

Town of Stouffville

Agritourism: Draft Research Summary and Market Analysis



May 2026



Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
About this Project.....	3
2. Legislative and Policy Review	9
Land Use Planning.....	9
Other Regulatory Considerations.....	39
3. Agritourism Today	47
Trends.....	47
What Makes a Great Agritourism Business?.....	51
How Can Municipalities Support Agritourism?.....	54
Visitor Data.....	58
4. What We Heard	67
Residents.....	67
Agricultural Operators.....	68
Key Informants.....	74
5. Market Analysis	77
Introduction and Approach.....	77
Agricultural and Geographic Context.....	78
Current Agritourism Supply.....	80
Sizing the Agritourism Opportunity.....	83
Labour and Operational Capacity.....	87
Conditions for Viability.....	89
Opportunity Areas.....	91
6. Key Takeaways	94
7. Preliminary Recommendations	96
Agritourism Strategy.....	96
Toolkit.....	98
8. Next Steps	100
9. Bibliography	101
Endnotes.....	106

1. Introduction

About this Project

Recognizing the economic, cultural, and environmental value of agritourism. The Town of Stouffville is undertaking a research project to better understand the current state of agritourism and its growth potential, along with related opportunities and challenges.

The overarching goal of this project is to set a strong foundation of agritourism knowledge in Stouffville and chart the best path forward to diversify and build resilience into this area of the town's economy. Related motivators for action include strengthening rural livelihoods, maintaining productive agricultural lands, protecting ecosystems, and supporting local food and drink culture.

The project is scheduled to run from late March 2026 through to mid-September 2026 and the Town has engaged Bannikin, an Ontario-based consultancy, to facilitate the research and engagement process. Town staff are working closely with Bannikin and York Region across the project.

Over the course of the project the following objectives are set to be accomplished:

1. Define what agritourism means in Stouffville
2. Confirm which kinds of agritourism uses are currently permitted across Stouffville
3. Identify agritourism opportunities with market potential in Stouffville
4. Grow awareness around compliant agritourism business opportunities in Stouffville
5. Meaningfully engage a diversity of stakeholders (businesses, staff, Council, partner organizations, public, etc.)
6. Identify barriers to agritourism growth (e.g. processes, policies, misinformation, etc.)
7. Identify land-use policy changes, as well as process improvements, that are needed to create a more enabling environment for agritourism development (incl. Official Plan, Zoning By-law and related to Greenbelt Plan review process, information sharing, etc.).

Key outputs of the project will include:

- An **Agritourism Strategy** to guide Town efforts to foster a policy environment that supports agritourism
- An **Agritourism Toolkit** with practical information to make it easy for farmers to navigate processes related to agritourism development in Stouffville
- An **Agritourism Toolkit** with practical information to make it easy for farmers to navigate processes related to agritourism at a regional level (i.e., in York Region)

Note: across this document the general spelling of "agritourism" will be used, unless quoting a policy document, which often spell agritourism as "agri-tourism."

Methodology

This Research Summary and Market Analysis document present data collected, and analysis performed up to and including Monday 18 May 2026. Findings included in this summary document are based on the following research and engagement activities:

- Legislative and policy review of provincial, regional, and municipal regulations governing agritourism and on-farm diversified uses
- Background document review and analysis of Town and regional plans, policies, past research, etc.
- Agritourism best practices review (municipal level)
- Agritourism best practices review (business level)
- Agritourism trends review
- Review of visitation data and agritourist segmentation
- Key informant interviews
- Online survey of agricultural business owners, operators, investors.
- Farm table talks with agricultural producers (x2)
- Community Open House (for residents and industry)
- Agritourism market assessment

To ensure meaningful community engagement takes place, a decision was made with the project team to extend the consultation process and add in additional engagement opportunities across the summer. This includes rescheduling a farm table talk, extending the agritourism survey, and adding a survey geared toward residents. Results from these engagements, which will be integrated into the results from the first round of engagements, will inform the agritourism strategy and toolkit development process.

Agritourism

Agritourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic intersections between agriculture, tourism, rural development, and community economic diversification in Ontario. Increasingly, farms are no longer viewed solely as sites of food production, but also as places of education, recreation, hospitality, heritage interpretation, and experiential tourism. Across Ontario, Canada, and around the world, agritourism has become an important mechanism for supporting farm viability, strengthening rural economies, preserving agricultural landscapes, and reconnecting residents and visitors with food systems and agricultural culture.

At its core, agritourism represents the blending of working agricultural operations with tourism-related experiences. These experiences may include farm markets, pick-your-own operations, educational tours, culinary experiences, festivals, accommodations, weddings and on-farm events, seasonal attractions, recreational activities, and value-added experiences tied directly to farming and rural identity. Importantly, agritourism is generally understood not as a replacement for agriculture, but as a complementary and diversified activity that remains connected to active agricultural operations.

Globally, agritourism has evolved in response to several broader trends. Examples include increasing consumer interest in local food systems, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, a demand for experiential travel and more authentic destination experiences, environmental awareness, and rural revitalization. Visitors are increasingly seeking opportunities to connect with place-based culture, agricultural heritage, and hands-on experiences that differ from conventional urban tourism products. In this context, farms and rural landscapes have become important tourism assets that are capable of generating economic, social, educational, and cultural value.

The concept of agritourism is also increasingly being explored and formalized through policy, legislation, and industry standards. The Global Agritourism Network (GAN), which

is an international community of producers, academics, and agritourism practitioners, has socially validated and adopted the following definition:

Agritourism is an agricultural diversification activity that results from the synergistic intersection of agriculture and tourism. Agritourism offers authentic experiences related to agricultural production that showcase the tangible and intangible resources of the region or locality.

(Global Agritourism Network, Definitions and Standards Committee, 2024).

This definition is contextualized by several values that were developed and adopted by the GAN Definitions and Standards Committee through regular monthly meetings that took place across 2023 and 2024.

- Agritourism results from the synergistic intersection of agriculture and tourism.
- Agritourism is an agricultural diversification activity.
- Agricultural production (e.g., crops, trees, livestock, fish) is the basic function of the agritourism setting. Direct derivatives (e.g., products, services) are supporting functions of agritourism.
- Agritourism showcases the agricultural, natural, social, and cultural resources of the region or locality, both tangible and intangible.
- Agritourism provides authentic experiences by:
 - Reflecting local/regional culture, traditions, innovations, and ways of life,
 - Delivering meaningful activities, products, and services, and
 - Sharing unique stories and practices.

(Global Agritourism Network, Definitions and Standards Committee, 2024).

Importantly, GAN acknowledges that there is variability in agritourism definitions, values, and reference to specific activities, and this is because geographical, socio-cultural, and policy contexts vary around the world. As such, the GAN definition and value are not intended to be universally adopted but rather used to inform agritourism plans, pursuits, and policy developments.

Agritourism in Ontario

Ontario has increasingly recognized agritourism as both an agricultural and economic development opportunity. Provincial policy frameworks over the past two decades have gradually expanded permissions and support mechanisms for on-farm diversified uses, value-added agriculture, and tourism-related activities connected to farming operations. This evolution reflects broader shifts in rural economic development, changing consumer demand, and the need to support long-term farm viability in areas facing urbanization pressures and rising operational costs.

In 2024, Ontario introduced the Growing Agritourism Act, 2024, which provided additional legislative recognition and liability protections related to agritourism activities. The Act includes the following definition for agritourism activities:

“Agritourism activity” means an agriculture related educational, entertainment, historical, cultural, limited accommodations or recreational activity, including you-pick operations or farm markets, conducted on a farm

that allows or invites members of the general public to observe, participate in or enjoy that activity.

(Growing Agritourism Act, 2024, SO 2024, c 38).

This wording is significant because it recognizes diverse forms agritourism while reinforcing the requirement that these activities remain connected to a farm context. The legislation also signals a growing provincial interest in reducing barriers to agritourism development and improving clarity around operational and liability considerations.

Within Ontario's land use planning framework, agritourism is also addressed through provincial and municipal planning policy. The Provincial Planning Statement defines "agri-tourism uses" as:

...those farm-related tourism uses, including limited accommodation such as a bed and breakfast, that promote the enjoyment, education or activities related to the farm operation.

(Provincial Planning Statement, 2024)

Agritourism in Stouffville

'Agri-Tourism Uses' in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville Official Plan reflect the broader provincial policy approach that agritourism should remain secondary and complementary to agriculture while supporting public engagement with farming and rural landscapes:

1. Overnight tourist accommodations such as bed and breakfast establishments, cabins, farm vacation enterprises, or farm stays;
2. Recreational uses such as hayrides, petting zoos, corn mazes, and farm-themed playgrounds; and,
3. Events, such as equine events, seasonal events, weddings, and wine-tastings.

(Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville Official Plan, September 2025, s. 5.2.2.1, x.)

However, the Official Plan also provides details around on-farm diversified uses in agricultural areas and rural area lands that also align with how the province defines "agritourism activity" and many destinations perceive agritourism, such as "...retail uses such as farmers' markets, cafes or small restaurants, or food stores primarily selling locally produced products..." (Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville Official Plan, September 2025, s. 5.2.2.1, iv.).

Growing Agritourism

In Ontario, agritourism is increasingly viewed as a strategic rural development tool with the potential to:

- Diversify farm revenues and improve farm resilience
- Strengthen local food and beverage economies
- Increase tourism visitation and visitor spending
- Support small business development and entrepreneurship
- Preserve agricultural landscapes and rural character
- Foster agricultural education and public awareness

- Strengthen community identity and sense of place
- Create opportunities for cross-sector collaboration between agriculture, tourism, culture, and economic development.

These opportunities are particularly relevant in municipalities experiencing growth pressures and land use transition, where maintaining agricultural viability and rural identity is becoming increasingly challenging. Agritourism can provide a mechanism for farms to remain economically productive while simultaneously contributing to community vibrancy, destination development, and resident quality of life.

At the same time, agritourism exists within a complex policy and operational environment. Agritourism businesses often intersect with planning policy, zoning, property taxes, transportation, public health, alcohol regulation, environmental management, event management, building and fire codes, signage, liability, and infrastructure capacity considerations. As a result, municipalities increasingly play an important role in shaping how agritourism develops through land use policy, regulatory frameworks, infrastructure planning, and economic development strategies.

Understanding the evolution, definitions, and broader strategic role of agritourism is therefore essential for contextualizing the opportunities and challenges explored throughout this report.

Alignments with Other Work

Agritourism development in Stouffville does not exist in a vacuum. It is highly connected to other initiatives taking place at the Town, within York Region, and across Ontario within tourism, agriculture, and related fields.

Municipal Alignment

At the municipal level, the project aligns closely with the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville's broader economic development, tourism, and community planning objectives. The Town's *Economic Development Strategy (2021-2025)*, *Strategic Plan (2022-2026)*, and *Visitor Plan (2025-2028)* collectively emphasize destination development, rural assets, tourism readiness, entrepreneurship, and experience-based economic growth. These directions align directly with stakeholder interests in expanding farm-based experiences, improving tourism coordination, and strengthening the visibility of rural and agricultural assets.

The project also aligns with municipal priorities related to process modernization and community development. Stakeholder feedback consistently identified zoning interpretation, approvals processes, and regulatory navigation as key challenges for agritourism operators, reinforcing broader municipal interests in streamlining processes and improving development clarity.

Additional alignment exists with the Town's *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy and Reconciliation and Engagement Plan (2023)*, particularly through themes related to inclusive storytelling, cultural recognition, community participation, and Indigenous engagement. These directions support opportunities for place-based storytelling, local identity development, and more inclusive tourism experiences tied to agriculture, food systems, and rural heritage.

Regional Alignment

At the regional scale, the project aligns with the *York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy (2024–2027)*, which identifies agritourism, local food systems, and value-added agriculture as important opportunities for rural economic diversification. The Strategy recognizes York Region’s agricultural assets and proximity to the Greater Toronto Area as a competitive advantage for farm-based experiences and destination development.

The project also supports broader regional objectives related to balancing growth, environmental stewardship, economic competitiveness, and quality of life, as identified through the *York Region Strategic Plan (2023–2027)*. Many of the opportunities identified through stakeholder engagement, including preserving rural character, strengthening local food networks, and supporting sustainable tourism growth, reinforce these broader regional priorities.

Provincial and Sectoral Alignment

This project also reflects ongoing discussions taking place around Ontario about on-farm diversified uses, agricultural resilience, and rural economic diversification. Recent provincial research and guidance documents consistently identify agritourism as an economic opportunity for Ontario’s agricultural sector while also recognizing the planning, infrastructure, insurance, and regulatory challenges associated with implementation. Documents such as *the Agritourism Ontario Growth Study (2025–2026)*, the *Town of Essex Agritourism Toolkit*, *Ottawa’s Guide to Planning Your On-Farm Diversified Uses*, and the *North Durham Agriculture-Related and OFDU Study* reinforce several recurring themes:

- The importance of clear and enabling municipal policy frameworks
- The need for streamlined and coordinated approvals processes
- Support for farm diversification and value-added agriculture
- Balancing agricultural protection with rural economic development
- Improving municipal capacity to support agritourism operators

Similarly, sector-focused resources such as the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance Event Barns report and the University of Guelph presentation *From Wineries to Wedding Barns* highlight a need for municipalities to modernize planning approaches related to farm-based events, hospitality, and experiential tourism. These resources consistently identify tensions between agricultural protection, infrastructure capacity, servicing, compatibility, and evolving rural business models, all of which emerged through stakeholder engagement conducted as part of this project.

These documents demonstrate that agritourism is increasingly being recognized across Ontario as a cross-sector opportunity that intersects tourism, agriculture, economic development, land use planning, and community identity. The findings of this project align strongly with these broader conversations and reinforce the need for collaborative, coordinated, and locally tailored approaches to agritourism development.

2. Legislative and Policy Review

Agritourism in Ontario operates within a multi-layered governance environment that spans federal, provincial, regional, and municipal jurisdictions. Like other tourism sectors, agritourism businesses must navigate regulations related to land use, public safety, transportation, food service, alcohol, accessibility, liability, and visitor management. However, agritourism faces additional complexity because tourism activities are layered onto active agricultural operations, creating overlap between agricultural exemptions, tourism regulations, and public-facing commercial uses. The following section outlines the legislative and policy context surrounding agritourism development in Ontario.

Land Use Planning

In Ontario, the land use planning framework is organized in a hierarchical structure that begins at the provincial level. Specifically, land use policy and planning are directed by the *Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13* (i.e., *Planning Act*). It establishes the roles of planning authorities (i.e., municipalities), the province, and other approval authorities. It also establishes planning tools to direct and develop land use planning, such as official plans, zoning bylaws, and site plan control bylaws, and it establishes requirements for consultation on land use planning matters. Below is a table outlining the hierarchy of the land use planning framework.

Of note, some recent changes to Ontario's land-use planning framework have been made. Upper-tier municipalities no longer have land-use planning responsibilities and are now deemed "upper-tier municipalities without planning responsibilities". As a result, in May 2026, the Town of Stouffville officially repealed York Region's *Regional Official Plan (2022)*. This means the Town of Stouffville will be the only planning authority for lands within the municipality.

Additionally, the role of Conservation Authorities has narrowed to focusing their input on hazard-related issues (i.e., risks to people and property from natural hazards) versus both hazard-related issues and broader environmental protection. For the Town of Stouffville, this means more control over approvals and policy interpretation. Development that interferes with wetlands, affects floodplains, or alters shorelines or watercourses will still require a permit from the Conservation Authority; however, some development approvals may be exempt under the *Planning Act*.

Provincial plans and policies

There are a variety of provincial documents relevant to land use planning and agritourism development in the Town of Stouffville. The *Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 (PPS)* (which replaced both the *Provincial Policy Statement, 2020* and *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*), the *Greenbelt Plan (2017)*, and *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2017)*. An important note is that both the *Greenbelt Plan* and the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* are due for their 10-year review.

In addition to these key planning documents, the former Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, now split into the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness, and the Ministry of Rural Affairs, in 2016 published *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas: Publication 851*, a key guide in agricultural planning matters. Another relevant provincial document is the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan (2009)*.

Provincial Planning Statement

The *Provincial Planning Statement (2024)* (PPS) is a key policy document that provides direction to all provincial and municipal land use plans and policies. It is supportive of on farm-diversified uses agritourism and provides definitions for key terms, including “On-farm Diversified Uses”, “Agri-tourism Uses”, “Rural Areas”, and “Rural Lands” as follows:

- **On-farm Diversified Uses:** “uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property, and are limited in area. On-farm diversified uses include, but are not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses, uses that produce value-added agricultural products, and electricity generation facilities and transmission systems, and energy storage systems.”
- **Agri-tourism Uses:** “those farm-related tourism uses, including limited accommodation such as a bed and breakfast, that promote the enjoyment, education or activities related to the farm operation.”
- **Rural Areas:** “a system of lands within municipalities that may include *rural settlement areas, rural lands, prime agricultural areas, natural heritage features* and areas, and resource areas.”
- **Rural Lands:** “lands which are located outside *settlement areas* and which are outside *prime agricultural areas*.”

More specifically, the PPS provides direction on on-farm diversified uses, including agritourism, in rural areas, rural lands, and agricultural lands.

Rural Areas and Rural Lands in Municipalities

Under Chapter 2: Building Homes, Sustaining Strong and Competitive Communities, the PPS identifies Rural Areas in Municipalities and Rural Lands in Municipalities. Of relevance under 2.5.1 Rural Areas in Municipalities, it states, “Healthy, integrated and viable *rural areas* should be supported by:

- e) promoting diversification of the economic base and employment opportunities through goods and services, including value-added products and the sustainable management or use of resources;
- f) providing opportunities for sustainable and diversified tourism, including leveraging historical, cultural, and natural assets;
- h) providing opportunities for economic activities in *prime agricultural areas*, in accordance with policy 4.3.”

Agriculture

Of note, Policy 4.3 refers to “Agriculture,” which is discussed later. Under 2.6.1 Rural Lands in Municipalities, it states, “On *rural lands* located in municipalities, permitted uses are:

- b) resource-based recreational uses (including recreational dwellings not intended as permanent residences);
- d) *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses, on-farm diversified uses* and *normal farm practices*, in accordance with provincial standards;
- e) home occupations and home industries

Under Chapter 4: Wise Use and Management of Resources, the PPS identifies policies for “Agriculture” including permitted uses. Specifically, it says under 4.3.1.2, “As part of the

agricultural land base, *prime agricultural areas*, including *specialty crop areas*, shall be designated and protected for long-term use for agriculture." Of relevance, permitted uses under 4.3.2. on *prime agricultural areas* include:

- "1. In *prime agricultural areas*, permitted uses and activities are: *agricultural uses*, *agriculture-related uses* and *on-farm diversified uses* based on provincial guidance. Proposed agriculture-related uses and *on-farm diversified uses* shall be compatible with, and shall not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations. Criteria for these uses may be based on provincial guidance or municipal approaches, as set out in municipal planning documents, which achieve the same objectives."

A note on *Urban Agriculture*.

Despite *urban agriculture* not being an *on-farm diversified use* or an *agri-tourism use*, it is a relevant use that can support a stronger and broader agritourism destination through programming that teaches visitors about their food, commercial sales, or even for wellness purposes.

Importantly, the PPS defines *urban agriculture* as, "food production in settlement areas, whether it is for personal consumption, commercial sale, education, or therapy. Examples include, but are not limited to, vertical agriculture facilities, community gardens, greenhouses, and rooftop gardens."

Under 4.3.6 Supporting Local Food and the Agri-food Network, the PPS states, "1. Planning authorities are encouraged to support local food, facilitate near-urban and urban agriculture, and foster a robust agri-food network."

[Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas](#)

The *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas* (i.e., Guidelines) are a provincial guidance document developed by the former Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Its purpose is to support municipalities in interpreting and applying land-use policies about "Prime Agricultural Areas" in the Provincial Planning Statement.

Of relevance, the Guidelines provide advice on *agricultural*, *agriculture-related* and *on-farm diversified uses* described in Policy 2.3.3 (i.e., Agriculture's permitted uses) of the former Provincial Policy Statement (equivalent to Policy 4.3.2 of the Provincial Planning Statement). Importantly, the document notes that,

"it is for informational purposes only [and] it is not intended to serve as a guide to the Provincial Policy Statement, 2014 [currently the Provincial Planning Statement], and not as expert advice."

On-Farm Diversified Uses

Under 2.3 On-Farm Diversified Uses, the document notes that *on-farm diversified uses* (OFDUs) should be related to agriculture, supportive of agriculture or able to co-exist with agriculture without conflict. It is intended to enable farm operators to diversify and supplement their farm income, as well as to accommodate value-added and *agri-tourism uses* in *prime agricultural areas*.

Below are descriptions from the Guidelines around how to interpret criteria that must be met to qualify as an *OFDU* on *Prime Agricultural Areas* according to the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS).

1. Located on a farm property that is actively in *agricultural use*.

Agricultural use is defined in the PPS as “the growing of crops, including nursery, biomass, and horticultural crops; raising of livestock; raising of other animals for food, fur or fibre, including poultry and fish; aquaculture; apiaries; agro-forestry; maple syrup production; and associated on-farm buildings and structures, including, but not limited to livestock facilities, manure storages, value-retaining facilities, and housing for farm workers, when the size and nature of the operation requires additional employment.”

Of note, *OFDUs* provisions in the PPS do not apply to small residential lots in the *prime agricultural area*. Additionally, *agricultural uses* are expected to generate income (i.e., gains and rewards) on a farm. This means it does not include production that is mainly for personal use (e.g. agriculture for consumption by family members, for pastime or recreation, in a park, on a property used primarily for residential purposes, or in a garden located in a public space, etc.).

For this reason, to be eligible, the property must qualify for the Farm Property Class under *Assessment Act, 1990*, which is a tax classification (i.e., not a land-use designation) that requires the owner/operator of the property to have a Farm Business Registration Number (FBRN). To get the FBRN they must generate at least \$7,000 in annual gross farm income as a commercial farming operation (i.e., not a hobby farm or incidental use).

2. Secondary to the principal *agricultural use* of the property, specifically in temporal terms

The Guidelines offer specific considerations to uses that are temporary or intermittent, such as events. The frequency and timing of any event cannot interfere with cropping cycles or other *agricultural uses* on the farm or in the surrounding area. This is due to the fact that *OFDUs* must be compatible with surrounding agricultural operations.

A temporary use zoning by-law under the Planning Act can be used to allow an event to take place as long as the temporary uses meet all criteria for *OFDUs*, no permanent alterations are proposed to the land or structures (e.g., stages, washrooms, or pavilions), and the farmland is returned to agriculture immediately following the event (e.g., detailed provisions to avoid soil compaction, timing avoids impacts on cropping systems, etc.).

Note: Large-scale, repeated or permanent events are not *OFDUs*. Additionally, other municipal by-laws, permit requirements, and event conditions may be required for a temporary event to ensure a safe experience (e.g., site plans, traffic plans, emergency plans, security plans, etc.). Criteria to confirm if a potential *OFDU* is indeed a secondary use include:

- permanently displace little-to-no agricultural land, within the limits discussed under the “limited in area” criterion
- do not require site grading and/or drainage unless it improves conditions for agricultural production
- are one-time uses or held infrequently when impacts to agriculture are minimal
- any land used for a temporary use must be immediately returned to agriculture

- a harvestable crop is produced on the land the year in which the temporary use is implemented (if applicable)
- meet compatibility requirements (e.g., do not require significant emergency, water and wastewater services; maintain reasonable noise and traffic levels in the area)
- impacts to the site itself and surrounding agricultural operations are mitigated (e.g., compaction, drainage, trespassing)

3. Limited in area

The Guidelines mention that OFDUs must be “limited in area.” The footprint percentage occupied by the OFDUs should be calculated out of the total lot coverage or individual parcel of land where the OFDUs take place. This is important to note because some farm operations may take place across several parcels of land. Importantly, if there are multiple OFDUs on the same lot coverage or individual parcel of land, all the OFDUs should be within the recommended footprint percentage.

The total lot coverage or individual parcel of land used for the calculation should also include land subject to an easement, meaning it could include land that is not in *agricultural use*. The footprint percentage recommended is up to two (2) percent of a farm parcel to a maximum of 1 hectare (i.e., 10,000 square feet).

According to the Guidelines, the footprint percentage should include all aspects related to the OFDUs, such as buildings, outdoor storage, landscaped areas, berms, well and septic systems, parking and new access roads. However, there are some exemptions to this, as listed below.

- **Existing and/or demolished buildings:** The guidelines suggest that existing agricultural buildings or structures (e.g., barns, etc.) no longer needed for agricultural production should be used when available. To encourage this, the area of an existing building built prior to April 30, 2014, be calculated at 50%. Importantly, the guidelines suggest the same discount be applied for OFDUs occupying the same footprint as a demolished building.
- **Existing and new laneways:** The guidelines recommend that existing laneways not be included in the “limited in area” calculation. New laneways should be included.
- **Home occupation:** The guidelines recommend that home occupations in existing residences or outbuildings can also be calculated for area calculations at 50%.
- **Parking and outdoor storage:** The guidelines recommend that the area needed for parking and outdoor storage be fully included in the calculation.

For uses like events, wagon rides, or corn mazes, the guidelines provide some additional flexibility in calculating the footprint percentage.

- **Temporary or intermittent uses (e.g., events, etc.):** For temporary or intermittent uses like events, the “limited in area” size may be greater than the 2% or 1 hectare (i.e., 10,000 square feet).
- **Agri-tourism uses (e.g., wagon rides, corn mazes, etc.):** The guidelines note that for uses where lands are producing harvestable crops as part of an agri-tourism use, these lands are considered *agricultural uses* and are not included in the “limited in area” calculation. Some examples given include wagon rides or corn mazes. However, lands that are only used in relation to the agri-tourism use, and not harvestable, should be included in the calculation, such as loading areas for hayrides, playgrounds, seating spaces, etc.

Importantly, the Guidelines recommend a cap be placed on the gross floor area of buildings for OFDUs and suggest municipalities can set the cap size (i.e., either percentage or gross floor area) for the proportion of the footprint percentage. It suggests a maximum of 20% of the 2%.

Note: If a proposed on-farm diversified use goes above the recommended footprint percentage, the guidelines recommend considering the use as *non-agricultural* in the *prime agricultural areas*. The PPS permits *non-agricultural uses in prime agricultural areas* for: “b) limited non-residential uses, provided that all of the following are demonstrated:

1. the land does not comprise a specialty crop area;
2. the proposed use complies with the *minimum distance separation formulae*;
3. there is an identified need within the planning horizon identified in the official plan as provided for in policy 2.1.3 for additional land to accommodate the proposed use; and
4. alternative locations have been evaluated, and
 - o there are no reasonable alternative locations which avoid *prime agricultural areas*; and
 - o there are no reasonable alternative locations in *prime agricultural areas* with lower priority agricultural lands.”

It also notes: “Impacts from any new or expanding non-agricultural uses on the *agricultural system* are to be avoided, or where avoidance is not possible, minimized and mitigated as determined through an *agricultural impact assessment* or equivalent analysis, based on provincial guidance.”

The tables below are presented in the Guidelines to provide clarity on what is an OFDU.

Not Considered OFDUs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-scale restaurants, banquet halls, large-scale recurring events with permanent structures, large-scale recreational facilities (e.g., golf courses, soccer fields, ball diamonds, arenas, etc.)
Considered OFDUs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value-added uses: winery, cheese factory, bakery, abattoir, etc. (Note: if products are grown in the area, this could be considered an agriculture-related use) • Home occupations: classes and workshops, etc. • Home industries: woodworking or welding shop, seasonal equipment storage, etc. • Retail uses: farm markets, antique businesses, tack shops, food stores, etc. • Food operators: Cafes, small restaurants, cooking classes, etc. • Agri-tourism and recreation: farm vacation suites, bed and breakfasts, hayrides, petting zoos, farm-themed playgrounds, horse trail rides, corn mazes, seasonal events, equine events, wine tastings, retreats, zip lining, etc. • Pick-your-own operation with associated uses

Type of Use	Agricultural	Agriculture-related	On-Farm Diversified
Description	Growing of crops or raising of animals; includes associated on-farm buildings and structures; all types, sizes and intensities; normal farm practices are promoted and protected	May or may not be on a farm; farm-related commercial or industrial use; compatible with surrounding agricultural operations; directly related to farms in the area; supports agriculture, provides products or services to farms; benefits from proximity to farms	On a farm; secondary use; limited in area; includes, but is not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses and value-added uses; compatible with surrounding agricultural operations
Accommodation for full-time farm labour	Yes: On-farm housing for own workers	No	Yes: Can house workers from own or neighbouring farms
Value-added process (e.g., food processing)	No	Yes: Can do value-added processing of farm products grown in the area	Yes: No restriction on what can be processed or its origin
Pick-your-own operation (with associated uses)	Yes: Includes harvesting of crops.	Yes: Can include retailing of farm products grown in the area (e.g., farm stand)	Yes: Can include retailing of products grown beyond the area or unrelated to agriculture, as well as visitor amenities (e.g., playground)
Winery, cidery, meadery	No	Yes, if fruit or honey is primarily from farms in area; can include tasting and retailing; appropriate servicing (water and wastewater) must be available	Yes: No restriction on where fruit or honey is from; may include other permitted uses (e.g., tasting and retailing); appropriate servicing (water and wastewater) must be available
Small-scale micro-brewery, distillery	No	No: Unless agricultural products from area (e.g., grains) are main	Yes: Appropriate servicing (water and

		input. Appropriate servicing (water and wastewater) must be available. High water uses/effluent generators should be on full municipal services.	wastewater) must be available
Agri-tourism venture (e.g., bed and breakfasts, playgrounds, hayrides, corn mazes, haunted barns)	No	No	Yes; however, area limits, rural servicing and building code requirements may restrict uses (e.g., wedding and banquet facilities)
Home occupation	No	No: Unless it primarily provides products or services to farms in the area (e.g., farm business advisor)	Yes: All types

Implementation of On-Farm Diversified Uses

The Guidelines provide direction specific to a municipality's official plan, zoning by-laws, and site plan controls. They also provide insights into development permits, lot creation, municipal bylaws and building permits. Below are key high-level considerations offered by the Guidelines:

Official Plans: The guidelines suggest municipalities must explicitly state that *OFDUs* are permitted on *prime agricultural* areas with criteria for *OFDUs* being based on the guidelines or municipal approaches that achieve the same objectives.

