

Fairfield Farm Shop & Café

Planning issues stifle farm tourism diversification

BACKGROUND

The leading issue for this farm tourism business was the problems surrounding planning permission. Whilst the magistrates were happy to grant both off and on licences and the Highways department approved their plans, one particular traffic officer for Lancashire County Council continuously raised objections to their plans. This has stifled their plans for diversification which have been assisted through a capital grant received through NWFTI.



Fairfield Farm shop and café offers home produced and butchered pork products in the farm shop as well as a licensed café. Located on the A59, they have permission for a 40 space car park.

DIVERSIFICATION

Having farmed for 23 years, diversification started 3-4 years ago and the café was built

18 months ago. Future plans include evening opening for events such as W.I. of rotary club nights for cookery/butchery demonstrations.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The site attracts around 350 visitors per week with an average spend of £10 per head. The business represents 100% of farm turnover as all produce is sold through the shop. The business operates at 53% GPM.

Turnover is growing at around 8% per month. They operate all year round with the busiest month being December.



USE OF LOCAL PRODUCE

Fundamentally, the business is that of a local butcher. 40% of business is local, 30% regional and 30% is passing trade which includes regular customers from as far afield as Windsor. They would feel uncomfortable if the proportion of trade from tourists grew too large as they would worry about the sustainability and prefer to have a strong local client base. They feel local shops should supply local people. The tea room is more geared towards tourists and acts as a lure to sell their meat to visitors.



The majority of meat sold is produced on their farm. The majority of other produce is local (so long as the quality is high). The business was voted North West Farm Food producer (supreme champion) in 2003/4.

MARKETING

Marketing activity includes road signage. A recent sign cost £1,250 but has resulted in a 30% increase in business. Event-driven press articles are released through local newspapers and the Farmers' Guardian. They operate a website www.fairfieldfarm.co.uk but have no immediate plans to sell produce on-line or mail order (due to practical reasons and because they feel people should support their local shops).

Business support and advice received included advice on on/off licensing from Rural Futures. This was a free service and helped them with planning issues and was appreciated.

Other bodies who have been in contact include ADAS, North West Fine Food, ELTEC, Business Link, Bowland Initiative and DEFRA. This has all been a bit of a "paper chase".



INVOLVEMENT WITH NWFTI

The first grant they actually received was the NWFTI grant. This was £3,777 out of a total spend of £12.5k which went towards the road sign, block paving, tarmac and pagoda. The grant was turned around in two months.

Their experience of NWFTI was very positive. There were limited meetings, no long forms or requirement for a business plan, just recognition that it

was genuine farm diversification. The commonsense attitude was a breath of fresh air.

FUTURE PLANS

Future plans for diversification included developing log cabins on the farm. Again, all subject to planning permission.