

Title: “Agritourism: Growing Education in Agriculture Literacy”

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Fall marks the season for hayrides, pumpkin patches, and corn mazes, especially here in Cache Valley. Though great ways to connect people with agriculture, how can they become more? Agritourism is a growing form of education that encourages others to learn about agriculture.

Agritourism continues to grow across the nation. Data from the Census of Agriculture shows that agritourism more than tripled between the years 2002 and 2017. Revenues increased from \$704 million to almost \$950 million alone between 2012 and 2017.

The American West Heritage Center is one local business that is experiencing this growth. The mission of the center is to create an educational and entertaining environment to inspire people to discover and learn the history of Cache Valley. During the fall, the center provides various activities such as candle dipping, corn harvesting, and several other fun historic activities. The center even hosts events like a corn maze and Baby Animal Days. The fall season is special.

“It was an important time for farmers when they bring in the harvest,” said Wendy King, a manager at AWHC. “History in general, and you know our history in particular, helps us stay grounded to who we are and where we came from. If you don't understand where you came from, you can't really know where you're going.”

The history of Cache Valley truly is rooted in agriculture. Native Americans and early settlers worked and thrived off the land. Utah State University, located in the heart of Cache Valley, holds the honor of being Utah’s public land-grant university, originally being called the Agricultural College of Utah. Students at USU are known as “Aggies,” the term being a nickname for agriculturalists.

“This community has always been an agriculture community,” King said.

Agritourism is an educational tool that the American West Heritage Center has

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effectively implemented in the valley. However, agritourism is a simple word for a complex system, as it goes even beyond typical fall festivities in the scope of agricultural education.

Agritourism involves farms that contain a recreational or educational component. These include you-pick farms and farm tours. Dr. Rose Judd-Murray, assistant professor in the Applied Sciences, Technology, & Education Department at USU, explained that educational agritourism is a form of non-formal education or organized educational experiences outside of a formal education system. She called agritourism “something that would be a deliberate effort to bring them to your place to teach and have fun edutainment.”

Judd-Murray explained that agritourism is a unique form of non-formal education in its goal to get participants to think and learn beyond the event. She said, “In non-formal, we're really working hard to get people to think about the so what and the now what.”

She also explained that non-formal education, such as agritourism, creates a low-stakes learning environment, meaning the individual has some level of control over how they move through a space and what they are going to learn there. “People actually really like to learn things when they're not pressured to learn,” Judd-Murray commented.

Though agritourism has its advantages, there are risks involved, and it requires deliberate planning. “I think a lot of people underestimate what it's like,” said Judd-Murray.

Improving agricultural literacy is important, and agritourism can play a part in the battle, but it will be most effective when it is done deliberately and with a carefully devised plan.

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