authentic and not developed as manufactured visitor attractions
• Involve a degree of privileged access and insight to the farm or landholding, that is not available to casual visitors
• Relate directly to the management of land and to the maintenance of landscapes and natural and cultural heritage.
• Potentially include experiences related to the produce/output from sustainable land management – food and fibre and its further working, e.g. as specialist produce or artefacts.
• Where possible, include some interactive visitor participation.

The types of experience that may most obviously meet these requirements will primarily involve organised visits to farms/sites and an engagement with the farmers and land managers.

3.2 Learning from the work on ENPEC to date

From the outset it was intended that farmers and land managers would become involved in the visitor experiences contained in ENPEC. The original National Experience Development Framework identified farming/agriculture as one of ten themes (called activity types). Four parks were identified as particular locations with opportunities for experiences based on this theme – Exmoor, Lake District, North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales.

In the final collection of experiences, farming/agriculture does not appear as a theme. The final themes are more generic, such as ‘landscape’ and ‘nature’. This alternative structure may have been deliberately chosen or may simply reflect the lack of significant numbers of specifically farm/agriculture experiences coming forward.

Consultation with those involved in developing the experiences revealed relatively little direct engagement with farmers and land managers during the process, especially where they were not already involved with tourism. This partly reflects the short time available but also a perceived tendency for farmers not to attend meetings and workshops owing to their busy schedules. There were also reports of some farmers dropping out of discussions when they learnt of the commitment required.

Despite the relative lack of engagement, at least 12 of the final collection of 72 experiences appear to include some elements involving farming and land management. The most directly relevant are three experiences in the Yorkshire Dales, which were established partly through contacts already made from other projects:
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• Flock to the Yorkshire Dales – Visit a sheep farmer and experience his life, work with the sheep, gather wool, move on to a working mill to do weaving, create something to take home.
• The Wensleydale Farmer’s Experience – Try out life as a farmer on the Swinithwaite Estate, take a look at drystone walls, feed the animals, gather sheep and learn how sheep are farmed, learn about the sustainable process of farm to plate.
• From Field to Forest – Meet a local farmer, find out about his life as a sheep farmer, forage for seasonal specialities, cookery demonstration (in conjunction with a local restaurant).

In the South Downs National Park, one of the experiences (People, Place and Produce) involves a visit to the farm containing the national cider collection and includes a cider tutorial. There are also three experiences (Sparkling South Downs) involving visits to different vineyards, with guided tours, meeting winemakers, tastings and lunch.

In Exmoor, the ‘Explore with a National Park Ranger’ programme involves a visit to a working hill farm and a farmhouse lunch. Ranger programmes in some of the other parks (e.g. Northumberland, Peak District) also appear to offer some interface with farming and land management.

Some of the experiences that are focussed on other themes also take place on farms or estates. An example is in Dartmoor, where one experience involves a visit to the Pony Heritage Trust and finding out about the lives and work of the farmers who keep the ponies on the commons.

A few of the experiences relate to local food. Examples include a visit to a local cheesemaker in the Yorkshire Dales, a tour around farmers markets and food shops in the North York Moors, and a foraging walk combined with gin making in the Peak District. Here, the experience of farming and land management on offer appears to be relatively tenuous.

Of accommodation listed in the ENPEC manual, fifteen properties have ‘farm’ in the title. However, of these, only eight appear to be working farms. Relatively little is made of the farming context in the descriptions and offers.

While the overall presence of farming and land management related experiences in the ENPEC is quite limited, it will be very important to monitor the take up of the experiences mentioned here and to seek feedback from them and their visitors, in order to inform future opportunities.

3.3 Issues, challenges and opportunities for the further involvement of farmers

A limited number of discussions were held with national park staff and others who have contact with the farming community, on issues affecting the involvement of farmers and land managers in providing more visitor experiences. Those raised fall under the following headings.

The level of interest amongst farmers

This is hard to judge. The fact that there was relatively little take-up by farmers or land managers of the opportunity presented by the ENPEC might point to low levels of interest in providing experiences for visitors. However, the limited time for recruitment probably militated against this.

Consultees had mixed views about the level of interest in providing for farm visits. One opinion was that increasing numbers of farmers are recognising that they should be engaging more with visitors, as they become aware of the need to gain more public support in the light of funding changes and are concerned about media coverage of farming practices and impacts. On the other hand, farmers do not necessarily have the time or capacity to follow this up. Levels of engagement in opportunities...
such as open farm weekends have been falling in some areas, maybe reflecting the pressure on farmers’ time.

One commentator felt that farmers fall into three categories of roughly equal size: those who are very interested and prepared to engage with visitors; those who feel they should but lack motivation, knowledge and confidence to do so; and those for whom this would be anathema. Broadly, younger farmers were thought to be more interested than older ones.

**Challenges and barriers inhibiting involvement**

A primary barrier to farmer engagement with visitors is seen as their lack of time and the complexity and pressure of their lifestyles, which can be wholly committing at certain times of year. This was identified as one of the reasons why some farmers who were informed about ENPEC decided not to pursue it. This situation is hard to address. It may point to finding forms of engagement which require limited amounts of individual commitment, possibly through farmers working together, involving different members of their family or working with external facilitators.

A second barrier is lack of confidence, for example on presenting information to visitors. This may be easier to overcome with time and support. It is apparent that many farmers do like to talk and can turn out to be natural raconteurs. Again, involving other, perhaps younger, family members may help, as well as working with external guides.

Thirdly, there are various practical issues which are seen as holding farmers back. These include:

- The location of farms – often isolated or up narrow roads and tracks
- Lack of places to park cars, minibuses or coaches.
- Insufficient toilet facilities and no provision for people with limited mobility
- Concerns about safety, hygiene and potentially biosecurity
- Liability and insurance issues – administrative and financial
- Lack of suitable space to cater and provide for groups, especially in wet weather.

The extent to which each of the above is a significant barrier in reality, and the ease with which they may be overcome, will vary from farm to farm.

**Finding ways in - building on existing forms of engagement**

It was widely suggested that farms which already have some kind of involvement with visitors are those that are most likely to be prepared and able to offer new forms of engagement, including tours and different experiences. This may point particularly to those providing accommodation, but it could also apply to farms already receiving occasional groups, such as those contracted to receive educational visits or participating in a limited number of open days and events. However, there was also a feeling that many farmers not yet involved in these ways could, nevertheless, be interested in offering creative new experiences or be well placed to do so.

The nature of the farm or landholding and the form of tenure may also provide an opportunity to build on, although the latter might also be an inhibitor. For example, there is interest in some National Parks in working with the National Trust or other landowners with a heritage or conservation interest, including the possibility of working with them to develop opportunities for their tenant farmers.
**Market issues and opportunities**

Most discussions suggested that experiences of farming and land management are likely to be at least as interesting and relevant to domestic visitors as they would be to visitors from overseas – indeed, possibly more so. Attention was drawn to the far greater size of the domestic market and the potential returns of raising awareness amongst UK residents of farming practice and policy. While the international orientation of the ENPEC scheme was understood, it was felt that this should encourage and facilitate the development of experiences that are also promoted within the UK.

Overall, it was felt that there had been significant growth in interest amongst visitors in finding new ways to experience the Parks. Some consultees were aware of increased demand and activity from specialist tour operators, based locally or overseas. Based on limited anecdotal evidence, there was a belief that visitors were interested to learn more about farming and sustainable land management.

**Product opportunities – types of experience**

The establishment of ENPEC was applauded and the set of experiences was felt to provide a valuable resource, although the desire to involve more farmers and land managers was widely shared.

Some thought was given to existing farms whose current activities might provide future potential for visitor experiences. Apart from those providing visitor accommodation, the following three categories were identified:

- Farms and estates which are well known for their more progressive and sustainable approach to agriculture and land management, who are already hosting visits for professionals in this field which might appeal to a wider public.
- Farms producing high quality or unusual local produce. They could provide opportunities for visitors to experience the production (possibly with a participatory element), taste it (maybe as part of a special meal) and make a purchase on site or elsewhere. Observing and learning about contributory processes further back in the production cycle, including livestock husbandry and crop growing, could also be part of this.
- Farms providing specific activities, such as horse-riding, archery, mountain-bike up-lift etc. However, it was acknowledged that this was not particularly related to this current study.

The need to consider other land uses, notably forestry, was also recognised but no product opportunities were identified.

It was widely felt that product development should maximise on opportunities to meet and talk with local people, including farming families, as a key part of the experience, which is very much in line with the ENPEC philosophy.

**Providing support**

There was a widespread belief that most farmers would need some level of advice and support in identifying and developing potential experiences, delivering them on the ground and getting them to market. The importance of three types of providers was particularly identified:

- Farm business advisors, who understand the farming context as well as the National Park
- Intermediaries and facilitators of packages and visits. In the main these may be locally based tourism professionals, including tour guides, small operators/handling agents etc, who may also provide or arrange transport for groups.
- Bodies responsible for tourism promotion and building market linkages.
4 Market research and analysis

A number of existing datasets and research reports, including data gathered through the Discover England Fund programme and some compiled for the ENPEC project, provide evidence which can inform the case for farms, land managers or conservation organisations developing new products which tell the stories of National Park landscapes and their people to new audiences.

While none of the research has specifically addressed the potential market for farm visits, some of the activities that it covers might be expected to form at least part of a farm or land-based experience within a National Park. In reviewing the research, the focus has been on pulling out data and comment which increases understanding of levels of interest and participation in such activities. This selective approach means that care should be taken to avoid placing undue reliance on this analysis, which should be regarded as providing pointers rather than conclusions.

4.1 Market interest in activities relevant to farm and-land based experiences

Early research for the Discover England Fund\(^1\) looked at relative levels of interest in different activities in the UK, amongst certain overseas markets.

The research was carried out in four markets (Germany, Netherlands, US, Australia). Respondents were asked which of 40 possible pre-defined activities they would consider as part of a visit to the UK. The results relating to the top ten activities are summarised in Table 4.1 below. The three activities most strongly considered centre on history: visiting world famous or iconic places, visiting castles or visiting historic monuments. ‘Visiting a National Park’ \textit{per se} was also within the top ten, but only just. Three separate activities, that could be considered relevant to farm or land-based experiences (trying food and drink specialities; short country walks; and exploring villages/rural areas) fared better.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity would consider</th>
<th>% strongly consider (all four markets)</th>
<th>Source market interest most interested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Visiting world famous/iconic places</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Visiting castles/historic houses</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Visiting historic monuments</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Trying food and drink specialities</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Visiting a museum</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Visiting a park/garden</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Short &lt;2hrs) country/coastal walk</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Exploring villages/rural areas</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>Australia and Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting a National Park</td>
<td></td>
<td>Germany 52% Netherlands 52% Australia 53% US 60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Activities and Themes Research 2017

\textit{Strengthening visitor experiences of farming and land management in England’s National Parks}

The Tourism Company, April 2019
A second level of analysis was carried out into those respondents who indicated that they would consider visiting a National Park\(^2\). Even when applying this filter, a similar pattern of interest in other activities emerged – i.e. amongst people who might consider visiting National Parks, the most likely other activities that they would consider were visiting iconic and historic sites (86% - 91%). Similarly, ‘trying food and drink specialities’ was also popular amongst these would-be National Park visitors, being considered by 83% of them, with significant proportions also considering short walks (77%) and exploring villages/rural areas (also 77%).

Looking at the differences between the four source markets, amongst people who would consider visiting a National Park, it is notable that ‘trying food and drink specialities’ is of more interest to the US (93% would consider it) and Australian markets than to people from Germany or the Netherlands. By contrast, these latter, European, markets are relatively more likely to consider short walks or exploring villages/rural areas.

The above results suggest that in designing and promoting farm and land-based experiences in National Parks it would be advantageous to:

- Incorporate elements, where appropriate, of trying local food/produce, gentle walking and experiencing rural life.
- Take the opportunity to combine farm/land visits with visits to nearby significant historic and heritage sites, when putting together multi-day programmes or adding on to existing tour itineraries.