Zoning By-laws: The guidelines suggest four (4) key things that municipalities may choose to do for *OFDUs*. The first is to consider using "partial lot zoning" for *OFDUs*. For example, the portion of the property used for *OFDUs* would be zoned for those specific uses up to the recommended footprint percentage, while the remainder of the property would remain an agricultural zone. The second is to specify setbacks for some of the permitted uses in *prime agricultural areas* to mitigate impacts on drinking water systems, fire protection, odour, noise, dust, etc. The third is to adopt "as-of-right" zoning for *agricultural uses* and other permitted uses that are compatible and appropriate in *prime agricultural areas*. This means landowners would be able to establish these uses as long as they comply with the related by-law requirements for the use proposed. Examples given include home offices in existing buildings, small produce stands, etc. Other uses could be subject to minor variance or zoning by-law amendment. The fourth suggestion is to use "temporary use zoning by-laws" for event uses like concerts, rodeos, farm shows, etc.

Site Plan Control: As a best practice, municipalities exempt *agricultural uses* from site plan control. However, the guideline suggests it is useful to apply site plan control to *on-farm diversified uses* and *agriculture-related uses*, given the broad range of uses that could occur. To expedite the process, the guidelines recommend that municipalities delegate authority for the planning department to approve.

Perspectives from Key Informant Interviews:

- **Make more uses permitted as of right.** Growth happens when municipalities stop forcing farmers to rezone for every idea. It is important to allow on-farm diversified uses as of right, to make the process faster and less expensive, as well as build flexibility into zoning so businesses are not “locked in” to one narrowly defined idea.
- **Build flexible policy.** Farmers’ business models evolve, and if zoning is too specific, they end up needing another amendment every time the concept shifts. This means, using criteria-based permissions instead of only enumerating fixed uses
- **Use clear definitions.** An implementation problem can be figuring out what category a proposal falls into. Important to clearly define on-farm diversified uses, agricultural -related uses, agritourism and related terms like home occupation, home industry, on-farm accommodation, and event venues. This will help staff know which criteria to apply and reduce confusion for applicants.
- **Use provincial criteria with municipal discretion.** There is room for municipalities to create a more enabling environment, even within Greenbelt constraints. Provincial frameworks require adherence but there is discretion for municipalities to shape implementation. Key provincial guidelines and requirements: OFDU kept to 2% or up to 1 hectare of parcel area, OFDU must remain secondary to the farm operation, the property must be tied to a real farm business. the use should not create negative impacts on adjacent agricultural uses
- **Require evidence that the use is helping a farm business.** The intent should be to help farmers diversify, not let unrelated commercial businesses locate on farmland. Allow some flexibility in situations where another operator runs the agritourism business, as long as the farmer is still farming and benefiting.
- **Adopt early screening and concierge process.** Create a more guided process with a standardized checklist for applicants to identify issues early, an early and informal intake meeting before formal pre-consultation, circulation to internal and external agencies (i.e. planning, building, health, bylaw, transportation, Conservation Authorities), a concierge-style handoff involving economic development. Farmers are not professional developers and need a supportive, plain-language process.
- **Triage approvals by impact.** Do not treat every agritourism proposal the same. Consider creating different streams: site plan exempt, subject to minor site plan, subject to full site plan. If impacts are low, applicants should go straight to building permit to avoid unnecessary reviews. If there were issues like parking, traffic, noise, or event-related impacts, then more review is needed. Current process can be burdensome and discouraging. When people are told they need an OPA, ZBA, or other approvals, investing in agritourism may not seem worth it anymore.
- **Lower fees and provide upfront information.** Farmers are often frustrated by the planning approvals process and cost uncertainty. Development charges can kill a project late in the process. For this reason, it is important to flag development charges early and build them into applicant guidance. Consider review whether

current fee structures are fair for these uses. Similarly, this means reducing site plan fees for minor applications.

- **Coordinate regionally for consistency.** Inconsistent rules create frustration and competition between municipalities. Farmers often ask why something was allowed in one place and not another.
- **Support applicants as business owners.** Municipalities should approach agritourism proponents as people trying to build a business, not simply as someone submitting a planning file. Toolkits can help with this approach for that reason by explaining the process in non-planner language.

Greenbelt Plan

The *Greenbelt Plan* (2017) is a key document that builds upon the policy foundation provided by the former Provincial Policy Statement, now replaced by the *Provincial Planning Statement* (PPS). It provides additional land-use planning policies to address issues facing the geographic area surrounding the Greater Golden Horseshoe, home to over two-thirds of all Ontarians. Importantly, the Greenbelt governs lands that include the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan Area, and lands designated as Protected Countryside.

The *Greenbelt Plan* defines *On-farm Diversified Uses*, and *Rural Lands*. However, it is important to note that the definition of *On-farm Diversified Uses* is more limited than the definition of the PPS due to the *Greenbelt Plan* referencing the former *Provincial Policy Statement* rather than the current *PPS*. Additionally, the *Greenbelt Plan* does not provide a specific definition for “agri-tourism”.

- **On-farm Diversified Uses:** “uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property and are limited in area. On-farm diversified uses include, but are not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses, and uses that produce value-added agricultural products.
 - Note: The definition does not include the following from the PPS, “...and electricity generation facilities and transmission systems, and energy storage systems.”
- **Rural Lands:** “lands which are located outside settlement areas, and which are outside prime agricultural areas.”

The Greenbelt Plan identifies Protected Countryside lands, which are divided into three (3) types, with the most relevant for this project being the *Agriculture System*. More specifically, the *Agriculture System* is a group of interconnected elements, including the *Agri-food network*, which includes the *infrastructure*, services, and assets important to the viability of the agri-food sector, and the agricultural land base, including *prime agricultural areas (incl. specialty crop areas)* and *rural lands*.

Protected Countryside Goals

Section 1.2.2 Protected Countryside Goals notes the goal to, “enhance our urban and rural areas and overall quality of life by promoting the following matters within the Protected Countryside.” Of these six (6) goals, the following two (2) sub-goals are of most relevance to and supportive of *On-farm Diversified Uses* and *Agri-tourism*. Specifically, 1.2.2.3 Culture, Recreation and Tourism mentions, “c) Enabling continued opportunities for sustainable tourism development,” while 1.2.2.1 Agricultural Viability and Protection, it mentions two (2) things:

- “c) Protection of *prime agricultural areas* by preventing further fragmentation and loss of the agricultural land base caused by lot creation and the redesignation of *prime agricultural areas*;
- d) Provision of the appropriate flexibility to allow for *agricultural, agriculture-related* and *on-farm diversified uses, normal farm practices* and an evolving agricultural and rural economy.”

Within *Protected Countryside, Agricultural Systems* and *Natural Systems* designations mention *on-farm diversified uses* and are worth noting as they are relevant to and supportive of agritourism development as long as specific criteria are met.

Agriculture System: Specialty Crop Area Policies and Prime Agricultural Area Policies

Section 3.1.2 Specialty Crop Area Policies and 3.1.3 Prime Agricultural Area Policies, notes that the following policy applies, “1. All types, sizes and intensities of *agricultural uses* and *normal farm practices* shall be promoted and protected, and a full range of *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses* and *on-farm diversified uses* are permitted based on the provincial Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario’s Prime Agricultural Areas. Proposed *agriculture-related uses* and *on-farm diversified uses* shall be compatible with and shall not hinder surrounding agricultural operations. Importantly, Stouffville does not currently have any *specialty crop areas*.

Agriculture System: Rural Lands Policies

Under 3.1.4 Rural Lands Policies it says that for lands falling within *rural lands* the Protected Countryside, the following policies shall apply,

“2. *Rural lands* may contain existing agricultural operations and provide important linkages between *prime agricultural areas* as part of the overall *Agricultural System*. *Normal farm practices* and a full range of *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses* and *on-farm diversified uses* are supported and permitted. Proposed *agriculture-related uses* and *on-farm diversified uses* should be compatible with and should not hinder surrounding agricultural operations. Criteria for all these uses shall be based on provincial Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario’s Prime Agricultural Areas.”

Natural System: Natural Heritage System Policies

Under 3.2.2 Natural Heritage System Policies, it says, “for lands within the Natural Heritage System of the Protected Countryside, the following policies shall apply,

1. The full range of existing and *new agricultural, agriculture-related* and *on-farm diversified uses* and *normal farm practices* are permitted subject to the policies of section 3.2.2.2.
2. New buildings or structures for *agriculture, agriculture-related* and *on-farm diversified uses* are not subject to the policies of section 3.2.2.3, but are subject to the policies of section 3.2.5.
3. When official plans are brought into conformity with this Plan, the boundaries of the Natural Heritage System may be refined, with greater precision, in a manner that is consistent with this Plan and the system shown on Schedule 4.”

Natural System: Key Hydrologic Areas

Under 3.2.4 Key Hydrologic Areas, it identifies these areas as *significant groundwater recharge areas, highly vulnerable aquifers, and significant surface water contribution areas*. It specifically notes that:

“for lands within a key hydrologic area in the Protected Countryside, the following policies apply: 2. Section 3.2.4.1 does not apply to major development that is a new or expanding building or structure for agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses where the total impervious surface does not exceed 10 percent of the lot.”

Natural System: Key Natural Heritage Features and Key Hydrologic Features Policies

Under 3.2.5 Key Natural Heritage Features and Key Hydrologic Features Policies, it identifies *key natural heritage features* as well as *key hydrologic features*.

- *Key natural heritage features*: Habitat of endangered species and threatened species; Fish habitat; Wetlands; Life science areas of natural and scientific interest (ANSIs); Significant valleylands; Significant woodlands; Significant wildlife habitat (including habitat of special concern species); Sand barrens, savannahs and tallgrass prairies; and Alvars.
- *Key hydrologic features*: Permanent and intermittent streams; Lakes (and their littoral zones); Seepage areas and springs; and Wetlands.

It also says, “for lands within a *key natural heritage feature* or a *key hydrologic feature* in the Protected Countryside, the following policies shall apply:

7. Notwithstanding section 3.2.5.5, new buildings and structures for *agricultural, agriculture-related* or *on-farm diversified uses* are not required to undertake a natural heritage or hydrologic evaluation if a minimum 30 metre *vegetation protection zone* is provided from a *key natural heritage feature* or *key hydrologic feature*. In addition, these uses are exempt from the requirement of establishing a condition of *natural self-sustaining vegetation* if the land is and will continue to be used for agricultural purposes. However, *agricultural, agriculture-related* and *on-farm diversified uses* shall pursue best management practices to protect and/or restore *key natural heritage features* and *key hydrologic features and functions*.”

General Policies for the Protected Countryside: Existing Uses

Under 4.5 Existing Uses it says, “for lands falling within the Protected Countryside, the following policies shall apply:

5. Expansions or alterations to existing buildings and structures for *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses* or *on-farm diversified uses* and expansions to existing residential dwellings may be considered within *key natural heritage features, key hydrologic features* and their associated *vegetation protection zones* if it is demonstrated that:

- a) There is no alternative, and the expansion or alteration in the feature is minimized and, in the *vegetation protection zone*, is directed away from the feature to the maximum extent possible; and
- b) The impact of the expansion or alteration on the feature and its functions is minimized and mitigated to the maximum extent possible.”

Note on Recreation and Tourism:

Although not part of *on-farm diversified uses* or *agri-tourism uses*, under 4. General Policies for the Protected Countryside, 4.1 Non Agricultural Uses, the Greenbelt Plan mentions that it supports a range of recreation and tourism uses on *rural lands* of the Protected Countryside,

“the *rural lands* of the Protected Countryside are intended to continue to accommodate a range of commercial, industrial and institutional (including cemetery) uses serving the rural resource and agricultural sectors. They are also intended to support a range of recreation and tourism uses such as trails, parks, golf courses, bed and breakfasts and other tourism-based accommodation, serviced playing fields and campgrounds, ski hills and resorts.

Note on Near-urban Agriculture:

Section 1.2.2 Protected Countryside Goals, references near-urban agriculture under “f) Enhancing the strengths of the Agricultural System, including through consideration for the impacts of development on agriculture and planning for local food and near-urban agriculture.”

3.1.5 Agri-food Network says, “2. Municipalities are encouraged to implement regional agri-food strategies and other approaches to sustain and enhance the Agricultural System and the long-term economic prosperity and viability of the agri-food sector, including the maintenance and improvement of the agri-food network, by: a) Providing opportunities to support access to healthy, local, and affordable food, urban and near-urban agriculture, food system planning and promoting the sustainability of agricultural, agri-food and agri-product businesses while protecting agricultural resources and minimizing land use conflicts.”

Under 3.3.3 Municipal Parkland, Open Space and Trail Strategies, which says “for all lands falling within the Protected Countryside, municipalities should: 3. Include the following considerations in municipal parks plans and open space strategies: f) Support urban agriculture and other local food initiatives.”

Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan

The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2017) (ORMCP) is a provincial, ecologically based land-use plan whose primary purpose is to protect the Oak Ridges Moraine, while guiding how land and water can be used within it. Importantly, the lands to which the *ORMCP* apply are subject to the *Greenbelt Plan (2017)*. They both, in conjunction, identify where urbanization should not occur to provide permanent protection to the agricultural land base and the ecological and hydrological features, areas, and functions of the Oak Ridges Moraine.

More broadly, the ORMCP acknowledges that the Oak Ridges Moraine provides opportunities for recreational activities and contributes to public health and quality of life. It explicitly provides for the development of trail networks across the Moraine to support recreation and public access in a manner compatible with the natural features.

Additionally, despite *low-intensity recreation uses* not being an *on-farm diversified use* or an *agri-tourism use*, it is a use that can strengthen the physical interconnectedness of a destination and link agritourism with outdoor recreation assets through low-intensity uses. See *Trail System* and *Low-intensity Recreation Uses* below for more information.

The ORMCP defines *On-farm Diversified Uses*, *Agri-tourism Uses*, *Bed and Breakfast Establishment*, *Home Industry*, *Home Occupation*, and *Value-added Product*. These definitions are similar but not always the same as the PPS.

- **On-farm Diversified Uses:** “with respect to a farming operation, uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property, that are compatible with and do not hinder the surrounding agricultural operations and that occupy a limited area of the property including, (a) home occupations, (b) home industries, (c) agri-tourism uses, and (d) uses that produce value-added products.”
 - Note: The definition does not include the following from the PPS, “...and electricity generation facilities and transmission systems, and energy storage systems.”
- **Agri-tourism Uses:** “uses located on a farm that promote the enjoyment of farm operations or education or activities related to farm operations and includes the provision of accommodations such as a bed and breakfast establishment.”
- **Bed and Breakfast Establishment:** “an establishment that provides sleeping accommodation (including breakfast and other meals, services, facilities and amenities for the exclusive use of guests) for the travelling or vacationing public in a single dwelling that is the principal residence of the proprietor of the establishment.”
- **Home Industry:** “an industry that, a) is carried out in the home or in a building that is accessory to the home or, if the home is located on a farm, to the agricultural operation; c) if the home is located on a farm,
 - i. is carried on as a small-scale use that is secondary to the principal use of the farm as an agricultural operation, and
 - ii. may include, but is not limited to, a sawmill, welding or woodworking shop, manufacturing or fabrication shop, equipment repair and seasonal storage of boats or trailers.
- **Home Occupation:** “an occupation that is carried out on a farm and that, (a) involves providing personal or professional services such as those offered at or by a professional office, bookkeeper, land surveyor, art studio, hairdresser, massage therapist, daycare, veterinary clinic, kennel classes or workshops, and (b) is carried on as a small-scale secondary use within a single dwelling on the farm”
- **Value-added Product:** “an agricultural product that has been processed by means of chopping, canning, pressing, bottling, roasting or any other similar process.”

The ORMCP identifies four (4) land-use designations, which include 1) Natural Core Areas, 2) Natural Linkage Areas, 3) Countryside Areas, and 4) Settlement Areas. Of relevance to On-farm Diversified Uses and Agri-tourism are the first three land-use designations. Key characteristics of each land use are outlined below.

Natural Core Areas

Natural Core Areas are “areas with a high concentration of key natural heritage features, key hydrologic features, ecological functions or landform conservation areas. Only existing uses, agricultural uses and very restricted new resource management, low

intensity recreational, home businesses, and infrastructure uses are allowed in these areas.” Under Section 11 (1), the *ORMCP* notes the purpose of Natural Core Areas as, “to maintain and, where possible, improve or restore the ecological integrity of the Plan Area. It references a variety of ways to do this, as well as identifies the following related objective to tourism development:

- a) accommodating a trail system through the Plan Area and trail connections to it; serving cultural heritage resources; and
- b) providing for limited economic development that is compatible with clauses (a) and (a.1) and subsection (1).”

(3) The below uses are permitted with respect to land in Natural Core Areas, subject to Parts III and IV. Importantly, many agritourism activities, such as walking or cycling food tours, outdoor workshops, etc. may not require significant physical infrastructure, while other agritourism activities like wineries, retail shops, accommodations, etc. may need more. For this reason, several of the permitted uses are relevant to planning for agritourism growth in Stouffville, including 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

1. Fish, wildlife and forest management.
2. Conservation projects and flood and erosion control projects.
3. Agricultural uses.
4. Infrastructure uses.
5. Home businesses.
6. Home industries.
7. Bed and breakfast establishments.
8. On-farm diversified uses, subject to subsection (4).
9. Agriculture-related uses, subject to subsection (4).
10. Low-intensity recreational uses as described in section 37.
11. Unserviced parks.
12. Uses accessory to the uses set out in paragraphs 1 to 10.

(4) The on-farm diversified uses referred to in paragraph 8 of subsection (3) and the agriculture-related uses referred to in paragraph 8.1 of subsection (3) are only permitted in prime agricultural areas in the Natural Core Areas. Meaning in Natural Core Areas, *on-farm diversified uses*, and *agriculture-related uses* are only permitted on *prime agricultural land*.

Natural Linkage Areas

Natural Linkage Areas: “forming part of a central corridor system that support or have the potential to support movement of plants and animals among the Natural Core Areas, Natural Linkage Areas, river valleys and stream corridors. The only uses that are allowed are those allowed in Natural Core Areas, plus some aggregate resource operations.” Under Section 12 (1) the *ORMCP* identifies the purpose of Natural Linkage Areas as “to maintain, and where possible improve or restore, the ecological integrity of the Plan Area, and to maintain, and where possible improve or restore, regional-scale open space linkages between Natural Core Areas and along river valleys and stream corridors.”

“(2) Natural Linkage Areas also have the objectives of,

- a) accommodating a trail system through the Plan Area and trail connections to it; a.1) conserving cultural heritage resources; a.2) contributing to a regional network of green infrastructure; and

- b) providing for limited economic development that is compatible with clauses (a) to (a.2) and subsection (1)."

(3) The below uses are permitted with respect to land in Natural Linkage Areas, subject to Parts III and IV: Similar to Natural Core Areas, several of the permitted uses are relevant to planning for agritourism growth in Stouffville, including 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 13. Several are relevant to planning for agritourism growth in Stouffville.

1. Fish, wildlife and forest management.
2. Conservation projects and flood and erosion control projects.
3. Agricultural uses.
4. Infrastructure uses.
5. Home businesses.
6. Home industries.
7. Bed and breakfast establishments.
8. On-farm diversified uses, subject to subsection (4).
9. Low-intensity recreational uses as described in section 37.
10. Unserviced parks.
11. Mineral aggregate operations.
12. Wayside pits.
13. Agriculture-related uses, subject to subsection (4).
14. Uses accessory to the uses set out in paragraphs 1 to 13.

(4) The on-farm diversified uses referred to in paragraph 8 of subsection (3) and the agriculture-related uses referred to in paragraph 13 of subsection (3) are only permitted in prime agricultural areas in the Natural Linkage Areas.

Countryside Areas

Countryside Areas: "rural land use such as agriculture, recreation, residential development, Rural Settlements, mineral aggregate operations, parks and open space. Rural Settlements, which form part of Countryside Areas and are existing hamlets or similar existing small communities, generally long-established and identified in official plans, are also shown on the land use designation map referred to in section 2. Uses typically allowed in agricultural and other rural areas are allowed here to support agriculture and the rural economy. Policies on creating and developing new lots in Natural Core Areas, Natural Linkage Areas and Countryside Areas are very restrictive."

Under Section 13 (1) the *ORMCP* notes the purpose of Countryside Areas as, "to encourage agricultural and other rural uses that support the Plan's objectives by,

- a) protecting prime agricultural areas;
- b) promoting and protecting agricultural and other rural land uses and normal farm practices;
- c) maintaining the rural character of the Rural Settlements;
- d) protecting and restoring natural areas and features that sequester carbon and provide ecological functions, including water storage, to help reduce the impacts of climate change; and
- e) maintaining existing public service facilities and adapting them, where feasible, to meet the needs of the community."

"(2) Countryside Areas also have the following objectives:

- g) accommodating a trail system through the Plan Area and trail connections to it; g.1) conserving cultural heritage resources; and
- h) h) providing for economic development that is compatible with subsection (1) and with clauses (a) to (g.1)."

(3) The below uses are permitted with respect to land in Countryside Areas, subject to Parts III and IV. Similar to Natural Core Area, and Natural Linkage Areas, several are relevant to planning for agritourism growth in Stouffville, including 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 13.

1. Fish, wildlife and forest management.
2. Conservation projects and flood and erosion control projects.
3. Agricultural uses.
4. Infrastructure uses.
5. Home businesses.
6. Home industries.
7. Bed and breakfast establishments.
8. On-farm diversified uses.
9. Low-intensity recreational uses as described in section 37.
10. Unserviced parks.
11. Mineral aggregate operations.
12. Wayside pits.
13. Agriculture-related uses.
14. Small-scale commercial, industrial, and institutional uses as described in section 40, subject to subsection (5).
15. Major recreational uses as described in section 38, subject to subsection (5).
16. Residential development in accordance with section 14.
17. Uses accessory to the uses set out in paragraphs 1 to 16.

(4) With respect to land in a Rural Settlement, the following uses are permitted, subject to Parts III and IV, in addition to the uses listed in subsection (3):

1. Residential development in accordance with paragraph 3 of subsection 15 (1).
2. Small-scale commercial, industrial, and institutional uses as described in section 40, but not subject to clauses (1) (a), (1) (c) or (2) (a) of that section.

(5) The uses described in paragraphs 14 and 15 of subsection (3) are prohibited in prime agricultural areas; and (a) areas designated primarily for agricultural uses in the applicable (b) official plan.

Key Natural Heritage Features

Key Natural Heritage Features is another land use worth considering as it relates to agritourism development. Under Section 22. (1) the *ORMCP* identifies "key natural heritage features, which include 1. Wetlands, 2. Habitat of endangered and threatened species, 3. Fish habitat, 4. Areas of natural and scientific interest (life science), 5. Significant valleylands, 6. Significant woodlands, 7. Significant wildlife habitat (including habitat of special concern species), 8. Sand barrens, savannahs and tallgrass prairies."

"(2) All development and site alteration with respect to land within a key natural heritage feature or the related minimum vegetation protection zone is prohibited, except the following:

- Low-intensity recreational uses as described in section 37.

- Agricultural uses other than uses associated with on-farm buildings and structures, but only with respect to land in the minimum vegetation protection zone related to a key natural heritage feature and not in the key natural heritage feature itself."

This section also notes in (4) that "despite subsection (3), a natural heritage evaluation is not required in the case of an application relating to the construction of a new building or structure in the minimum area of influence of a key natural heritage feature if the proposed building or structure is for agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses and is located a minimum of 30 metres from the key natural heritage feature."

"(5) Any agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses that are carried out in the minimum area of influence that relates to a key natural heritage feature shall be carried out in accordance with best management practices to protect or restore key natural heritage features and related ecological functions."

Hydrological Features

Under Section 26. (1) the *ORMCP* identifies "key hydrologic features, which include 1. Permanent and intermittent streams, 2. Wetlands, 3. Kettle lakes, 4. Seepage areas and springs."

"(2) All development and site alteration with respect to land within a key hydrologic feature or the related minimum vegetation protection zone is prohibited, except the following:

4. Low-intensity recreational uses as described in section 37.
5. Agricultural uses other than uses associated with on-farm buildings and structures, but only with respect to land in the minimum vegetation protection zone related to a key hydrologic feature and not in the key hydrologic feature itself."

This section also notes in (4.1) that "despite subsection (3), a hydrological evaluation is not required in the case of an application relating to the construction of a new building or structure in the minimum area of influence of a key hydrologic feature if the proposed building or structure is for agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses and is located a minimum of 30 metres from the key hydrologic feature."

"(4.2) Any agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses that are carried out in the minimum area of influence that relates to a key hydrologic feature shall be carried out in accordance with best management practices to protect or restore key hydrologic features and related ecological functions."

Trail System and Low-intensity Recreational Uses

To create an agritourism destination, it is important that visitors can easily access and move between visitor experiences. Two areas of the *ORMCP* can be consulted to inform decisions around how to improve agritourism connections.

Under Section 39. (1) the *ORMCP* identifies the requirement to establish a recreational trail system "to provide continuous access and travel along the entire Plan Area, accessible to all including persons with disabilities."

"(2) The trail system shall,

- a) be designed to maintain and, where possible, improve or restore the ecological integrity of the Plan Area;
- b) be located in the Natural Core Areas and Natural Linkage Areas as much as possible;
- c) be located away from unopened road allowances, prime agricultural areas and agricultural operations as much as possible."

"(3) Despite anything else in this Plan, the following uses, buildings and structures are permitted on the trail system:

1. Non-motorized trail uses.
2. Parking, signage, washrooms and interpretive facilities to support access to the trail system.
3. Fencing to define and protect the trails while limiting access to, and trespass on, adjoining agricultural lands.
4. Works to improve access to the trail system and remove barriers to its use, for the benefit of all including persons with disabilities.
5. Works to protect ecologically sensitive portions of the trail system.
6. Conservation and erosion control to protect or restore key natural heritage features and key hydrologic features and the related ecological functions along the trail system."

"(4) Paragraph 1 of subsection (3) does not prohibit the use of mobility aids, including motorized wheelchairs and other power-assisted devices by persons who need them for mobility."

Perspectives from Key Informant Interviews

Several interviewees noted the importance of physical infrastructure and connectivity in unlocking agritourism's potential in Stouffville. In particular, trail networks, transportation linkages, and wayfinding systems were seen as critical tools for connecting farms to each other, to natural assets, and to Stouffville's downtown. Some interviewees described a vision where visitors can move seamlessly between experiences such as cycling between farms or combining outdoor recreation with culinary and agritourism.

Under Section 37 (1), the *ORMCP* describes *Low-intensity Recreational Uses* as "recreational uses that have minimal impact on the natural environment, and require very little terrain or vegetation modification and few, if any, buildings or structures, including but not limited to the following: 1. Non-motorized trail uses, 2. Natural heritage appreciation, 3. Unserviced camping on public and institutional land, 4. Accessory uses."

"(2) Small-scale structures accessory to low-intensity recreational uses, such as trails, boardwalks, foot bridges, fences, docks and picnic facilities, are permitted only if the applicant demonstrates that the adverse effects on the ecological integrity of the Plan Area will be kept to a minimum by, a) keeping disturbed areas to a minimum; and b) avoiding the most sensitive portions of the site, such as steep slopes and organic soils."

Municipal plans and policies

Town of Stouffville's Official Plan

The Town of Stouffville's *Official Plan* (2025) (OP) is guided by and developed under a framework established by the province to ensure that short-term and long-term growth are coordinated to meet local social, economic, built, and natural environment needs and aspirations. Importantly, the *OP* must be consistent with the *Provincial Planning Statement* (2024) (PPS) and must conform or not conflict with any applicable Provincial Plans like the *Greenbelt Plan* (2017), *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* (2017), *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan* (2009), and the *Clean Water Act*. (2006).

Importantly, as of July 1, 2024, York Region is an upper-tier municipality without planning responsibilities. The *York Region Official Plan* was revoked by the Town of Stouffville in May 2025. Of note, Section 3.8: Economic Development and Attracting Employment in the *OP* notes it has been "deferred in its entirety." However, it does reference *on-farm diversified use* and *agri-tourism*.

The Town's *OP* defines "*On-farm Diversified Uses*", and "*Agri-tourism*", but it does not define "Bed and Breakfast Establishment" like the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. However, the term appears under Hamlet of Gromley, Hamlet of Vandorf, Vandorf-Mixed Use Area, Hamlet of Bloomington, as well as under an *on-farm diversified use*. Additionally, the *OP* does not define "Value-added Uses", however, it does appear as a permitted *on-farm diversified use* in the Agricultural Area and Rural Area designations.

