



Destination
Riverina Murray NSW

Riverina Murray Agritourism Development Strategy

2024-2033



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands and waterways that make up the Riverina Murray region on which we live, work and visit. The diverse First Nations people from this region have been caring for country and welcoming visitors for tens of thousands of years before us and still do to this day. We pay respects to past and current Elders and acknowledge the significant contribution made by First Nations people to our visitor economy.

Special thanks to SMA Tourism for the development of this plan.

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Strategic Plan for the Development of Agritourism in the Riverina Murray Region

Background

The 2023-2030 Destination Management Plan (DMP) for the NSW Riverina Murray region set a priority to develop and implement an Agritourism, Produce, Food and Drink Product & Experience Development Strategy. The DMP noted that while the region is known as the food bowl of NSW, there is a disproportionate lack of agritourism and associated local dining and produce to capitalise on this point of regional differentiation.

In response, this Agritourism Strategy will provide Destination Riverina Murray (DRM) and its stakeholders with the directions needed to grow a differentiated and competitive agritourism sector in the NSW Riverina Murray region that will leverage the strength of the agriculture sector to strengthen the appeal of visiting the region and enhance the benefits of the region's visitor economy.

Agritourism as used within this Strategic Plan is a tourism-related experience or product that connects agricultural products, people or places, with visitors to a farm; or to an ancillary off-farm premises, that provides strong experiential interpretation of the produce, product or process.

CSIRO¹ has identified agritourism as a key growth area for Australia's regional economy for the next decade, with a nationally projected total expenditure of \$18.6B by 2030 (growing at approximately 5% per annum). It can provide benefits to both consumers through connection to primary producers and a greater understanding of where their food comes from; and to farmers and their communities through strengthening their brand and building customer loyalty, diversification of income and social benefits.

1 CSIRO 2018, Opportunities for Australian food and agribusiness

Agritourism can provide significant social benefits for the farmers and indeed the broader community through increased employment opportunities, increased social contact and sense of purpose, lifestyle changes and an opportunity to tell their story and distribute direct to consumers.

The NSW state reforms² implemented in December 2022 were introduced to encourage primary producers to diversify into small-scale agritourism ventures, as a potential way to create resilience within their agricultural businesses while still protecting their core activity of commercial agricultural production. Those reforms have been considered within this plan.

2 Standard Instrument (Local Environmental Plans) Amendment (Agritourism) Order 2022

Courabyra Wines, Tumbarumba. Credit: Destination NSW.