These two points are further supported by other research evidence, as follows:

- A separate study considered the same activities as the study above but looked at ten source markets including the UK domestic market\(^3\). It identified history & heritage activities as ‘powerhouses’ - driving footfall to and within England. Trying local food and drink is also seen as a powerhouse, but less potent. Short walks, by contrast are not seen as driving visits to England but are frequently considered as popular activities of choice post arrival.
- Research on trends in demand for experiences, tours and activities, which found evidence that visitors are looking to incorporate a combination of different activities into their visit.
  
  “We’re seeing more travellers balancing their itineraries with a mix of classic sightseeing and more unique local experiences.”\(^4\)
- Research into the outdoor activity market\(^5\), which found that this audience too expects to mix up their holiday with more than outdoor activities. Amongst the 4.5 other activities sought, during visits to the UK that average over 7 days, history and heritage related attractions are again those most popular, followed by trying local food and experiencing rural life and scenery.

While the three most popular forms of activity relevant to farm and land based experiences have been highlighted above (namely trying food and drink specialities, taking short country or coastal walks, and exploring villages and rural areas), consideration should also be given to the relative popularity of the other activities with the 40 investigated in the study of Australian, German, Dutch and US markets\(^6\). A number of relevant activities are listed in Table 4.2, showing the percentage of respondents who would consider undertaking them in the UK.

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\(^3\) Optimising the Discover England Fund Application through Insight. One Minute To Midnight & Maru/edr for VisitEngland, 24th March 2017

\(^4\) Experiences, Tours, and Activities Trend Report for 2018, TripAdvisor

\(^5\) Discover England Fund Outdoor Activities, maru/edr, OMTM, June 2018

\(^6\) Activities and Themes Research 2017

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Table 4.2 Other activities considered by visitors from four markets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>% strongly consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Event associated with local traditions</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping for locally made products/crafts</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and drink tour or attraction</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long country or coastal walk (&gt; half day)</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching wildlife in natural environment</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling or mountain-biking</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying adventure/adrenalin activity</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is notable that activities associated with food and local traditions are significantly more likely to be considered than watching wildlife or certain forms of physical outdoor recreation such as cycling and adventure-based activities. This is important to bear in mind when considering themes that might be most appealing to the target overseas markets when designing farm and land-based experiences.

Finally, when considering potential market interest in farm and land-based experiences, it is important to look at research undertaken within the National Parks themselves, primarily relating to the domestic market. As joint study of National Park visitors in 2017 showed results that mirror the interest of potential overseas visitors. It found that the most common visitor activities in National Parks are all relatively gentle: visiting towns or villages, taking a short walk, sightseeing and eating and drinking\(^7\). Wildlife watching is also important but undertaken by half as many visitors.

4.2 Market aspirations and factors influencing response

The research studies also contain data and evidence about market aspirations and aspects of the offers that may affect the level of response.

**Desire for authenticity**

Genuine, authentic tourism products are preferred by future travellers as they seek to get rid of their “tourist” stamp and experience their destination like a local instead\(^8\). Emotional engagement, authenticity and the pursuit of real should lie at the heart of itineraries.\(^9\)

64% of overseas visitors agree with the statement: “When I go on holiday, the most important thing for me is to experience the authentic culture of a place.”\(^10\)

Food and drink is seen to have a special part to play.

“While food and drink is rarely a main reason to visit Britain, it can play a significant supporting role in ‘authentic exploration of the region’. There is an appetite to try food and drink related activities among those considering visiting Britain.”\(^11\)

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\(^7\) Joint National Park Visitor Research 1 – Characteristics, Team Tourism, June 2017  
\(^8\) The Future Travel Journey, Foresight Factory for VisitEngland, 2017  
\(^9\) Making Great Memories in England’s National Parks – Product Audit Wrap-Up, brio research and consulting, XV Insight, file dated 16 May 2018  
\(^10\) The Future Travel Journey, Foresight Factory for VisitEngland, 2017  
\(^11\) Making Great Memories in England’s National Park, XV Insight for VisitEngland, November 2017
**Engagement with local people**

Opportunities to engage with local people are particularly welcome. Even those specifically seeking outdoor activities identify such connections as an outcome of taking part, with 68% agreeing that they are “a way of getting to know the locals.” Qualitative research into the German and Australian markets and their interest in experiences in England’s National Parks identified that one of the most powerful ways to provide the ‘ownable’ experiences sought by these markets is through “deep, authentic cultural connections”, including meeting someone of the place or connecting with a local. The same research points out interest in “the historical connection that lives on now between land and people” and “the meeting of people and land over time”. What group can be better placed than the farming community to fulfil this interest?

The wider point is made elsewhere: “Cultural heritage is all about people and food and wine and that one has become more important than the built heritage and natural heritage. Culture is no longer dead, the cultural is alive and that experience economy is driving everything.”

**The pull of the ‘different’**

Research into opportunities to grow awareness and appeal of areas beyond London in overseas markets has pointed to the need to address the following key themes, all of which can be brought out in farm and land-based visits:

- Heritage: get across the ‘experience’ and the story behind a place.
- Countryside: a major lever to convey ‘unique, different, beautiful and relaxing’ experiences. 78% of those going beyond London did so because of Britain’s unique and beautiful countryside.
- Uniqueness and variety: 80% of those who went beyond London did so because Britain’s diverse regions make for an interesting holiday.
- British people and way of life: 70% of those who went beyond London wanted to meet British people and see the British way of life and 67% because they were friendly and welcoming.

**Awareness of National Parks**

Familiarity with the National Park concept varies between source markets.

Taking all visitors to the National Parks, surveys have found that the majority (86%) were aware that they were visiting a National Park. However, nine out of ten of these visitors are domestic, from the UK.

Taking the domestic population as a whole, understanding of the geography of England is limited. Amongst non-visitors to National Parks, two-fifths were unable to name a National Park, the most well-known being the Lake District followed by the Peak District.

Awareness of the National Parks, what they are, and their location is even lower amongst potential overseas visitors.

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12 Discover England Research Outdoor Activities, maru/edr, OMTM, June 2018
13 England’s National Parks: Concept Development, Qualitative Research Findings, Final Report. One Minute to Midnight, date unknown.
14 Ian Yeoman, Tourism Futurist
15 IPS via Discover England summary Insights on overseas visitors to England’s regions, 2016
16 Joint National Park Visitor Research 2 – Non-visitors, Team Tourism, July 2017
"The big story was one of surprise that England has this terrain and landscapes on offer…. Regional knowledge was tiny….so imagining activity holidays there can be impossible."[17]

It is also clear that the concept of ‘National Park’ and what it may contain varies between different markets. This is partly influenced by the fact that the term may be used to describe a different type of destination designation within the source country – possibly smaller areas, state owned and maybe with certain restrictions on access. For example, it has been found that Germans need far more education than Australians about the underlying concept.

These results suggest that there may be relative ignorance of the nature of the potential relationship between private estates/farms and a National Park, which may be confusing to visitors and require clarification before and during a visit.

**Ease of access**

Ease and perceptions of access are important factors in the decision to visit a particular location. For visits to National Parks, and especially to farms in National Parks, the last mile is an important consideration, even for those who are willing to travel 2-3 hours from their initial base (typically London) to stay in another destination. Although the Australian and German markets have the advantage that they can be prepared to drive (hire car/own car), their preference is for train travel. Packaged tours were also mentioned to enable them to get the most from their trip.

“Don’t underestimate the challenge in journey time, complexity etc…..Plan routes and itineraries that are simple and minimise journey times.”[18]

“Support the whole journey – from gateway to England, to the Park, around the Park.”[19]

“Providing clarity on key entry points to our Parks and simplifying the last mile for inbound travellers is the key for National Parks. Less reliance on itineraries where driving/hiring cars is required, most especially among visitors from the US.”[20]

Certain farms will be at an advantage when it comes to access, while others will be aware that the journey to reach them can be slow and/or tortuous. Timed tours depend on predictable travel times for visitor arrivals. At the outset, individual farms would do well to consider their location with respect to the road network, a railhead or a town or city with good public transport links.

Long haul visitors are more likely to have extra time in their itinerary and be more attuned to multi-location breaks, including accommodating significant amounts of travelling.

**A personal voyage of discovery**

Experiences should be designed and talked about in ways which create an ‘ownable personal experience’. [21] Qualitative research among the Australian and German markets showed freedom and independence to be really important to these segments. They expressed a desire for discovery and surprise and a dislike of being bussed around and of definitive schedules.

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17 Discover England Research Outdoor Activities, maru/edr, OMTM, June 2018
18 Making Great Memories in England’s National Parks - Product Audit Project Wrap-Up, XV Insight, file dated 16 May 2018
19 ibid
20 The last mile (VisitBritain beyond London, 2013 IPS)
21 England’s National Parks: Concept Development Qualitative Research Findings, Final Report. One Minute to Midnight, date unknown

**Strengthening visitor experiences of farming and land management in England’s National Parks**
The Tourism Company, April 2019
“Can we ensure that experiences don’t feel too touristy, have a level of flexibility and enable them to do their own thing?”

The experience itself should aim to achieve a good balance between learning something new and having fun. In one study, 72% of travellers agreed (68% agreeing strongly) that “Entertainment should be about learning new things as much as simply having fun.”

This was confirmed elsewhere:

“Achieving the balance between interesting, fun history and feeling too much like a school trip.”

“The meeting of people and land over time ....without being too worthy”

“Sight-doing not sight-seeing”.

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22 ibid
23 The Future Travel Journey, Foresight Factory for VisitEngland, 2017
24 England’s National Parks: Concept Development Qualitative Research Findings, Final Report. One Minute to Midnight, date unknown
25 ibid
26 Making Great Memories in England’s National Parks - Product Audit Project Wrap-Up, XV Insight, file dated 16 May 2018
5 International case studies

The brief for this study required the presentation of case studies from around the world of exceptional farm experiences, with key lessons identified for the UK.

There is no available list of ‘exceptional farm experiences’ and there is no basis on which they can be defined. The approach has therefore been to use a variety or methods to identify examples of individual farm and land management business and related projects and initiatives whose experience is considered relevant to the situation to be found in England’s National Parks.

The objective was to come up with a set of case studies which illustrate a range of types of visitor experience and support programmes, led by and involving different types of player. The purpose is to enhance appreciation of the issues surrounding the provision of visitor experiences of farming and land management, stimulate ideas and inform consideration of challenges and opportunities.

The methods used to identify the case studies include:

- approaching known international contacts involved in rural and sustainable tourism and following up on leads provided by them;
- undertaking web searches, based on ‘farm visits’ and other key words;
- visiting destination stands at the world’s largest tourism trade fair, ITB Berlin, in March 2019.

After obtaining initial information about the potential case studies, contact was made with each of them and further details obtained through extensive interviews, mainly using Skype.

The search and the resulting case studies are predominantly related to the provision of visits to working farms, based on pre-purchased packages and programmes, mainly accessed through tour operators but sometimes directly. One study considers forest-based experiences.

The case studies look at both the nature of the experiences offered and the development and support processes. The perspective taken and the source of information varies between the studies:

- three are from the farmers themselves or their immediate representatives (B, C, G);
- two are from a farm tourism association or support body (A, E);
- one is from an established tour operator (D); and
- one is from a destination plus experience provider (F).

At the end of each case study, key lessons and take-aways are listed.

The case studies include:

(A) Heritage agritourism in Latvia: supporting individual farms and engaging tour operators
(B) Livestock farming as the basis for visitor experiences in New Zealand
(C) La Masseria – using farm visits to support ecological lemon production in Italy
(D) Horizontes – a sustainable tour operator supporting land-based experiences in Costa Rica
(E) Farm tourism support and the development of visitor experiences in North Carolina, USA
(F) Woodland experiences and land-based products linked to Germany’s protected areas
(G) West Cork Farm Tours – a collaborative initiative between four farms in Ireland.
(A) Heritage agritourism in Latvia: supporting individual farms and engaging tour operators

Lauku Ceļotājs, the Latvian Country Tourism Association, is an NGO which was formed in Latvia through a private initiative back in 1993, aimed at uniting farmers and providing them with services for the development and promotion of tourism. Since then it has become one of the most active and innovative farm tourism bodies in Europe, undertaking projects with a strong focus on the needs of farmers and the market. The development and transformation of the association shows how priorities and practices have had to change to meet new realities and opportunities.