- **On-farm Diversified Uses:** "uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property and are limited in area. On-farm diversified uses include, but are not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses, uses that produce value-added agricultural products, and electricity generation facilities and transmission systems, and energy storage systems."
 - Note: This definition aligns with the current Provincial Planning Statement.
- **Agri-tourism Uses:** "farm-related tourism uses, including limited accommodation such as a bed and breakfast, that promote enjoyment, education or activities related to the farm operation.
- **Home Industry:** "an industry that is carried out in the home or in a building that is accessory to the home or if the home is located on a farm, to the agricultural operation and: If the home is located on a farm, the use is carried on as a small-scale use that is secondary to the principal use of the farm as an agricultural operation, and may include but is not limited to a sawmill, welding or woodworking shop, manufacturing or fabrication shop, equipment repair and seasonal storage of boats or trailers."
- **Home Occupation:** "an occupation for profit or gain conducted entirely within a dwelling unit that is incidental and secondary to the use of the dwelling unit for residential purposes and does not change the residential character of the dwelling unit."

Agritourism and OFDUs are referred to several times across the *OP*. The following sections provide a list of these references.

Agricultural System

Under 2.6 Agricultural System, the *OP* recognizes the *agricultural system* as an important part of the fabric of Stouffville that supports a vibrant agricultural community and contributes to the economy, quality of life, and natural heritage legacy. As a result of this, under 2.6.1.1 the *OP* notes that, "the Town will:

- c) recognize *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses, and on-farm diversified uses* as the dominant land use which are supported by large areas of *prime agricultural areas* in the south, northwest and northeast portions of the Town.
- e) Promote *agricultural uses, agriculture-related, and on-farm diversified uses, buildings and structures, home industries, and uses that produce value added agricultural products from the farm operation.*
- f) Promote *rural areas* as a focus for agriculture, as well as *non-agricultural uses* and recreational uses as set out in this plan."

Under 6.2.1 Agricultural Area, and 6.2.2 Rural Area, the *OP* notes *on-farm diversified uses, home occupation, home industry, and bed and breakfast* as permitted uses in accordance with section 5.2.2. For Rural Area, under Development Policies 6.2.2.2, the *OP* says, "the Rural Area will conform to the following policies, "i. The character of the rural area shall be retained and the viability of agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses shall be protected."

Note on Low-intensity Recreational Uses:

As noted in previous plan documents, low-intensity recreation uses are not *on-farm diversified uses* or *agri-tourism*, however, they are an important asset, especially when thinking about the integration of agritourism and food tourism to outdoor tourism activities. Under 6.2.1 Agricultural Area, and 6.2.2 the *OP* notes low-intensity recreational use as a permitted use,

"Low-intensity recreational uses, including a full range of public *open space* uses, including environmental education and demonstration projects, passive and active recreation uses, and unserviced parks, that do not constitute *major recreational uses, and associated facilities.*"

Building Complete Communities

Under 3.1 Building Complete Communities, the *OP* recognizes the need for the concept of a *complete community* to be implemented with the goal of providing for a high quality of life and ensuring that equitable opportunities for all people are established as a key objective of the Plan. As a result, under 3.1.1.1 it notes that, "the Town will: support *on-farm diversified uses, agri-tourism and agri-food production* to enhance the viability of the agricultural industry, the local agricultural economy and access to high quality local food."

The Natural Environment: Regional Greenlands System

Under. 4.1.6 Regional Greenlands System, the *OP* notes the role of the system to be the protection of natural heritage features in a system of core areas connected by corridors and linkages. As a result, under 4.1.6.1 it notes that, "the Town will: c) Permit some uses within the Regional Greenlands System provided the requirements of applicable Provincial policies, York Region Official Plan, and this Plan are met, such as: ii. new buildings or structures and the full range of uses for existing and new agricultural, agriculture-related and *on-farm diversified uses and normal farm practices*, subject to the policies of Section 5, are permitted."

The Natural Environment: Key Natural Heritage Features and Key Hydrologic Features

Under 4.1.7 Key Natural Heritage Features and Key Hydrologic Features, the *OP* notes these features as integral components of the Natural Heritage System and, therefore, the *OP* establishes a policy framework to protect the network of these heritage features, including their associated vegetation protection zones, as well as linkages to protect and restore their ecological and hydrologic functions. As a result, under 4.1.7.1 it notes that, “the Town will:

- c) Prohibit development and site alteration within *key natural heritage features, key hydrologic features, minimum vegetation protection zones* and the minimum area of influence, unless: iii. for *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses*, subject to the applicable Provincial Plan.
- h) In the case of an application relating to the construction of a new building or structure in the *minimum area of influence* of a *key natural heritage feature* or *key hydrologic feature*, not require an *Environmental Impact Study* if the proposed building or structure is for *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses* and is located a minimum of 30 metres from the *key natural heritage feature* or *key hydrologic feature*.
- Require that any *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses* that are carried out in the minimum area of influence that relates to a *key natural heritage feature* or *key hydrologic feature* shall be carried out in accordance with *best management practices* to protect or restore *key hydrologic features* and related *ecological functions*.”

The Natural Environment: Development and Site Alteration Outside of Settlement Areas

Under 4.1.15 Development and Site Alteration Outside of Settlement Areas, the *OP* notes that, “the Town will” a) Ensure that *development or site alteration* is not permitted in *key natural heritage features and key hydrologic features* or the *minimum vegetation protection zone*, with the exception of the following uses: vi. Expansions or alterations to existing buildings and structures for *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses, or on-farm diversified uses* and expansions to existing residential dwellings if it is demonstrated that:

1. There is no alternative, and the expansion or alteration in the feature is minimized and, in the vegetation protection zone, is directed away from the feature to the maximum extent possible; and,
2. The impact of the expansion or alteration on the feature and its functions is minimized and mitigated to the maximum extent possible.”

Water Resources, Watershed Planning and Groundwater: Major Development within the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan Area

Under 4.2.6 Major Development within the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan Area, the *OP* notes that the Town may exempt major developments related to *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses* from the major development policies as noted under 4.2.6.1 d. “Notwithstanding, buildings or structures for *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses* may be exempt from the major development policies, subject to provincial requirements.

Implementation of the Natural Heritage System: Environmental Impact Study Requirements

Under 4.4.2 Environmental Impact Study Requirements, the *OP* notes that the main objective of an environmental impact study is to “identify and assess the potential impacts of development on natural heritage features, hydrologic features and functions of the area.” More specifically, under 4.4.2.1, the Town notes it will,

“Not require an *Environmental Impact Study* if a minimum 30 metre *vegetation protection zone* is provided from a *key natural heritage feature* or *key hydrologic feature* for new buildings and structures for *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses, or on-farm diversified uses*. *Agricultural uses* are exempt from the requirement of establishing a condition of natural self-sustaining vegetation if the land is, and will continue to be, used for agricultural purposes, and will pursue best management practices to protect and restore *key natural heritage features, key hydrologic features, and their functions*. These uses are subject to the policies prohibiting *development* in key natural and hydrologic areas.”

General Policies

Under 5.1.1.1, the Town identifies that it will protect and enhance the *Agricultural System* to support a productive and sustainable agricultural and rural land base as follows:

- c) Ensure *normal farm practices* and a full range of *agricultural uses, agricultural related uses and on-farm diversified uses* are permitted within the *Agricultural Area* and *Rural Area*, in accordance with the applicable land use designations, York Region Official Plan policies, and Provincial Plan policies and guidelines.
- g) Require some land use activities associated with *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses* within *Wellhead Protection Areas, and Areas of High Aquifer Vulnerability* to meet the applicable policies in Section 4.2.
- h) Require any proposed expansions or alterations to existing buildings and structures for *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses* within *key natural heritage features and/or key hydrologic features* and their associated vegetation protection zones to conform with the policies in Section 4 – The Natural Environment and Section 7 – Implementation, Interpretation and Monitoring.

General Policies: Agri-Food Network

Under 5.1.4, the *OP* defines an *agri-food network* as “the network of farms, distribution businesses, restaurants, processing uses and related uses, which connect people and businesses with local food.” Specifically, under 5.1.4.1 the Town notes it will support the agri-food network by: f) Promote agri-tourism through on-farm diversified uses and support the agri-food sector by supporting agriculture-related uses in accordance with the policies of this Plan.

Note on Urban Agriculture & Circular Food Economy:

Although not on-farm diversified uses or agri-tourism, under 5.1.4.1 the *OP* encourages urban agriculture and the circular food economy, which can be part of developing a stronger and broader agritourism destination.

“g. Reduce food waste and promote circular food economy.

- i. Work with York Region to support implementation of the Region’s Agricultural and Agri-Food Strategy by:

- i. Encouraging food growing opportunities in the Town's urban areas by permitting *urban agriculture* activities including *community gardens*, food cooperatives, vertical farming, local food sourcing programs for municipal facilities, events and other food initiatives;
- ii. Encouraging and facilitating farmers markets to be located within the urban areas and *agricultural areas*, and,
- iii. Promoting opportunities for local farmers with farmers markets and retail outlets."

Policies for Specific Uses in the Agricultural System: On-farm Diversified Uses

Under 5.2.2 On-farm Diversified Uses, the *OP* notes that it may be permitted in the *agricultural area*, and rural area land use designations and the Town will:

"a. Permit *on-farm diversified uses* in the *Agricultural Area* and Rural Area designations including, but not limited to: i. Value-added uses that use produce and/or livestock from the surrounding *agricultural area*; ii. *Home occupation*; iii. *Home industry*; iv. Retail uses such as farmers' markets, cafes or small restaurants, or food stores primarily selling locally produced products; and, v. Agricultural research and training centre; vi. Winery, cidery or meadery; vii. Small-scale micro-brewery, distillery; viii. Landscaping business; ix. Veterinary clinic; x. *Agri-tourism uses*, including, but not limited to:

1. Overnight tourist accommodations such as bed and breakfast establishments, cabins, farm vacation enterprises, or farm stays;
2. Recreational uses such as hayrides, petting zoos, corn mazes, and farm-themed playgrounds; and,
3. Events, such as equine events, seasonal events, weddings, and wine-tastings."

Note: Broader tourism-based definitions of agritourism are likely to consider several of the OFDUs mentioned in the *OP* as agritourism, including cafés, small restaurants, wineries, etc.

b. Notwithstanding the above, only permit *on-farm diversified uses* in the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan Area and Greenbelt Plan Area where permitted by those Provincial Plans.

c) In considering a proposed *on-farm diversified use*, determine whether the proposed location of the use is appropriate, and whether the use is consistent with the Provincial Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas, and the following criteria:

- i. The use is located on a farm property and is located within the existing cluster of farm buildings, where feasible;
- ii. The use is secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property;
- iii. The total extent of *on-farm diversified uses* on a property are limited in area, consistent with the Provincial Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas, and pursuant to the provisions of the Town's Zoning By-law;
- iv. The use is compatible with and will not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations from pursuing their agricultural practices without impairment or inconvenience;

- v. The use can be serviced with appropriate private water supply and means of sewage disposal and will not have an *adverse effect* on neighbouring wells;
- vi. Adequate on-site parking facilities, setbacks and landscaping is provided;
- vii. Access to the site will not have a negative impact on local traffic; and
- viii. Setbacks from existing livestock facilities, manure storage and anaerobic digesters are in accordance with the *Minimum Distance Separation Formulae*.

d. Consider requiring a temporary use by-law to permit certain *agri-tourism uses*, such as events and festivals, and/or set out detailed standards in the Zoning By-law.

e. Establish additional detailed permitted uses and provisions for *on-farm diversified uses* in the Town's Zoning By-law, with respect to scale, the gross floor area, lot coverage, the number of employees, and outside storage, among other matters."

Policies for Specific Uses in the Agricultural System: Farm Help Accommodation

Under 5.2.6 Farm Help Accommodation, the *OP* notes that farm help accommodations may be permitted in the Agricultural Area and Rural Area land use designations. However, it notes in 5.2.6.1 d. that if the farm help accommodation is within a building that houses an *on-farm diversified use* it is permitted as long as the two uses do not happen at the same time. "d. Notwithstanding policy c) above, permit farm help accommodation within a building that houses an on-farm diversified use, provided that the two uses do not happen concurrently."

Planning Tools: Community Improvement Planning

Under 7.3.3 notes support for a *Community Improvement Plan* (CIP) designates the whole Town as a Community Improvement Project Area under the provisions of Section 28 of the Planning Act. Importantly, the purpose of the CIP is to support the revitalization of areas in the community by designing the CIP area, and providing support programs like grants, to encourage private interest to implement the goals identified by the Town. Importantly, under 7.3.3.1, the Town notes it will, "g. Promote *on-farm diversified uses, agriculture-related uses* or other measures to promote revitalization and economic activity in the *rural areas* of the Town, in accordance with the permitted uses in this Plan."

Existing and Legal Non-Conforming Uses

Under 7.7 Existing and Legal Non-Conforming Uses, the *OP* notes that a *non-conforming use* allows for the continued use of a particular land use that is no longer permitted under the current zoning. The land use must have been established at the time when it was permitted under the previous zoning regulations or predated any zoning by-law being in existence and has been in continuous use since that time.

Under 7.7.1.5, it notes that "With respect to existing uses and lots of record that exist within the Protected Countryside of the Greenbelt Plan the Town will: d. Consider expansions or alterations to existing buildings and structures for *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses* or *on-farm diversified uses* and expansions to existing residential dwellings within *key natural heritage features, key hydrologic features* and their associated vegetation protection zones if it is demonstrated that there is no alternative, and the impact from the expansion or alteration is minimized and is directed away from the feature to the maximum extent possible."

Under 7.7.1.7, it notes that “The Town will require any proposed expansions or alterations to existing buildings and structures for *agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses* within *key natural heritage features and/or key hydrologic features* and their associated vegetation protection zones within the Oak Ridges Moraine to meet the policies in Section 4 – The Natural Environment.”

Town of Stouffville’s Comprehensive Zoning By-laws

The Town of Stouffville’s current, “Comprehensive Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO,” (i.e., Zoning By-law) was approved by Town Council on March 2, 2010. However, since the Town adopted a new *Official Plan* (2025), the Town is now updating its zoning by-law and urban design guidelines to align with the new *Official Plan*. Of most relevance to on-farm diversified uses and agri-tourism are the zoning by-laws, which provide regulations for development, including permitted uses, building types, setbacks, heights, and site standards.

In the Town’s “Comprehensive Zoning By-law Update & Town-wide Urban Design Guidelines: Draft Discussion Paper #2: Rural and Environmental Zones,” (2026), the paper specifically looks at zoning regulations in the rural areas of the municipality, including *agricultural system, natural heritage system, and regional greenland system* on Schedule A – Town Structure of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Official Plan. Importantly, an objective of the paper is to “establish zoning options and recommendations to support the agricultural and rural economy.”

It is important to note that within the existing Zoning By-law, neither *on-farm diversified uses* nor *agri-tourism uses* are defined or mentioned. However, other uses that may fall within *on-farm diversified uses* are defined. These include, Bed and Breakfast Establishment, Craft Brewery or Craft Cidery (2020-060-ZO), Home Industry Use, and Home Occupation.

Under Section 4: Rural and Environmental Zones, it identifies Permitted Uses, Buildings, and Structures on specific land zones. Below are the uses that are relevant to *on-farm diversified uses*. Additionally, under 4.2 Regulations, it shows the minimum lot areas, lot frontage, front yard, exterior side yard, interior side yard, rear yard; maximum lot coverage, and building height by specific land zones.

Rules for **Bed and Breakfast Establishments** change by land designation, as seen below, where, For lands with a (7) it means bed and breakfast establishments are only permitted in single detached dwellings permitted by Section 3.18, 3.19 and 3.20 of the By-law. (2013-111-ZO).

- Agricultural lands (8)
- Environmental lands outside Oak Ridges Moraine Area (8)
- Environmental lands in Oak Ridges Moraine Area (7) (8)
- Oak Ridges Moraine – Countryside lands (7) (8)
- Oak Ridges Moraine – Linkage lands (7) (8)
- Oak Rides Moraine – Natural Core lands (7) (8)

For those lands with a (8), the owner of a bed and breakfast establishments must establish to the satisfaction of the Town the adequacy of water and wastewater services. Also, every bed and breakfast establishment must provide a minimum of 37 m² of outdoor amenity space, which may consist of landscaped area, patio, verandah, porch, pool, or any combination thereof. (2013-111-ZO)

Farm Produce Sales Outlets are permitted in several designations as seen below. The maximum size of a farm produce sales outlet shall be 100 m² and is subject to a minimum lot area of 25 ha. A maximum of 25% of the sales area of a farm produce sales outlet may be devoted to the sale of produce and food products produced off the farm.

- Agricultural lands
- Environmental lands outside Oak Ridges Moraine Area
- Oak Ridges Moraine – Countryside lands (
- Oak Ridges Moraine – Linkage lands
- Oak Rides Moraine – Natural Core lands

Farm Vacation Homes are permitted in several designations as seen below. For those lands with a (7) it means a farm vacation home is only permitted in single detached dwellings permitted by Section 3.18, 3.19 and 3.20 of the By-law. (2013-111-ZO). Note this use does not appear in the updated Official Plan.

- Agricultural lands
- Environmental lands outside Oak Ridges Moraine Area
- Environmental lands in Oak Ridges Moraine Area (7)
- Oak Ridges Moraine – Countryside lands (7)
- Oak Ridges Moraine – Linkage lands (7)
- Oak Rides Moraine – Natural Core lands (7)

Home Industry uses are permitted in several designations as seen below. Home industries are subject to the regulations in Section 3.26 (2011-115-ZO).

- Agricultural lands
- Environmental lands outside Oak Ridges Moraine Area
- Environmental lands in Oak Ridges Moraine Area
- Oak Ridges Moraine – Countryside lands
- Oak Ridges Moraine – Linkage lands
- Oak Rides Moraine – Natural Core lands

Home Occupation uses are permitted in several designations as seen below. Home occupations are subject to the regulations in Section 3.27 (2011-115-ZO).

- Agricultural lands
- Environmental lands outside Oak Ridges Moraine Area
- Environmental lands in Oak Ridges Moraine Area
- Oak Ridges Moraine – Countryside lands
- Oak Ridges Moraine – Linkage lands
- Oak Rides Moraine – Natural Core lands

Low Intensity Recreation Uses are permitted in several designations as seen below. Low intensity recreation uses are subject to the regulations in Section 3.27 (2011-115-ZO).

- Oak Ridges Moraine – Countryside lands
- Oak Ridges Moraine – Linkage lands
- Oak Rides Moraine – Natural Core lands

Perspectives from Key Informant Interviews:

- **The biggest barriers are policy-level, not site-specific.** The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) is often “a policy hurdle” for overnight accommodations.
- **The TWS permitting process is fragmented and not user-friendly.** Pre-consultation is important and often reveals why an agritourism idea may not work. Usually because the site is in: Oak Ridges Moraine linkage/core, environmental protection areas, flood hazard areas, other constrained designations. Pre-consultation functions more as an early screening mechanism than as a support tool.
- **Overnight accommodation is especially tricky to permit.** Cabins, bunkies, yurts, and similar uses can work if they do not look like a dwelling unit (e.g. depends on whether it has cooking, washroom, living facilities, servicing, etc.) An unserviced cabin may be easier to interpret as permitted agritourism than a fully serviced unit. One of the biggest issues is the classification of the use, not just the use itself.
- **Municipal policy is becoming more permissive, but zoning is lagging.** Even when the policy direction is improving in the Official Plan, proponents can still get blocked by outdated zoning.
- **OMAFRA guidance is being used, but it is not binding.** It is an important a guide and interpretive tool. 2% is not always enough, depending on lot size and the nature of the use.
- **Apply a tiered approvals framework and sliding payment scale.** A sliding scale based on criteria (i.e. type of agritourism use, whether existing buildings are reused, whether new buildings are proposed, whether servicing is involved, event frequency / scale, likely traffic and servicing impacts) would work better. Small, low-impact uses in existing structures should have a lighter process and lower fee whereas larger or serviced new-build proposals should require more review. Moreover, occasional events should not be treated the same as major recurring venue operations.
- **Temporary use bylaws are not a great solution** because they are cumbersome and expensive. **Event permit processes may be more promising**, as a possible way to manage low frequency agritourism events. However, this sits with municipal administration and would require cross-department coordination.
- **Barn conversions are especially difficult.** People want to use barns for weddings and events, but barns are hard to convert because of building code and occupancy issues. Even where the idea is attractive from a tourism standpoint, barn may work better as a backdrop than as the actual occupied venue.
- **Neighbour complaints** usually relate to party-houses, errant Airbnbs, uncontrolled parking, traffic/noise from frequent large events not agritourism broadly.
- **Checklists and intake tools** can play a useful role, as long as questions are limited or they are asked verbally during a pre-application meeting rather than expecting farmers to complete a long form on their own.

What Does this All Mean?

Based on the land use planning review, agritourism in Stouffville sits within a highly layered planning system that integrates a variety of plans and policies. Key themes are expanded upon below

Permissive in Principle, Restrictive in Execution

Across all layers of the planning framework, there is clear and consistent policy support for agri-tourism and on-farm diversified uses. These uses are explicitly permitted within both prime agricultural areas and rural lands as a means of supporting rural economic diversification and the long-term viability of agriculture.

However, this permission is tightly conditioned. On-farm diversified uses must remain secondary to the principal agricultural use, be limited in scale and area (i.e., generally guided by the ~2% footprint principle identified in the OMAFRA Guidelines), demonstrate compatibility with surrounding agricultural operations, and not undermine the agricultural land base or natural heritage system. This creates a tension since at the policy level, agri-tourism is enabled, yet it is constrained at the implementation level through cumulative requirements related to scale, siting, compatibility, and environmental protection.

Tension Between the Greenbelt Plan and Provincial Guidelines

A tension exists between the *Greenbelt Plan's* reliance on the *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas (Publication 851)* and the legal status of those Guidelines themselves. The *Greenbelt Plan* repeatedly states that on-farm diversified uses must be "based on" or "in accordance with" provincial guidelines, which effectively includes them as a core decision-making framework. However, the Guidelines explicitly state that they are informational only and not a legally binding policy.

This creates an ambiguity in practice since municipalities are expected to apply the Guidelines as if they are authoritative, particularly when evaluating scale (e.g., the 2% footprint), secondary use, and compatibility. However, municipalities retain discretion to interpret or adapt these criteria, provided they achieve the same policy objectives. The result of this is that it limits the municipality's flexibility in practice and reinforces interpretations that contribute to a pattern of being permissive in principle but restrictive in execution.

Consolidated Planning Authority Enables Local Action

With the removal of upper-tier planning responsibilities, Stouffville is now the primary planning authority for land use decisions. This creates an opportunity to streamline approvals, interpret provincial policy more flexibly at the local level, and tailor zoning and implementation tools to local agricultural and tourism conditions. Importantly, the Town can inform what is permitted in Stouffville, as well as how easily it can be approved.

Official Plan is Structurally Pro-Agritourism

Stouffville's *Official Plan* builds on provincial direction by embedding agri-tourism and on-farm diversified uses directly within the Agricultural System and Rural Area policy framework. It explicitly permits a broad spectrum of uses, including accommodation like farm stays, B&Bs, and cabins; events like weddings, festivals, seasonal activities; food and beverage like cafés, restaurants, wineries, breweries, cideries; farm retail and value-added products; and educational and recreational uses like corn mazes, and petting zoos.

Importantly, the Plan positions on-farm diversified uses as part of the core rural economic function, versus incidental uses. It also supports the development of an Agri-Food Network, linking farms to tourism, processing, and local food systems; and it encourages

integration of agricultural and compatible non-agricultural uses, rather than strict separation. For this reason, it provides a strong strategic foundation for agritourism growth.

Zoning By-law Gap is the Core Implementation Barrier

Despite strong *Official Plan* direction, the current *Comprehensive Zoning By-law* is outdated (2010), it does not clearly define or enable on-farm diversified uses or agritourism uses as a unified use category, and it relies on fragmented, use-specific permissions (e.g., B&Bs, farm retail, home industries, etc.). Because of this, there is limited clarity amongst applicants around the permissions required, many proposals require minor variances or rezoning, and there is room for interpretation through the process. For this reason, the ongoing zoning by-law update is an important opportunity to formalize OFDUs as a clear, comprehensive use category, enable more uses “as-of-right”.

Community Improvement Plan as an Underutilized Enabler

The *Official Plan* designates the entire Town as a Community Improvement Project Area, enabling the use of Community Improvement Plans (CIPs), which provide a non-regulatory tool to attract private investment in agritourism, offer financial incentives (e.g., grants, loans, tax increment financing, etc.), and support marketing, infrastructure, and site improvements. This is important because the CIP framework can enable support for implementation and uptake from current and prospective agritourism businesses and operators.

Opportunity to Expand Urban-Edge and Low-Impact Agritourism

Beyond traditional farm-based agritourism, there is a clear opportunity to support emerging forms of urban and near-urban agriculture and low-impact outdoor recreation within the existing policy framework. The *Provincial Planning Statement*, *Greenbelt Plan*, and *Official Plan* all permit on-farm diversified uses, home industries, value-added activities, and resource-based recreational uses, particularly in rural lands and areas adjacent to settlement boundaries.

In addition, both the *Greenbelt Plan* and *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* support low-intensity recreational uses and trail-based systems, which can be complementary to agritourism experiences. This creates opportunities for small-scale, near-urban agriculture experiences (e.g., market gardens, educational farms, community-supported agriculture with visitor components, etc.), passive and low-impact tourism (e.g., farm trails, nature interpretation, cycling routes, seasonal outdoor programming, etc.), and hybrid models that combine food, education, and recreation without requiring large built infrastructure. This may represent a strategic opportunity to expand agritourism in a way that aligns more easily with existing policy constraints, particularly in areas where larger-scale uses may be difficult to permit.

On-farm Accommodation Versus Farm Help Accommodation

The policy framework permits both agritourism-related accommodations (e.g., farm stays, B&Bs, cabins) and farm help accommodation, but treats them as distinct and non-overlapping uses. This creates both a constraint and an opportunity. Within the *Official Plan*, agritourism accommodations are permitted as on-farm diversified uses, supporting tourism and farm income diversification. On the other hand, farm help accommodations are permitted to support agricultural labour needs, but is subject to restrictions,

including that they cannot operate concurrently with an on-farm diversified use within the same building. As a result, this creates some limitations since the same built form could not flexibly serve both tourism and labour needs at the same time (e.g., if one unit is being used by farm help other units in the same built form would not be able to be used for tourism). However, there is an opportunity to explore more flexible or shared-use accommodation models to address labour shortages and grow experiential farm stays.

Other Regulatory Considerations

Signage

Agritourism signage in Ontario is governed through a combination of transportation standards, municipal by-laws, accessibility requirements, and safety regulations. At the federal level, the Transportation Association of Canada provides guidance through the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Canada (MUTCDC) and this informs traffic and directional signage standards across jurisdictions. At the provincial level, tourism-related highway signage is primarily governed through Ontario's Tourism-Oriented Directional Signing (TODS) program, which is administered by the Ministry of Transportation and Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming. These "blue signs" provide standardized tourism wayfinding on provincial highways. Provincial oversight also includes the Highway Traffic Act, Ontario Traffic Manual (OTM), which are instruments for the regulation, design standards, placement, and operational requirements for all directional signage across Ontario's transportation network. Additional regulatory considerations includes the Ontario Building Code requirements related to structural safety and installation, and Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) requirements related to readability related to the contrast, and placement. Some destinations and tourism organizations operate coordinated tourism wayfinding programs or branded signage systems intended to improve visitor navigation and destination consistency. In Ontario, for example, the Niagara Falls Tourism and municipal partners across the Niagara Region have implemented coordinated visitor wayfinding and branded tourism signage to create a more consistent visitor experience across attractions, gateways, and tourism districts. Similarly, the RTO4 region has supported tourism wayfinding initiatives and destination branding programs across multiple municipalities and tourism operators, helping visitors navigate between downtowns, cultural attractions, trails, and regional experiences under a more unified tourism identity. At the local level, the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville regulates signage through multiple municipal frameworks, including the Town's Sign and Advertising Devices By-law, Portable Signs By-law, Comprehensive Zoning By-law, and related permitting and road authority approval processes.

Within the agricultural and rural context, signage permissions and requirements may vary significantly depending on whether an activity is considered a primary agricultural use, an on-farm diversified use (OFDU), or a commercial/tourism-oriented use. In practice, this can affect the type, scale, placement, duration, and permitting requirements associated with farm identification signage, directional signage, event signage, and advertising signage. Additional permissions may also be required where signage is located within regional road allowances under York Region jurisdiction, on public boulevards, or within regulated corridors. Depending on the nature and intensity of the activity, agritourism operations may also trigger additional municipal considerations related to signage zoning compliance, temporary event sign permissions, parking and site circulation, visibility and traffic safety, illumination standards, servicing, and emergency access. Illuminated signage may additionally require review through the

Electrical Safety Authority (ESA). Collectively, these frameworks demonstrate how the transition from a traditional agricultural use toward more visitor-oriented or commercialized agritourism activities can be accompanied by important signage requirements and other operational considerations within the Town of Stouffville context.

Health and safety

Health and safety governance represents one of the most significant operational and regulatory considerations for agritourism businesses. Agritourism operations exist at the interface between public visitation and active agricultural environments, which may contain machinery, livestock, uneven terrain, food preparation areas, temporary structures, event spaces, water features, and seasonal infrastructure. As such, operators must be mindful of the potential risks associated with these environments while balancing agricultural authenticity and visitor experience with evolving public safety, risk management, and operational oversight considerations.

Provincially, workplace health and safety oversight is primarily governed through Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and workplace regulations administered by the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. Provisions relate to worker training and supervision, farm machinery and equipment safety, hazard communication and signage, fall protection requirements under O. Reg. 213/91 (Construction Projects); workplace safety obligations under Reg. 851 (Industrial Establishments), emergency preparedness, electrical safety, and the safe use of temporary structures and event-related infrastructure. Additional oversight may involve Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) requirements, Ontario Fire Code provisions, Ontario Building Code standards, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) requirements, public health regulations, and emergency management considerations depending on the nature and scale of the operation.