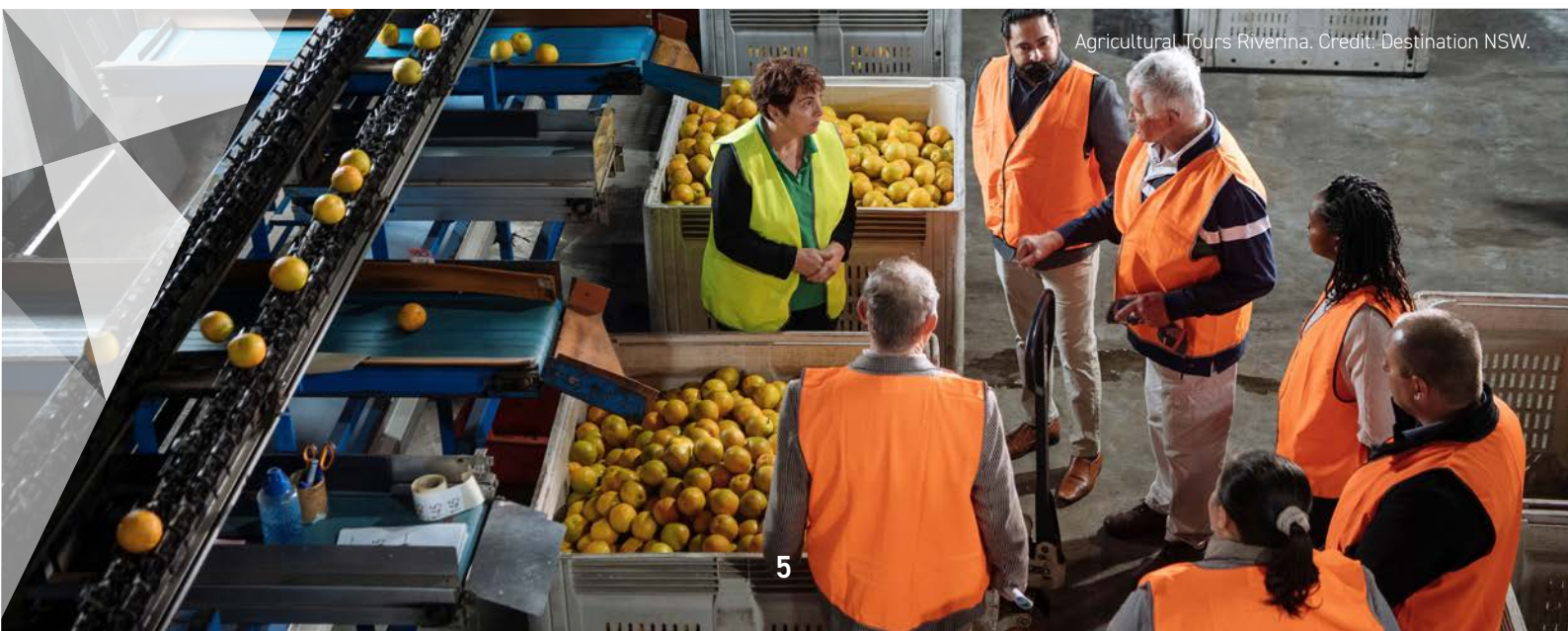
Riverina Murray Region

The Riverina Murray visitor economy region in NSW encompasses 149,000 square kilometres, the third longest navigable river in the world, 16 National Parks, 2 RAMSAR listed wetlands, 1 World Heritage Listed area and 22 local government areas (LGAs) and is home to over 275,000 people (Figure 1).

- **RIVERINA:** Bland, Carrathool, Coolamon, Cootamundra-Gundagai, Griffith, Hay, Junee, Leeton, Lockhart, Murrumbidgee, Narrandera, Snowy Valleys, Temora, Wagga Wagga.
- **MURRAY:** Albury, Balranald, Berrigan, Edward River, Federation, Greater Hume Shire, Murray River and Wentworth.



Figure 1. Map of the Destination Riverina Murray region



Agriculture and Agritourism in the Region

Most of the leading agritourism regions across Australia and indeed the world have a vastly different agricultural sector to the Riverina Murray. Many leading agritourism regions have a hub of boutique/gourmet products in a relatively small and attractive setting (such as wine regions). They can have boutique farms and farm-gates that are often building small consumer brands.

While the Riverina Murray has some pockets of this, the region has predominantly larger land holdings dominated by dry land grazing, commodity cereal-based cropping and large-scale irrigated agriculture. Consequently, this Plan proposes a more diverse positioning to the conventional boutique model, based on the region's four agricultural strengths of:

1. **Diversity** of agricultural products due to climate and access to water.
2. Large **scale** irrigation increasing productivity.
3. Preparedness to **innovate**, trial and implement new technology and systems (e.g., monitoring and automation) allowing for improved efficiency and adaptive management.
4. **Sustainability** leadership in some products and regions (e.g., efficient use of water by irrigated-crop producers).

The Four Strategic Directions of this Plan

Following development of an Agritourism Situation Analysis and Options Report, several in-region consultation workshops, virtual meetings with agricultural peak bodies and regional and state stakeholders, numerous site-visits to potentially significant agritourism sites, and target consumer market research took place.

The outcome of this consultation was development and prioritisation of 4 strategic objectives:

1. Build capacity across the region's local governments and agritourism sector.
2. Focus support for agritourism development and marketing on emerging agritourism hub areas.
3. Develop lead agritourism products to reflect the brand and maximise the region's competitive agritourism offer.
4. Lead the region's marketing with agritourism and its lead experiences.

Action Plans have been prepared to support each of these strategic directions over a period of up to 10 years.



Corowa Whisky and Chocolate, Corowa. Credit: Destination NSW.

What is Agritourism?

The National definition of agritourism has been defined as a type of experiential travel which connects people to product or produce, delivered on farming land through a direct "on farm" experience (Australian Regional Tourism 2023). This definition posits four essential elements:

1. Combines tourism and agriculture industries
2. Attracts members of the public to visit on farm
3. Farmers diversify from agriculture into tourism, increasing farm income and/or employment.
4. Provides recreation, entertainment and/or educational experiences related to the agriculture enterprise.



Figure 2. Ways to strengthen agritourism (Source: Australian Regional Tourism 2023, National Agritourism Framework).

Definition of Agritourism used for this Strategy

Consultation for this Strategy identified three pragmatic tests of the agritourism definitions that test the National and NSW definitions.

The first test was the need to confirm that ancillary off-farm experiences featuring the production of non-local produce or product should not be considered agritourism. This subsequently excludes many food and beverage experiences, including distilleries that source ingredients from outside the area.

The second test was the need to accommodate producers that wish to engage with visitors but cannot host agritourism on farm due to biosecurity or capability issues, such as limited time to service visitors. These operators may want to interpret their agriculture and sell their product at an alternative or ancillary location to their farm. A regional example of this could be Holbrook Paddock Eggs, that wishes to deliver their experience off-farm in an ancillary location to the farm. In this case a packaging shed located in town.

The third test was the need for parts of the market to only want an on-farm or rural experience whose connection to agriculture is indirect. A good example of this is farm stay accommodation on a piece of farmland that offers no interpretation about the property, and doesn't promote interpretive agritourism experiences in the area, but nonetheless meets consumer needs to stay overnight on a farm.