The association started with just 10 members – it now has 400 members which are primarily Latvian working farms. Each pays a nominal membership of 50 Euros, which links them into the initiative. The Association has 15 staff. It is divided into an NGO responsible for business advice, development and projects, and a ground handling service called Baltic Holidays which is involved in marketing and relationships with tour operators. This latter commercial operation enables the association to keep up to date with market trends and opportunities which help to inform their development activity.

The combined operation has four primary functions:
• Pursuing and implementing rural development and tourism projects, mainly through EU funding
• Providing training, support and advice for farmers, through publications, workshops, seminars, networking and one-to-one input
• Assembling products and visitor experiences/offers to promote directly to consumers and to meet the needs of tour operators
• Marketing and communications.

Initially, the Association was mainly involved in supporting and promoting farm-based accommodation on behalf of its members. However, with the advent of online portals such as Booking.com it has had to differentiate itself to survive. It did this by recognising the growing market demand for visitor experiences rather than just accommodation, coupled with a search for authenticity and an interest in heritage. At the same time, growing consumer interest in quality, organic and traditionally grown local food provided a further and parallel opportunity. As a consequence, they worked with their existing members and new types of business to establish a suite of products based on farm tours, hands-on experiences, food preparation and catering. However, they did not turn their backs on accommodation and many of the farms they work with offer farm-stays which may also involve some element of the above activities.
The most recent project has involved putting together a product manual on “Heritage Agritourism”. This involves places where “people can learn about life in the countryside and the historical heritage that is linked to agriculture”, as well as its continuation in modern farming. The manual is in four main sections, covering: Open farms (day visits); Farm-stays; Touring routes (2 to 5 day programmes linking farms and other sites); and Agricultural Study Tours (largely aimed at professionals in agriculture).

Open farms essentially offer bookable experience rather than being accessible to casual visits. Typically, they provide a visit for up to two hours involving:

- Greeting, introduction and talk with the farming family/hosts
- Excursion on the farm, understanding production processes, working life and challenges
- Some hands-on activity, such as one of the farm tasks, cooking, crafts etc
- Tasting the farm products. Some offer a light lunch, others do not or only on request.

Examples of the experiences offered include: cheese-making; bread-baking; horse cart rides and work on horse harnessing; barefoot trail; clay pot making; pressing for grapeseed oil; how to relate safely to farm animals; wool felting and weaving; honey extraction; sheep shearing; use of herbs and medicinal plants; identifying and collecting wild mushrooms.

Some of the farms in the programme were already providing these activities, while for others it is a new venture. The Association has been keen to work with large farms as well as smaller ones. They have found that many ordinary tourists are very interested in modern agricultural practices.

One of the ways in which the Association has sought to involve more farms is through the annual Latvian Open Farm Weekend, previously put on by the Ministry of Agriculture but now run by the Association. Around 100 farms participate. It has given some farms an initial taste of having visitors, and some have gone on to join the Association and offer more.

The product development work has involved a lot of discussions with the farmers on what to include in their programmes and how to relate to visitors. They have found that this can be quite hard for farmers, especially knowing how much to say and when to stop. It is very important to provide constructive criticism where this is needed. Some exposure to tour groups before the product is finalised can be helpful.

The market for the farm visits is mainly domestic, from Latvia and neighbouring countries, with about 25% international. There are some differences in their interests:

- Domestic visitors are generally interested in country life away from the city, seeing a real farm, opportunities for walking in the countryside and buying fresh food. Some return regularly for this.
- Foreign visitors are more interested in new experiences and types of food and customs that are different from what they have at home.
The Association has learnt a lot about working with international tour operators. Many of them have very particular requirements for their groups in terms of the location of the farms, the time available for the visits and the components of programmes. Often they will select their own combination of farms to suit these needs, rather than respond to pre-prescribed programmes. Frequently, visits will be made to two or three farms in one day. The level of detail sought by the operators and their clients, including precise timings and content, can be very significant. This has applied in particular to the Japanese market, which has been seen as an opportunity owing to their interest in rural experiences.

The programmes have not always delivered high levels of business and income to the participating farms. However, many farms have reported that they have benefitted significantly from the interaction with visitors in other ways, which has given them more pride in what they do and in their way of life. There are clear examples of how this has encouraged them to maintain their farming practices, owing to the interest shown by visitors and also increased evidence of the market demand for organic food produced in traditional ways.

International tour operators have shown a positive response to the products introduced to them. Based on the experience of working with Japanese tour operators, further attention is being paid to the Chinese market.

The Association recognises that it is important for individual farmers to have the right level of business to suit their needs. While there is scope for this to increase, there is a concern that too many visitors could change the character of the farms, which could then lose their authenticity. It is also important that farmers do not become overburdened by the amount of time they have to spend with visitors or find that they are no longer enjoying the experience.

Key lessons/take-aways:

- Linking farm support with tour handling can strengthen knowledge and outcomes
- Providing heritage and visit experiences can help to differentiate farm-based accommodation
- Interest may exist in visits to large modern farms as well as smaller holdings
- Occasional ‘open farm’ events can provide a way in for farmers
- Advisors must be prepared to offer criticism, if this is constructive
- Opportunities may exist in both domestic and international markets, but interests may differ
- Tour operators may have their own particular needs and require clear details on what is offered
- Benefit to farmers may come from increased pride and awareness as well as additional income
- It is important to strike the right balance between time given to visitors and to farming.

https://www.celotajs.lv/en/c/brand/agriheritage
(B) Livestock farming as the basis for visitor experiences in New Zealand

In New Zealand, farm visits have been actively promoted for many years. As a country with a strong rural heritage and image, they provide a way of bringing this to life for international visitors. ‘Farm visits’ constitute a routine search item on mainstream tourism websites. A range of opportunities are available, many of which are based on livestock farming. Two examples are presented below. Although they work with different markets and use different approaches, both are centred on providing an experience of farming life, the people involved and their relationship with the land and its management.

The Akaroa Farm Tour is offered by Murray Johns and his family based on their farm at Paua Bay, outside the attractive coastal town of Akaroa, near Christchurch. The farm was established by Murray’s great grandfather and has been run by the family ever since.

In the 1980s/90s the farm had around 1000 hectares, running 2000 ewes, 50 cattle and 100 deer. Business was often hard. In 2004 Murray’s son had left school and was looking to return to the farm, so the family was seeking a way of boosting their income to enable this to happen. Conversations with neighbours led to the idea of offering farm visits for a fee. An important aspect of the decision to do this was that Murray had been involved in local amateur dramatics and felt confident about meeting people and telling them stories. Some previous experience of providing bed and breakfast was relevant but not significant to the decision.

The farm tours operation started in a small way. A group often comprised just two or three people and eight was considered to be a lot. However, it was clear that international visitors liked meeting ordinary Kiwis and seeing how they lived on the farm.

A significant change occurred with the arrival of cruise ships in the immediate area, some of which docked in Christchurch and later in Akaroa. The farm arranged to take groups from the ships, often up to thirty people at a time.

The response from the groups was very positive and visitors gave warm feedback about the experience they had enjoyed. However, the family was concerned about safety and the risks of mixing guests with the livestock and dogs. A more managed approach was adopted. The tour changed from focussing on the sheep yards to an experience that was more centred on people. Murray started to tell stories about his family, past and present, about their challenges with maintaining the farm and about the local community.

Much of the visit takes place at a point where visitors can observe the sheep handlers at work, with an opportunity to see the shearing taking place. Murray talks about the life of a sheep bottom-washer and shearer.
and what goes on in their mind. The group is also given a demonstration of sheepdog work on an adjacent hill. The visit involves Murray’s son and daughter-in-law who provide different elements of the demonstrations and are involved in the stories. At the end of the visit the group goes into the farmhouse and garden where they meet Murray’s wife Sue who provides them with fresh scones and jam.

The activity has required relatively little investment. Toilets were already available on site. Buses are provided to transfer groups to and from Akaroa, driven by neighbours in the local community.

Currently the farm receives about 130 group tours each year in the season between October and April, with between one and three tours per day. Visitors total around 2,400. The charge per head is $NZ 85, including a 15% commission to the tour operator. This contributes significantly to the overall income of the farm. However, the property has remained very much a working farm and this is its primary function. More land has been acquired and livestock numbers have increased significantly, now amounting to 6,000 sheep and over 400 cattle. Moreover, the family is now fully employed on the farm.

Part of the farm is of ecological significance and is managed to comply with the requirements of environmental legislation. Some areas of land have been donated to a conservation trust. Murray mentions this in his presentation in a limited way, although visitors seem relatively less interested in these issues.

Cruise ships now provide virtually all the visitors to the farm. Because of this, there has been no need to deal with individual visitors and tour operators and the family prefer to avoid the extra work that this involves. However, they are conscious that the presence of cruise ships in the area is controversial within the community and the long-term future of this market in Akaroa is not certain.

Criffel Station is located at Wanaka in the hill country of Otago Region in the South Island. In 1993 it was converted by the current owners, Mandy and Jerry Bell, into one of New Zealand’s largest deer breeding and stud farms. The property contains 350 hectares of finishing pastures and 1650 hectares of breeding hill blocks on the steeper tussock country.

In the early 2000s the owners recognised the need and the opportunity to diversify their activities. At that time they were providing a venue for events. Over the following few years a varied tourism operation was established, including the provision of overnight accommodation, a base for a range of outdoor activities and a programme of discovery tours, available for day and staying visitors.

The motivation for this diversification and the approach adopted was driven by two concerns:

- The growing difficulties faced by farmers in maintaining profitable family businesses
- Recognition of the challenges facing land managers and rural communities related to environmental quality, water quality and availability, changing consumer preferences, disruptive new technologies and climate change.
The Bells’ approach to addressing these issues is based on a “One Health” philosophy, which is clearly set out on their website. This entails an integrated approach to a healthy environment; healthy people and healthy animals. The objective is sustainability for future generations, allowing ongoing enhancement and enjoyment of the land. This philosophy has influenced their farming and land management practices and also plays an increasing part in the visitor experience and the content of tours. Engaging with visitors is seen as a rewarding two-way process in connecting land and people.

Informed by market research, Mandy Bell recognised that visitors are increasingly wanting to “experience the real”. There has also been a trend towards smaller groups and a growing interest in environmental issues and challenges.

Currently Criffel Station provides farm tours for around six groups per week in a season from mid-October to mid-May. Tours include the provision of lunch and/or overnight accommodation. The overnight accommodation is full for most of the year, with forty percent of staying guests taking a farm tour. The tours that are offered broadly fall into:

- Explore tours. This includes an introduction to deer farming and Kiwi farm life. It is an interactive tour and enables visitors to get close to the animals with an opportunity to feed the deer.
- High Country tours. These involve trips by 4WD to enjoy the different landscapes on the property.
- Bespoke tours. These offer exclusive access and are designed to meet individual interests and needs. They may include visits to different sites, various activities and hands-on experiences and gourmet meals, including high quality picnics provided in a range of stunning locations.

Over time, it has become easier to match the types of tour offered to the profile of different groups. Broadly these vary between those that place a focus on sustainability, those that want a high-end more exclusive experience, and groups with a technical interest, although these themes do of course overlap. Criffel Station is increasingly able to fine tune their service to the requirements of the various tour operators with whom they have developed a relationship. They have also been able to become more selective, with the emphasis on higher value over increased volume.

Feedback from visitors suggests that the highlight for most is the contact made with people on the farm and understanding more about their way of life. Combining this with extraordinary landscapes and stunning local fare is a winning formula.

Criffel Station employs 20 staff in total, of which 17 are engaged in some way with tourism and visitors. The income from tourism has grown and is now nearing parity with that achieved from farming. The owners have analysed this very carefully, including calculating the return per hectare from animals versus people. Integrating agriculture with tourism on a working farm is an ongoing challenge. Sound management is important, with a priority given to ensuring the welfare of visitors.