Ontario's Growing Agritourism Act (2024) introduced additional liability protection measures, under Section 3(1), for agritourism providers using inherent risk notices and warning signage. Section 6 says While these measures provide important risk management tools for operators, they do not remove the responsibility for reasonable safety precautions, due diligence, operational planning, or maintaining safe visitor environments.

At the local level, municipalities like the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and York Region's public health authorities play a significant role in regulating visitor-facing agritourism operations through frameworks such as the Comprehensive Zoning By-law, Site Plan Control processes, Special Event Permit requirements, fire inspections, occupancy limits, parking and traffic management requirements, washroom and servicing standards, accessibility considerations, emergency access requirements, and public health inspections. Larger-scale events or tourism-oriented operations may additionally require coordination with fire services, York Regional Police, emergency services, public health officials, conservation authorities, or regional transportation departments depending on the scale and complexity of the activity.

A key governance and planning consideration for agritourism operations involves the transition of agricultural spaces into public-facing visitor environments. Farm buildings, barns, greenhouses, or agricultural lands that may operate primarily under agricultural permissions or exemptions can trigger additional building, assembly occupancy, accessibility, fire safety, event, or site servicing requirements once tourism-oriented uses are introduced. This is particularly relevant for weddings, festivals, farm dinners, retail

operations, educational programming, overnight accommodations, seasonal attractions, or larger visitor gatherings where public access and visitor intensity substantially increase.

Site-specific health and safety considerations often include visitor circulation, emergency access planning, crowd management, lighting, fencing and barriers, parking management, accessibility accommodations, weather protection, hazard identification and mitigation, sanitation infrastructure, temporary structure safety, traffic coordination, and incident response procedures. Seasonal operations may also require snow and ice management planning, heat mitigation measures, and/or temporary infrastructure inspections, depending on the activity type and time of year.

Industry organizations and non-governmental actors also contribute operational guidance, education, training resources, and sector-specific best practices related to agritourism risk management and visitor safety, including but not limited to the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, Farm and Food Care Ontario, Workplace Safety and Prevention Services (WSPS), insurers, event safety consultants, and agricultural commodity organizations.

The health and safety governance environment surrounding agritourism demonstrates that these operations exist at the intersection of agriculture, tourism, hospitality, public assembly, and recreation. From a municipal planning and approvals perspective, this reinforces the importance of coordinated interdepartmental review, proactive operator education, clear guidance frameworks, and early communication between operators and regulatory authorities as agricultural properties evolve into more public-facing tourism environments.

Insurance and Liability

Insurance and liability management represent foundational governance and operational considerations for agritourism businesses due to the inherently variable, public-facing, and multi-use nature of agritourism activities. Agritourism businesses bring hospitality, recreation, retail, food service, event programming, and public assembly functions into active agricultural settings, creating complex liability and risk management environments that differ substantially from running agricultural operations alone.

Provincially, liability frameworks are influenced through Ontario's Occupiers' Liability Act, insurance law, workplace safety legislation, Ontario's Growing Agritourism Act (2024), and broader common law duty of care principles. The introduction of agritourism liability protections and inherent risk notices under the Growing Agritourism Act provides additional legal and operational tools for operators through warning signage, as mentioned previously, and visitor awareness measures. However, these provisions do not eliminate the need for appropriate insurance coverage, operational due diligence, documented safety procedures, and/or reasonable precautions to be taken to protect agritourism visitors, staff, volunteers, and participants.

For the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, insurance and liability considerations frequently intersect with municipal approvals, permitting, and operational review processes. Proof of insurance is required as part of special event permit applications, facility rentals, road occupancy permissions, temporary structure approvals, municipal alcohol policy requirements, or other municipal approvals involving public access or visitor activity. This is particularly relevant for farm weddings, festivals, seasonal attractions, alcohol service, petting zoos, food service operations, temporary tents and structures, parking areas, shuttle operations, or activities occurring on or adjacent to public lands and roadways.

From a municipal planning and risk management perspective, liability considerations often increase as agricultural operations transition into more visitor-facing tourism environments. Uses involving large gatherings, overnight accommodations, entertainment programming, interactive experiences, or higher visitor volumes will likely trigger additional review related to emergency management planning, fire safety, crowd management, traffic coordination, accessibility, servicing capacity, and operational oversight. Agritourism operators may therefore encounter liability-related considerations indirectly through zoning interpretation, event approvals, site plan review, fire and emergency services coordination, or public health and building review processes.

At the site-specific level, risk management strategies commonly include visitor waivers, warning and inherent risk signage, incident reporting systems, documented emergency procedures, staff and volunteer training, security planning, accessibility accommodations, transportation coordination, fencing and barriers, animal interaction protocols, weather response plans, and formalized health and safety procedures. Operators may also require specialized insurance products related to alcohol service, equine activities, food operations, festivals, entertainment programming, or overnight accommodations depending on the scale and nature of the operation.

Other variables to consider are non-governmental organizations and private sector actors, including insurers, legal advisors, event management professionals, agricultural associations, and risk management consultants, who also shape operational expectations and best practices within the agritourism sector. Insurance providers often influence operational design decisions through coverage conditions related to occupancy limits, fencing requirements, security staffing, emergency access, inspections, or documented safety procedures.

Food, farm retail, and waste management

Foodservice and farm retail operations introduce additional layers of public health, food safety, and municipal governance into agritourism businesses. Activities such as prepared food sales, sampling, food trucks, farm dinners, catering, seasonal markets, and on-farm retail can trigger multiple regulatory and approval requirements depending on the scale and nature of the operation.

Provincially, food operations are governed through the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA), the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario Regulation 493/17 (Food Premises), the Food Safety and Quality Act, and commodity-specific legislation related to meat, dairy, eggs, and produce. York Region Public Health also plays a central role in food safety governance through inspections, approvals, operator requirements, and ongoing operational oversight.

Within the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, food-related agritourism activities may additionally engage municipal frameworks, including the Comprehensive Zoning By-law, Site Plan Control requirements, Special Event Permit processes, the Community Festivals and Events Policy, Municipal Alcohol Policy, building permit requirements, parking standards, servicing requirements, waste management considerations, and fire safety review processes. Depending on the intensity and frequency of the tourism activity, operations may transition from being interpreted as traditional farm-related uses (e.g. the sale of fruits and vegetables grown on the property) toward more commercialized foodservice, hospitality, or event-based uses (e.g. preparing food in a restaurant style setting) triggering additional approvals, inspections, and operational requirements.

Site-specific operational considerations can include commercial kitchen requirements, handwashing facilities, refrigeration, potable water access, food handling procedures,

waste management systems, emergency access, parking and circulation management, and temporary vendor coordination. Industry organizations like Farmers' Markets Ontario, CanadaGAP, commodity organizations, and HACCP food safety programs also contribute operational standards and voluntary best practices across the sector.

Importantly, many agritourism operators may unintentionally transition into more heavily regulated food service environments as tourism activities expand over time. Farm dinners, tasting experiences, prepared foods, seasonal markets, and larger visitor events often trigger greater public health and municipal oversight than traditional farm retail activities alone.

Alcohol

Alcohol service within agritourism operations is heavily regulated and often intersects with event management, hospitality, tourism, and agricultural production frameworks. At the federal level, excise and alcohol manufacturing rules apply where alcohol production occurs, including at wineries, cideries, meaderies, breweries, or distilleries.

Provincially, alcohol service and sales are governed through the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO), the Liquor Licence and Control Act, the AGCO's manufacturer licensing systems – which allows producers to store and sell their own products directly or through retail channels – and Special Occasion Permit (SOP) requirements. Note, special occasion permits are commonly required where alcohol is sold or served outside of licensed establishments or private residences, including weddings, festivals, tastings, dinners, and public events hosted on farms.

Within the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, alcohol-related agritourism activities may additionally engage municipal frameworks, including the Comprehensive Zoning By-law, Special Event Permit processes, the Community Festivals and Events Policy, Municipal Alcohol Policy, noise by-laws, parking and traffic management requirements, fire and emergency access review processes, and site servicing considerations. Depending on the scale of the event or operation, activities such as weddings, tasting events, seasonal festivals, or farm-based hospitality experiences may trigger additional municipal approvals, public health involvement, York Regional Police coordination, and/or emergency planning requirements.

Site-specific operational considerations can include licensed area boundaries, fencing, security requirements, smart serving certification, transportation and shuttle planning, washroom capacity, food service availability, occupancy limits, crowd management measures, and emergency access provisions. In some cases, temporary structures, tents, or event infrastructure may also require building or fire review approvals. Non-governmental organizations and industry actors such as Smart Serve Ontario, insurers, event security providers, and alcohol producers also influence operational expectations and risk management practices within the sector.

As noted in previous sections, many agritourism operators may unintentionally transition into more heavily regulated commercial, hospitality or event-based environments as tourism activities expand over time. Farm weddings, tasting experiences, seasonal festivals, catered events, and ticketed gatherings often trigger substantially greater operational, licensing, insurance, and municipal oversight requirements than traditional agricultural uses alone. For smaller-scale accommodations such as farm stays or bed-and-breakfast operations, some operators instead rely on lower-risk approaches such as BYOB policies or complimentary welcome beverages rather than formal alcohol sales programs.

Animal Experiences

Animal-based tourism experiences represent one of the most distinctive, but also one of the highest-risk, components of some agritourism operations. At the federal level, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) oversees matters related to animal disease control, biosecurity, import and export requirements, livestock traceability, and reportable diseases.

Provincially, OMAFA, Ontario's Provincial Animal Welfare Services (PAWS) Act, animal health regulations, livestock transportation standards, and sector-specific requirements related to equine operations, poultry, dairy, or other livestock activities. Public health authorities may additionally become involved where zoonotic disease risks exist or where animal interactions occur in high-volume visitor environments.

Within the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, animal-based agritourism activities may additionally engage municipal frameworks, including the Comprehensive Zoning By-law, animal control by-laws, property standards requirements, noise by-laws, Special Event Permit processes, site plan considerations, parking and traffic management requirements, and public safety review processes. Depending on the scale and nature of the operation, activities such as petting zoos, equestrian experiences, educational farm tours, animal demonstrations, seasonal festivals, or temporary events may trigger additional municipal review related to visitor safety, emergency access, servicing capacity, circulation management, and compatibility with surrounding rural and residential uses.

Site-specific operational considerations often include visitor separation measures, fencing and containment systems, feeding controls, supervised interaction areas, handwashing and sanitation stations, manure management practices, biosecurity procedures, accessibility considerations, weather protection, staff and volunteer training, and emergency response planning for both visitors and animals. Larger-scale or higher-volume operations may also require coordination with fire services, public health officials, veterinarians, insurers, or emergency services depending on the activity type and visitor volumes. Industry organizations and non-governmental actors, including veterinarians, agricultural commodity organizations, equine associations, 4-H Ontario programs, fall fair and festival organizations, and farm safety organizations, also influence operational expectations, risk management practices, and animal welfare standards across the sector.

Importantly, animal-based agritourism requires careful balancing between visitor experience, agricultural authenticity, animal welfare, operational safety, and public health protection. This is particularly relevant for interactive experiences such as petting zoos, horseback riding, educational farm programming, animal feeding activities, and seasonal attractions where agricultural operations transition into more intensive visitor-facing tourism environments.

Broadly, the governance environment surrounding agritourism demonstrates that these operations are not regulated through a single framework, but rather through a highly interconnected system of agricultural, tourism, land use planning, public health, emergency management, transportation, and municipal governance structures. From a municipal planning perspective, this reinforces the importance of coordinated review processes, clear policy direction, early interdepartmental collaboration, and proactive communication with operators as agricultural activities evolve into more complex visitor-serving uses.

Human Resources

Human resources and employment governance within agritourism operations often intersects with agriculture, hospitality, tourism, food service, retail, and event management frameworks. Agritourism businesses frequently rely on a combination of seasonal staff, family labour, volunteers, hospitality workers, event staff, and tourism employees, creating a complex operational environment that blends traditional agricultural activity with visitor-facing tourism operations. Importantly, as agritourism activities expand, staff can no longer be viewed simply as informal or seasonal farm help, but increasingly operate within regulated employment, hospitality, customer service, food handling, and public safety environments that require more formalized staffing structures, training, and oversight.

At the federal level, employment governance relates to payroll taxation, Employment Insurance (EI), the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), temporary foreign worker programs, and federal human rights protections.

Provincially, employment standards and workplace safety are primarily governed through the Employment Standards Act (ESA), Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), Human Rights Code, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) requirements, and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). A key governance consideration is that some agricultural labour exemptions may no longer apply once operations transition into tourism-oriented activities, such as accommodations, restaurants, events, retail, entertainment programming, or hospitality services.

Within the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, staffing and employment considerations may also intersect with municipal approval and operational requirements related to Special Event Permits, occupancy limits, fire safety planning, parking and traffic management, emergency management procedures, accessibility requirements, and security or crowd management expectations. For example, larger scale agritourism operations or event-based activities may require designated staffing related to first aid, security, parking coordination, traffic control, food handling, alcohol service, customer service, or emergency response planning. Municipal review processes may therefore indirectly influence staffing models, operational planning, and labour requirements as agritourism operations evolve into more intensive visitor-serving environments.

Regional organizations such as workforce planning boards, tourism organizations, chambers of commerce, and economic development departments may also support tourism workforce development, labour attraction, hospitality training, and sector capacity-building initiatives. Public health units may additionally influence staffing requirements related to sanitation protocols, food handling certifications, and public-facing operations.

Non-governmental organizations such as Workplace Safety and Prevention Services (WSPS), Tourism HR Canada, Farm and Food Care Ontario, Smart Serve Ontario, insurers, and agricultural safety organizations also shape workforce expectations, operational standards, risk management practices, and training requirements across the agritourism sector.

Site-specific operational considerations often include staff health and safety training, emergency procedures, accessibility accommodations, food handling certifications, Smart Serve certification, customer service standards, volunteer management

procedures, incident reporting systems, animal handling protocols, supervision requirements, and workplace harassment and violence policies. Seasonal tourism environments may additionally require onboarding procedures, visitor management training, transportation coordination, and weather-related safety planning.

A challenge for agritourism operators is recognizing when operations shift from primarily agricultural activities into hospitality and tourism environments that require substantially higher levels of staffing oversight, documentation, customer service management, operational coordination, and public safety planning. From a municipal planning and economic development perspective, this reinforces the importance of clear guidance, coordinated approvals processes, workforce development support, and proactive operator education as agritourism activities continue to diversify and intensify over time.

DRAFT

3. Agritourism Today

Trends

When destinations lean into unique selling points rather than replicate the offerings of other destinations, they can better differentiate themselves in the marketplace. At the same time, staying on top of what visitors are looking for can help to inform strategic planning generally, and product development in particular. Below is a list of key travel trends identified for 2026, with comment on how they relate to agritourism in Stouffville.

Near-urban, short-break destinations

Domestic travel continues to be a major trend with visitors. With the increase in cost of living, many travellers are looking for shorter trips and budget-friendly destinations. At the same time, interest in rural tourism and road trips continues post-COVID, with urban visitors seeking out daytrip and weekend getaways. This trend plays in Stouffville's favour due to its proximity to Greater Toronto Area markets. There is also an opportunity to attract new visitors, while encouraging previous visitors to return and experience the destination in a different season. If visitor expectations are met, domestic audiences and regional audiences in particular present an opportunity to grow repeat visitation.

Visitors today are in search of stackable experiences where they can combine multiple activities (i.e. farm retail + quick activity + food and drink). This is something that can be developed to grow agritourism in Stouffville. That said, when catering to weekend travellers, visitation peaks can strain local infrastructure and detract from the visitor and local experience. Adequate visitor management through tools like wayfinding and parking is important for building a visitor economy that also works for residents.

Continued rise of the experience economy

There is strong visitor interest in travel that goes beyond sightseeing and instead focuses on engaging with destination communities in a meaningful, personalized way. For example, connecting with local culture, developing new skills, and supporting community-led projects. A tourism approach that prioritizes stewardship, while creating opportunities for connection and storytelling, aligns with this kind of visitor demand.

Destinations around the world are responding to this trend by moving away from *icons* and towards *experiences*, with curated, bookable activities becoming central. One approach favoured by some destinations is to develop on-farm seasonal events and pop-ups, which can be a useful to combating seasonality in tourism and lead to major food and beverage spending. The drawback is that such events often mean complex operations and increased visitation-pressures across specific timeframes. It also comes with a need for permitting clarity, traffic and parking management, safety planning, and neighbour relations. An additional way to tap into the experience economy is to develop farm offerings that combine learning, immersion, and sensory engagement (i.e. tours, workshops, tastings, seasonal moments). Increasingly, this also means visitor-facing interpretation and customer services skills are key for agritourism operators, as visitors look to be engaged and interact directly with agricultural producers and staff. This creates a strong fit for farm-to-table, tastings, u-pick, markets, on-farm retail, and interpretive elements that make farm practices tangible.

Stouffville should expect more planning applications for experience-forward uses (workshops, tours, small-scale hospitality, structured programming). This can and should be complemented by a destination-wide emphasis on experience packaging across farms (i.e. clusters, routes, etc.). An opportunity exists to ensure that agritourism experiences are bundled and bookable online, particularly as use of AI and online tech rises among visitors.

Perspectives from Key Informant Interviews:

- **Help operators see the value in small-scale experiences:** Farmers do not always recognize the “magic” in simple activities like digging carrots, cutting herbs, or watching goats being milked. Support should include helping operators identify easy, low-lift experiences they can offer without overcomplicating things.
- **Encourage operators to choose models that fit their farm and capacity:** Agritourism should not look the same everywhere. Farms should be encouraged to create experiences that fit their own personality, workload, and comfort level. Not everyone should build large, family-focused attractions.
- **Provide business training and practical guidance:** New agritourism businesses many not understand that people will pay well for boutique, curated experiences. There is a need for business training to help farmers understand pricing, packaging, staffing, and return on investment. Pair this with networking and peer learning opportunities for farmers, encouraging early adopters share what is working and celebrating these successes through marketing support.
- **Expand thinking beyond family-focused offers.** Agritourism does not all need to be for families with children. There is also a market for adults, couples, and double-income-no-kids visitors seeking unique, curated rural experiences.
- **Support overnight and wellness-oriented products:** Glamping and overnight stays, especially in areas with limited accommodation, along with wellness retreats, yoga, mindfulness, and workshop-style farm days are emerging opportunities.
- **Use collaboration and route-based/product-based approaches:** Not every farm needs to build a standalone attraction; some could plug into broader experiences like farm crawls, routes, or multi-stop curated products. This can reduce the burden on individual operators while still growing the destination offer.
- **Agritourism grows when farms offer more than one reason to visit.**
- Having **flexible spaces** means that businesses are more resilient in that they can change what they offer to visitors and when.

Luxury, nature, and wellness retreats

Wellness tourism has grown into one of the world's fastest-expanding tourism segments, driven by rising concerns about mental health, chronic disease, and social stressors. A recent 2025 Globe and Mail article, “The explosive rise of wellness tourism, from digital detoxes and sleep retreats to dopamine dining” presents it as a sub-sector projected to reach US\$9 trillion by 2028. Canada plays a significant role in this global landscape, with the country's overall wellness economy having reached US\$143.8 billion in 2023, ranking eighth worldwide and accounting for 6.72% of national GDP.

Looking at the Ontario context, according to Destination Ontario's “December 2025 Ontario Travel & Tourism Monthly,” 70% of travellers to Ontario who were surveyed identify Ontario as a province whose travel experiences allow them to recharge. This is

reinforced by Destination Ontario's 2025 "Ontario Consumer Report," where 26% of survey participants identify health & wellness as an aspect of their favourite leisure activities while travelling in Ontario.

In parallel, unique, one-of-a-kind accommodations are becoming an important part of the visitor experience. Such accommodations are now draws, incentivizing guests to pick one destination over another. There is a diversity of trendy accommodations that visitors are planning trips around including revamped motels, treehouses, glamping, and floating hotels to name a few. For example, treehouses, cabins, and glamping accommodations are popping up around the world. Often, they are set up in forests or sites with dramatic viewpoints, whether rural or remote. These self-contained accommodations are in demand and range from basic to luxurious. They convey a sense of retreat and often include whimsical, fairytale touches like string lights, reading nooks, or stargazing windows. Some of these accommodations lean into wellness trends by providing saunas, hot tubs, or an opportunity for a digital detox.

Canada's accommodation scene is leaning into wellness including through the growth of digital detoxes and quiet escapes, sometimes referred to as ("hushpitality"). Other points of appeal include off-grid and active/nature-based wellbeing experiences. This trend supports retreat-like, low-crowd, and nature-connected farm experiences (i.e. nature walks, dark-sky, sauna/cold plunge wellness add-ons where appropriate, quiet zones, mindful programming, etc.). Local food and landscapes add value to these experiences by creating a sense of place.

Retreats are an important element of wellness tourism that can be incorporated into agritourism. They may be themed such as yoga retreats or digital detox retreats, but the setting, programming, and accommodation should allow guests to get away from the stresses of life and focus on their wellbeing. Retreats can take place in a variety of settings and offer important local economic benefit since they continue to run mid-week as well as in the winter/shoulder seasons, drawing in groups of visitors, usually for several nights. When retreat centres maintain a connection to the communities where they are based, their local benefits are stronger. This could be through food procurement or by encouraging guests to explore off resort. In recent years, there's also been an increase in solo travel, especially among younger visitors, as digital nomadism and wellness tourism grow. As a result, destinations should look to develop tourism products and experiences catered to these individuals, including packages and itineraries, opportunities for connection, as well as emphasizing safety and comfort.

For Stouffville, wellness tourism trends provide an additional motivation for protecting and communicating rural tranquillity and landscape quality to visitors (e.g. low noise, minimal light pollution, compatibility guidance, visitor dispersal, etc.). This trend also sets up an opportunity for winter and shoulder-season wellness programming. Certain destinations close to urban centres, like the Laurentians in Quebec have recently launched a responsible and slow tourism resource page for travellers to appeal to mindful consumption and inform positive behaviour when visiting.

Shifting travel seasons

The idea of travelling to a crowded destination at the height of the summer season is losing its appeal. Visitors are choosing to visit when temperatures are more bearable and when they can have more meaningful experiences. This even means taking their children out of school for a little while and/or adding a few days on either side of a vacation. Others are also actively choosing to visit more temperate destinations.

At the same time, seasonal adaptation (e.g. through the timing of activities or offering shade shelters, etc.) is increasingly necessary to ensure visitor comfort, especially for outdoor activities. For agritourism, this trend is likely to impact crop-linked experiences (u-pick timing), outdoor event reliability, and heat/smoke/extreme weather contingencies. This context increases the value of shoulder-season programming and weather-resilient infrastructure. Fortunately, this kind of diversification can produce additional benefits such as visitor dispersal across the year, support business resiliency, and diversifying the visitor offering through seasonal activities (e.g., fall fairs, winter escapes, spring planting season workshops, etc.). In the years to come, agritourism development will increasingly intersect with climate adaptation expectations (shade, water management, emergency planning, infrastructure resilience). Relevant infrastructure should be considered in designing agritourism businesses and experiences.

Changing Spending Habits

Canadians are concerned about food prices and using cost-saving strategies; which can carry into food-related leisure behaviour and willingness to pay for add-ons. This trend points to an advantage for offers that are clearly priced, family-friendly, and value-transparent; while signalling an increased sensitivity to entry fees and upsells unless the experience is distinctive and/or educational. Agritourism is often framed as a journey where visitors understand “people and processes that grow and make food.” Interestingly, several agricultural producers engaged as part of the research for this process noted that education and learning are often motivating factors for agritourists who want to learn a new skill or simply where their food comes from. These farmers also positioned leaning into sustainable food systems as a potential differentiating factor for agritourism in Stouffville.

Consumers often equate “local” with “sustainable” but may struggle to identify sustainability without clear cues. This supports the case for ensuring a mix of free/low-cost access points (e.g., scenic stops, public space activations, trails connectivity) alongside paid experiences at local businesses to keep agritourism broadly accessible while supporting farm business viability. In addition this trend points to a potential role for the Town of Stouffville in enabling local food culture infrastructure (marketplaces, routes, wayfinding, event permissions, etc.) as well as offering consistent messaging around what “local/sustainable” means in the local farm context.

Digital Discovery

The use of artificial intelligence in the travel industry is increasing as travellers look for support with travel planning (e.g. itinerary development) and destinations seek to offer a seamless travel experience and better manage the destination, through customer service, operational efficiency, wayfinding, data collection, etc. Ensuring destination discoverability by Generative AI tools is already a key part of being found and selected by potential visitors. This is happening within a landscape of uneven SME readiness and where algorithmic pathways can worsen overtourism or misinformation (i.e. by sharing incorrect information that consumers trust without verifying). In this context, farms without a strong digital presence risk invisibility and bookable experiences with clear online information become more important as travellers rely on AI, Online Travel Agencies (i.e. third-party digital marketplaces like Booking.com), and social media searches.

This trend builds the case for Town-enabled digital foundations that reduce friction for visitors. Examples of how to do this include consistent listing standards, easily available

and consistent wayfinding information, seasonal calendars, and supports to grow small operators' digital readiness.

Perspectives from Key Informants:

- **Stouffville already has compelling agritourism assets**, especially wineries, but many people simply do not know about them. Stouffville's **wineries** are among the closest to the GTA. **Cideries** also have much potential.
- Producers may feel hesitant about new technology and can be a learning curve. Growth is more likely when the setup is **simple, minimal, affordable, and ideally centralized into one system**, where people can see farms nearby, understand what each one offers, and go directly to that farm's storefront. It also takes some of the marketing burden off of farmers.

Business viability and market pressures

Workforce shortages and technology adoption barriers are persistent challenges for tourism and agricultural businesses, making agritourism particularly hard hit. Labour shortages also limit operator capacity to extend hours and seasons of operations and deliver consistent service quality to customers. At the same time, these labour challenges increase the value of operational efficiency, simplification, and potentially tech-enabled processes.

As agricultural technologies develop and are adopted by farms in Stouffville, this has the potential to translate into new agritourism experiences across the visitor journey, from trip planning to visitor interactions to learning about tech-led and climate adaptation solutions (e.g. hydroponic farms, AI-management systems for farms, etc.).

It is well known that market structures tend to favour large scale enterprises. Smaller producers adapt with strategies including community-embedded models (CSAs, co-ops, workshops), collaboration, and tourism. As labour challenges worsen, agritourism expansion will likely come with needs for training opportunities, creative staffing solutions (e.g. one tour guide who works on multiple farms), and practical supports that reduce burden on small operators. To meet visitor needs, agritourism businesses are trending towards multi-function farm models, combining multiple uses like retail, education, events, etc. As this trend progresses, collaboration between farms and other local businesses will increasingly become a strategy to stay competitive.

What Makes a Great Agritourism Business?

Great agritourism businesses blend an authentic agricultural identity with well-designed, visitor-focused experiences—supported by strong infrastructure, skilled people, strategic seasonal evolutions, and collaboration. A literature review was conducted to identify key elements of great agritourism businesses, and these good practices are outlined below. These findings will help to inform the agritourism toolkits that will be developed as part of this project.

Visitor-centered experiences

Successful agritourism businesses focus on the visitor experience not just the agricultural products they offer. Leading operators design offerings that go beyond transactional

farm-gate sales to provide engaging, memorable experiences such as tours, workshops, festivals, and hands-on activities. These experiences are intentionally aligned with visitor motivations like learning, relaxation, and family connection, and are supported by educational storytelling and interpretation. Importantly, products (fresh or value-added) add to the visit rather than define it, positioning the farm as a place to experience rather than simply purchase aligns with current visitor expectations.

Authenticity, storytelling, and sense of place

Great agritourism businesses tell compelling stories about the farm, its people, and its practices to connect emotionally with visitors. This includes sharing stories about production processes and ties to local culture. Strong storytelling should take place across all touchpoints of the visitor journey, both online and in-person. It should aim to convey meaning, values, and the “behind-the-scenes” reality of farm life. Perceived authenticity is a key driver of trust, repeat visitation, and word-of-mouth marketing.

To be successful in this, it is also important that agritourism businesses clearly articulate a value proposition based on authenticity, local connection, and experiential value. Many successful agritourism businesses use digital channels strategically to communicate what visitors will feel, learn, and do on the farm, rather than just what they can buy. Strong visual storytelling, consistent brand voice, and active engagement with audiences help build loyalty and anticipation. Clear booking pathways and accurate, detailed information further reinforce professionalism and ease of access, incentivizing booking. It is equally important that the visitor experience promised online is available in real life so that visitor expectations are met and ideally exceeded. The theme of authenticity should continue on the ground.

Perspectives from Key Informants

- Comparators like Uxbridge show what **stronger agriculture-focused positioning** can look like, suggesting that Stouffville could learn from models that are more rooted in agriculture.
- **Big community events**, like the Strawberry Festival could support agritourism. It draws lots of people, but the agricultural/strawberry focus is weak. There is an opportunity to reconnect major events more intentionally to local agriculture.

Diversified offerings across the year

Successful agritourism businesses tend to offer a diverse but cohesive mix of products, services, and experiences. This may include a mix of retail (e.g. farm products and value-added goods from the farm and other local businesses), hospitality (e.g. food service, accommodations), and activities (e.g. events, education, recreation, workshops, etc.). Integration between these offerings is key. High-performing operations connect food, retail, and experiences seamlessly (e.g., tastings paired with tours, farm-to-table meals using on-site products). This diversification supports multiple revenue streams while maintaining a clear connection to the core agricultural operation. These learnings have implications for business model design and the sorts of buildings and spaces that will be needed to support these visitor experience on farm.

