

# Safety Watch: Biosecurity a top safety concern for agritourism ventures

By Mandy Archer, Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health

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Bloomsbury Farm is ready for their Iowa Fall Festival with U-Pick pumpkins, a 10-acre corn maze, and 30+ attractions.

Photo courtesy of Sammy Petersen, bloomsburyfarm.com.

**A**s the weather starts to chill in autumn, the cool air brings with it the memories of pumpkin patches, hayrides and corn mazes that would not be possible without the involvement of farmers.

Agritourism blends agriculture and tourism to provide these experiences. Behind the scenes, insurance, zoning preparation and overall safety guidelines are essential.

Unlike farmers and those that help tend their land, guests that attend agritourist ventures may be entirely unfamiliar with the hazards of agriculture. Your visitors' protection could come at a greater cost if they are not considered from the inception of an enterprise and in every stage that follows when setting a farm up for agritourism.

Bloomsbury Farm, located in Atkins, Iowa, is one of these farms. The farm is managed by the Petersen family, which consists of mom Karen, dad Dave and their daughters Jess and Sammy.

The farm has an assortment of protocols to keep visitors safe. They post signage around the farm and especially in their "Animal Town" areas where there are petting zoos. Sammy Petersen said they promote handwashing in their high-volume areas.

Hand washing stations and hand sanitizer are available all over the farm, along with signs that remind patrons that washing hands is important.

The farm also prioritizes animal health, which Petersen said includes veterinary visits, up-to-date vaccinations and routine pen cleaning.

In addition, the Bloomsbury Farm kitchens are inspected by the Blackhawk County Health Department.

They prepare staff for emergencies with annual CPR training and safety protocol training that includes collaboration with the volunteer fire department. Their AED machine is in a central location in case of a heart emergency.

Petersen said their team has a fast response time, and that promoting a safe and healthy environment for their customers and their team is a core value at Bloomsbury Farm. This comes back to placing signage, which also includes language taken from the Iowa Agricultural Tourism Promotion Act.

“The Iowa legislature does a great job of promoting and supporting the agritourism industry,” Petersen said. “We feel very lucky to live in Iowa where agritourism is a priority.”

Likewise, local Extension is a resource for health and safety standards in agritourism. Iowa State University has many resources, including signage for farms found at [tinyurl.com/m9rbe24a](https://tinyurl.com/m9rbe24a).

Kendra Meyer is an Extension agent at Iowa State University and her focus is on agritourism. She said before starting a business, begin talking with county planning and zoning officials first.

“The legal and licensing side of it specifically to your farm is a great starting point because it helps you build a good foundation for the best success,” Meyers said.

ISU also offers a free, online course for farms with on-farm visitors at [tinyurl.com/45bb8sdz](https://tinyurl.com/45bb8sdz).

Iowa State’s course discusses first what an insurance agent identifies when they come onto farm property. Legal risk is a major consideration in the course because when visitors come to a farm, the risks grow.

Moreover, the course takes into consideration how the farm and its employees would handle emergencies such as severe weather events. Biosecurity, food safety and pesticide safety are included in the course too.

Meyer said biosecurity is the hazard that comes top of mind for her with agritourism. If guests have contact with animals, it can spread sickness to humans or from humans to animals. These are defined as zoonotic diseases, and it is highly important to promote handwashing for this reason if customers make contact with any animals.

Other more-overlooked hazards are slips, trips and falls. Slips, trips and falls are a year-round hazard, and what a farmer thinks are obvious fall hazards may be invisible to a visiting guest. Meyer said it's not enough to put up a sign that states the hazard — the location of the potential injury must be blocked off from public access.

This has an enormous impact on how you set up your farm for sightseers. Have a fresh pair of eyes assess your farm and check that your machinery is completely out of sight so no one gets hurt. It is even necessary to tell visitors what to wear when they come to a farm as it may not be clear to non-farmers.

In close, do the research for your farm. Each farm has specific needs and safety risks that need to be covered before you can operate a successful agritourist farm.

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*Mandy Archer is the outreach specialist for the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health at the University of Iowa College of Public Health.*