Based on the experience at Criffel, the Bells have been working with a select number of other farms in New Zealand who share the same approach and philosophy. They have established a handling company called A Hika which undertakes marketing, booking and engagement with tour operators, enabling the farmers to concentrate on running their properties and hosting guests. They firmly believe in this networking approach and are seeking to expand it into other countries.
<table>
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<td>• Telling stories of farm life can be appealing to visitors and provide the core of the experience</td>
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[https://www.akaroafarmtours.com](https://www.akaroafarmtours.com)
[https://criffelstation.com](https://criffelstation.com)
La Masseria is a traditional farm, growing lemons, olives and some other fruits and vegetables, located outside Sorrento in southern Italy. The lemon and olive groves form a series of terraces leading down to the Mediterranean, protected by pergolas made from the farm’s chestnut trees. The farm offers tours at 10am and 4pm, lasting for two to three hours.

The farm was started in 1898 and has been run by four generations of the Gargiulo family since that time. This historic legacy is highly important to them and is featured strongly in the promotion of the tours and in the story that is told.

The website for the tours clearly states the philosophy and approach at the outset: “Our tour is an experience, created with the intention of learning about our history, enhancing the quality of products of our country and safeguarding the land – through an excursion for discovering anew the authentic typical products which are disappearing little by little”.

The lemon growing process has been certified for its ecologically sound approach and its traditional authenticity. The farm holds the EU designations of IGP (Protected Geographical Indication) for its lemons and DOP (Protected Origin Denomination) for its olive oil. This is featured strongly in the tourism promotion and visitors are invited to “see why our farm is one of the few holding these awards”.

In addition to these agricultural certificates, La Masseria is also designated as an “Educational Farm” by the Region of Campania.

This is very much a family business, involving Eugenio and Raffaele Gargiulo and their parents Ferdinando and Maria. The tour business was initiated by Eugenio in 2011. Following degrees in accountancy and economics at Naples University, he decided to return home and help his family run and develop the farm. He spearheads the tourism operation, but the other family members are also involved in accompanying tours and providing demonstrations and catering etc.

The tours have the following basic elements:
- Walking the lemon and olive groves with Eugenio and his father, showing how the fruit is nurtured and harvested.
- Visit to the operating olive press, wine cellar etc. and the collection of old farm implements
- Demonstration and participation in making Limoncello, including providing a recipe and training for people to make it back home
- Demonstration and tasting of a range of products from the farm – marmalades, lemon infused olive oil, honey from own bees, cured meats etc.
- Snack/lunch with bread, cheeses, olives, other farm products, lemon desert, homemade lemonade, wine and limoncello. A more substantial farm lunch or dinner can be pre-booked.
- Opportunity to buy the full range of farm products.
Although the farm grows fruit and crops, there are also a few animals around which add a significant additional dimension to the visitor experience and enjoyment, featuring often in guest feedback.

Access to the farm has been a problem for some visitors as public transport is limited, but there is free parking and the farm also offers a full pick-up and transfer service from Sorrento.

La Masseria sells over two thousand tours per year and numbers have been growing. The tours are booked by individuals and by groups. Around 40% of the business comes from tour operators. Visitors are mainly international, with the main markets being the USA, UK and other European countries. Word-of-mouth and social media are very important in generating business. The tour is also recommended to guests by hotels and other accommodation establishments in the area.

The advent of web portals promoting tours has been highly important to the business, resulting in bookings growing by at least a third. Two key sites are Airbnb (La Masseria is an Airbnb™ Experience, presented as a personal invitation by Eugenio as the ‘host’), and Viator (owned by TripAdvisor). The latter offers the Masseria half-day tour with transfers to and from Sorrento and light lunch for £57. There is also a package which combines the lemon farm visit with other farm/food visits, including pizza making, on a day tour for £100, provided by a local guide.

The tours tend to have around 15 to 20 participants, on average. It is also possible to arrange for a more exclusive, tailor made tour for smaller groups of around five to eight people. This would include a full meal and may also involve cookery demonstrations. This has not been actively promoted and does not happen frequently.

The experience of developing and running the tours since 2011 has been very positive for La Masseria. It is important to note that both the farming and the tourism aspects of the business have grown together. The level of agricultural production has expanded and there are plans to add further land for olive and lemon growing. There are also plans to extend the covered space available for the visits.

Eugenio has found that it is possible and satisfying to be engaged in providing for visitors as well as in farming, although this leads to a very busy life. He had no external advice at the outset and had to learn on the job. The main challenges were regulations, pricing and promotion.

The most important message from La Masseria is that it has been the tourism income, from the tour fees and from the additional on-site sale of produce, that has enabled them to maintain ecological and traditional processes on the farm. They could have invested in more and larger machinery to increase production but this would have been at the expense of quality. Eugenio emphasises that they have followed an alternative route of essentially ‘niche’ production and have capitalised on the value of this through tourism.
Key lessons/take-aways:

- The younger generation returning to the farm can stimulate diversification into tourism
- Certification and designation of sound farming practice can be used to encourage visits
- Maintaining and talking about the family’s heritage on the land can be a motivator
- Web portals selling tours can be a key source of business
- Providing good means of access to farms is important
- Food can be key – simply prepared as part of the offer and for demonstrations and sales
- A few friendly animals are important for visitors, even on arable/horticultural farms
- Income from visitors can motivate and enable traditional and sustainable agriculture.

http://www.aziendaagricolalamasseria.com/en/
(D) Horizontes – a sustainable tour operator supporting land-based experiences in Costa Rica

For many years sustainability has been at the forefront of tourism policy in Costa Rica and the country’s tourism brand and visitor appeal is centred on its superb landscapes, biodiversity and natural heritage.

Horizontes Nature Tours is a leading Costa Rican tour operator, established 35 years ago and employing a staff of over thirty people. It primarily delivers services to partners that specialise in tailor-made experiences and groups. It provides an excellent example of how a high-end tour operator is taking a lead role in supporting existing farming enterprises and working with communities to deliver more land-based products, in order to meet a growing market demand for authentic experiences linked to sustainability. It is mainly involved in delivering multi-day tours, many of which are tailor-made, contracting with local providers and experiences on the ground.

From an early stage, Horizontes has adopted the principles of sustainable tourism in its approach, seeking to identify and support products that are delivering an authentic experience and are supportive of local communities and environments. The market has both influenced and responded to this. They reckon that 90% of their business now involves purchasers who are seeking tours where these principles apply.

The company’s end clients tend to be well educated travellers from the USA, Europe and elsewhere who are looking for life-changing experiences. On occasions they expect high-end service (barefoot luxury) but also value simple, authentic quality, locally provided and adventure-orientated facilities. They will pay a premium price for this – the Horizontes tours are relatively expensive. Sometimes, potential client tour operators have questioned the price but accepted it when they see the added value which differentiates the tours.

Some of the tours offered by Horizontes are overtly educational, aimed at academics, students and professionals. They offer tours in sustainable agriculture, sustainable tourism and other subjects to such groups. However, they have seen an interesting cross-over between these and more general tours, with some families and other groups looking for some of the specific learning experiences that are contained in the educational programmes.

A fundamental aspect of the Horizontes approach is the quality and knowledge of their tour guides. All of them receive intense annual training in topics such as climate change, renewable energies, world economic environment, community development, self-motivation and other sustainability issues, as well as in guiding.

A significant component of the programmes offered by Horizontes, and of their work in developing them, has involved farmers, land managers and community-based smallholders.
A number of the mainstream tours involve a visit to already established farms. Examples include:

- **Finca Don Juan**, a plantation and farm growing over thirty different Costa Rican vegetables and herbs, together with some livestock. Groups visiting the nearby Arenal volcano, an iconic tourist site, often visit the site for lunch. The visit includes a tour of the farm, introduced by the owner, with a strong focus on organic production. Some longer programmes can include involvement in harvesting.

- **Doka Estate Coffee Farm**, a locally owned property providing a tour and coffee making/tasting experience. The farm is certified by Rainforest Alliance for its sustainability, relating both to the production and the operation.

A very significant contribution by Horizontes has been made through a five-year project in the Osa Peninsula on the Pacific coast in the south west corner of Costa Rica. This is a highly biodiverse area, with a distinctive landscape, containing various small communities engaged in agriculture and fishing in juxtaposition with an expanse of rainforest, including the Corcovardo National Park. Here, Horizontes themselves saw the opportunity to create a diverse set of unique experiences for visitors while also benefitting the local communities.

The work was undertaken with the support of the Horizontes Foundation, set up in 2009 as a charitable body with the objective of raising and disseminating funds to support environmental and community projects.

The result has been the development of a varied set of experiences, normally lasting two to three hours on each site. They cover farming, forest experiences and conservation. Examples, amongst many others, include:

- **Heart of Palm tour**. A local lady demonstrates the production of this palm-based vegetable, with cooking lessons and tasting. Previously, she had to walk long distances to sell her produce.
- **Chocolate tour**, with small cocoa grower, showing production process, tasting etc.
- **Visit to a butterfly farm** to learn about different butterflies and their relationship to plants, as well as life cycles of other species that are exclusive to Osa.
- **Visit to the Osa Conservation Project**, walking the trails on private land/reserves with the managers and scientists to observe forest conservation and improvement of habitat for macaws.
- **Participating with local communities** in mangrove re-planting.
- **Horseback riding** with local providers.

These experiences are offered as:

- **Individual one-day tours**. Horizontes will add them into other programmes. They have also been working with local accommodation providers in the area, including a number of high-quality ecolodges, to encourage them to offer and promote the tours/visits to their guests.
- **Multi-day programmes**. Horizontes has established a series of three to five day itineraries and trails in different parts of the peninsula.

Some of the suppliers did have previous experience of receiving visitors, but most did not. Horizontes has implemented a training programme within the communities over the last four years. A key aspect has been training in communication, delivered by experienced guides. Other issues addressed include safety, quality and sustainability. Horizontes has been careful to ensure that a...
A reliable experience is in place to meet the needs of their international client operators and wholesalers.

The outcome for the communities has been an increase in income but also in pride and awareness of the value of their heritage and their relationship with the land. A number of other areas in Costa Rica are now seeking to follow the approach, aware of the market interest.

The main challenge for Horizontes has been to ensure that due processes are followed in developing the products. The communities have a tendency towards informality. While this can lead to an easy-going experience for visitors, the suppliers have to commit to compliance with legal requirements and regulations, with a clear structure for decision making and communication. Insurance and security measures must to be in place and the experience has to be fully delivered to visitors as described and on schedule.

**Key lessons/take-aways:**

- There is growing international demand for authentic experiences linked to sustainability
- Tour operators themselves can influence, shape, support and lead on product development
- Premium prices can be charged for authentic local experiences
- There is a growing demand for educational and learning experiences
- The knowledge and ability of tour guides, including in sustainability, is crucial to success
- Farm tours and visits can be part of more general programmes
- Tour operators themselves can establish mechanisms for raising funds to support initiatives
- Different land based experiences, including farm, forest and conservation visits, can be linked
- Short day visit programmes can be offered individually or in different combinations
- Accommodation operators can play a valuable role in promoting and selling day visits
- Ensuring reliable delivery that meets regulations and safety requirements can be challenging

[https://www.horizontes.com](https://www.horizontes.com)
(E) Farm tourism support and the development of visitor experiences in North Carolina, USA

Agritourism is well established in the USA. Many farms are open to the public in some way, ranging from opportunities for limited visits to highly developed operations providing farm shops and leisure facilities. A particular focus is on food production and purchasing – people value the ability to buy fresh produce from the farm. Agritourism appears to have a higher profile in agriculture and rural development policy and activity in the US than in most other countries.

Much of the agritourism development and promotion activity takes place at state level and more locally within counties. Individual states may have a range of public, private and voluntary bodies that are engaged in supporting farmers involved in tourism and providing opportunities for networking.

North Carolina is an example of a state with an active programme to support agritourism, including the development of innovative visitor experience packages involving working farms. It is a leading state in US agriculture and the sector is highly important to the local economy. A mixture of livestock and arable farms include large scale production units and many small family businesses. Agriculture in North Carolina has faced many changes and challenges, including diversification from tobacco growing, impact of hurricanes and wider climate effects, low levels of farm income and an exodus of young people.

The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services provides a changing list of open farm events on the homepage of its website. It also has a whole section on agritourism, including information on the subject, webinars on getting involved, links to research studies and data, access to practical tips via a weekly topical message, a map and directory of over 450 farms welcoming guests, and a ‘Visit NC Farms’ phone App. The support for agritourism is justified as: “Farms that diversify to include welcoming the public to the farm support economic stability in rural areas, contribute to environmental sustainability, promote and protect local food systems, and provide visitors with unique ways to learn about North Carolina farms. Agritourism creates many new opportunities for farmers to even out the revenue stream, to strengthen the family farm and its connection to the public, all while preserving the beautiful rural landscape of North Carolina”.