Rather than viewing seasonality as a limitation, successful agritourism businesses try to leverage it as an asset. They align experiences with agricultural cycles (e.g., harvest events, u-pick seasons, maple workshops, fall festivals, etc.) and use seasonal programming to

create time-relevance and uniqueness. For example, West Avenue Cidery in Freelon, Ontario sets up picnic tables in the winter and fire pits in the colder months, encouraging more visitors to get outside year-round. They also have an indoor tasting room for inclement weather. At the same time, agritourism businesses need to make deliberate operational decisions when it comes to seasonality. This may include adjusting staffing, hours, and offerings to manage risk and avoid overextending resources or reducing the quality of the visitor experience.

Infrastructure and visitor readiness

Delivering a strong agritourism experience depends on intentional investment in both physical and operational infrastructure, including practical elements like parking, washrooms, signage, accessibility features, and safe visitor circulation, as well as welcoming spaces like farm stores and gathering areas. Equally important are digital systems (i.e. websites, online booking, POS systems) and clear pre-visit information that helps visitors plan their experience. Increasingly, since the COVID-19 pandemic, visitors expect to be able to reserve online for a guaranteed-experience. Attention to accessibility, cleanliness, wayfinding, and first impressions are also important to signal professionalism and enhances visitor satisfaction.

People are central to the success of agritourism. High-performing businesses prioritize customer service, hospitality, and interpretation skills, ensuring staff can act as knowledgeable and welcoming “ambassadors” for the farm. Not all farmers make great hosts. Training, cross-skilling, and positive workplace culture are critical, particularly given the reliance on seasonal, flexible labour, that may be paid minimum wage. Businesses that invest in their teams through recognition, meaningful work, and skill development are better positioned to deliver consistent, high-quality visitor experiences. Holding on to staff is often a focus of successful agritourism businesses. Expanding into the shoulder and winter seasons makes it easier for businesses to attract workers with full time work.

Perspectives from Key Informant Interviews:

- Stouffville needs places for people to stay. **Accommodations** are a major missing piece especially if the town wants to grow year-round visitation.
- **Marketing and packaging** matter as much as the product. Stouffville should package experiences together, and marketing them at the destination level so small businesses are not left to do it alone.
- Town should actively **attract** missing pieces of the visitor experience.

Collaboration

Finally, successful agritourism businesses do not operate in isolation. They collaborate with other farms, tourism operators, and destination organizations to create bundled experiences, regional routes, and cross-promotional opportunities. They are helping to build up a destination with a critical mass of attractions. Partnerships with municipalities, DMOs, and community organizations amplify visibility, improve visitor readiness, and integrate farms into broader tourism itineraries. This connected approach strengthens both individual businesses and the overall destination. For Stouffville businesses, encouraging the movement of visitors between agricultural businesses and the downtown can help to disperse the benefits of tourism across the community.

Perspectives from Key Informant Interviews:

- **Partnerships** will be important to the success of agritourism development, including with organizations such as Parks Canada, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the Chamber of Commerce, York Farm Fresh, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, etc.

How Can Municipalities Support Agritourism?

Municipalities play an important role in shaping the conditions that allow agritourism to grow, balancing farm viability and destination development. Through planning policies, funding tools, business supports, infrastructure investments, and tourism leadership, municipalities can help reduce barriers for farm operators and clarify what is possible. In doing so, they can create an environment where agritourism businesses are able to develop more confidently. Municipal support is most effective when coordinated across planning, economic development, and tourism departments. Of course, it is essential that efforts to support agritourism development balance opportunities for diversification with the long-term protection of agricultural land and farm operations.

Tools and Trainings

Municipalities can support agritourism development by equipping farmers and rural entrepreneurs with practical tools and capacity-development opportunities. Examples include creating agritourism toolkits, how-to checklists, and tourism business resources. Such tools can focus on a variety of topics including, what uses are permitted, how approvals work, and what operators should consider around accessibility, risk management, signage, neighbour relations, etc. Simcoe County and the City of Ottawa both offer toolkits for farmers interested in agritourism development, while Durham Region and its lower-tier municipalities created a step-by-step application toolkit to help farmers determine whether an agritourism business idea is permitted before moving into the application process.

Municipalities can also support agritourism development by sharing visitor data, tourism trends, customer-service tips, creating farmer-chef networking opportunities, etc. via webinars, workshops, videos, and in-person trainings. This kind of information makes it easier for agritourism operators to develop solid, reality-based business plans. Norfolk County's Planning 101 videos, Haldimand County's workshops on on-farm diversification, and Durham Region's advisory supports make planning processes build farmer confidence to invest in their business ideas. It is important for municipal staff to stay on top of agritourism trends and best practices so they can connect agritourism business owners to relevant resources. Haldimand County, for example, partners with the Haldimand Federation of Agriculture to offer workshops related to biosecurity, on-farm diversification, and farm resilience. Norfolk County's Agritourism Spark Program adds an incubation layer to the municipal support system by pairing seed funding with mentorship for new agritourism ideas.

- Examples of on-farm diversified uses and agritourism toolkits from [City of Ottawa](#) and [Simcoe County](#).
- The Ontario Federation of agriculture created an information sheet for non-farmers in rural areas. The document outlines respect for farm operations and normal farm

operations. The [Welcome to Rural Ontario](#) information sheet aims to reduce conflict between farmers and neighbours.

Marketing and Product Development Support

Municipal support for agritourism marketing and product development tend to focus on helping farm businesses become more visible and offer new experiences that complement the broader destination offering. Examples of how this is done include, food and farm trails, shared branding, maps, and coordinated promotions that connect rural assets and encourage visitors to explore more during their trip. Oxford County's Cheese Trail and the Apple Pie Trail in The Blue Mountains are examples of themed routes that help to create a stronger visitor draw, while moving visitors around the destination. Both routes celebrate experiences and are complemented by local events. Encouraging agritourism businesses to refer and recommend visitors to other local businesses is a useful tool for activating food and drink routes. Municipalities can encourage agritourism growth by supporting experience development at the business-level and linking this at the destination-level through cross-promotion and partnerships between farms, chefs, tourism operators, and local organizations, etc. This approach means that agritourism products are marketed as part of a cohesive regional experience, rather than stand-alone activities.

Niagara Benchlands and Haldimand County's "Real. Local." brand are examples of how place-based branding can go beyond tourism and be tied to local agricultural products, routes, and visitor experiences more broadly. Haldimand supports wayfinding and marketing through its tourism and agricultural signage programs. Wellington County's Taste Real brand and its Rural Romp tours work to create a regional agricultural identity and grow local pride. Durham Region supports promotion and sector development through partnerships such as Durham Farm Fresh. Norfolk is positioning agritourism as a sector to be actively developed and promoted, by supporting mapping, app-based promotion, digital marketing, and event-based programming.

- [Taste Real](#) in Wellington County produces unified rural identity, encourages residents and visitors to explore via the County's Rural Romp self-guided tours and maps.
- The [Niagara Benchlands](#) brand is designed to be interchangeable with the Town of Lincoln brand. It focuses on the UNESCO biosphere and agricultural roots of the area. It is linked to on-the-ground routes like the Taste Trail and Wine Trail.

Enabling Policies and Processes

Municipalities play an important role in enabling agritourism through setting up clear, farmer-friendly policies and navigable approval processes related to land use planning, signage, building codes, etc. For land use planning, this means clearly defining agritourism, on-farm diversified uses, agriculture-related uses, and other key terms in Official Plans and Zoning Bylaws; identifying what is permitted as-of-right; distinguishing between smaller compatible uses vs. proposals with greater impacts, and adjusting fees and processes accordingly, all the while ensuring that agritourism is secondary to the principal farm operation.

- Research out of the University of Guelph suggests that municipalities should carefully define a 'farm' within local policies and require proof of a 'farm' when permitting OFDUs.
- Durham region requires a Farm Business Registration (FBR) or exemption from AgriCorp to be considered a farm and allowed an OFDU.

For example, Norfolk County updated its zoning framework so a broader range of agritourism experiences and on-farm accommodations can proceed on agricultural lands with fewer site-specific planning approvals (i.e. the approval pathway shifted from rezoning to building permits, reducing time, cost, and improve predictability for applicants and staff. Durham Region and its lower-tier municipalities provide strong examples of this approach through their recent work to create a more enabling policy environment. They now have detailed definitions, criteria, and approval guidance in their Official Plans, Zoning Bylaws, and online via a business-facing toolkit. Durham Region supports as-of-right permissions where criteria are met. Several municipalities including Norfolk County, Elgin County, Haldimand County, and King Township have also created Community Improvement Plans, several of which are specifically focussed on rural areas and/or tourism.

Another way that municipalities can support agritourism development is through simplifying and streamlining approval processes. Approaches include developing checklists, providing concierge-style support to help farmers navigate planning, building, health, finance, and other requirements, encouraging or mandating pre-application meetings, offering simplified site plan control where possible, and prioritizing open communication across departments. For example, Haldimand County has development concierge support through economic development, providing a centralized point of entry for business proponents navigating a multi-departmental approval environment. Following recommendations from Durham Region's North Durham Agriculture-Related and On-Farm Diversified Uses initiative, Durham and its lower tier municipalities created a consistent policy and process model for agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses across the region. For Scugog, this meant setting up a user-friendly "Ready, Set, Go!" process that guides applicants from early idea development through pre-application discussions (which sometimes include multiple meetings), information gathering, and then site plan or building permit approvals where needed. This stepped process helps farmers understand base requirements early and reduces uncertainty around approvals.

Durham Region also supports agritourism businesses through a detailed on-farm diversified uses application toolkit, checklist, FAQs, and staff support through Invest Durham. In addition, Durham Region reinforces implementation through broader agri-food and tourism strategies that identify agritourism as a growth area.

Durham Region's criteria for an on-farm diversified uses include:

- The use is located on a farm;
- The use occupies no more than 2% of the total lot area of the farm parcel to a maximum of one (1) hectare. For further clarity, the total lot area of a farm property includes environmental features and any hazard lands;
- The use shall remain secondary to the principal agricultural uses of the property;

- Shall be compatible with, and not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations; and
- The use shall be subject to the Minimum Distance Separation Formulae where applicable.

Of course, enabling policies must also protect farming by considering size and scale, compatibility, servicing, Minimum Distance Separation requirements, and the long-term viability of farm operations. Agritourism should not contribute to the widespread fragmentation of farmland.

Financial Support

Financial support can reduce the cost and risk of diversification for farm businesses and help municipalities signal that agritourism is a priority and a safe place to invest. There are a range of support tools available such as municipal grants, Community Improvement Plans (CIP), development charge relief, fee rebates, seed funding, as well as the use of Municipal Accommodation Taxes for marketing, experience development and rural infrastructure (e.g. roads).

For example, Norfolk County also has a CIP, which includes matching grants for agritourism and value-added uses, as well as grants for planning application fees, building permits, façade improvements, and accessibility and safety upgrades. Haldimand County's Rural Business and Tourism CIP and King Township's Rural Resiliency CIP encourage reinvestment in rural properties and on-farm diversified uses.

Haldimand's Rural Business and Tourism Community Improvement Plan to support agritourism-related investment, (e.g. grants tied to planning fees, building permits, signage, façade improvements, rehabilitation, and redevelopment work.)

Other policy-oriented financial supports that municipalities can pursue include, adopting the optional on-farm diversified use tax subclass, advocating for more favourable tax treatment for value-added farm activities, and exempting agricultural buildings from municipal fees and development charges where appropriate. For example, Norfolk County adopted an on-farm diversified uses tax subclass, which addresses recurring financial barriers for diversified farm businesses that might otherwise attract commercial or industrial tax treatment.

Perspectives from Key Informant Interviews:

- Take a **long-term support approach**, not a fee-collection approach. It is important to support entrepreneurship so farms can generate revenue, stay viable, and attract visitors. Long term success is more important than short-term permitting revenue.
- The Town should see agritourism as a **major economic development opportunity** that will require being more proactive and ambitious to harness.

Other

Municipalities can also strengthen agritourism by investing in the broader ecosystem needed for farm businesses to succeed. This includes maintaining rural roads, bridges,

and other infrastructure that support both farm operations and visitor access; undertaking asset mapping to identify clusters, gaps, and opportunities; and continuing to engage the farm community through agricultural advisory committees and relationship-building with farmers and conservation authorities.

Haldimand County, Norfolk County, and Durham Region all have advisory committees, networks, and/or partnerships to keep municipal approaches grounded in farm realities. Municipalities can help preserve farm character by encouraging the reuse of existing buildings, developing design guidelines for on-farm diversified uses, and ensuring staff across planning, tourism, and economic development understand emerging trends in agritourism. Finally, partnerships with organizations such as OMAFA, Agritourism Ontario, Farm Fresh Ontario, and regional tourism organizations can help municipalities extend their capacity, advocate for supportive policy change, and connect local businesses to wider expertise and promotional opportunities. This also connects businesses to agritourism training opportunities offered by other organizations. Norfolk County is noteworthy for its broader advocacy posture, including requests for provincial collaboration on matters such as farm severance flexibility and expanded accessory dwelling unit permissions in rural areas, both of which intersect with longer-term farm business succession and labour force considerations.

Perspectives from Key Informant Interviews:

- **Reduce restrictive planning rules**, especially the 2% guideline from OMAFA for on-farm diversified uses. Interviewee noted it can be “incredibly frustrating” and “really hamstringing” operators, especially smaller farms.
- **Protect farmers, not just farmland.** Municipalities often think they are protecting farmland through restrictions, but in practice they may be undermining farmers’ ability to stay viable. If farmers can’t make the economics work, farmland becomes more at risk in the long run.
- **Make approvals easier and more coordinated.** The current process as fragmented across municipalities, regions, conservation authorities, provincial bodies, etc., which can lead to long, expensive processes and last-minute refusals for projects.
- **Bring all approval bodies together earlier**, through pre-application meetings or one-stop-shop process, so operators are not getting multiple partial approvals and then a final “no.”

Visitor Data

Agritourism Visitors in Ontario

According to Agritourism Ontario's *Fields of Opportunity: An Economic Growth Study for Ontario's Agritourism Industry*, on average, agritourism businesses welcome about 22,000 people each year, with an estimated median of 3,800 people annually. This indicates that there is breadth and diversity of agritourism business sizes across the province. More specifically, agritourism visitors, who are defined in this study as those travelling 50km or more spend \$145/person in Ontario. Their spending is primarily on accommodations (\$65/person or 45%), food (\$60/person or 41%), and transportation (\$20/person or 14%).

(Note: 50km is different from the industry standard of 40 km used in Ontario to define a visitor).

The most common agritourism activities in Ontario include on-farm retail, tours, and workshops. However, other activities found in the province include farm gate stands; pick-your-own; on-farm entertainment; wedding, special events, and birthday parties; animal feeding and petting areas; wellness activities; on-farm café and restaurant; bakery, butcher, and value-added processing; on-farm winery, brewery, cidery, and distillery; horseback riding; nature trails; sports activities; community shared agriculture; camps; and others.

Visitors in Central Counties (Durham, York, Headwaters)

In 2024, most visitor spending (about 60% or \$2.12 billion) was from other Ontarians, followed by Overseas visitors (about 14% or \$0.47 billion), the United States (about 13% or \$0.47 billion), and Inter-provincial visitors (13% or \$0.46). Interestingly, in 2024, visitors from the United States spent more than other visitors (26%), followed by Overseas visitors (21%). Key inter-provincial visitor markets include Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta. Additionally, a key overseas visitor market is China.

Most visitor spending in Central Counties is on food and beverage (33%), followed by transportation (21%), accommodations (18%), retail (16%), and recreation and entertainment (12%). Importantly, spending on accommodations is less than the provincial average (25%) due to the high number of day trippers from the Greater Toronto Area. However, visitors from Toronto account for 62% of Ontario spending in Central Counties, making it a prime target market for the Town of Stouffville.

More specifically, visitor spending steadily increases from January and peaks in August, followed by a stabilized but significant drop between September and December. This indicates a strong opportunity to encourage spending in Central Counties, particularly during the winter, but particularly in the spring and fall.

Visitor Profiles

Six (6) visitor profiles have been identified by Central Counties Tourism. These include Adventure Seekers, Passionate Putter, Foodie Fanatics, Family Fun, Art Lovers – The Urbanite (Core), and Art Lovers – Community Explorer (Tactical). Below are the visitor segments most relevant to Stouffville based on the visitation percentage and index as identified in *“Stouffville Visitor Plan 2025-2028”*.

- Adventure Seekers are 26.8% of all visitors with a high index of 168.
- Family Fun are 27.4% with a low index of 88,
- Foodie Fanatics are 14% with a high index of 164, and
- Passionate Putter are 11.5% with a low index of 84.

Of note, Foodie Fanatics has doubled both its visitation percentage and index between 2019 and 2023, while Adventure Seekers has slightly decreased in both. Of the visitor segments most relevant to Stouffville, Foodie Fanatics and Family Fun may be most attracted to agritourism, with Passionate Putter and Adventure Seekers being secondary visitor segments.

Primary Agritourism Visitor Segments

Foodie Fanatics are avid foodies who are health-conscious. They enjoy going to restaurants with healthier and lighter gourmet options as well as attending food and beverage festivals, wineries, and craft breweries. Additionally, they love the outdoors and enjoy going to conservation parks and city gardens. They also appreciate art experiences, as well as sporting activities like golfing, fishing, and winter sports. In the context of Stouffville's agritourism sector, these visitors may be interested in farm-to-fork experiences, food-based festivals, like the Stouffville Strawberry Festival, craft beverage tastes, among other things. They are avid travellers and are therefore looking for food experiences where they can taste a new cuisine. Of note, developing agritourism experiences that integrate the outdoors may be of high interest to Foodie Fanatics. An example could be a guided hike or cycling experience with a farm-to-fork lunch or picnic lunch on a farm. Other key information about Foodie Fanatics is identified below:

- Older university-educated couples without children (empty nesters), and above-average income with an upscale lifestyle (vivid urban neighbourhoods). This means considering developing itineraries and experiences that cater to couples interested in spending money to have high-quality experiences.
- Purchase decisions are researched and made in advance. This means ensuring agritourism businesses have updated and accurate information about what they offer both online and in related traditional media. This will help Foodie Fanatics better plan their visits and itineraries in advance.
- Receive information through traditional media (e.g., radio, newspaper, magazines, etc.); However, they search online for food-related websites. This means exploring opportunities to market the destination or specific businesses strategically, which could include working with media relations professionals.

Family Fun prefers to spend time with children at family-friendly attractions, while also enjoying having fun and adventures in the outdoors. Some examples include attending festivals where everyone can enjoy, going to amusement parks where their children are highly engaged, or visiting a zoo or a petting zoo. They enjoy travelling and taking vacations to escape their daily life and usually prefer all-inclusive options or spa resorts for accommodations. In other words, they prefer an option where it's simple and already packaged, so there is less of a need to plan. Other key information about Family Fun is identified below:

- Young to middle-aged families with school-aged children. The parents are university-educated with a higher-than-average household income. The families and the suburban neighbourhoods they come from are culturally diverse. This means it is important to ensure the destination and agritourism businesses have cultural competencies to be welcoming and inclusive, as well as ensuring marketing materials are representative of the community and visitors who are coming. There may also be some alignments with the Town's *"Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy and Reconciliation and Engagement Plan"* (2023).
- Within the family, one (1) parent is the decision-maker who does a lot of research before deciding to visit a place. This means ensuring agritourism businesses have updated and accurate information about what they offer, especially online. This will be of even more importance as more visitors continue to use AI-powered research tools.
- They receive information through the radio during daily commutes, but are also heavy internet users. Of note, cultural diversity in marketing materials appeals to them, and they enjoy sharing their experiences and making recommendations through social media posts (e.g., Instagram, X, Facebook, etc.). This means

ensuring agritourism businesses are market-ready or prepared to welcome visitors is key to ensuring they are positively communicating about their experiences in Stouffville.

Secondary Agritourism Visitor Segments

Passionate Putters enjoy moderate physical activities like fitness, walking, swimming, and exercising at home. They are passionate about watching and participating in golf since this is a way of maintaining a strong connection to their family, friends, and community. Importantly, for the context of Stouffville as an agritourism destination, they also enjoy food experiences, and craft beverages. At the same time, they enjoy art experiences, gardening, and home shows. For Stouffville, this may indicate an opportunity to develop itineraries that integrate sports activities with a farm-to-fork experience. Some might also be interested in participating in community gardening experiences as a way to learn about agriculture, the community, while also being active. Other key information about Passionate Putters is identified below:

- Older demographic living in upscale suburban neighbourhoods that values family and hard work. They value cultural diversity in their community and social network. This means considering highlighting the breadth and diversity of peoples, places, and communities found within Stouffville, including different produce grown or cuisines available in the destination.
- Receive information primarily through traditional media (e.g., local news, radio, newspapers, travel and lifestyle magazines, etc.), but they also receive some information through social media, primarily Facebook and LinkedIn and the internet, through their children. Importantly, when gathering information about a place, they use the internet. This means ensuring information about the destination positions agritourism as a key value proposition.
- Prefer to book online, which means they are in advance of arriving to the destination. This means ensuring information is readily available and up-to-date. It also means encouraging agritourism businesses offering experiences to have online booking.

Adventure Seekers are family-oriented and enjoy the outdoors, watching sports-related events, and physical activities like camping, skiing, zip-lining, and cycling. However, they also enjoy cultural activities like food, festivals, carnivals, and concerts. They have upscale household incomes and live in middle-class suburban areas. Other key information about Adventure Seekers is identified below:

- Enjoy taking three (3) to five (5) out-of-town vacations a year, and make informed decisions quickly. This means ensuring information about the destination and agritourism businesses is readily available and up-to-date. This could also mean disseminating print marketing materials in key geographic areas.
- Receive information through outdoor advertisements, radio, television, and lifestyle magazines. Their use of the internet, social media, and technology is limited. This means exploring opportunities to market the agritourism businesses in a way that connects with the outdoors on more traditional media platforms.

Visitors to the Village of Stouffville

Daily & Unique Visits

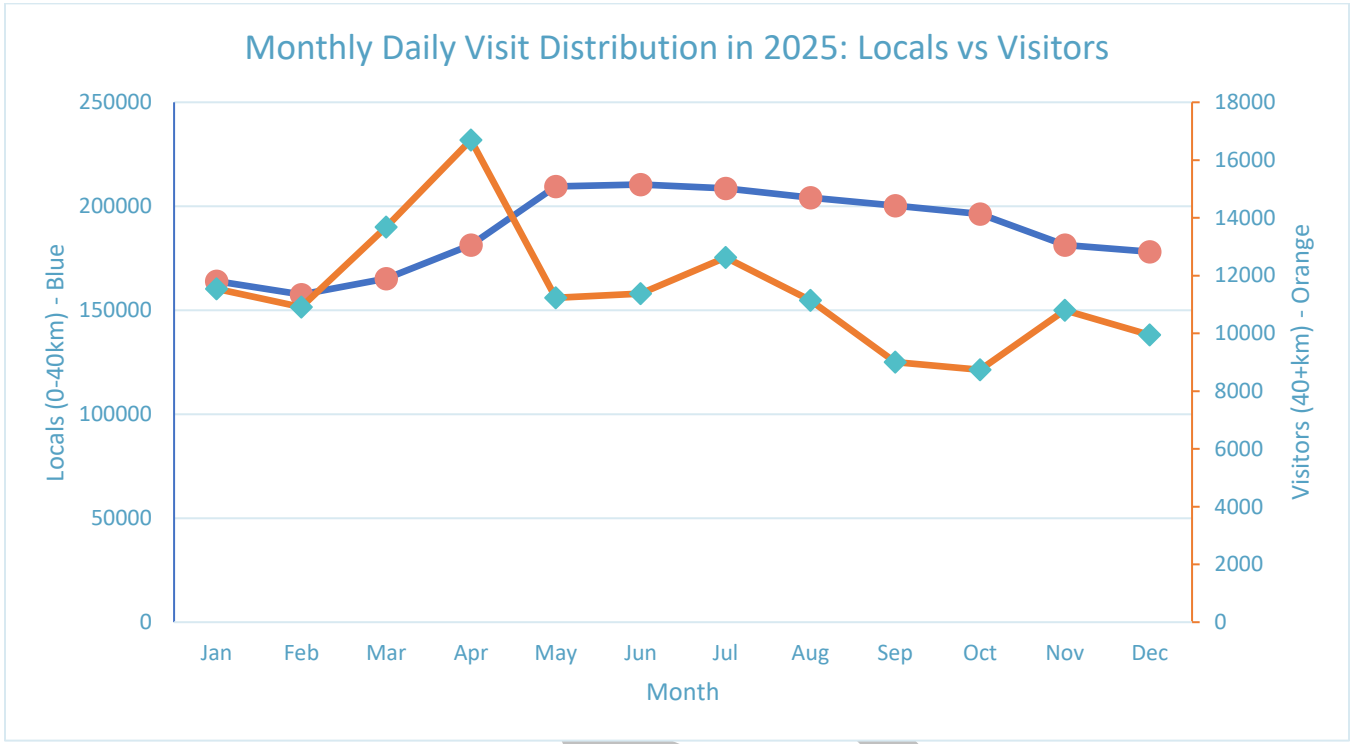
In 2025, geofence data for historic downtown Village of Stouffville saw 137,685 total visits from those travelling 40 kilometres or more (i.e., visitors). Importantly, the daily visit count includes visitors who may have come more than once to the downtown area, including those who commute 40 kilometres or more. However, of the 137,685 daily visits, 13,769 were unique visits, meaning there were 13,769 different people who travelled 40 kilometres or more to the downtown area.

Comparing weekday and weekend visitation, most daily visits are during the weekday with 103,940 visits, while daily visits during the weekend were 33,746. Although it may seem that more visitors are coming during week, there is no data on unique visits broken down between weekday and weekend visits; therefore, it is unclear if this would be true. The below graph shows the breakdown of total daily visits from both locals and visitors.



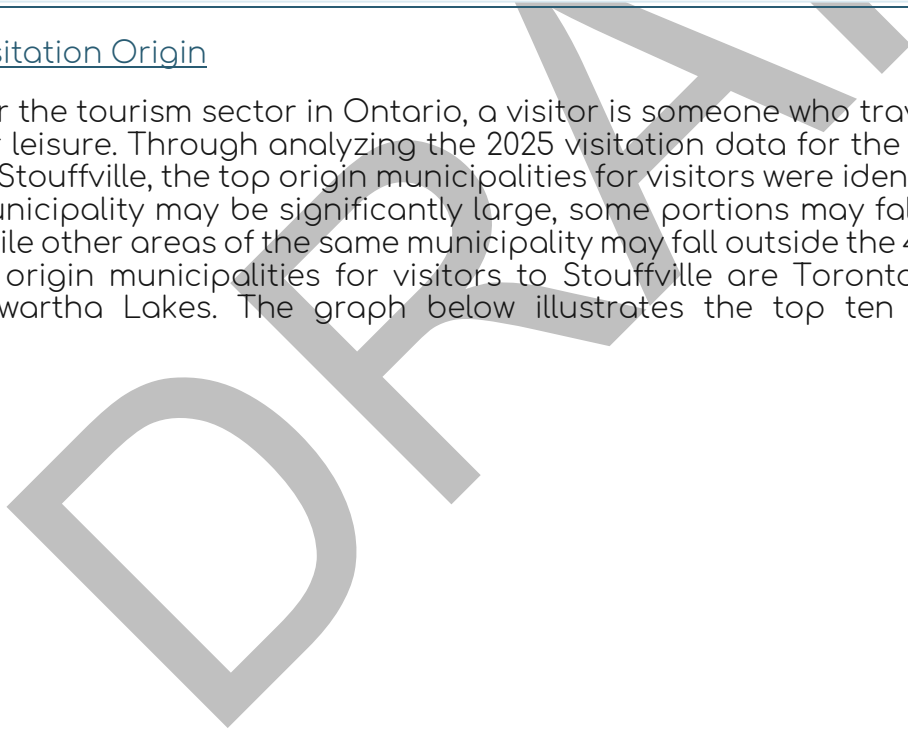
Monthly Visitation

Based on the 2025 visitor data to the historic downtown Village of Stouffville, there is an average of 11,474 total daily visits from visitors per month, with the highest being 16,695 in April, and the lowest being 8,739 in October. In comparison, the average daily visits from locals is 188,089, with the highest being 210,465 in June, and the lowest being 163,935 in January. The graph below illustrates the monthly daily visit distribution in 2025 between locals and visitors. Something to note in the graph is that during March and April, the number of visitors sharply increases, then sharply decreases in May, while the number of locals gradually increases and then remains relatively steady. This may mean some assets in the downtown or the destination generally are attracting visitors during the spring relative to locals. This also shows a strong opportunity to increase visitation to during the summer and fall months.



