

Lakeland Maize

The issue of weather and long term planning

BACKGROUND



The Wadsworth family have been owners of the Lakeland Maize for over 70 years. At present the farm occupies 160 acres of arable land and grassland and hosts 200 beef cattle and sheep. Some small scale green composting is also undertaken.

DIVERSIFICATION

To increase the income after finishing with the dairy herd, and to do something different, the owners of Raines Hall Farm decided to diversify 2 years ago. After a period of intense planning, they started composting the green waste of local landscape gardeners on a small scale, a year ago.

When NWFTI suggested a corn maze, they went ahead with the idea and expanded to include a visitor centre and play area for children.



FINANCIAL INFORMATION

With the launch of the corn maze Raines Hall Farm attracted 13,000 visitors within the first 4 weeks. It is expected that the set target of 8-10,000 visitors per year, will be doubled and reach up to 20,000- 25,000.

The tourism revenue, based upon the entrance prices (£4.50 for adults, £3.50 for children and £14.00 for families) can be estimated respectively. Projections suggest tourism provides 50% of the overall farm turnover over the period between mid July and end of September. The other 50% is achieved by regular farm activities.



Turnover has probably increased compared to the previous year.

Visitors primarily come from the local areas (60%) or are passing tourists (40%). The majority of visitors are families or couples, with some coach and children's parties.

QUALITY STANDARDS

In order to maintain or increase visitor numbers in a business that is strongly dependent on weather conditions, some quality standards were introduced this year, including Food Standards for Food Serving and the Cumbria Tourist Board Welcome Host Certificate.

USE OF LOCAL PRODUCE

A range of local homemade ice cream and locally bottled water is offered on Raines Hall farm. They also sell paintings by local artists. All other goods on sale are inexpensive toys priced at 50p-£1, with a high profit margin.

They may expand on local crafts in the future.

MARKETING

Marketing activities were mainly focussed on the North West. The Lakeland Maize business was advertised through distribution of coloured leaflets (support from NWFTI, NWRDA (North West Regional Development Agency) and Cumbria Tourist Board) and posters from Blackpool to Carlisle and along the West coast.

Further promotional activities included adverts in local papers, AA road signs, radio advertisement (Bay Radio and Lakeland Radio) and the creation of a website (www.lakelandmaze.co.uk).



Since Raines Hall farm has been involved with NWFTI, NWRDA and Cumbria Tourist Board, they have received business advice for their farm tourism business from both NWFTI and NWRDA and further professional help from a PR agency.

Their maze was designed by one of the world's leading maze designers, Adrian Fisher.

The farm is still very much interested in receiving further training and business advice.

INVOLVEMENT WITH NWFTI

The farm has been involved with the North West Farm Tourism Initiative. Their support with regard to advice and general problem solving was very much appreciated. In particular NWFTI was very supportive with gathering ideas, promotional leaflets and general questions.

It would be beneficial to advertise on the NWFTI website but the owners have some reservation as they fear other farms may copy the idea, leading to market saturation.

FUTURE PLANS

Raines Hall Farm is aware of the dependency on the changing weather conditions and is planning some indoor attractions such as go-karting. A definite decision has not yet been made.

Long term plans still depend very much on the yearly grants provided by the authorities.