The North Carolina Agritourism Networking Association is a membership body that provides support and engagement opportunities for farmers. This includes an annual conference and other learning opportunities. A useful service is the provision of standardised metallic display signs that warn visitors of the limits to liability on agritourism farms under state law.

A number of other bodies also support farm visits. The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association is a sustainable agriculture body that organises an annual weekend of open farm tours. This has proved popular amongst farmers who may initially be reluctant to go further into farm tourism. They focus on gaining income from produce sales during the event, avoiding liability concerns arising from charging for tours.

North Carolina State University (NCSU) plays a particularly interesting and significant role in developing agritourism in the state and in fostering its success. The University has a sizeable Extension Service that works within the state’s 100 counties, including a tourism team with a focus
on agritourism. It is one of the most active universities in the world in supporting local entrepreneurship. The service is partly state-funded but also supported by research grants and other resources.

The team has amassed a considerable amount of knowledge about agritourism from their research studies and ongoing work. They have found that:

- Many farmers consider getting involved with tourism but don’t know where to start
- There is a lot of variation in the motivation of farmers to provide tours, from primarily economic to more educational.
- There is a considerable level of ignorance about agriculture and associated issues amongst visitors to farms.
- Of farmers offering farm visits, over three quarters have found this to be very important to their farm operation and a similar proportion want to expand it.
- Farmers that use sustainable practices are more inclined to be interested in offering farm tourism experiences, which in turn are more appealing to visitors.

The University Extension Service concentrates on small farmers that want to continue their focus on food production while also adding another revenue stream from tourism. Owing to their need to retain this balance, in the main these farmers only want to receive small groups, only accept visitors with a confirmed reservation and want to offer a hands-on experience.

A key aspect of the service is the People First Tourism Lab, which was established by the University as a practical, research-based initiative helping businesses to develop visitor experiences and actually take them to market. It involves:

- Providing one-to-one advice and support to the farmers. This is delivered mainly through a Participatory Action Research project involving the extension service together with experienced students, who visit, mentor and monitor the business. They provide advice on pricing, formulating visitor experiences, scripting evocative text, providing illustrations (stills and film) and promotion.
- Featuring the experiences within the People First Tourism platform that promotes tour programmes online and through social media. A strong link has also been made with Visit North Carolina and the county tourism offices/DMOs, who have helped with publicity, media contacts, tour operator linkages, fam trips etc.

Two types of experience programmes are offered. The first is a short farm visit of around two hours on average. This gives an introductory opportunity for farmers to become involved in tourism without needing to make a big commitment. A range of types of agriculture is covered, including livestock, arable and horticultural farms, offering programmes such as: ‘sowing seeds of success’, ‘back to earth farm renewal’, ‘ostrich hands-on farm tour’, ‘sustainable farm workshop’, ‘work on all natural farm’ and ‘down and dirty tour’. Prices vary quite widely, from around $20 to over $50, depending on tour length, activity and size of group.
The tours are for small groups and are very personal and engaging. In the promotion, much is made of the farmers themselves and their individual stories. Typical descriptions may include passages like: “Do you want to get down in the dirt? Then, work with Warren - help him prop beds, seed, water, plow and harvest! Feed the pigs and chickens and guineas and farm cats if you want.”

A second type of experience is a more elaborate package over two days or more. This delivers an ultimate food and farming experience, under the title “Fork to Farmer” rather than the more common ‘farm to fork’. It is based around well-known local chefs and involves visitors having a meal with them in their restaurant and then visiting and working on the farms that supply their produce. Typically, the multi-day package may include three hands-on farm experiences, two dinners, one lunch and one brunch. Prices are around $500. The rationale is well described by Duarte Morais of People First Tourism as follows (personal communication): “The famous chefs claim that they source locally, so they need their trusted farmers to stay in business; but the restaurant business is tough so the chefs cannot pay those local farmers much more than they would pay commodity food suppliers; but they can encourage their fans to book hands-on experiences with the farmers which will make the chefs look even more admirable to the local food tourists. Win, win, win.”

The short single day experiences have mainly attracted a local and regional market, including couples, families and small groups. The longer ‘fork to farmer’ packages have been particularly popular with food lovers. They generate a significant following on social media. All the experiences can be customised to meet the needs and interests of different groups.

A set of high quality and atmospheric videos have been created to illustrate the experiences and the rationale behind them. The People First Tourism team is applying its approach in other destinations, including internationally, and is keen to work with others who have similar aims.

Key lessons/take-aways:
• Public sector bodies can play a strong role in supporting farm tourism
• Farmers offering visits can be supported by membership associations
• Public liability issues can be a concern for some farmers, requiring clarity
• Farmers vary in their motives for engaging with tourism and visitors
• The provision of farm tours relates well to sustainable agricultural practice
• Farmers benefit from direct help and advice on product development and promotion
• Farmers may value structured opportunities to start with tourism in a limited way
• There are creative opportunities to link special food experiences with farming
• Promotion based on personal stories, evocative text and film, can be powerful.

https://tourism.ces.ncsu.edu/site-tourism-3001
Woodland experiences and land-based products linked to Germany’s protected areas

Germany has been taking strides to improve the management and sustainability of individual destinations and to deliver visitor experiences in line with this approach.

The Deutsche Tourismusverband, the association of national, regional and municipal tourism organisations, is the umbrella body for German tourism. In 2016/17 it ran a national competition to identify and reward destinations demonstrating good practice in sustainable tourism. Many of the participants were rural destinations, often containing different kinds of designated protected area. Some are taking a positive approach to the link between tourism and sustainable land management, including innovative programmes of visitor engagement.

The Bliesgau Biosphere Reserve was a finalist in the competition. Designated by UNESCO in 2009 for the beauty of its landscape, this is a relatively small area of some 360 km$^2$ in the Saarland, near the border with France. The area comprises forests and woodland together with species-rich grassland, bog and meadow orchards.

Working with the local tourism office and local guides the Bliesgau Biosphere Reserve has established a range of packages for visitors. They are mainly short or single-day programmes but some are for two or three days. Almost all relate to different aspects of the landscape and include themed walks and participatory activities. Much is made of the link between the landscape and local produce, with visits to orchards, honey producers and local food outlets. Some of the packages are promoted as events taking place on specified dates, but these and others can also be booked by groups at other times.

A particularly innovative approach is taken in engaging visitors with the local woodland and its conservation and management. Various packages are offered by forest managers and conservationists in the forest of Blieskastel, which is owned and managed as a community forest. In the national competition they were identified as ‘lighthouse’ projects, owing to their originality. The activities on offer include:

- Selecting particular varieties of living wood and using this to construct one’s own wildwood chair.
- Finding woodland products, including specific woods, deer horn and skins, and using them to make a knife, involving metalwork and crafting the handle.
- Using carefully selected timber from the forest to construct a natural raft and then taking it on an expedition on the nearby lake.

The delivery of the packages is notable for the attention paid to providing the participants with a very deep understanding and experience of the woodland as a life-giving space, an important habitat and special component of the area’s ecosystem and heritage landscape. Examples of this include:
• Introductory sessions - describing the management issues and challenges, such as the impact of ash-dieback on the woodland and the influence of global timber trading.
• Guided exploration of the forest, combining a botanist and woodland interpreter, with the latter helping to relate people to the place, for example explaining how they can make themselves invisible to woodland animals.
• Incorporating periods of silence and meditation into the visit, encouraging people to consider what they themselves find special about the forest.
• Focussing on issues of sustainability and balance in nature, which is even portrayed in the process of balancing the raft on the water.
• Involving visitors in replanting to replace the timber that has been used.

The experience builds on the Japanese concept of *Shinrin-yoku*, which means "taking in the forest atmosphere" or "forest bathing." It was developed in Japan during the 1980s and has become a cornerstone of preventive health care and healing in Japanese medicine.

The programmes are run by Lothar Wilhelm, a heritage interpreter and woodland specialist, and Helmut Wolf, the local forest manager and landscape guide.

The chair and knife making initiatives are relatively new. They have been supported by EU funding to test the concepts and are now being put on a more commercial footing. The raft building programme has run for eight years and is in high demand.

The packages have a seasonal dimension, with opportunities to experience the woodland in different conditions. The chair and knife making require visitors to come in the spring to select their wood and to return in the autumn to do the craft work, once the wood has dried. Extra wood is collected for those who can only visit once.

So far, visitors are mainly from the region or from elsewhere in Germany. While the packages could attract an international market, this is not seen as a priority. The activities appeal to all age groups. Special programmes have been developed for school children. Frequently, the packages are purchased and given as gifts, owing to the originality of the experience and, partly, to the creation of a physical end product.

The reaction of visitors has been extremely positive. They have strongly valued the creative and participatory process as a way of fully experiencing the woodland.

The benefit for the forest and land management is partly seen through the income earned by the providers. However, a greater impact is believed to come from the increase in awareness of the Bliesgau woodland and its life-giving importance. This has been picked up in the media and observed in the interest shown by other woodland owners.
A particular strength of this project is the strong relationship established between Biosphärenreservat Bliesgau (the protected area authority), Saarpfalz-Touristik (the local county tourism body) and the Saarland government. The land-based packages have formed a key part of the latter’s tourism promotion. This was tangibly evident at ITB (the global tourism fair) in 2019, where the woodland visitor experiences were demonstrated in a re-created forest as the centrepiece of the Saarland stand.

The Bliesgau Biosphere Reserve has a scheme whereby local businesses and individuals can be identified as ‘partners’ of the Reserve. This can include local guides and activity providers, such as those offering the land-based and woodland experiences. Partners can network with each other in a Bliesgau Awareness Association and receive other support. The process requires potential partners to submit documentary evidence, participate in an interview and pay a small fee. Partners commit to:

- identifying with the mission and goals of the protected area;
- promoting high quality and environmentally friendly products; and
- providing guests with professional information about Bliesgau.

The above partnership scheme is a local example of an approach promoted across many of Germany’s Nationale Naturlandschaften (National Natural Landscapes) by EUROPARC-Deutschland. This sets specific minimum requirements of partners (or ‘ambassadors’) in terms of sustainable management and service quality, linked to use of destination branding. Partners are expected to participate in training programmes and other ways of engaging with the protected area. In turn, this model reflects Part 2 (for businesses) of EUROPARC’s Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, which has been applied across Europe.

A number of other protected areas and rural destinations that were finalists in the German national competition for sustainable tourism in destinations in 2016/17, have established similar partnership schemes. In some cases, the partners are farmers or food producers, who are enabled to use the name and logo of the protected area (or of a related scheme) on their properties and produce, thereby signalling their relationship to the designated landscape in the eyes of tourists.

Key lessons/take-aways

- Forestry and woodland management can form a basis for visitor experiences
- Innovative experiences can be based on craft skills using natural materials
- Learning about land management issues can be integrated with creative activity
- Experiences in certain landscapes can contribute to personal health/wellbeing
- Silence and reflection can be a positive element of a visit
- Engaging visitors in replanting underlines the conservation message
- Visits may be spread by promoting opportunities available in different seasons
- Benefits can be multiplied by raising awareness amongst other landowners
- Protected Areas and tourism offices can coordinate on promoting experiences
- Land based experiences could provide a focal point for destination promotion
- Farmers, guides and others can be identified as ‘partners’ of protected areas.

West Cork Farm Tours – a collaborative initiative between four farms in Ireland

Located in the south west of Ireland, West Cork Farm Tours brings together four farming families who offer regular tours of their working farms.

This rural and coastal area is one of the most scenic in Ireland. In recent years it has been promoted as part of the Wild Atlantic Way, a successful branding campaign run by the national tourist board Fáilte Ireland. Agriculture is highly important in West Cork, which has a strong tradition in dairy and other livestock farming. However, there is an ongoing need to support farm incomes in this economically disadvantaged area and to encourage appropriate forms of diversification.