Visitation Origin

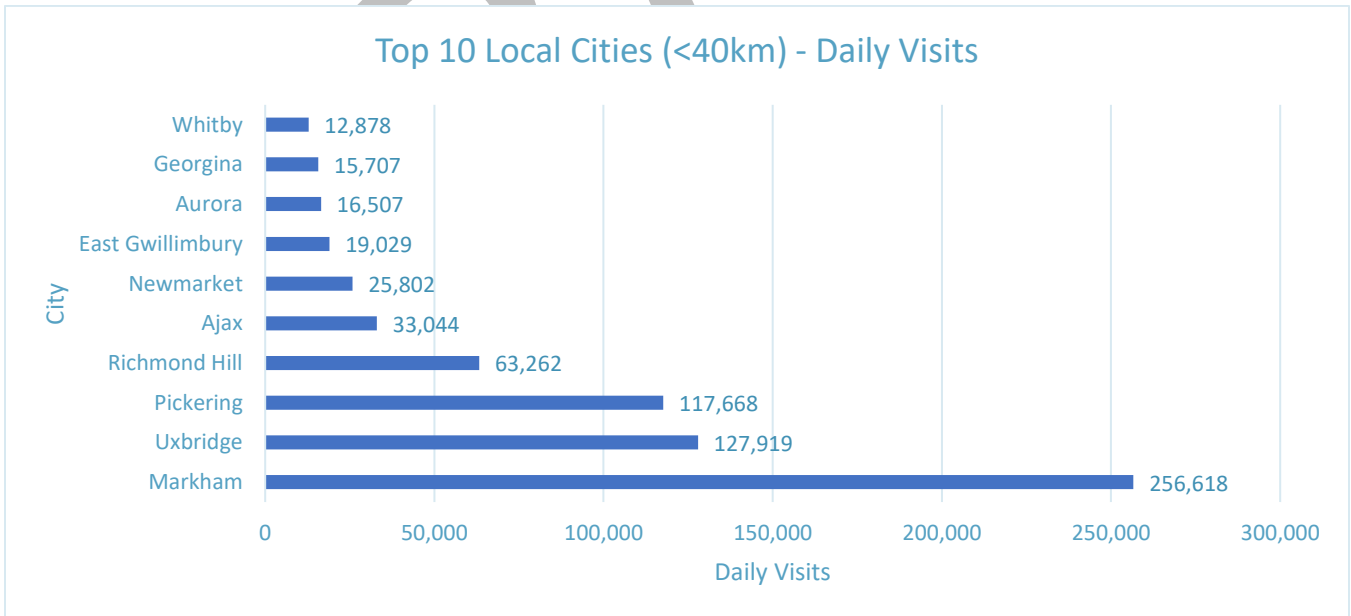
For the tourism sector in Ontario, a visitor is someone who travels 40 kilometres or more for leisure. Through analyzing the 2025 visitation data for the historic downtown Village of Stouffville, the top origin municipalities for visitors were identified. However, because a municipality may be significantly large, some portions may fall within the 40 kilometres, while other areas of the same municipality may fall outside the 40 kilometres. The top four (4) origin municipalities for visitors to Stouffville are Toronto, Vaughan, Oshawa, and Kawartha Lakes. The graph below illustrates the top ten (10) origin municipalities.



Additionally, Toronto's daily visits in 2025 were 197,730 daily visits.



In contrast, the top five (5) origin municipalities of locals (i.e., <40 kilometres) are Stouffville, Markham, Uxbridge, Pickering, and Richmond Hill. The graph illustrates the top ten (10) origin municipalities. Additionally, Whitchurch-Stouffville's total daily visits go beyond 300,000 at 1,311,191 daily visits in 2025.



The graphs below show the origin municipalities' seasonal ratio (i.e., the difference between the peak month's visitor count and the lowest month's visitor count) in relation to the volatility percentage (i.e., how much the monthly visits from a municipality fluctuate

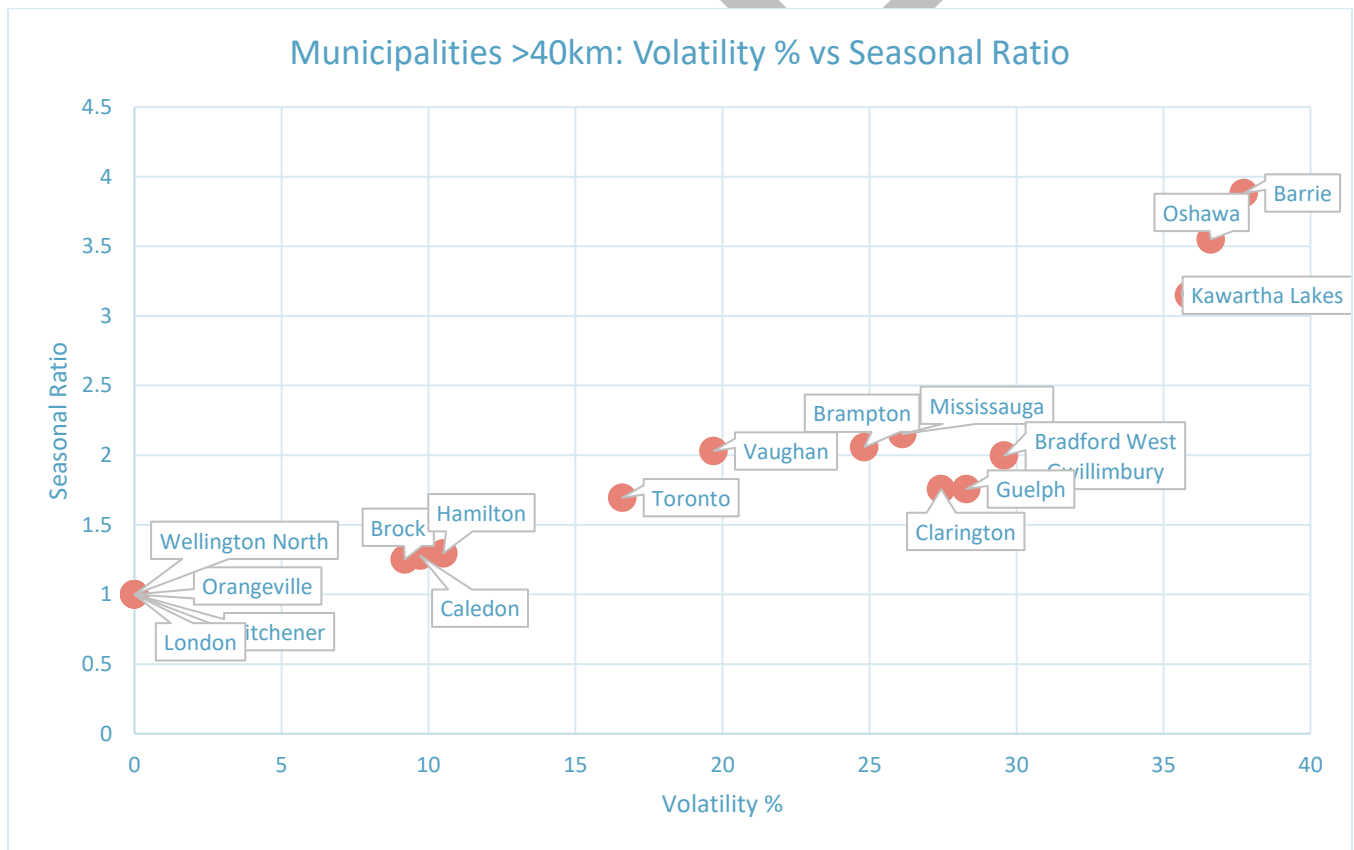
relative to the average throughout the year). Those municipalities on the lower left side of the graph indicate consistent visitation year-round, while those on the top right side of the graph indicate very unpredictable visitation with significant changes in visitation patterns. When comparing the origin municipalities' placement on the graph with their related total daily visits, the following are the top primary and emerging origin municipalities that Stouffville should consider targeting through marketing campaigns to grow agritourism. Emerging origin municipalities mean places where Stouffville is currently receiving small visitor numbers, but could see grow in future years.

Visitor Municipalities

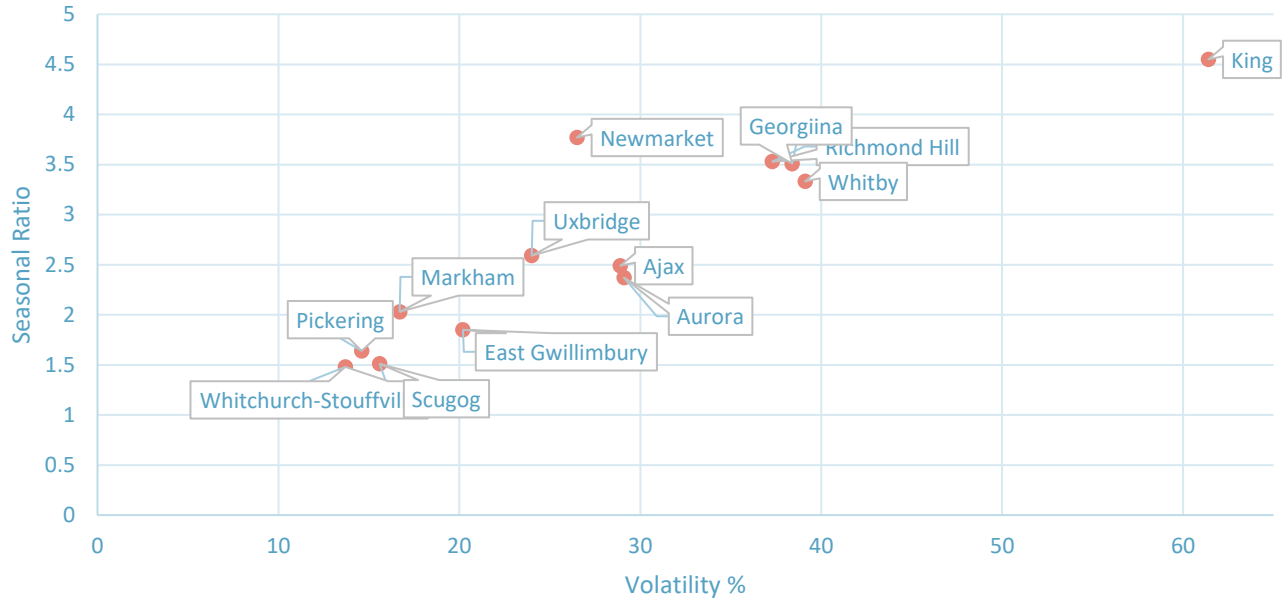
- Primary: Toronto, Vaughan, Brampton, Mississauga, Bradford-West Gwillimbury
- Emerging: Oshawa, Kawartha Lakes, Barrie

Local Municipalities

- Primary: Stouffville, Pickering, Markham, Uxbridge,
- Emerging: Ajax, Richmond Hill, , Newmarket



Municipalities >40km: Volatility % vs Seasonal Ratio



DRAFT

4. What We Heard

Engagement activities undertaken so far as part of this Agritourism Strategy and Toolkit Development project included two Farm Table Talks with agricultural operators, a community open house attended by residents and industry, and a survey targeting both existing agritourism business owners and operators, as well as individuals interested in starting or investing in agritourism ventures. These engagement activities were designed to better understand current perceptions of agritourism in Whitchurch-Stouffville, identify opportunities and barriers related to agritourism development, and explore what a thriving future for agritourism could look like in the community.

The Farm Table Talks brought together individuals involved in flower farming, livestock, dairy and grain production, farm retail, with and without existing agritourism operations. Discussions were semi-structured and conversational in nature, focusing on topics such as current agritourism activity, visitor markets, barriers to diversification, municipal processes, and long-term opportunities for the sector. The survey provided additional insight into the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of both current and prospective agritourism operators and investors, helping to identify market interests, needed supports, and opportunities for future growth in the sector. The community open house engaged residents in discussions around Stouffville's identity, the role of agritourism in the community, desired future experiences, and values to guide agritourism development moving forward. Participants contributed through facilitated discussions, written responses, and interactive engagement exercises.

Residents

Open house: Participants expressed strong pride in the municipality's rural identity and frequently connected agritourism with preserving and celebrating that identity. Community members described agritourism as helping bridge the gap between urban populations and agriculture by creating opportunities for people to better understand where food comes from and connect with farming in meaningful ways.

Resident sentiment expressed during the community open house was overwhelmingly supportive of agritourism, particularly when framed as a tool to preserve Stouffville's rural identity, strengthen community connections, and support local farms. Participants frequently described the municipality as having a valued "small-town vibe" characterized by farms, forests, trails, heritage landscapes, and a close connection to nature, while also benefiting from proximity to the Greater Toronto Area. Residents viewed agritourism positively because it helps connect urban and rural communities, educate people about agriculture and food systems, and create family-oriented experiences rooted in local identity. At the same time, participants expressed a strong desire for tourism growth to remain intentional, community-oriented, and environmentally sustainable. Concerns around overdevelopment, loss of rural character, traffic, parking, and pressures on farmland and natural areas were recurring themes throughout the engagement. Residents emphasized that future agritourism development should protect agricultural lands, maintain the municipality's rural atmosphere, support local businesses and farmers, and contribute positively to community wellbeing rather than prioritize growth for its own sake.

Agricultural Operators

Across our engagements, agricultural operators described agritourism in Stouffville as having significant potential, but still relatively limited and fragmented compared to other rural destinations in Ontario. Participants frequently described Stouffville as uniquely positioned because of its proximity to the Greater Toronto Area, while still maintaining a rural atmosphere and agricultural identity. Several operators referred to the municipality as “the backyard of Toronto,” noting that accessibility to large urban populations creates opportunities for day-trip visitation and family-oriented experiences.

Agricultural operators participating in the open house engagement expressed cautious optimism toward the future of agritourism in Stouffville. Overall sentiment reflected strong interest in agritourism to diversify farm operations, strengthen financial resilience, and connect the public more directly to agriculture, local food systems, and rural life. Operators recognized that Stouffville’s proximity to the Greater Toronto Area creates significant opportunities for family-oriented, experience-based visitation, particularly for visitors seeking authentic rural experiences close to the city. At the same time, operators consistently emphasized that agritourism growth must remain manageable, practical, and aligned with the realities of farming operations. Concerns were raised regarding rising land values, labour shortages, insurance requirements, infrastructure pressures, lengthy approvals, signage restrictions, and the complexity of municipal processes related to diversified farm uses. Participants also expressed concern about balancing visitor growth with the protection of farmland, rural character, and agricultural viability. Despite these challenges, operators demonstrated strong willingness to collaborate, explore new ideas, and expand offerings if clearer guidance, stronger municipal coordination, and practical support systems are established.

Agricultural producers participating in the Farm Table Talks expressed a pragmatic but optimistic outlook for agritourism in Stouffville. Participants viewed agritourism as an important opportunity to diversify farm operations, supplement farm income, and create stronger connections between producers and the public. Many operators emphasized that visitors are increasingly seeking immersive, educational, and family-oriented experiences rather than simply purchasing products, creating opportunities for workshops, pick-your-own activities, farm events, retail, and food experiences. Producers also recognized Stouffville’s strategic advantage as a rural area located close to the Greater Toronto Area, describing the municipality as “the backyard of Toronto” with strong potential for daytrip and multigenerational visitation. However, sentiment was tempered by significant concerns around operational and regulatory barriers. Participants repeatedly referenced rising land values, labour shortages, signage restrictions, infrastructure costs, insurance considerations, building code requirements, and difficulty navigating municipal and approval processes as major challenges to agritourism development – a sentiment that was also found in the survey. There was also concern that many farms lack the time, staffing, or financial capacity to pursue diversification without additional support. Despite these barriers, operators demonstrated strong interest in collaboration, clearer municipal guidance, and practical tools that could help make agritourism development more accessible and achievable for local farms.

Operators participating in the farm table talks were generally more operationally focused, emphasizing practical challenges related to labour shortages, signage, infrastructure, approvals, insurance, and the realities of running and diversifying farm businesses. Discussions centered on business viability, regulatory complexity, and the

need for clearer municipal processes and support systems. In contrast, agricultural operators participating in the open house engagement expressed more aspirational and community-oriented perspectives. Their comments focused more heavily on rural identity, sustainability, family experiences, local food systems, education, and the long-term vision for agritourism in Stouffville. While barriers such as cost and approvals were still acknowledged, discussions were broader and less detailed from an operational standpoint.

The themes that emerged through the farm table talks and community open house were further explored and validated through the Agritourism Survey, which provided additional insight into the perspectives, operational realities, and future aspirations of both current and prospective agritourism operators in Stouffville and York Region. While the in-person engagement activities highlighted broader conversations around rural identity, community values, agricultural viability, and long-term visioning, the survey helped quantify and expand upon many of the operational, financial, and development-related themes raised throughout the engagement process.

Across all engagement activities, participants consistently identified agritourism as an opportunity to strengthen connections between agriculture and the public, support local farms and food systems, diversify farm income, and reinforce Stouffville's rural identity and sense of place. At the same time, recurring concerns emerged regarding municipal approvals, infrastructure requirements, signage, labour shortages, insurance, land values, and the balance between tourism growth and the preservation of agricultural lands and rural character. These themes were echoed strongly within the survey findings, which provided more detailed insight into the types of agritourism activities currently operating in the region, future business expansion plans, desired visitor experiences, and the practical supports and resources operators believe are needed to enable sustainable agritourism development.

Survey

An agritourism survey was disseminated between Monday, 20 April 2026 to Monday, 18 May 2026. The purpose was to gather insights and perspectives from those who own or operate an agritourism business (i.e., current), as well as those who are interested in starting an agritourism business on their farm or are considering investing in an agritourism business (i.e., prospective).

A total of 15 eligible responses were received, which means they either currently own or operate an agritourism business in Stouffville and York Region, or are considering investing in or starting an agritourism business in Stouffville and York Region. Of the 15 respondents (excluding 3 that skipped), eight (8) own or operate an agritourism business, two (2) are considering investing in an agritourism business, and two (2) were interested in starting an agritourism business on their farm.

[Agritourism Businesses](#)

Of the eight (8) respondents who own or operate an agritourism business, five (5) were located in the Town of Stouffville, and three (3) in the larger York Region. Of note, three (3) were unsure which provincial plans (i.e., Greenbelt Plan, and/or Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan) were relevant to their agritourism business. This may indicate a need to strengthen clarity among prospective agritourism business owners and operators about the different land-use plans, policies, and bylaws they will need to keep in mind as they develop their new agritourism ideas.

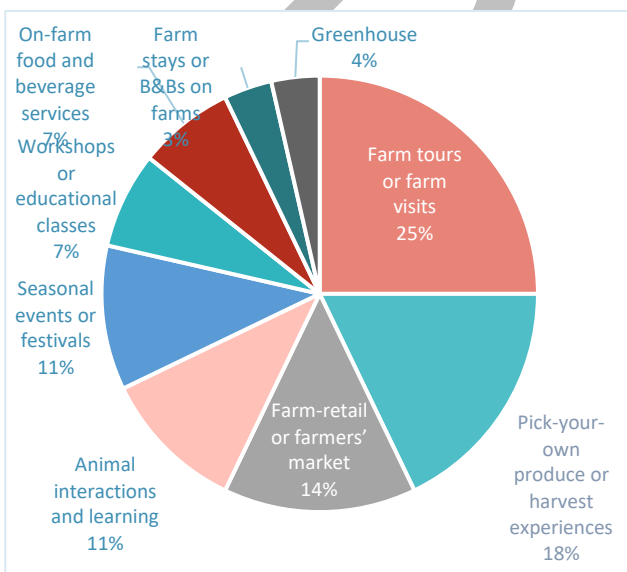
Most respondents (n=5) have had their agritourism business for more than 20 years, with the rest being 3 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, and 11 to 15 years. The most common agritourism activities and experiences identified were farm tours and farm visits, u-picks and harvest experiences, and farm-retail or farmers' markets. Over 75% (n=6) received more than 5,000 visitors a year, with 29% (n=7) identifying family and friends as the main workforce, followed by students at 25% (n=6), and regional workers at 21% (n=5). About 50% (n=4) of all respondents identified generating revenue of \$250,000 or more per year, and 25% (n=2) generating under \$10,000 per year.

Importantly, 75% (n=6) of all respondents noted they are planning to grow their agritourism business in the next five (5) years. Some examples shared include the following:

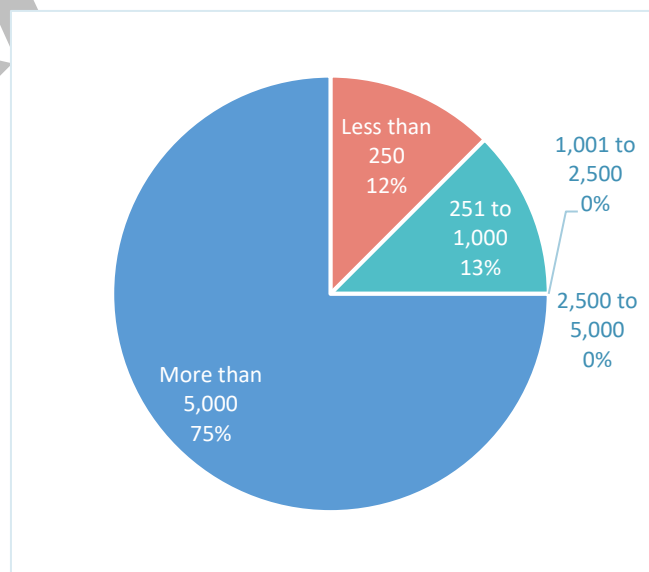
- Food and beverage production, like a cidery, light food services with local produce
- Crop expansion to extend the season, like blueberries, sweet corn, shelling peas, etc.
- Educational programming and small group gatherings like workshops, educational growing meetings, hands-on experiences for families and schools, and culinary experiences
- U-pick programs with seasonal events and farm-based activities
- Guided farm tours
- On-farm visitor infrastructure like washrooms, shaded areas, parking, etc.
- On-site sales of produce and farm-made goods

The four graphs below illustrate the activities and experiences offered, the number of annual visitors, workforce composition, and annual revenue.

Activities & Experiences

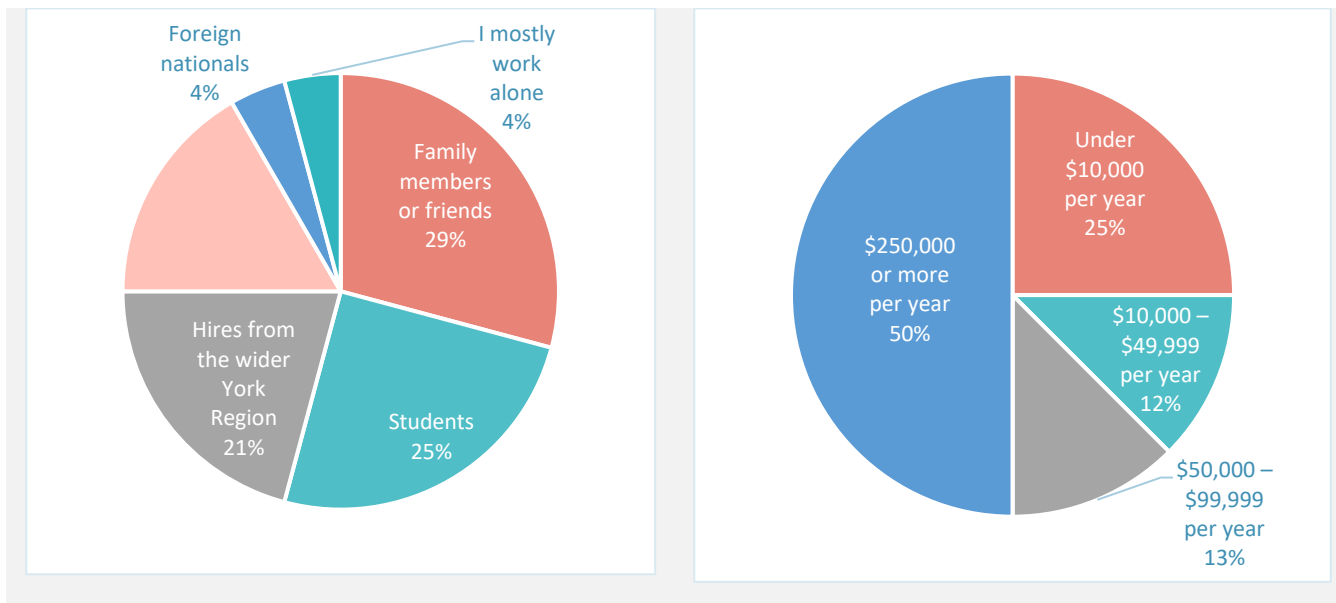


Annual Visitors



Agritourism Workforce

Annual Revenue



Potential Agritourism Business

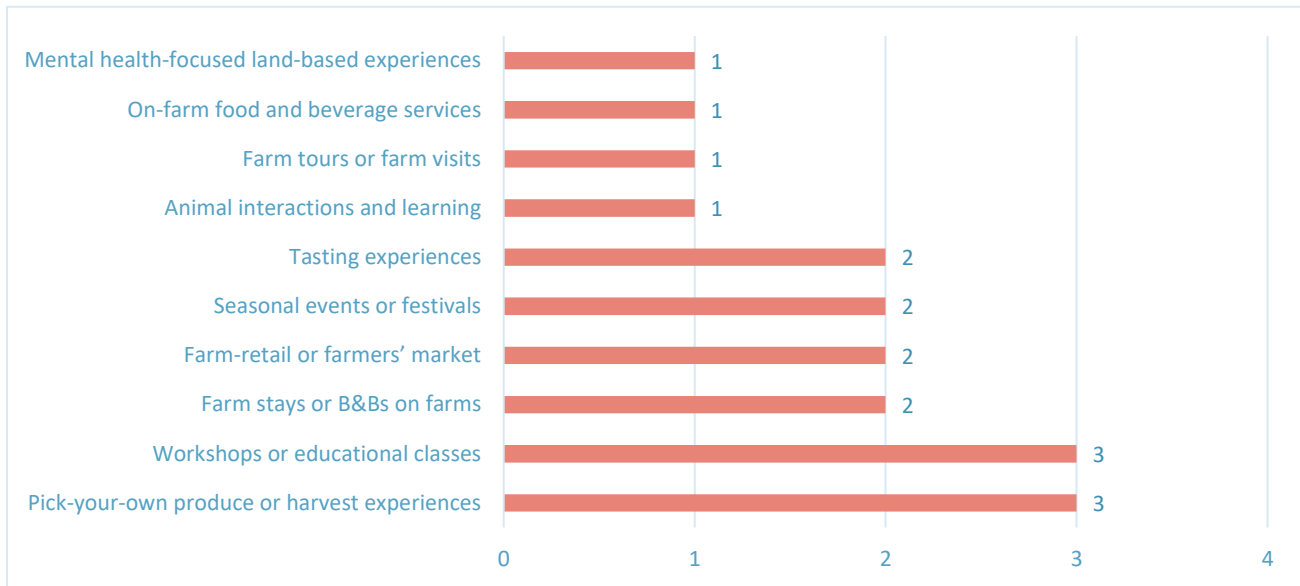
Of the four (4) respondents who are interested in starting an agritourism business on their farm or are considering investing in an agritourism business, all are considering starting their agritourism business in the Town of Stouffville. Interestingly, the top five (5) motivations for starting or investing in an agritourism business included the following:

- To support local agriculture by connecting the public with farming
- Personal passion, as they enjoy sharing their farm/love of agriculture with visitors
- To generate additional income or diversify the use of their farm and revenue
- To make use of farm assets (e.g., unused land, buildings, crops, etc.) for value-added activities
- For the municipal support and agritourism opportunities in the area (e.g., municipal approvals, permits, etc.)

Others mentioned were to involve family or the next generation in the farm, diversify an existing agricultural operation, to provide mental health-focused land-based experiences, provide equity-deserving groups with land access, grow community appreciation about the value of the land, and to connect people to local historic rural roots and food sources.

About 50% (n=2) noted they would start or invest in an agritourism business within 1 to 2 years, with 25% each (n=1) planning to start and invest within the next 12 months, and within 3 to 5 years. 50% (n=2) are already collaborating with partners or receiving outside support with the development of their agritourism business. Some of the factors mentioned that have had an influence on respondents' decisions include upfront costs, time and workload, profitability, and regulations and permits. The graph below shows the types of agritourism activities and experiences respondents were interested in developing.

Agritourism Activities Respondents Would Like to See



Future for Stouffville as an Agritourism Destination

For the future of Stouffville as an agritourism destination, respondents who own or operate an agritourism business, as well as those who are interested in starting or investing in an agritourism business, envisioned the a year-round destination known as a regional agritourism hub with a strong network of interconnected farms that provide educational opportunities as well as inclusive access to land, as a way to strengthen the local food system and conserve the agricultural character of the community. Additionally, respondents highlighted the following agritourism activities and experiences.

- Seasonal and year-round tours connecting multiple farms
- Educational hands-on workshops (e.g., land-based experiences, food growing, cheese making, food preserving, drying herbs, flower bouquet assembly, etc.)
- Farm trail itineraries
- Expanded u-pick programs
- Farm-to-table dining experiences
- Local restaurants serving local produce
- On-farm light food services
- Seasonal festivals
- Year-round greenhouse experiences
- Farm animal experiences (e.g., petting zoos, etc.)
- Opportunities for equity-deserving groups to have access to the land

Opportunities

Through the Agritourism Survey, respondents identified a variety of opportunities, including resources and supports that would be useful for businesses and the overall destination.

- Leverage the Town of Stouffville within the Greater Toronto Area to access a large potential customer base
- Explore branding ideas that link the Town of Stouffville and its proximity within the Greater Toronto Area (e.g., "Country close to the city", etc.)
- Leverage the growing urban population in York Region that may have an interest in agricultural education and experiences
- Work with schools to offer educational agricultural experiences
- Develop year-round on-farm experiences by having adaptable farm spaces for shoulder and winter-season programming
- Develop a signature agritourism event that positions the Town of Stouffville as a regional hub (e.g., Open Farm Days, etc.)
- Develop land-based mental health opportunities connected to agriculture
- Strengthen trail and farm linkages throughout the Town of Stouffville and with Rouge National Park to be able to integrate a visitor's agritourism experience with other outdoor activities like cycling
- Develop marketing materials to encourage repeat visitation to the Town of Stouffville
- Support the strengthening of the local food value chain so that more local food and beverage operators use and offer locally made and grown products
- Host regional networking events to connect local and regional farmers doing agritourism
- Provide linkages between those who need land to garden or farm, and those with underutilized agricultural spaces for younger generations, equity-deserving groups, and entrepreneurs
- Resources and Supports
 - Tourism marketing support
 - Grants and funding
 - Farm itinerary development
 - Town-organized events
 - Clear practical guidelines on land-use policies and by-laws
 - Streamlined approval process for seasonal or low-impact activities
 - Standardized requirements for visitor amenities (e.g., parking, washrooms, traffic management, temporary structures, facilities, etc.)
 - Access to funding and grants for infrastructure
 - On-farm customer flow and visitor capacity management guides
 - Mentorship support, including for specialized small-scale gardening, beekeeping, etc.

Concerns and Challenges

In addition to the opportunities, resources, and supports respondents identified, they also highlighted key concerns and challenges that may be hindering them from developing agritourism activities or experiences, as well as hindering the Town of Stouffville to be a thriving agritourism destination.

- Lengthy, costly, and complex municipal approval process (e.g., high cost to just get an interview with the planning department to determine if the idea is possible; lots of processes to go through for small, seasonal, or minimal impact ideas; unclear expectations from the municipality on infrastructure and servicing requirements, etc.)

- Higher security concerns with an increased number of visitors to on-farm agritourism activities and experiences
- Traffic and transportation to get visitors to on-farm agritourism activities and experiences
- Requirements for food trucks, coffee services, beehives, etc.
- Lack of awareness amongst locals and visitors about existing farms and agritourism experiences and activities in the Town of Stouffville
- Limited consistent marketing of the destination, and specifically, agritourism offerings
- Lack of signage to direct visitors to farms
- Lack of financial support, especially to offer off-season agritourism experiences and activities (e.g., capital investment, etc.)
- An aging population of farmers and business owners, with younger generations not wanting or unable to take over the family farm
- Shortage of overnight accommodation options
- Limited experiences for visitors
- Lack of culturally diverse offerings to attract broader demographics

Key Informants

To better understand the context surrounding Agritourism in Stouffville, York Region, and Ontario more broadly, 10 key informant interviews were undertaken. Conversations were semi-structured and were tailored to focus on the area of expertise of each interviewee. Interviews took place with tourism and agritourism organizations, agricultural organizations, planning departments at neighbouring municipalities, etc. Five main themes emerged through the conversations, and these are outlined below. In addition, there are pink call out boxes across this document that highlight relevant points made by key informants.

Please note, several conversations are still outstanding as it was not possible to schedule these in advance of drafting this report. That said, there are plans to conduct several gap-filling interviews across the summer.

Agritourism growth

Interviewees consistently described how broader shifts in tourism and lifestyle preferences are spurring a growth in agritourism demand. There was overall agreement that visitors are increasingly seeking authentic, hands-on, and local experiences, and that agritourism is well positioned to deliver on this.

Interviewees identified a shift in agritourism toward experiential, immersive, and visually appealing offerings. Visitors are no longer looking solely to purchase products or visit a farm store. They are seeking curated experiences that combine entertainment, education, and aesthetic appeal. Social media was frequently referenced as a driving influence, with “Instagrammable” environments and experiences playing a key role in attracting visitors. However, this trend also presents operational and financial challenges for farmers, particularly in balancing visitor expectations with revenue generation and managing high volumes of visitors that do not always translate into meaningful spending.

Demand for agritourism and rural, nature-based activities is seen as coming from residents and visitors, particularly from nearby urban areas. Participants emphasized

that Stouffville's proximity to the Greater Toronto Area offers a significant potential market. At the same time, they noted that this opportunity is time-sensitive, with some suggesting that the Town of Stouffville has not historically prioritized agritourism to the extent needed to fully capitalize on these consumer trends.

Policy and process barriers

A dominant theme across interviews was the perception that existing policy and planning frameworks are not well aligned with the realities of agritourism development. While there is recognition of the importance of protecting agricultural land and environmental assets, many interviewees expressed concern that current regulations are overly restrictive, unclear, or inconsistently applied. They noted that this misalignment creates uncertainty for farmers and developers, limiting the scale or viability of agritourism initiatives. Interviewees also mentioned that policies originally intended as guidelines are sometimes interpreted or embedded as rigid rules, constraining innovation. There is a strong sense that encouraging agritourism will require a more flexible and supportive policy environment that better reflects how farms operate. That said, some of the red tape mentioned by interviewees is not within the capacity of the Town of Stouffville to change, beyond potential advocacy efforts to respective bodies.

Relatedly, interviewees described the development process for agritourism as complex and difficult to navigate. From a farmer's perspective, it was mentioned that there is often no clear starting point or streamlined pathway for pursuing an agritourism idea. Participants outlined processes that involve multiple departments, pre-consultations, and approvals, each with associated high costs and extended timelines. Interviewees explained that even small or low-impact projects can trigger extensive review processes or be halted due to zoning limitations or environmental constraints. This complexity is a potential deterrent for farmers interested in pursuing diversification opportunities.

Protecting farmland and supporting farmers

Interviewees highlighted a tension between policies designed to protect farmland and the economic realities faced by farmers. While land-use protections are widely understood and supported in principle by interviewees, many of them emphasized that long-term preservation of farmland depends on the financial sustainability of farming operations. In other words, farmland is only farmland if it is being farmed. Agritourism is viewed as a critical tool for enabling this farm sustainability by providing supplementary income streams. Interviewees noted that when diversification opportunities are limited or overly regulated, there is a risk that farmers may exit agriculture entirely. This conflict underscores the importance of this project and agritourism development work more generally. It also suggests a need to reconsider how policies can better balance land protection objectives with the economic viability of farming.

Infrastructure and connectivity

Several interviewees noted the importance of physical infrastructure and connectivity in unlocking agritourism's potential in Stouffville. In particular, trail networks, transportation linkages, and wayfinding systems were seen as critical tools for connecting farms to each other, to natural assets, and to Stouffville's downtown. Some interviewees described a vision where visitors can move seamlessly between experiences such as cycling between farms or combining outdoor recreation with culinary and agritourism. Improving these

connections was viewed as a way to enhance the visitor experience and incentivize visitors to stay longer and spend more, increasing economic impacts for the community.

Looking ahead

Interviewees highlighted several opportunities for Stouffville to strengthen its agritourism sector, including leveraging its proximity to the Greater Toronto Area, developing more cohesive and connected experiences across farms, and expanding the range of agritourism experiences on offer. They also see an opportunity to adopt a more supportive and proactive approach to planning processes, including outlining clearer pathways for businesses to move through and stronger integration between economic development and planning functions. Additionally, technology and digital platforms (potentially managed by the Town of Stouffville) were identified as emerging tools that could help improve visibility, booking, and coordination across agritourism operators.

Several considerations were also noted, including potential conflicts with neighbouring land uses and infrastructure limitations like parking, servicing, and environmental considerations. In addition, they saw a need to balance public interest in accessing rural spaces with the reality that farms are private, working environments that need to be able to run unencumbered. Finally, differences in capacity among farmers, including varying levels of comfort with technology and business development, were noted as a determining factor to who is likely to participate in and benefit from opportunities related to agritourism as an on-farm diversified use.

DRAFT

5. Market Analysis

Introduction and Approach

Purpose and approach

Following the desk research and engagement activities associated with this project, a market analysis was undertaken. Its purpose is to present the agritourism opportunity available to the Town of Stouffville and to provide an evidence base for the Agritourism Strategy and Toolkit development activities that will follow. The analysis evaluates the asset base on which agritourism in Stouffville is built, the market that those assets can serve, the competitive position Stouffville occupies relative to peer destinations, and the conditions under which specific agritourism opportunities are likely to be viable. The analysis does not forecast revenues, model operator-level economics, or prescribe specific business actions. Those decisions sit with operators and, where the regulatory environment is involved, with the Town. The role of this assessment is to define the playing field on which those decisions will be made.

The assessment draws on five complementary sources of evidence. A Regional Assessment Model (RAM) developed for this study consolidates an inventory of agritourism and on-farm diversified operations across Stouffville, York Region, Durham Region, and the Headwaters (made up of communities from multiple jurisdictions including parts of Peel Region, Wellington County, and Dufferin County) region, classified against an 11-category framework of agritourism activities and on-farm diversified uses. The inventory is merged with Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture data accessed through OMAFA's open data portal, using a farm-type crosswalk that maps Census farm types onto eight farm-type bundles used throughout this report. The RAM allows the agritourism inventory to be analyzed both in absolute terms and relative to the underlying farm base of each region. The construction of the RAM and its data sources are described in greater detail in the *Stouffville's Agritourism Inventory* section.

As noted earlier, a survey was completed as part of this project, capturing responses from current agritourism operators and prospective operators interested in starting an agritourism business on their farm. The survey informs the supply-side picture with forward-looking signals (expansion plans, perceived opportunities, and reported barriers) that the inventory alone cannot capture. Key informant interviews and engagement sessions with stakeholders including the Town's project team, provided qualitative context and a means to validate quantitative findings against the experience of operators and sector leaders.

Data limitations

The agritourism inventory for Stouffville is expected to be more complete than the inventories for surrounding municipalities, because the local list was sourced directly from the Town's own contact database whereas surrounding regions rely primarily on regional tourism directory listings. Absolute operation counts between Stouffville and peer municipalities should therefore be read as directional. Where cross-regional comparisons are made in this report, percentages and shares are used in preference to raw counts to reduce, though not eliminate, the effect of this asymmetry.

Agricultural and Geographic Context

Stouffville is a lower-tier municipality in York Region covering approximately 200 square kilometres along the eastern edge of York Region. It sits roughly 50 kilometres north of downtown Toronto. The Town has a current population of approximately 53,000 residents and is projected to grow to 103,000 by 2051.ⁱ This combination of features (a rural land base, an urbanizing population, and proximity to the largest visitor market in Canada) is the structural condition that shapes the agritourism opportunity in Stouffville.

The scale of the nearby urban market is substantial. The Greater Toronto Area population was estimated at approximately 7.7 million in 2024.ⁱⁱ Most of that population is within a roughly hour's drive of Stouffville.

The Town's land base is predominantly rural and protected. The vast majority of farmland and natural areas in Stouffville sit in provincially designated areas, including the Greenbelt and the Oak Ridges Moraine. These designations protect the agricultural land base from conversion to non-agricultural uses, which is an asset for the long-term viability of farming and agritourism in the Town. They also shape the regulatory environment within which agritourism operates, sometimes in ways that are restrictive. For the purposes of framing the asset base, Stouffville's agricultural land is unusually well-protected and unusually well-positioned relative to large urban demand.

Stouffville accounts for approximately 23% of York Region's total farm area. That is the second-largest share among York Region municipalities, after King Township at 24%, despite Stouffville being one of the smaller municipalities by population. Total farm area in Stouffville grew from approximately 17,127 acres in 2016 to 30,682 acres in 2021, even as the total number of farms declined from 116 to 83.ⁱⁱⁱ This pattern of fewer, larger farms working a larger total acreage highlights consolidation trends consistent with broader York Region and Ontario patterns. It is relevant to agritourism because larger operating units generally have more capacity to support diversification into visitor-facing activities.

Within the broader Regional Tourism Organization 6 (also known as Central Counties Tourism or CCT) catchment of York, Durham, and Headwaters (2,944 farms in total), Stouffville's 83 farms represent a small share by count.^{iv} The more useful comparison is the composition of Stouffville's farm base relative to the broader region. That composition is what determines which types of agritourism activities are physically possible. The composition of Stouffville's farm base differs meaningfully from the broader CCT area. The table below sets out the share of each farm-type bundle in Stouffville, in each of the three regions in the catchment, and across the CCT total. The rightmost column shows the difference between Stouffville's share and the CCT total share, expressed in percentage points.

Farm Type Bundle	S	York	Durham	Headwaters	CCT Total	S vs CCT
Field Crops & Forage	27.5%	23.7%	28.6%	31.5%	28.7%	-1.2 pp
Fruit & Orchard Crops	3.8%	1.8%	2.0%	1.1%	1.6%	+2.2 pp

Vegetables, Mushrooms & Field Produce	10.6%	16.7%	4.9%	5.1%	7.4%	+3.2 pp
Greenhouse, Nursery, Floriculture & Tree Farms	15.6%	10.1%	5.8%	3.0%	5.6%	+10.0 pp
Maple, Honey & Specialty	2.5%	1.1%	1.4%	1.5%	1.4%	+1.1 pp
Livestock, Dairy & Poultry	29.4%	34.1%	43.3%	42.8%	41.2%	-11.8 pp
Equine	7.5%	6.7%	4.7%	5.6%	5.5%	+2.0 pp
Mixed / Other / Unclassified	3.1%	5.9%	9.4%	9.4%	8.7%	-5.5 pp
Total farms	83	604	1,200	1,140	2,944	—

Source: Produced by the Regional Assessment Model using Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture (2021) data accessed through OMAFA's Ontario Farm Data by County dataset, with farm-type bundles.

This pattern is distinctive. Stouffville is significantly over-represented in greenhouse, nursery, floriculture and tree farms, with a share roughly three times the CCT average. It is also meaningfully over-represented in fruit and orchard crops, more than twice the CCT average. Stouffville is over-represented in vegetable and produce farms as well, particularly compared to Durham and Headwaters. At the same time, Stouffville is significantly under-represented in livestock, dairy and poultry farms, with a share roughly 12 percentage points below the CCT average. Field crops and forage are present in roughly typical proportions, and equine sits slightly above the catchment average.

The farm and agritourism

This composition matters because agritourism activity is bounded by what is physically grown. A region with few orchards will struggle to host a strong u-pick or cider economy. A region dominated by commodity livestock production is likely to tend toward direct farm sales rather than visitor experiences built around harvest seasons. Stouffville's farm-base composition therefore tilts the field of possibility in a few specific directions. The over-represented farm types map naturally onto higher-engagement, higher-spend agritourism activities.

For example, greenhouse, nursery, floriculture and tree farms support seasonal harvest activities such as Christmas tree farms, garden-centre experiences, and ornamental sunflower fields. They may also support workshops and value-added retail. These farm types are generally compatible with visitor-facing infrastructure on relatively small footprints, which matters in a regulatory environment that restricts the size of non-agricultural uses on farmland. Fruit and orchard farms are likely to support u-pick, cidery and winery production, value-added processing activations, farm-to-table dining, and seasonal events. The Town has only a small number of fruit and orchard farms in absolute

terms, but proportionally Stouffville has more of this farm type than any peer region in the catchment. Vegetable and produce farms tend to support farm-gate retail, farm markets, and educational experiences for school-age and family visitors.

The under-represented segment, livestock, is the farm type with the largest absolute presence in Stouffville at 47 farms. However, it is the segment where agritourism conversion has historically been slowest across Ontario. Livestock-based agritourism (e.g. farm stays, animal-experience operations, on-farm butchery classes, working-farm tours, etc.) is possible but tends to require higher capital investment and more sophisticated visitor-management infrastructure than crop-based activities. Whether and how this segment can be activated is a question taken up in the supply analysis and opportunity analysis that follows.

Context summary

Stouffville has three (3) structural assets that give it a strong foundation for agritourism development.

- Substantial and protected farmland base, with approximately 30,700 acres of farmland within a 200-square-kilometre municipality.
- Located next to a metropolitan visitor market of 7.7 million people.
- Farm-base composition that is well aligned with high-engagement agritourism, including a relatively strong presence of orchards, nursery and tree farms, and vegetable operations.

At the same time, these advantages are constrained by two important factors. The regulatory environment that protects Stouffville's farmland is restrictive in what it permits, and the largest single segment of the farm base, livestock, is also the segment where agritourism conversion is often most difficult. The strategic question for the rest of this assessment is therefore whether Stouffville's existing operators and prospective operators have begun to activate this asset base, how that activity compares to peer regions, and where the largest remaining gaps and opportunities lie.

Current Agritourism Supply

This section examines the current state of agritourism supply in Stouffville. It draws on the inventory of agritourism, and on-farm diversified operations developed for this study, the farm-base data introduced above, and operator insights from the agritourism survey. The analysis tests the common stakeholder framing of Stouffville's agritourism sector as "limited and fragmented" against the underlying data and introduces an analytical lens on how much of Stouffville's farm base has been engaged in agritourism activity, by farm type.

Stouffville agritourism inventory

The inventory analyzed in this section comes from the Regional Assessment Model (RAM) introduced earlier. The RAM identifies 32 distinct agritourism and on-farm diversified operations in Stouffville, offering a combined 48 activity records across the RAM's 11-category framework. The activity count exceeds the operation count because most operations offer more than one type of experience. A winery that also serves café food and hosts private functions, for example, appears in three activity categories. Of the 32 distinct operations, 6 appear to be direct-sales-only operations (i.e. farm-gate retail or

farm market without any on-farm experiential component), and 26 are experience-based operations (i.e. offering activities that draw visitors for purposes beyond purchasing product).

Stouffville's agritourism activity is summarized in the table below. The categories most associated with a destination-level visitor draw and overnight stays (i.e. farm-based accommodation, winery and beverage, café and dining, and event venues) are listed at the bottom of the table to highlight where the inventory is currently thin.

Activity Category	Activity Records
Direct Farm Sales / Farm Gate Retail	12
U-Pick / Seasonal Harvest	7
Animal Experience	6
Experiential Farm / Agri-Entertainment	5
Other On-Farm Diversified Use	5
Agricultural Education	3
Event Venue / Private Functions	3
Farm Market / Local Food Retail	2
Winery / Cidery / Brewery / Meadery	2
Locally Sourced Café / Dining	2
Farm-Based Accommodation / Retreat	1
Total activity records	48

Source: Produced by the Regional Assessment Model. Inventory compiled from the Town of Stouffville's operator contact database, the York-Durham-Headwaters agritourism directory, and supplementary secondary scans, classified against the RAM's 11-category framework.

The data tells a more nuanced story than the "limited and fragmented" narrative we heard from stakeholders. Stouffville has activity in nearly every agritourism category, with meaningful clusters in direct sales, seasonal harvest, animal experience, and experiential agri-entertainment. The thinnest categories are the ones that typically drive longer visits, higher spend, and overnight stays: farm-based accommodation (n=1), winery and beverage (n=2), on-farm café and dining (n=2), and event venues (n=3). The retail and seasonal-harvest layer of the sector is well-established. The experience-and-stay layer is present but uneven, with strength in animal experience and agri-entertainment and gaps in the higher-spend categories.

Since a meaningful share of Stouffville's farm base is engaged in agritourism in some form, a more accurate characterization of what the engagement is describing is that the

sector is substantial but not yet cohesive. Stakeholders are not mistaken to flag fragmentation through the community engagement activities. They are observing that the sector lacks coordinated marketing, shared visitor pathways between operations, branded destination identity, and the higher-spend experience-and-stay categories that turn an inventory of farms into a destination. The "fragmented" observation is best read as a critique of destination cohesion rather than a critique of inventory size.

Engagement of farm base

As noted earlier, Stouffville is significantly over-represented in greenhouse, nursery, floriculture and tree farms, and meaningfully over-represented in fruit and orchard crops, relative to the broader Central Counties catchment. It is also over-represented in vegetable and produce farms, and significantly under-represented in livestock, dairy and poultry. This supply data brings up an important question: Of the farms in each category, how many have been engaged in agritourism?

The table below presents an engagement rate for each farm-type bundle in Stouffville, defined as the number of agritourism or on-farm diversified operations classified under that farm type, divided by the total number of farms of that type identified in the 2021 Census of Agriculture. The agritourism operation count for this analysis includes all 32 operations in the Stouffville inventory, including direct-sales-only operations, reflecting the broad agritourism definition.

Farm Type Bundle	S Farms	S Agritourism Operations	S Engagement Rate
Fruit & Orchard Crops	6	5	83%
Equine	12	9	75%
Greenhouse, Nursery, Floriculture & Tree Farms	25	8	32%
Vegetables, Mushrooms & Field Produce	17	5	29%
Livestock, Dairy & Poultry	47	4	9%
Field Crops & Forage	44	2	5%
Maple, Honey & Specialty	4	0	0%
Mixed / Other / Unclassified	5	0	0%

Source: Produced by the Regional Assessment Model. Agritourism operations from the RAM inventory; farm counts from Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture (2021) via OMAFA's Ontario Farm Data by County dataset.

The pattern within Stouffville is one of medium to high engagement in the farm types most readily suited to agritourism, and lower engagement in the largest bundle by farm count. Most fruit and orchard farms offer some form of agritourism, and the same is true

of equine operations. Roughly one in three greenhouse, nursery and tree farms is engaged in agritourism. Livestock, dairy and poultry farms show lower engagement at about one in twelve.

It should be noted that the livestock, dairy and poultry farm bundle is diverse. It includes large-scale beef and dairy operations, where on-farm visitor activity is less typical, alongside smaller-scale poultry, goat, and sheep operations that can readily support petting experiences, fresh egg or specialty product sales, and farm tours. The smaller specialty segment of maple, honey, and other specialty farm bundle has no current engagement.

Notably, roughly five of every six fruit and orchard farms in Stouffville offer some form of agritourism. This engagement rate is unusual at this concentration level and reflects both the small number of orchard farms in the region and the high suitability of orchards for visitor-facing activity.

Forward-looking signals from the survey

Among current operators surveyed, 7 indicated they have plans to add new activities or expand existing ones over the next five years, with another 3 considering expansion. Reported expansion plans skew toward higher-engagement categories, including new workshops, expanded food and beverage offerings, wedding and event hosting, restaurant or café development.

Prospective operators and investors expressed strongest interest in workshops and educational classes, U-pick experiences, farm-based accommodation, farm retail, on-farm events, and tasting experiences. It is worth noting that the categories where prospective operators are most interested, overlap closely with the categories where Stouffville's current agritourism inventory is thinnest. These include workshops, accommodation, on-farm food and beverage, and tasting experiences. Two of four prospective and investor respondents identified farm-based accommodation as a desired offering. With only one operation of this type in the region, this is the clearest single signal in the survey that the market is identifying a category gap that current supply has not filled. Whether the visitor market accessible to Stouffville is consistent with this direction is the question the demand analysis looks at next.

Sizing the Agritourism Opportunity

The Town of Stouffville does not currently have visitor data specific to its agritourism operations. The visitor data presented earlier in this report captures visitation to downtown Stouffville, not visitors to farm-based attractions. The market sizing in this section combines that visitor analysis with broader agritourism studies to produce an estimated picture of agritourism market demand. The figures are intended for market sizing and strategic planning purposes, not as operational targets, and reflect conservative assumptions throughout. The actual addressable market and current Stouffville capture may be larger than the figures presented.

A standing recommendation of this study, carried forward into the strategy development phase, is for the Town to commission geofenced visitor data specific to its agritourism operations. Direct measurement of agritourism visitation would allow the conservative estimates here to be refined into operational figures.

Visitor data through an agritourism lens

Two implications from the visitor data presented earlier set up the analysis that follows.

Firstly, the downtown geofence data shows 137,685 daily visits but only 13,769 unique visitors in 2025, a ratio of roughly ten daily visits per unique visitor. This pattern likely reflects commuter, repeat-shopper, and other non-tourism behaviour rather than tourism visitation. It confirms that downtown geofence data is not an indicator of agritourism demand and supports the need for the separate market sizing analysis presented in this section.

Secondly, the origin geography of downtown visitors directly informs the catchment definition used in the market sizing below. The primary visitor origin municipalities span Toronto, York, Peel, and the immediate northern fringe of the GTA, with emerging origin markets extending into Durham Region and beyond. This pattern aligns with a market catchment of the Greater Toronto Area (Toronto, York, Durham, Peel, and Halton regions), which is the catchment used in the analysis below.

The visitor profiles outlined in the *Visitor Data* section of this report, particularly *Foodie Fanatics* and *Family Fun - Core* as the primary agritourism-aligned segments with *Passionate Putters* and *Adventure Seekers* as secondary, identify the demographic groups that agritourism marketing should target with priority placement, message design, and channel selection.

Addressable agritourism market

To estimate the size of the agritourism market accessible to Stouffville, this analysis applies the Ontario agritourism participation rate from the Fields of Opportunity (FoO) study to the population of the GTA catchment.

According to FoO, between 3 and 4.5 million Ontarians visit an agritourism operation each year, representing approximately one in four Ontario residents.^v Using the midpoint of this range (3.75 million annual visitors) against Ontario's 2024 population of 16.2 million yields a participation rate of 23.2%. Applied to the GTA's estimated 2024 population of 7.7 million,^{vi} this produces an estimated 1.78 million GTA residents who visit an agritourism operation each year. This figure constitutes the agritourism market accessible to Stouffville. It is the visitor pool from which local operations compete for visits alongside agritourism destinations across the rest of the province, including Niagara, Prince Edward County, Norfolk County, Wellington County, etc. It is not a measure of unique visitors to Stouffville specifically, but the addressable pool against which Stouffville's current and potential capture can be assessed.

Current capture

The supply analysis above identifies 32 catalogued agritourism and on-farm diversified operations in Stouffville, of which 27 are agritourism operations (excluding 5 on-farm diversified uses tracked separately). In the absence of geofence data specific to these operations, this section estimates Stouffville's current annual visitor capture by combining the operator count with visitor-volume benchmarks drawn from the FoO survey. The FoO survey reports the distribution of annual visitor counts across Ontario agritourism operators.^{vii} The median Ontario operator draws approximately 3,800 visitors

annually,¹ with the median bucket spanning 1,000 to 4,999 visitors. Three converging signals suggest that Stouffville operators are likely to sit at the upper end of this median bucket or higher.

The first is structural advantages. Most Ontario agritourism operators are not adjacent to a 7.7 million-person urban market. Proximity to the GTA is consistently identified by operators and stakeholders as the single most important driver of visitation. The second is operator survey evidence. The Stouffville agritourism survey conducted for this study collected responses from five Town of Stouffville current operators, all five of whom reported receiving more than 5,000 visitors per year. The Ontario benchmark from FoO is that approximately 42% of operators report 5,000 or more visitors annually. The Stouffville sample is small, but its complete concentration above the 5,000 threshold is directionally consistent with the larger FoO distribution and provides supporting evidence that Stouffville operators report higher visitor counts than the Ontario norm. The third is inventory composition. Engagement and survey responses identify several Stouffville operations with a substantial visitor draw, including at least one operation reporting more than 20,000 visitors annually. This does not reflect all operations, but it supports the notion that a portion of the Stouffville agritourism inventory sits well above the Ontario median.

For the purposes of this analysis, a conservative estimate of 5,000 annual visitors to each Stouffville agritourism operator is used (this is the upper end of the Ontario median bucket). Applied to the 27 agritourism operations in the Stouffville inventory,² this produces a conservative estimated annual visit total of approximately 135,000 visits. The conservative framing deliberately avoids overstating the current capture given the absence of operator-specific visitor data. That said, there are signals, particularly the survey data, which suggest the actual figure is likely higher. Against the GTA agritourism market of 1.78 million annual visits, this reflects a current Stouffville capture rate of approximately 7.6% of the GTA agritourism market.

The market sizing logic is summarized below.

Metric	Value
GTA catchment population (2024)	7.7 million
Ontario agritourism participation rate	23.2%
Estimated GTA agritourism market (annual visits)	1.78 million
Stouffville agritourism operations	27

¹ The median is used in preference to the mean because the *FoO* agritourism operator distribution is heavily right-skewed. A small number of large operations (the top 5% drawing 100,000+ visitors annually) pulls the mean upward to approximately 22,000 visitors per operator, which is not representative of a typical operator. The median, drawn from the bucket containing the 50th percentile of operators, is the more defensible benchmark for sizing a typical operator's visitor draw.

² The 27-operation count excludes 5 on-farm diversified use operations but includes 6 direct-sales-only operations. This is done to maintain consistency with the *Fields of Opportunity* visitor data.

Visits per Stouffville operator (conservative estimate)	5,000
Estimated Stouffville annual visits	135,000
Stouffville current capture rate	7.6%
Stouffville doubling target capture rate	15.1%

Interpreting the capture rate

The 7.6% capture rate is Stouffville's current position in a competitive regional market. This figure is broadly consistent with what would be expected if Stouffville's share of agritourism visits roughly tracked its share of regional agritourism supply, suggesting Stouffville is capturing approximately its fair share of the GTA agritourism market today. This is the position of a participant in the regional agritourism economy, but not yet that of a destination within it.

A destination captures market share that exceeds its share of supply. A destination is the place that GTA residents specifically choose for an agritourism experience, rather than the place they happen to encounter while looking for an agritourism activity. Moving from a fair-share position to a destination position is the strategic question that Stouffville's agritourism sector faces, and it connects directly to the supply-side observation above that Stouffville's agritourism sector is substantial but not yet cohesive. Capturing above fair share will likely require the experience-and-stay categories that Stouffville is currently thin on, the destination identity that operators report as missing, and the coordinated marketing infrastructure that turns an inventory of farms into a destination.

A useful framing of the strategic ambition is a doubling target, capturing approximately 15% of the GTA agritourism market, equivalent to approximately 270,000 annual visits to Stouffville agritourism operations. This is meaningfully above current capture and would position Stouffville among the leading agritourism destinations accessible to the GTA. It is also ambitious. Achieving it would require the combination of supply-side investment, destination positioning, and marketing coordination outlined in subsequent sections of this assessment.

Growth and competition

The GTA agritourism market is growing in both absolute and relative terms, with three trends shaping Stouffville's medium-term opportunity.

Population growth. The GTA is projected to grow by approximately 22% between 2024 and 2051 according to the Government of Ontario's population projections.^{viii} On its current per-capita participation rate, this implies the addressable GTA agritourism market will grow to approximately 2.2 million annual visits by 2051 through population growth alone, before any change in participation rates.