The development and promotion of farm tours was recognised as an opportunity to enhance the range of authentic visitor experiences in the area, based on its rural heritage, while providing an additional dimension to the lives and livelihoods of local farming families. Teagasc, the Agriculture and Food Development Authority, held meetings to pursue the concept. This was further developed and supported by Fáilte Ireland through their work on establishing more visitor experiences. This process led to the identification of four farming families who were interested in participating and who have provided the basis for the farm tours initiative. The farms involved include three dairy farms, which also rear calves, and a unit that combines forestry, free-range pigs and meat processing.

After over a year of preparation, West Cork Farm Tours started trading in 2018. The following types of tour are offered:

- A regular farm tour run between 11am and 1pm every Thursday from April to October, provided by one of the four farms in any one week. The price is EUR 19.50 per person in 2019.
- A similar tour offered for group bookings at other times, according to demand.
- A full day tour involving visits to farms and other sites, with lunch, offered as a dated departure but also available at other times. The tour illustrates the transition of West Cork from a famine-hit region to the home of Ireland's most famous food producers.
- Specialist tours for groups of agriculturalists from other areas.

A central role is played by an appointed coordinator, who is a tourism professional based in the area. She handles the bookings and makes the arrangements with the participating farmers. It involves identifying which farms are available and suited to the requirements of groups at any one time. This is recognised as an essential service, which the farmers were not in a position to fulfil themselves. The coordinator is also involved in delivering the day tour programmes.

The model, based on coordinated collaboration between the farms, means that individual farmers are able to participate while making a relatively limited time commitment to providing the tours.
across the season. This enables them to maintain the necessary level of engagement required to run their farms.

The motivation behind the farmers’ decision to start offering tours was both economic and social. As well as supplementing farm incomes, the farmers were keen to engage with visitors and to raise their understanding of agriculture and the farming life. There was a strong desire to improve the reputation of farming in the eyes of the public.

The farm visits essentially involve a walk around the farm, but the main component is the presentation and conversation between the farmers and their visitors. Much of this relates to the challenges and responsibilities of farming today. The farmers have been pleased to talk about what they are doing to manage the land sustainably, including energy saving activity and making use of the latest research.

An important issue and concern has been to ensure that all visitors are left with a very positive impression of farming standards and to guard against anything that might cause reputational damage. Attention is paid to visitor safety and other practical issues involved with inviting people onto the farms. Wellington boots are provided and visitors are asked for their foot size when booking.

Visitors are mainly from overseas, especially from the UK, Germany and France and with a notably strong interest from the USA. The tours have also attracted the domestic Irish market, appealing to city dwellers interested in their rural heritage. Most visitors display a strong interest and curiosity about farming life, although their level of knowledge and understanding of agriculture can be surprisingly low. The aspect of the tours that they appear to value most is simply the opportunity to meet with the farming families and hear their stories.

The time between booking and the tour taking place varies according to the type of visitor. Independent travellers staying in the area may make their booking the day before the tour. With larger groups the lead in time can be two months or more.

These are still early days for West Cork Farm Tours. Much of the initial business has come from ad hoc groups, some of which are provided through links with specialist tour operators. Patterns of visitation have been rather variable and the balance and timing of different tours will be the subject of future consideration as the business develops.

A very positive aspect of the development and promotion of the tours has been the link formed with local hotels. One of the hoteliers, for example, was extremely helpful in the early stages in providing advice about practical tourism issues, including pricing and how to meet visitor needs. Subsequently he has built the farm tours into a two-day package, alongside meals and accommodation, recognising the growing demand for creative experiences and using this as a way of attracting more business out of season to his hotel.

The participating farming families are very satisfied with the experience to date. They would like to see it develop further. They have been pleased with the recognition that this has brought them.
Overall, West Cork Farm Tours as a concept has attracted a lot of interest from other parts of Ireland and elsewhere.

Key lessons/take-aways
- Farmers working in a small group can share benefits while reducing personal time commitment
- Professional coordination and visitor handling is a required service
- Farmer motivations may be social as well as economic
- Sustainability issues can be well integrated into presentations by farmers
- Building and maintaining a reputation for high standards of husbandry requires vigilance
- Levels of business may take time to build and can come from a variety of sources
- Local tourism businesses, such as hotels, can provide strong support.

https://www.westcorkfarmtours.com
6 Conclusions – insights for consideration

This chapter contains a set of conclusions from the study, to inform the further development and promotion of visitor experiences relating to farming and land management in England’s National Parks. They are presented as insights for consideration by the National Park Authorities, VisitEngland, farmers, land managers and other business interests and stakeholders.

The conclusions have been informed by the context and situation analysis contained in the first part of the report, the further assessment of market research and the experience presented in the international case studies.

6.1 Objectives met and benefits obtained

The assessment of policy and context relating to farming, the environment, tourism and National Parks, presented earlier in this report, led to the identification of four objectives for expanding the engagement of farmers and land managers:

1) FARM INCOMES: To strengthen and diversify the income base for farming families, to enable them to remain on their holdings with a stable future in farming.

2) NATIONAL PARK ENVIRONMENTS: To encourage and support farmers and land managers in pursuing sustainable management of the land, maintaining and where necessary enhancing the landscape quality of the National Parks and the natural and cultural heritage and assets of their holdings.

3) VISITOR AWARENESS AND FULFILMENT: To provide visitors to National Parks with new access opportunities, an enjoyable and fulfilling experience, enhanced awareness of the special qualities of the Park, and a greater understanding of the role and challenges faced by farmers and others in delivering sustainable land management.

4) TOURISM PERFORMANCE: To enhance the appeal of National Parks and rural England as an attractive destination for international and domestic visitors, increasing the level of tourism income and its geographic and seasonal spread, including within rural communities.

The experience from the case studies reaffirms the relevance of these objective and shows how each has been met to a greater or lesser extent, given the individual circumstances pertaining. They also confirm the mutual interdependence of the objectives. The following conclusions can be drawn about the objectives and the benefits derived from farm and land-based visitor experiences:

➢ Levels of income generation vary but visitor experiences can make a crucial contribution to livelihoods and succession on family farms

In all cases, the provision of visitor experiences has delivered income to the farms or land holdings involved. The level of this has varied, partly on account of the level of engagement by the farmers and the ability to attract markets. However, broadly it appears that expectations have been satisfied. In two cases, in New Zealand (B) and Italy (C), the income from the visitor experiences has enabled economic survival and provided an opportunity for young people to remain and thrive on the family farm. This is highly relevant to the circumstances on many farms on England’s National Parks, faced with marginal profitability and uncertainties over succession.
➢ **Social benefits from engaging with visitors are highly valued by participating farmers or land managers**

In most of the case studies the motivation of the farmers or land managers, and of the initiatives to which they relate, has been only partially economic, with many valuing the social benefits equally or more highly. Many were keen to improve communication with the public and have obtained considerable personal satisfaction from the process. In Ireland (G), for example, the farmers were concerned to improve the reputation of agriculture and their engagement with visitors has increased their pride and confidence.

➢ **Visitor reaction tends to be highly positive – they find the experiences to be enjoyable, fulfilling and educational**

Evidence here is mainly anecdotal, based on feedback reported in the case studies. The objective of raising visitor awareness of farming and land management appears to have been well met in the case studies. A significant ignorance about farming practice was apparent in a number of countries and visitors were found to be interested to understand and learn more. Some initiatives have provided more in-depth learning experiences, while also taking a more holistic approach to helping people connect with the land. Examples include the presentation of the ‘One health’ philosophy of land management at Crieff Station in New Zealand (B) and visitors experiencing the health-giving properties of woodland in Germany (F). Overall, the case studies show how farms can meet visitor aspirations for authentic and real experiences as identified in the market research.

➢ **Providing visitor experience can lead to environmental benefits and more sustainable land management, through direct and indirect influences.**

A key question is whether provision of visitor experiences has led to a more sustainable form of land management and the conservation of landscapes, heritage and natural assets. While this has not been explicitly monitored, the approach taken in all the cases studies would suggest that this has occurred, though processes of direct support or indirect motivation. Examples include:

- In most initiatives, farmers are pleased to describe what they are doing to meet environmental challenges and address sustainability issues, encouraging them to maintain or extend their approach in the light of visitor interest.
- Income from tours has enabled a more costly form of traditional and organic horticulture to be practised on a lemon farm in Italy (C).
- In Costa Rica (D), the tour company requires that sustainability standards are met where possible by the farms visited and the experiences offered; they have also involved visitors in community-based conservation activity.
- In Germany, neighbouring woodland owners (G) have been influenced by the activities carried out in the community forest, which have received media attention.

6.2 Potential markets and considerations for marketing

Discussions with personnel in the English National Parks, the market research assessment and the experience from the case studies provide a number of insights on relevant markets and communication with them.
Farm and land-based experiences can appeal to a range of markets, both domestic and international

The relative balance of source markets attracted to the farm and land based experiences covered in the case studies was strongly influenced by the tourism market mix in the country or region as a whole. The case study initiatives in New Zealand (B), Italy (C) and Costa Rica (D) were attracting mainly international visitors, in USA/North Carolina (E) and Germany (F) the market was predominantly domestic, and in Latvia (A) and Ireland (G) it was mixed. The international markets showing interest were quite widespread, including American and European but also, in Latvia, the Japanese market.

In England, it should be born in mind that a large majority (over 80%) of visitors to National Parks are domestic. Stakeholders consulted underlined their belief that initiatives to involve farmers and land managers in visitor experiences should not only focus on overseas markets.

Visitors may be reached through tour operators or independent group or individual bookings, with the relative potential dependent partly on location

Tour operators, both general and more specialised, have provided an important source of business for the majority of the initiatives covered in the case studies. However, all have also received independent bookings from groups and individuals and for some this provides the largest part of their business. In some cases, e.g. Italy (C), Ireland (G), a proportion of bookings is made by visitors after arrival in the destination and sometimes the day before the tour.

The location of the farm or site can be a critical factor in the relative mix of trade-based or independent bookings. Operations close to busy holiday destinations tend to receive more independent, short lead bookings, e.g. the farm in Italy (C), which is close to Sorrento. One of the farms in New Zealand (G) attracts almost all its business from the cruise ships which dock nearby. In Latvia (A) farms located close to transit routes used by tour operators receive a lot of business from them, as they provide a convenient place to stop for a tour and lunch.

Farm and land-based experiences in the English National Parks should consider the available range of sources of bookings in designing their offers and marketing activity.

Core markets include people who enjoy experiencing rural life, gentle walking and tasting local produce

These interests and themes have all been found to appeal to sizeable proportions of overseas visitors in terms of activities they would consider undertaking in England, as presented earlier in Section 4 of this report. They broadly relate also to the activities enjoyed by current visitors to England’s National Parks. The call for experiences that are real, authentic, different and appealing to a sense of discovery, should also be seen as an important signal from the market. This research-based evidence is generally in line with what can be found in the case studies, which have seen a positive market response for authentic opportunities to experience rural life, spend time outdoors on the land and taste local produce.

There is a trend towards greater interest in learning experiences, including about sustainability, in general and also related to more specialist markets and operators

The case study initiatives have found that even amongst general visitor markets there is a significant level of interest in hearing about the challenges of farming and land management, the pressures to address climate change and other sustainability issues and the practical actions that...
have been taken. However, in addition to this, a slightly more specialist market segment can be detected of people who have a personal interest and commitment towards sustainability, where this will actually affect their choice of destination, operator and experience sought.

In the Costa Rica case study (D), the tour operator Horizontes is working with a market segment that, like the operator itself, is partly driven by sustainability concerns and will seek out and pay a premium for products and experiences that chime with their values. Opportunities to visit farms certified for sustainability, to contribute to local community initiatives and to visit conservation projects are well suited to this market. Horizontes also operates in the high-end segments seeking a degree of informal luxury and privileged access, recognising a cross-over between them and the segments interested in sustainability. A similar finding is apparent in the example of Criffel Station, in New Zealand (B) and may also be reflected in many high-end ecotour packages round the world.

The above may signal an opportunity for certain types of farm and land-based experience or tour package in the UK, perhaps aimed at the growing number of small specialist tour operators working in these segments in source markets.

The opportunity to hear and learn about sustainable land management, including farming practices more generally, can also be a motivator for a different type of visitor market segment. This is essentially an educational market, which could include school and student visits or the hosting of groups of professionals on study tours. There is potential for farmers and land-managers, who are already catering for this educational segment, to transition towards a wider tourist market. This could present a very important opportunity.

➢ **Tour operators may have specific requirements, to which products can be tailored and adjusted over time**

Most of the initiatives in the case studies have formed a strong relationship with particular tour operator or operators which has been consolidated over time. The development and maintenance of this relationship has been important to their success. It has been found that individual operators may have particular requirements for farm visits, reflecting their schedules and the markets in which they operate. In Latvia (A), for example, some international tour operators have required precise detail on the timing and content of the farm tours, activities that will happen, materials provided for visitors etc. Here, and elsewhere, the tour operators themselves become active partners in shaping the actual product on the ground.

➢ **Certain communication channels and processes have proved valuable in reaching independent travellers**

The success of many of the case study projects in receiving bookings from independent travellers has been referred to earlier. While a comprehensive assessment has not been made of this, some specific insights on valuable tools and approaches from the different studies include:

- Working with local accommodation establishments. These may include hotels, camping sites, self-catering businesses etc. in the local area. They have proved very important in recommending tours to their guests, notably in Italy (C), Costa Rica (D) and Ireland (G) but also elsewhere. Some accommodation establishments have developed their own short break packages to include the farm tours.
- Using web portals that promote excursions. There has been a significant increase in the number and reach of websites promoting a range of day tour opportunities in destinations.
An example is ‘Airbnb Experiences’ which is a key source of business for the lemon farm tour in Italy (C).

- Having websites containing evocative text, illustrations and film clips describing the experiences on offer, with a strong play on the host families and personalities involved. This is well done in a number of the case studies, notably in North Carolina (E).
- Encouraging the experience to be bought and offered as a gift. This is particularly relevant to more creative and tangible experiences, perhaps with a strong component of hands-on participation, as in the wood-craft project in Germany (F).

6.3 Farm/land-based visitor experiences – concepts and components

The case studies have illustrated a range of variations on farm and land-based experiences, around the central concept of a group visit to a landholding, with pointers to different components and aspects of an experience that add value and contribute to success. Identification of these aspects is also informed by evidence from the market research.

➢ A common form of experience, with proven success, involves a visit to a genuine working farm and engaging with the people who live and work there

Most of the case studies are based on visits to farms lasting from around two hours to half a day or longer. All have proved popular and successful. In all cases the farm has continued as a fully working agricultural holding, and this has been highly important with respect to the visitor experience.

Some of the key components of the visit, valued by visitors, have included:
- Personal hosting and talk by the farmer him/herself and/or members of their family, perhaps also involving other people that work on the farm.
- Telling stories about the family and farming life. This may include aspects of the heritage of the farm and previous generations.
- Clear descriptions of the actual farming processes, including interesting detail without being too technical. Where possible this should include demonstrations, such as working sheepdogs, shearing etc.
- Discussion on the challenges of modern farming, including sustainability issues, and how they are met.
- An opportunity to see different parts of the farm, normally as a short walk. However, this varies – with some farms, e.g. at Akaroa, New Zealand (B) it was found to be easier and sufficient to base the group at a vantage point offering a view of the holding and its activities.

The case studies include many types of agriculture. Some are predominantly livestock farms – New Zealand (B), Ireland (G); some mainly horticulture, fruit etc – Italy (C), Costa Rica (D); and others mixed: Latvia (A); North Carolina, US (E). The presence of at least some animals, including working animals and farm pets, has been found to be valuable in creating an enjoyable atmosphere for visitors.

In many cases, the visit will include the provision of some food, perhaps as a light lunch, which can be an important component of the experience, especially if based on produce from the farm. This can be varied to suit the needs of the group.
Some form of participatory activity has also proved to be popular. Again, this has varied between the case studies. Examples include basic food preparation (e.g. milling, juicing etc.); feeding animals; harvesting; planting (including re-planting for conservation) etc.. In some cases the hands-on experience has been a central or focal point of the overall visit – see later.

➢ Food and drink provides a highly valuable opportunity for creating experiences linked to farming

Some farm related visitor experiences may be centred around the food and drink produced, using this as key theme that attracts the visitors. There are three main ways in which this has been done in the case study initiatives:

- Making a strong feature of the produce during the tour, in the catering provided and in the sales opportunity. In Italy (C), for example, the tour involves the making of Limoncello with guests, the provision of homemade bread with farm olives and lemon-based deserts for lunch, and having lemon-infused olive oil and other products on sale.

- Linking the farm visit to gourmet catering experiences. In the USA, farm tourism experiences tend to be strongly related to the production and purchase of fresh organic food. This has been used creatively in the ‘Fork to Farmer’ programme in North Carolina (E), where visitors meet exceptional local chefs, eat in their restaurants, and then visit and work with the farmers who produced the raw ingredients.

- Using the food/produce to define and differentiate visits to different farms in one area or programme. In Latvia (A), individual farms and their associated visits are focused on different products such as honey, herbs, mushrooms, bread-making, grapeseed oil etc. In Costa Rica (D), different visits are centred on coffee, chocolate, and ‘heart of palm’.

In the English National Parks, the variety of food options may be more limited. Many upland and hill farms are based on sheep or other livestock, and lambs are often taken out of the area to be finished on lowland farms elsewhere. However, more work could be done on the food themes and linkages, including cooperation with local chefs and other outlets.

➢ Farm and land-based visits may be shaped around other specific themes and activities, differentiating the offer

While food and drink themes can be used to provide creative experiences and differentiate between the packages offered by different farms and land holdings, this can also be achieved by other themes and activities. This may relate to the nature of the land use and the participatory activities provided.

Outdoor activities may provide the basis for experiences that could possibly be included in bookable packages. In the UK, certain farms may provide opportunities for horse riding, for example. Outdoor activities have not been covered in the case studies. It could be argued that they are not of interest in this study as they are not in themselves about farming and land management. However, where they are providing a source of diversified income to farmers and land managers, thereby supporting the viability of the landholding, they can play an important role in meeting policy objectives. It should be pointed out, though, that the level of market interest in many specific outdoor activities is relatively low compared with experiencing rural life and heritage in general.

Another sizeable topic is the provision of visitor experiences centred on conservation and wildlife. This is clearly important in all National Parks. It is mainly provided for by heritage and
conservation bodies on land that they may own or manage. Landholdings of this kind, and their relationship to visitors, is a key topic in its own right and has not been included in this study. However, the way that farms are managed to support biodiversity is clearly a key issue covered here and has been a feature of many of the approaches and experiences presented in the case studies.

Forests and woodlands also provide an opportunity for the provision of visitor experiences involving land managers, based on land in different types of ownership. They clearly provide a highly important environment for various outdoor activities, including visitor accommodation. Alternative forms of visitor experience, based on day visits and related to woodland themes, are not so common. An example can be found in the case study from the Bliesgau Biosphere Reserve in Germany (F), which involves a highly creative set of experiences including the construction of wood-based products (wild-wood chairs, knives and rafts) linked to in-depth interpretation of the woodland and its importance as a life supporting environment.

The German case study also illustrates well the potential to use craft skills and opportunities to make things as a way of differentiating and adding value to visits. Some other examples of hands-on craft related activities provided on visits to farms were found in Latvia (e.g. pottery, weaving etc.) and elsewhere.

Hands-on experiences can also take the form of opportunities to participate in farm work. This is well illustrated in North Carolina (E), where a rage of farmers offer programmes from a few hours to up to one day for small groups, with different themes on each farm – working with animals, tilling the soil, planting etc.

A further way that visits can be differentiated is through the nature and level of the interpretation of the management issues, the educational and learning component and the topics covered. Examples are the ‘One Health’ learning experience at Criffel, New Zealand (B) and the ‘forest atmosphere’ experience in Germany (F), both previously mentioned. In the UK, there are examples of environmentalists working with farmers to offer one-day learning courses for interested visitors on sustainability and resource management issues, including regeneration and re-wilding.

National Park Authorities should consider further opportunities of this kind to work with farmers and land managers to offer differentiated experiences of a variety of environments, based on creative activities.

➢ **Attention should be paid to various operational factors in the delivery of visitor experiences**

A number of operational factors concerning the delivery of visitor experiences on farms will also be important for their success. These factors have not been analysed in detail but some observations from the case studies are as follows:

**Group size.** This should be kept relatively low in the interests of delivering a personal experience and avoiding management problems within a farm environment. In the case studies maximum numbers tended to vary between 8 and 20, which is similar to many of the ENPEC experiences.

**Price.** Getting the pricing right has been a challenge for some. Prices for farm tours of between two hours and one day have varied between £16 and £60 per person, depending on activities and catering offered. Overall, the prices may be a little lower that those in ENPEC.
Facilities. Many of the experiences appear to have required no significant level of initial investment in facilities. Examples include where this has been necessary include provision of toilets and other visitor handling facilities.

Quality of presentation. The warmth of welcome and delivery style is considered to be the most important factor determining the quality of farm visits. A style that is personal and authentic but also clear may be preferable to one that appears too professional. Where external tour guiding is involved the balance may be slightly different. In Costa Rica (D) the level of experience and knowledge of the tour guides was considered to be the key to success.

Health and safety. This is of paramount importance and can clearly present a challenge with farm visits. How this is being addressed in the case studies was not looked at in detail. In Ireland (G) the provision of Wellington boots for visitors is an example of measures that can be taken, benefiting both biosecurity and visitor wellbeing.

Liability and insurance. All farmers and land managers providing visitor experiences need to understand and comply with legislation and regulations that affect responsibility and liability and have the necessary insurance in place. This was identified and addressed in the case studies as an important issue. In North Carolina (E), standard notices are provided through the agritourism network to be used by farmers to inform visitors about limits to liability.

➢ It is important to consider the overall product offer, which includes the position of individual farm/land experiences within wider tour programmes

The end product which is promoted to the potential visitor may include more than the specific experience on any one individual property. Tour programmes, both single and multi-day, may include visits to more than one farm or site. The opportunity for differentiated experiences is particularly important here. The market research has indicated that the inclusion of visits to neighbouring heritage attractions within a tour programme may increase its appeal in certain overseas markets. The itineraries offered by Horizontes in Costa Rica (D) provide a good example of a mix of visits to different farms, conservation projects and iconic sites.

In England’s National Parks it will be important to consider how farm and land-based visitor experiences may be combined and form part of wider programmes sold by tour operators.

6.4 Engaging farmers and land managers and providing support

The process of establishing the ENPEC revealed the challenge of encouraging more farmers and land managers to provide visitor experiences. This was further confirmed and explored in the consultation with stakeholders in the National Parks in England. The issues raised then, including ways of addressing them, were presented in Chapter 3 of this report.

The principal barrier facing farmers and land managers may be a lack of time to undertake a new activity, especially on busy family farms which already require a huge commitment. Other important inhibitors are lack of knowledge and confidence and practical issues concerning the provision and operation of a visitor experience and its integration within the environment of a working farm. There can also be uncertainties relating to business viability and financial return and the ongoing availability of access to markets.

These are real issues and many farmers and land managers and/or their landholdings may not be well placed to provide successful a visitor experience.
Informed by the consultation and relevant approaches and action amongst the international case studies, a number of key considerations are set out below which may provide an insight into opportunities for addressing these issues in England’s National Parks.

➢ **Farmers and land managers who are already involved with providing for visitors may be more disposed to offer new forms of visitor experience**

Farmers with existing experience are likely to be more aware of visitors’ interests and confident about their ability to communicate with them.

The international case studies did not explore the advantages of links between on-farm accommodation and provision of visitor experiences, although this certainly was the case in Criffel, New Zealand (B), where accommodation was already established and a proportion of participants on the farm tours are overnight guests.

Many farms in National Parks provide various kinds of accommodation. Potentially, they offer a good place to start if seeking to encourage new farm visit experiences. On the other hand, accommodation provision may already be occupying much of their time and perhaps already provides them with sufficient diversified income from tourism. In any event, farms with accommodation should be encouraged to provide their overnight guests with information and opportunities to interface with the farming activities, as appropriate.

Another form of existing activity that is quite prevalent in the National Parks is provision for educational visits. This could provide the basis for extension into more general visitor experiences, as mentioned earlier, building on acquired experience and, in certain cases, investment in facilities.