Sector-level growth. Industry research projects the Canadian agritourism market to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of approximately 12.9% over the next several years, indicating that agritourism is among the faster-growing tourism categories in

Canada. Per-capita participation rates may therefore rise alongside population growth, compounding the market expansion.

Increased competitive activity. The same trends that benefit Stouffville also motivate other Ontario municipalities to invest in agritourism. As noted earlier, Norfolk County operates coordinated tourism marketing for participating farms and food and beverage businesses, and Wellington County's Rural Romp brings farms, markets, nurseries, and food and beverage operators together along mapped routes with municipal support. Other neighbouring Ontario municipalities are similarly developing destination-scale agritourism positioning.

Within this regional competitive context, Stouffville holds structural advantages in its farm base that are not easily replicated. As established in the analysis above, Stouffville is meaningfully over-represented relative to the broader Central Counties catchment in three farm-type bundles: fruit and orchard crops, greenhouse and nursery operations, and vegetable producers. These are precisely the farm types most associated with the high-engagement agritourism activities that drive longer visits and higher per-visit spending, including u-pick and seasonal harvest experiences, value-added beverage production, on-farm food retail, and farm-to-fork dining.

Other CCT municipalities have stronger livestock farm bases, but the agritourism conversion of livestock farms across Ontario remains low, particularly for larger beef and dairy operations. Stouffville's specific advantages in orchard and tree farm categories take years to develop in regions that do not already have them, since orchards require multiple years from planting to commercial production. Stouffville's advantage in these categories, combined with its established presence in greenhouse, nursery, and vegetable production, reflects a durable competitive position.

Stouffville's growth will need to come from a combination of expanding the regional market, capturing a larger share of it, and building on the farm-base advantage already in place. The supply-side gaps identified in the supply analysis above, including accommodation, on-farm food and beverage, and destination cohesion, are where competitive differentiation can be built on top of the existing farm-base advantage.

Stouffville's conservatively estimated 7.6% capture of the GTA agritourism market is a fair-share position. Moving to a destination position, framed as doubling that share, requires the labour and operational capacity, viability conditions, and specific opportunity categories examined in the analyses that follow.

Labour and Operational Capacity

Workforce composition

The Stouffville Agritourism Survey provides a direct view of how current operators staff their businesses. Across the 12 current operators who responded, workforce arrangements are layered, with most operators combining several labour sources rather than relying on any single one. Two-thirds (8 of 12) draw on unpaid family or friend labour. Nearly 60% (7 of 12) use seasonal or part-time student staff, and a comparable share (7 of 12) hire from the local area, including Stouffville itself and the wider York Region. One

operator reported working mostly alone due to difficulty finding or affording staff, and one reported using foreign nationals through seasonal agricultural worker programs. The pattern that emerges is of a sector built around family and small-team operations that supplement with seasonal student help and local hires during peak periods. The model works at current scale. The question is whether it scales.

Labour

Notably, labour was not named as a top concern by current operators when asked directly about challenges to growing their agritourism business. Operators primarily named regulatory and approval-process challenges, marketing visibility, and land-use pressures from residential development. Only one current operator explicitly referenced difficulty finding or affording staff as an operational constraint. Among prospective operators, one respondent identified "time and workload" as a key concern about starting an agritourism business. This is a labour-adjacent concern that signals the realistic demands of operating an agritourism business alongside other commitments. That said, finding skilled tourism labour did come up via the farm table talks and key informant interviews as a key challenge to agritourism growth.

Two structural factors will shape how labour constrains Stouffville's agritourism growth. The first is the gap between the current labour model and the labour requirements of higher-engagement agritourism categories. The categories where Stouffville's inventory is currently thin and where the strategy will identify the greatest growth opportunity (farm-based accommodation, on-farm food and beverage, expanded event hosting, structured educational programming) are also the categories with the highest labour intensity. They require trained staff for guest services, food handling, event coordination, hospitality, and supervisory functions that family labour and seasonal students might not be positioned to provide year-round. Expansion into these categories may require operators to move beyond the current labour model.

The second is the broader labour market context in York Region. The York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy 2024-2027 identifies labour (specifically skilled labour, transition planning, and the cost of living) as one of the top three challenges facing the regional agri-food sector. The York Region Strategy includes a goal area (Goal 1C) focused on skills development and labour force attraction, with action items addressing newcomer and immigrant talent engagement, partnerships with post-secondary institutions, and business succession planning. The agritourism sector sits within this broader labour challenge. Stouffville's competition for staff is not only with other agritourism operations but with the broader GTA service economy where wages and benefits packages can exceed what some agritourism operations can offer.

Implications for the strategy

The labour findings have three implications for the strategic recommendations that follow. First, opportunity categories should be assessed against their labour intensity. Some growth pathways (extending the season for existing operations, value-added retail, self-guided experiences) require relatively modest additional labour. Others (accommodations, events, on-farm dining) require substantially more staff and more skilled staff. The opportunity prioritization in a later section takes labour intensity into account.

Second, the regional partnerships identified in the York Region Strategy can be leveraged by the Town. Two action items in Goal 1C are particularly relevant to Stouffville's agritourism labour needs. Action 1C.7 focuses on helping sector employers understand and engage newcomer and immigrant talent, working with regional agricultural and workforce development partners. Action 1C.8 focuses on skills development through partnerships with post-secondary institutions and other educational organizations.^{ix} The first is a route to expanding the labour pool that Stouffville operators can draw from. The second is a route to building the trained, certified staff that higher-engagement agritourism categories require. Both are resources the Town and its operators can engage with, without needing to build new partnerships from scratch. The full list of partners under each action item is available in the York Region Strategy.

Third, the regulatory environment around labour shifts as operations transition from primary agriculture to including agritourism. As noted earlier, some agricultural labour exemptions under the Employment Standards Act, Occupational Health and Safety Act, and related provincial regulations may no longer apply when operations transition into accommodations, restaurants, events, retail, or hospitality services. Operators expanding into the higher-engagement categories will need clearer guidance on the employment requirements that come with that transition. This is a consideration that should be kept top of mind when confirming the contents of the Stouffville and York Region Agritourism Toolkits.

Conditions for Viability

The earlier sections of this analysis establish the asset base, the supply, along with the demand for agritourism in Stouffville. This section asks whether the underlying conditions support a viable agritourism economy in Stouffville. Viability here is not whether a single operation can succeed but whether the market and supply conditions, together, support a sustainable agritourism sector at meaningful scale. Five conditions are tested: demand, supply, competition, and product.

Demand

The market sizing analysis above establishes a GTA agritourism market of approximately 1.78 million annual visits, of which Stouffville is conservatively estimated to capture 7.6%. Both the participation rate (23.2% of Ontarians visiting a farm each year) and the catchment population (7.7 million GTA residents) provide a substantial demand base. The market is also growing on two fronts: GTA population is projected to increase by approximately 22% by 2051, and the Canadian agritourism category is growing faster than the broader tourism market. Demand is not a constraint on viability.

Supply

The context analysis above demonstrates that Stouffville's farm-base composition is well-suited to higher-engagement agritourism. The area is meaningfully over-represented in fruit and orchard crops, greenhouse and nursery operations, and vegetable producers, which are the farm types most strongly associated with the activities that drive longer visits and higher per-visit spending. The supply analysis confirms that Stouffville has 27 agritourism operations across nearly every category, with deep engagement in the high-

potential farm types and aspirations from prospective operators toward the experience-and-stay categories where the current inventory is thinnest. The supply base supports a viable agritourism sector and a credible path to expansion.

Competition

Stouffville's estimated current 7.6% capture rate aligns approximately with its share of GTA agritourism supply. This position is described in the demand analysis as fair-share. This is a viable position, and it is also a position from which growth is possible. Competing destinations are investing in agritourism, but the Town's location and structural advantages in farm-base composition are not easily replicated. The competitive position is not at risk of erosion in the short or medium term, and a doubling of capture to approximately 15% is a defensible strategic target.

Product

The most analytically interesting question for viability is whether Stouffville's agritourism offering is differentiated enough that GTA visitors will choose it rather than substituting with closer or comparable alternatives. The answer is that differentiation is real, but it operates in two layers that matter for different visit types.

The first layer is geographic. Stouffville's defining structural advantage is proximity. Most agritourism destinations that Ontario visitors might consider, including Niagara, Prince Edward County, and Norfolk, require multi-hour drives or overnight trip planning. Stouffville offers comparable experiences within day-trip range of 7.7 million GTA residents. For visit types where convenience matters (a Saturday family outing, a school trip, a quick u-pick stop), geographic proximity creates a real differentiation that competing destinations cannot match without relocating.

The second layer is product-based. For visit types where the specific experience matters (e.g. a destination-quality cidery, an Instagrammable orchard, a lavender field, etc.), the potential visitor switches from asking "where is the closest farm?" to "where is the best farm of the type I want?" In these visit types, Stouffville's farm-base concentration in orchard, nursery and tree, and vegetable farms may give it a stronger product-based differentiation than competing GTA-adjacent municipalities, but weaker than specialty destinations like Niagara's wine country or Prince Edward County's food and wine tourism.

In summary, for broad family-oriented agritourism visits within day-trip range, geographic proximity is the dominant differentiator. For category-specific destination visits, product concentration matters more, and Stouffville's farm-base advantages give it a defensible position in the categories where it has structural strength. Both kinds of differentiation reduce substitution risk and support viability.

Regulatory environment

The regulatory context that surrounds agritourism is outlined earlier in this report, but three points are relevant for viability. The first is that the regulatory environment is restrictive enough to constrain how operators can scale into the higher-engagement categories, but it is not so restrictive that the sector cannot operate. The second is that the majority of Stouffville's farmland sits within Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine

Conservation Plan areas, layering provincial restrictions on top of municipal zoning. Some competing regions outside the Greenbelt boundary do not face this overlay. These provincial restrictions add real costs (human and financial resources, delays, etc.) to planning, development, and ongoing operations in Stouffville, and they constrain the scale and type agritourism uses that operators can pursue. The third is that the Town's recent regulatory updates, including the new Official Plan and the Stouffville's new role as the sole municipal planning authority, create an opportunity to align zoning with current agritourism practice. Streamlining municipal regulatory pathways within the bounds of provincial requirements is one of the most direct levers the Town has for supporting sector growth. At the same time, it is important to note the important role the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan have played in making it possible for Stouffville to have a large agriculture and natural land bases so close to the Greater Toronto Area.

The conditions tested above support a viable agritourism economy in Stouffville. Demand is sufficient and growing, supply is well-aligned with high-engagement activities, the competitive position is fair-share with room to grow, and differentiation is real across both geographic and product-based dimensions. The regulatory environment is likely the most binding constraint because it adds costs that some competing regions outside the Greenbelt do not face, but it is addressable through municipal-level streamlining. This means that conditions to double the current capture, framed earlier as the strategic ambition, are in place for Stouffville.

Opportunity Areas

The supply, demand, and viability analyses above set out the conditions for agritourism growth in Stouffville. Drawing on those analyses together with input from project engagement, six opportunity areas emerge as the most promising candidates for converting current conditions into agritourism growth. Three are top-tier opportunities that address the strategic dimensions most consequential to moving Stouffville from a fair-share to a destination-share position. These dimensions are extending the operating season, creating reasons for visitors to stay longer, and building a connected destination experience. The remaining three are supporting opportunities that fill specific supply gaps and complement the strategic moves above. Together, they form a portfolio of investment areas that the Strategy phase can convert into concrete recommendations.

Top-tier opportunities

Extending the season. Ontario agritourism activity is heavily concentrated in summer and fall. Industry data shows operator activity peaking at 82-87% between June and October and dropping to 30-46% across December-to-March.^x Stouffville is meaningfully over-represented in the farm types that most readily support season extension, including greenhouse, nursery, and tree farms, which can host Christmas tree experiences, garden-centre programming, indoor floral and ornamental activity, and shoulder-season retail.

Extending operating weeks spreads fixed-cost infrastructure across more revenue, improves labour predictability for operators who rely on seasonal staff, and increases the share of operator income that comes from agritourism activity. Season extension is the opportunity area most directly aligned with Stouffville's structural farm-base

advantages, and it is accessible to operators across multiple scale tiers without large capital investment.

On-farm accommodations. Farm-based accommodation is the single largest supply gap identified in this analysis. The current Stouffville inventory contains only one accommodation record. The Agritourism Survey provides the strongest single demand signal for any category, with two of the four prospective and investor respondents identifying farm-based accommodation as a desired offering. Accommodation drives overnight visitor spending and creates multi-day visitor itineraries that increase the value of every other agritourism asset in the area. Operator capital requirements vary by accommodation format (i.e. tents, yurts, cabins, suites, etc.), and the smaller-footprint formats are accessible at modest investment levels.

Interconnected farm experiences. The supply analysis above describes Stouffville's agritourism sector as substantial but not cohesive. The opportunity to build connections between operations, including signed routes between farms, cycling paths linking farms and downtown, shared marketing across operators, and packaged multi-stop visitor itineraries, is the most direct response to that finding. It does not require new operations to be built, but it does require coordination amongst existing operators, infrastructure investment from the Town, and a unifying brand or wayfinding identity. The fair-share to destination-share progression framed as a goal in the demand analysis depends substantially on this opportunity being developed.

Supporting opportunities

Farm cafés and restaurants. The current inventory contains two records in the locally sourced café and dining category, making this one of the thinner segments of the supply base. Farm-to-fork dining aligns with the *Foodie Fanatics* visitor segment identified in the demand analysis above and supports longer dwell times and higher per-visit spend. The category is labour-intensive, requiring trained kitchen and service staff, along with higher capital requirements than for self-guided or retail-only operations. Development is more easily accessible to larger or destination-level operations than to smaller operators.

Events of different sizes. The current inventory contains three event venues, and the Stouffville agritourism survey identifies wedding and event hosting among the expansion plans of current operators. Events function as a cross-category enabler, drawing visitors to operations they would not otherwise visit and creating opportunities for partnership across farms. The category is constrained by labour intensity at scale, regulatory friction around special event permits, parking, traffic, and noise management, and the seasonal concentration of weddings and large events. Smaller-scale events such as workshops, harvest dinners, and intimate tastings are accessible to a broader range of operators than large-scale event venues.

Experience development. Workshops, animal experiences, and educational classes were the most-named category of interest among prospective and investor survey respondents. This category is among the most accessible from a capital and labour perspective: programming can be developed within existing infrastructure, and seasonal student staff can support delivery. It aligns with the *Family Fun – Core* visitor segment and with the trend toward authentic and educational visitor experiences noted via trends

research and engagements. It can also help provide year-round demand. The category supports broader sector readiness by introducing operators to visitor-facing activities at a scale they can manage before pursuing larger investments.

Summary of Opportunities

Opportunity	Analytical Fit	Conditions Needed	Priority
Extending the season	Stouffville is over-represented in greenhouse/nursery/tree farms; addresses the structural seasonality constraint and improves the economics of fixed-cost infrastructure	Operator investment in shoulder-season activities; modest capital requirements	Top tier
On-farm accommodations	Largest single supply gap (1 record); strongest single survey demand signal (2 of 4 prospective operators); drives overnight spend and multi-day itineraries	Zoning clarity; operator capital	Top tier
Interconnected farm experiences	Direct response to "substantial but not yet cohesive" finding; foundational for fair-share-to-destination-share progression	Inter-operator coordination; Town infrastructure (signage, wayfinding, cycling routes); brand development	Top tier
Farm cafés and restaurants	Foodie Fanatics segment fit; drives dwell time and per-visit spend; supply gap (2 records)	Trained labour; significant capital; food safety compliance	Supporting
Events of different sizes	Cross-category enabler; survey signal of operator expansion plans	Special event permitting; parking and traffic management; labour intensity at scale	Supporting
Educational programming	Strongest prospective operator interest; Family Fun – Core segment alignment; labour-light	Modest investment; programming design capacity	Supporting

The six opportunity areas above translate the conditions analyzed across this assessment into a concrete portfolio that fills specific supply gaps and will serve as an important foundation for the agritourism strategy development phase of this project. Focusing on top-tier opportunities, extending the agritourism season, growing a base of on-farm accommodations to improve the visitor experience and encourage them to stay longer, as well as increasing the connectedness of the sector, are most likely to convert Stouffville's substantial but not yet cohesive agritourism sector into a real destination. Of course, these should also be complemented by harnessing the supported opportunities.

6. Key Takeaways

The Town of Stouffville recognizes the economic, cultural, and environmental value of agritourism. The sector's position at intersection of tourism, farm viability, local food systems, and rural place-making means that it can contribute to community development in several ways. To harness this opportunity, action is needed in three areas including destination management, policies and processes, and additional business supports.

With its agricultural base, access to Greater Toronto Area markets, GO-Train connections, and proximity to Rouge National Park, Stouffville is well positioned to grow agritourism. Near-urban and short-break travel is growing in Ontario, particularly amongst visitors seeking nearby day trips and weekend escapes. The continued rise of the **experience economy** is increasing demand for immersive, bookable activities such as tours, tastings, workshops, seasonal u-picks, and curated farm-based events. Wellness and nature-based travel are also creating opportunities for quieter, restorative rural experiences, including those tied to landscapes and local food.

Stouffville's farm-base composition gives it a structural advantage in agritourism categories that drive higher visitor engagement. The Town is meaningfully over-represented in fruit and orchard farms, greenhouse and nursery operations, and vegetable producers relative to neighbouring municipalities. Five of six orchard farms in Stouffville already offer agritourism, the highest engagement rate of any farm-type bundle. These structural advantages take years to develop in regions that do not already have them and reflect a durable competitive position. At the same time, Stouffville faces competition from other nearby destinations. Establishing a **unique value proposition** will be important to lock in these competitive markets. Several community engagement activities associated with this project point to anchoring Stouffville's agritourism offering to education, wellness, and local food systems.

To become known as a leading agritourism destination in Ontario, several conditions need to align. Stouffville has substantial agritourism activity across 32 catalogued operations, but the sector is not yet positioned as a connected destination, and supply is thin in the higher-engagement categories that drive longer visits and overnight stays, including farm-based accommodations, on-farm food and beverage, event venues, and educational programming. These two characteristics, a connection gap and category gaps, define the current state of agritourism in the Stouffville region.

Rather than just purchasing products, agritourism visitors today seek to engage with how food is grown, connect with producers, and participate in hands-on experiences. When farms offer something beyond farm-gate sales, it encourages **longer stays** and higher economic impacts. Ideally, a diversity of experiences should be on offer across the year to encourage **repeat visitation** from nearby markets who can also provide referrals to family and friends. Moreover, farm staff who encourage visitors to move around the destination through personalized recommendations will help to grow Stouffville's overall reputation. Once a strong day-trip model has been established, the next step is to grow **overnight trips**, which generally come with higher spends.

Municipalities play a critical role in determining whether agritourism opportunities are realized. While individual operators develop the actual experiences, municipalities help shape the conditions in which agritourism can emerge and grow. In general, supportive municipalities do three things well. First, they **create clearer and more proportionate policy environments** through definitions, zoning, approvals pathways, and plain-

language guidance that reduce uncertainty for farm operators. Second, they **strengthen the broader destination ecosystem** through tools such as wayfinding, digital promotion, route development, visitor information, and partnerships that help visitors move between experiences. Third, they **support business readiness** by connecting operators to training, market intelligence, peer learning, funding opportunities, and resources related to visitor management, safety, signage, pricing, customer service, etc. Taken together, these forms of support help reduce friction for operators while making agritourism experiences more visible, navigable, and market-ready.

Key to a successful agritourism destination is **balancing farm viability with the protection of the agricultural land base**. It is important that agritourism remains a secondary use to farming, both to protect farming and the authenticity of the visitor experience. In Stouffville, several provincial plans and policies work to maintain this balance, including the Greenbelt Plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. These provincial protections do, however, add real human resources, financial, and time costs to the planning, development, and ongoing operations of Stouffville's agritourism businesses. Operators in regions outside the Greenbelt and Moraine do not face these costs.

Within the constraints set by these provincial protections, a municipality's role is to make it easier to approve small, legitimate, farm-based uses while still managing and mitigating impacts from larger, more commercialized operations. Overall, the current state of agritourism suggests a sector with strong momentum, but one that depends on thoughtful enabling conditions to reach its full potential. For Stouffville, this means the opportunity is not simply to encourage more agritourism activity, but to foster the conditions that help appropriate agritourism to flourish, including clearer rules, stronger coordination, better-connected experiences, improved discoverability, online and in-person and supports that help operators build market-ready, gap-filling products.

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7. Preliminary Recommendations

Based on the research to date, several preliminary recommendations have emerged for how the Town of Stouffville can support a more enabling policy environment for agritourism. These recommendations are non-exhaustive and will be pressure-tested and refined through additional community engagements across summer 2026. The preliminary recommendations outlined below have been divided into two areas of work, to inform both the Agritourism Strategy and the Agritourism Toolkits.

Agritourism Strategy

Policies and processes

- Confirm Economic Development as the **primary intake point and concierge guide** for current and prospective agritourism operators, with clear connections across planning, building, by-law, fire, health, and other relevant departments.
- Strengthen **pre-consultation and early screening processes** so applicants understand major constraints early on, including environmental, servicing, traffic, and compatibility issues.
- Use the Agritourism Toolkit and related municipal communications to provide a **plain-language approvals pathway** for different agritourism concepts, from early ideas through permitting and operations (incl. land uses, building permits, serving food and alcohol, etc.).
- Confirm a clear local **definition of a farm in the context of agritourism eligibility criteria** so that policies are tied to legitimate farm operations and applicants understand what qualifies (e.g. Durham requires a Farm Business Registration or exemption from AgriCorp to be considered a farm)
- **Expand and clarify as-of-right permissions for common, low-impact agritourism** uses where appropriate, reducing reliance on site-specific rezoning and minor variance applications. Uses to be confirmed after community engagement concludes.
- Adopt a **criteria-based and flexible zoning approach** so agritourism businesses can evolve over time without requiring repeated planning amendments for every business model change.
- Create a **tiered approvals and review framework** that distinguishes between low-impact uses in existing buildings, moderate-impact proposals, and larger or more complex developments. This also means clarifying what agritourism proposals should be exempt from **site plan control**, subject to a lighter review, or require full review. Minor projects should not trigger unnecessary studies and costs.
- Provide clear, early information on municipal fees and development charges so operators can assess feasibility before investing significant time and money. As part of this, develop a **sliding scale for fees** to make agritourism development more feasible for farmers.
- Advocate to the Province for **greater flexibility** in how the 2% OFDU guideline is interpreted and applied, particularly for smaller farms and agritourism concepts that remain secondary to the farm operation but need more functional space.
- Advocate for **updates** to the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan so definitions and implementation approaches better align with the Provincial Planning Statement.

- Work with sector partners to advocate for **provincial tools and incentives** that better support farm diversification, rural entrepreneurship, and agritourism investment.
- Clean up and add agritourism-related **definitions** into the Official Plan (i.e. add bed and breakfast establishment, on-farm accommodation, farm, farmer, etc. remove farm vacation homes, etc.)
- Consider that certain **agricultural** and **agricultural-related uses** such as selling farm-products and/or value-added products, as permitted, provide another platform for retail-based agritourism activities.

Destination management

- Continue to **collect key data** related to visitor behaviour, operator needs etc. that informs agritourism decision-making (e.g. establish agreement with ConnectON to access data, purchase Environics geofences for rural areas to learn more about current visitors, continue to engage agricultural producers, etc.)
- Develop a more coordinated **destination wayfinding and signage approach** to improve discoverability of agritourism businesses and reduce friction for visitors, while building a consistent destination brand (e.g. develop a tourism wayfinding signage program)
- Work with partners to enhance DiscoverStouffville.ca where visitors can find clear, up-to-date information on agritourism businesses, seasonal offerings, routes, and bookable experiences.
- Continue to enhance the **unified destination brand Discover Stouffville and create visitor-facing elements** for Stouffville's agritourism identity, supported by consistent marketing assets that operators can use, to strengthen recognition of Stouffville as an agritourism destination beyond individual operator marketing.
- Improve **infrastructure that supports visitor movement** and connected experiences across Stouffville, including roads, cycling linkages, trails, signage, parking, and connections to downtown and other settlement areas (incl. low impact recreation)
- Develop **itineraries, routes, and experiences** that connect farms with one another and with other Stouffville businesses to encourage longer stays and higher visitor spending (i.e. create "big days" with multiple activities and experiences).
- Provide training for operators that builds **capacity** to provide personalized visitor recommendations, so visitors are encouraged to explore multiple businesses in a single trip.
- Support a stronger **year-round agritourism** offering by encouraging season extension, shoulder-season programming, and weather-resilient visitor experiences and infrastructure.
- Launch a **signature agritourism experiences program** to grow the number of high-quality bookable agritourism experiences on offer in Stouffville, with a focus on experiences that support season extension and destination differentiation (e.g. encourage experiences that build off relevant trends, like wellness)
- Explore launching an agritourism **event series (e.g. Open Farm Days)** to better position Stouffville as an agritourism destination.
- Explore establishment of a **Municipal Accommodation Tax** and use Town portion of funds to support agritourism (e.g. Establish a Rural Community Improvement Plan with funds for business owners, invest in rural tourism infrastructure, etc.)

- Explore **urban agriculture** as a parallel agritourism opportunity that can create additional links to farm systems

Additional business supports

- Offer **business modelling support** to help operators design viable agritourism models that combine complementary revenue streams such as retail, food and beverage, events, workshops, and seasonal programming. Importantly, this support should consider the land use planning context early on in the process.
- **Strengthen relationships** with organizations such as Central Counties Tourism, Agritourism Ontario, Culinary Tourism Alliance, tourism partners, and agricultural organizations to connect local operators with external expertise, training, and promotional opportunities.
- Build **multi-sector partnerships** that help connect agritourism businesses with tourism organizations, educational institutions, workforce development partners, relevant sector associations, other municipalities (incl. York Region) etc.
- Provide **product development support** for opportunity areas identified in the research, including educational programming, on-farm food and beverage, small-scale events, wellness experiences, and accommodations.
- Continue to coordinate **networking and peer-learning opportunities** for agritourism operators, farms, restaurants, chefs, and tourism businesses to strengthen collaboration and farm-to-fork connections across food and tourism systems.
- Support operators with **digital readiness and online discoverability**, including listing support, photography, online booking and purchases, seasonal information updates, and visibility through destination channels, where funding is available.
- Offer or coordinate **training** on pricing, packaging, customer service, and visitor management so operators can build stronger, more market-ready experiences.
- Explore tools that **support reinvestment in rural businesses**, such as an on-farm diversified use tax subclass, rural Community Improvement Plan incentives, or other targeted financial supports, where feasible.
- Foster connections and encourage partnerships between **farmers and tourism entrepreneurs** where they support farm viability and align with local policy objectives, particularly for pop-up programming, food, and visitor experiences.

Toolkit

Purpose

Based on a thorough review of other agritourism toolkits from across Ontario and beyond, it is recommended that the Stouffville Agritourism Toolkit act a guide to move agritourism business owners and entrepreneurs through key stages of business ideation, planning, permitting, and management. The toolkit will also serve to connect operators with additional resources from other organizations. Additionally, it is recommended that toolkit be completed by a regularly updated webpage on the Stouffville and York Region websites.

Example Contents

- Is agritourism right for you?

- Is your idea a good fit for your farm, land base, capacity, and business goals?
 - What steps are involved in developing an agritourism operation in Stouffville?
 - What land use policies, zoning, and environmental constraints may apply to your property?
 - What approvals, permits, and reviews may be required for your type and scale of agritourism idea? (e.g. clarify pathways for small-scale on-farm accommodations, wellness retreats, and adaptive reuse of existing farm buildings)
 - Examples of low infrastructure agritourism uses.
- What to consider around parking, traffic, washrooms, signage, accessibility, servicing, and visitor flow?
- Key considerations for food service, alcohol, events, accommodations, retail, and animal experiences (i.e. Help operators better understand the labour implications of moving into higher-engagement agritourism categories, especially accommodations, food service, events, and hospitality-oriented programming).
- When do labour, employment, insurance, health and safety, and customer service become more complex?
- What are agritourism visitors expecting?
- Agritourism trends
- How to develop bookable, market-ready experiences and price them appropriately.
- Funding programs, partner organizations, and external resources that support agritourism development.
- Application checklist.

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8. Next Steps

This Research Summary and Market Analysis Report is informed by data collected between 26 March 2026 and 18 May 2026. Project timelines meant that engagements with farmers took place during the spring planting season, which contributed to low participation rates for both the survey and farm table talks. Moreover, attendance to the Community Open House by residents was also limited.

To ensure meaningful engagement and develop an agritourism strategy and toolkits that are informed by community feedback, a decision was made by the project team with support from senior staff to seek out additional feedback from the public. Steps to grow engagement and further refine the working recommendations will include:

- Extending the deadline for agricultural producers to complete the Agritourism Survey, and using direct phone calls by staff to encourage completion by agricultural business owners
- Adding an additional resident-facing Agritourism survey that mirrors the questions asked during the open house
- Rescheduling one of the farm table talks to the summer
- Adding additional gap-filling key informant interviews with Town staff and external organizations to address questions that have come up through the research process (e.g. with bylaw staff, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, OMAFA, York Region Indigenous Relations, etc.)

Once the data collection and analysis phases of this project are complete, including incorporating any feedback from Town Council during the 17 June 2026 Council meeting, the preliminary recommendations included in this document will be revised and updated, forming the basis of the Draft and Final Agritourism Strategy and Toolkits. Once key elements of the Agritourism Strategy are finalized a complementary implementation plan will also be co-developed with Town staff.

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