➢ **Opportunities may exist for farmers to obtain a very limited taster experience of engaging with visitors, which could be built on**

Farmers with no previous or current experience of receiving visitors could be given an opportunity to try it out in a very limited way, to see if they enjoy it, to gain some confidence and identify ways to address some of the practical issues involved.

Perhaps the most obvious opportunity is to participate in occasional events promoted by others. In Latvia (A) an annual open farm weekend is run by the Agritourism Association, which is then able to work after the event with those farmers who wish to offer more. In North Carolina (E), an annual weekend is provided by a sustainable agriculture body, using a standardised model with a focus on food themes and sales.

In England, Open Farm Sunday is promoted annually by LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming), with the purpose of “helping the public to appreciate and value the important work that farmers do to produce safe, nutritious food, sustainably”. In 2018 362 farms participated, 26% for the first time, receiving a total of 293,650 visitors. LEAF have accumulated a great deal of experience that is made available to farms wishing to open to visitors, including on: activity ideas (by type of farm); communication processes; health and safety; and risk assessment. This includes a link to the industry code of practice on preventing ill health from animal contact.

Some farms in National Parks have been involved in the scheme, which has been running for 13 years.
Different structures for organising and providing visits can enable forms of engagement by farmers and land managers which limit the time that they are required to commit

The significant barrier of available time can be addressed by farmers working together as a group to offer visitor experiences and share the inputs and benefits. A specific example from the case studies is West Cork Farm Tours, in Ireland, which is a branded experience provided by four farming families. Each farm provides a similar two-hour visit based on a talk and tour with the farmer. A tour is offered at the same time each Thursday, which can be provided by any one of the farms, and other group tours can be organised on demand. An appointed coordinator handles the bookings and distributes the business between the farms, according to availability. An approach of this kind could be suited to the National Parks.

Local tourism professionals, including tour organisers, handling agents and guides, have a key role to play as facilitators and intermediaries

Many of the existing ENPEC packages are put together and provided by local tour organisers or guides located in or near to the National Parks. Such enterprises and individuals could also be expected to play an important role in facilitating and delivering farm and land-based experiences. This could help significantly in limiting the input required by the farmers and land managers themselves. Facilitation of this kind can cover:

- Handling bookings and arrangements with the groups and the farmers/land managers
- Providing transport and guiding services for groups – bringing them to the farms/sites
- Working with the farmers and land managers on planning the content of visits and making sure practical issues are covered
- Communication – including promotion and information for visitors
- Conducting parts of the visit, as appropriate, alongside the host.

Various examples of these kinds of services are found in the case studies. The facilitator working with the Irish group mentioned above is a local tourism professional. In North Carolina (E), the People First Tourism initiative provides planning, training, promotion, communication and booking for a set of different farmers, leaving the latter free to focus on the hosting. In New Zealand (B), Criffel Station, a farm providing its own visitor experience, has gone on to establish a separate marketing and handling service for itself and other farmers in New Zealand with a similar ethos; it seeks to expand this internationally.

Readily available advice and support can be very helpful in the initial establishment and ongoing operation of visitor experiences

The availability of practical advice can play a valuable role in helping farmers and land managers decide whether to develop visitor experiences, if this would work for them and how to go about it. This can sometimes be linked to facilitation services referred to above.

There are a number of examples in the case studies of well established advisory services which have been key to the development and success of farm-based experiences. The Latvia Country Tourism Association (A) has helped many of its 400 members become established and provides workshops, training, advisory publications, networking and direct advice. It has realised the need to be constructively critical, finding that farmers need to be carefully guided in the balance and content of their programmes. It also delivers marketing services through operating as a handling agent that engages with tour operators, using the experience from this to improve its advice and support. In North Carolina (E), the Extension Service of the State University provides...
highly practical research-based advice to individual farmers, supporting them further through its own development and marketing initiative, People First Tourism, referred to above.

It is important to recognise the input that can be made by tour operators in helping farmers and land managers develop and shape their products to the needs of the market. The extensive work by Horizontes with communities in Costa Rica (D) is an example of this.

➢ **Recognition and partnership schemes between visitor related enterprises and the destination/National Park could provide a framework for ongoing engagement**

Finally, opportunities exist for farmers and land managers to be encouraged and supported by the relationship they have with the local destination – with the place itself, the brand and the management and marketing body. This could be a National Park and its responsible authority (NPA). Depending on the services available, the latter may be in a position to provide a degree of support for product development, information delivery and promotion.

The relationship between a National Park and the provider of farm and land-based visitor experiences could be placed on a more formalised footing, to mutual advantage.

In the Bliesgau Biosphere Reserve in Germany (F), local tourism service providers are able to associate themselves and their products directly with the protected area, so gaining maximum advantage from the brand (including use of logo etc), based on an agreement to support and promote the Biosphere Reserve’s objectives and meet certain sustainability criteria. This follows a national scheme amongst protected areas in Germany for identifying park/p.a. ‘partners’ or ‘ambassadors’. It also relates to EUROPARC’s Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (Part 2, concerning tourism businesses).
7 Implications for policy implementation, ENPEC and further research

The information summarised in Chapter 2 of this report showed the new direction for the environment and agriculture in England, set out in policy documents in the last two years, together with how this is being reflected in National Parks. Key parts of the vision concern sustainable management of land, protecting and celebrating landscapes and connecting people with the environment. The findings from this study show how the engagement of farmers and land managers in the provision of visitor experiences, especially in National Parks, can be highly relevant to the delivery of the vision.

The case studies have demonstrated the benefits for farmers and land managers, rural environments and visitors through diverse examples from around the world. They have described initiatives and activities that illustrate many of the specific proposals in the 2017 policy paper on Farming in the English National Parks, concerning public/visitor awareness, National Park branding, developing the food economy, and collaboration between farmers. They have also pointed to a range of practical considerations for selecting, relating to and reaching markets, developing appealing and distinctive bookable experiences, and encouraging and assisting farmers and land managers to engage with the opportunities.

7.1 Towards the implementation of policy – actions and support

The implementation of policy should take on board the considerations presented in this report. How can this best be done? It is suggested that action needs to be:

• planned and carried out at a National Park level
• focused at a farm/landholding level
• supported through coordination and initiatives at a national level.

At a National Park level, consideration should be given to how farm and land-based visitor experiences could be further developed within the farming, heritage and tourism context of the Park. This should look beyond the narrow field of visitor experiences, as plans and decisions at Park level and at the level of an individual farm/land unit should take an integrated approach, considering the range of options for using tourism to support Park and land management objectives. It should include an assessment of:

• The overall patterns and level of engagement of farms (and other types of landholding) in visitor related activities, including accommodation, catering, attractions, retail and outdoor activities, as well as visitor experiences related to farming and land-management.
• The agricultural, landscape, heritage, food and conservation themes and distinctiveness within the National Park and how these could be brought out more in the planning of visitor experiences.
• Current and potential future visitor markets, including how they can be reached and their potential response to farm and land-based experiences.
• The availability, activities and capacity of local support services including local tour operators and guides, as well as sources of advice and support within the NPA and other local bodies.
• The potential to involve the wider tourism sector in supporting farm and land-based experiences, such as promotion, packaging and provision of information by accommodation operators.

The above assessment should be undertaken with the engagement of the main stakeholders. Based on this, a short set of opportunities and actions should be identified, for delivery over time depending on priorities and resources available. It is appreciated that this assessment and planning will require the dedication of some human resources, but an elaborate exercise is not envisaged and the processes should be assisted by some joint working sessions to share knowledge and thinking.

The assessment and planning should take careful note of all the insights and considerations arising from this study, presented and elaborated in Chapter 6. This includes pointers about markets and market access, different types of visitor experience and key components of them, and ways to reach more farmers and land managers and address barriers to their participation. The latter points should inform planned approaches to farming communities. The role of farm advisors working for the NPAs or other bodies may be especially important in this.

A key purpose of the above assessment and action at a National Park level would be to provide well informed advice and guidance to farmers and land managers on opportunities that they might consider on their land, together with the provision of ongoing support for them.

At a farm level, the new national policy for agriculture and approaches outlined in National Parks have pointed to the agreement of integrated farm plans that meet established objectives, which could then be supported through funding.

The provision of visitor experiences should be seen as a potential component of integrated farm plans, alongside other aspects of farm diversification and the delivery of public goods and ecosystems services. However, in this process it will be extremely important to take a realistic approach to what may be possible and best for the farm or land unit. This should be informed by the National Park level assessment as identified above, including issues of supply and demand. It must also take full account of the aspirations, needs and capacity of the farmer or land manager and the resources, nature and location of the farm or landholding. Furthermore, consideration will need to be given to how potential earned income from visitor-related activities is seen within the context of funding support for the provision of public goods, as identified in Chapter 2.

At a national level a number of opportunities may exist or arise for supporting the action at a National Park and farm level. These include:

• Coordination and collaboration across England’s National Parks, including sharing of knowledge and information
• Making use of existing information and activities that support or promote farm visits or other related aspects of land-based tourism. A specific example is the LEAF Open Farm Sunday and support material related to this. Additional research and support could be developed and made available over time.
• Developing and maintaining initiatives to support the development and marketing of visitor experiences in National Parks, notably including ENPEC and any successor or subsequent initiatives, as referred to below.
7.2 Implications for ENPEC

The English National Parks Experience Collection has provided a highly valuable stimulus and vehicle for the establishment of bookable visitor experiences of National Parks, including some that involve farmers and land managers.

National tourism policy and priorities suggest that a focus on developing and promoting creative visitor experiences as a way of strengthening the performance of tourism outside London is likely to be maintained.

The implications of this study for the future of ENPEC are that it, or some successor initiative(s), should be seen as vehicles for supporting action at a National Park level that is designed to meet locally identified needs and objectives. More consideration should be given to local priorities and opportunities alongside nationally identified strategies and potential in the approach to products and markets.

Some specific points for the evolution of ENPEC, based on considerations from this study, are:

- Recognising and addressing the potential for visitor experiences to be taken up by the domestic market, as part of the plan at the outset, rather than simply an assumed possible consequence.
- Reassessing the target overseas markets, taking account of a potential re-orientation of the product to experiences of sustainable land management appropriate to a National Park setting.
- Monitoring performance and take up of the current ENPEC, including of the existing land-related experiences, to inform future development.
- Targeting international tour operators that are particularly orientated to sustainable tourism and markets with an interest in this.
- Enabling experiences to be accessed by independent visitors, including those already in the National Parks, rather than only through the travel trade.
- Making more of accommodation providers that are featured in ENPEC that are located on working farms or could be particularly well placed to engage their visitors in farm or land-based experiences. At its most simple, all entries that are farm-based should say more about the farm and opportunities it presents.
- Featuring new visitor experience opportunities of the kinds identified in this study, informed by what is brought forward through the assessment and development process at the National Park and farm/landholding level.

7.3 Recommendations for further research

Implications for future research are apparent from the considerations and approaches identified above and in the previous chapter. They include the following:

- Monitoring and reporting on the market response to ENPEC, including the relative performance of the individual experiences and especially those most related to farming/land management. This might include a process of going back to the operators and visitors who have taken up the experiences to investigate what attracted them and to obtain feedback on the outcome.
- Considering what information is currently available on international tour operators, including specialist operators in particular markets, in terms of their existing products and interests, notably in the field of rural experiences and sustainability, and then augmenting this with further research as necessary.
• Investigating more fully the sources of information, advice and support for farm-based tourism, and especially farm visits, in the UK. This could lead to further research to supplement knowledge, including on issues relating to the delivery of farm visits.

• Undertaking research within the domestic market, including current and potential visitors to National Parks, to identify levels of potential interest in farm and land-based experiences, including visitor profiles and reaction to different types of experience. This could include quantitative and qualitative (e.g. focus groups) research.

• Considering introducing a more specific research question within future quantitative and qualitative research in overseas markets, which refers specifically to visits to farms and local food and drink producers and engaging with the people involved.

• Undertaking research at a National Park level to inform the assessments, plans and approaches to delivering farm and land-based visitor experiences, as set out in Section 7.1 above. Aspects of this could be supported through coordinated research at a national level.