This Strategy recommends an inclusive approach aligned to the NSW definition, but which encourages and supports operators to add opportunities for customers to have an interpretive experience about the host site and / or its surrounding area's agriculture. In this sense the definitions have been positioned within a spectrum from which the operator can choose where to start and where to consider progressing towards. This approach has been similarly used to manage nature tourism and ecotourism in Australia – accepting nature tourism as a base case from which some operators choose to develop ecotourism elements as a value add.

This approach results in an agritourism definition for the Riverina Murray region as being:

Agritourism is a tourism-related experience or product that connects agricultural products, people or places, with visitors to a farm; or to an ancillary off-farm location that provides strong interpretation of the produce, product or process.

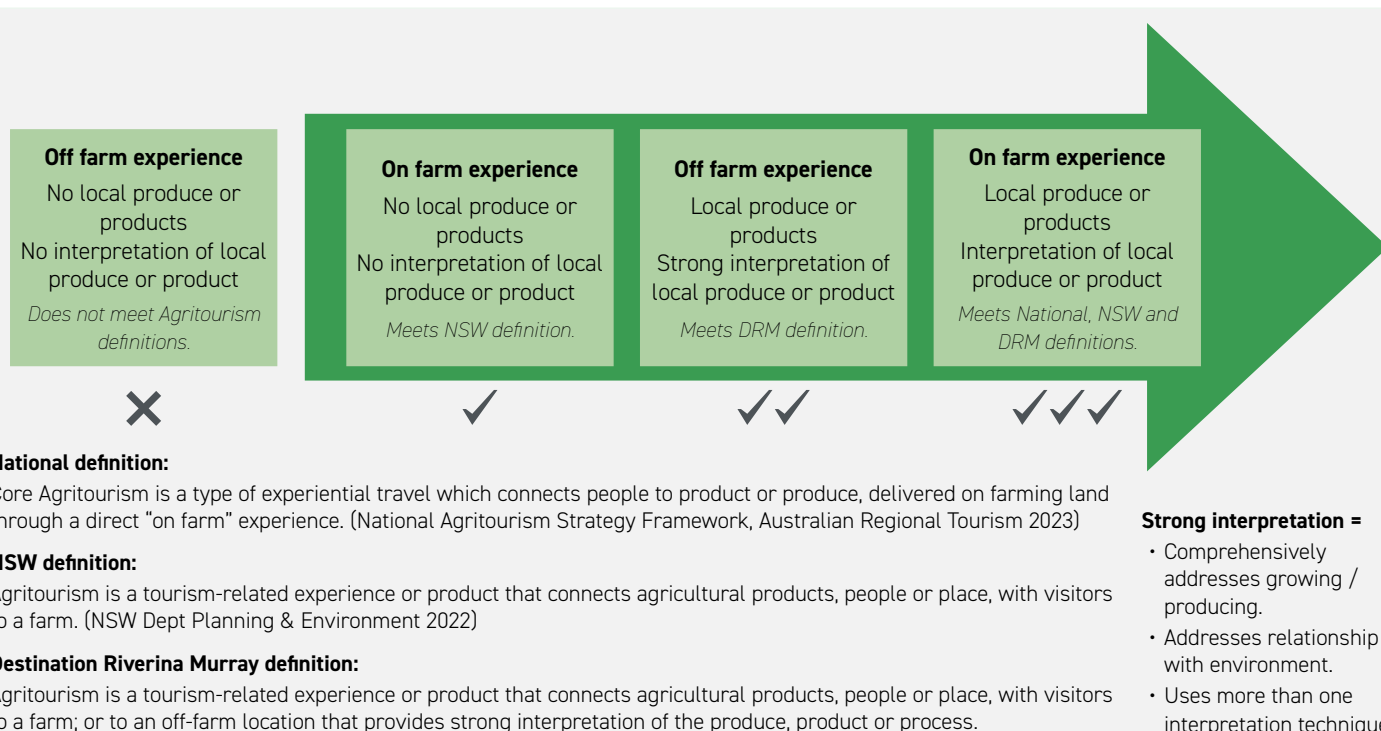


Figure 3. Adaptation of the National and NSW definition of agritourism for practical application.

Market Needs

From research into recent innovative agritourism product, it is apparent that there are several unmet consumer needs in the sector. These are connection with an authentic and personal experience, as well as an emerging interest in sustainable agricultural practices, and empowerment of consumers to understand how their food is grown and where it is coming from.

There remain some long-term opportunities for Australia's agritourism offer to refine or develop new agritourism experiences that:

- provide access to and awareness of hyper-local produce and reduced food miles.
- interpret the challenges of growing food, and especially the challenges of being productive and sustainable.
- demonstrate agriculture in action – things happening that represent processes and outcomes.
- reveal how Indigenous knowledge is being used to enhance agricultural practices and production.
- demonstrate conservation that addresses the challenges of being regenerative, productive, and sustainable; and
- showcases large-scale agriculture and broad acre farming.

At a more specific product level, there are National gaps in:

- demonstration farming integrated with food experiences.
- agricultural tourist attractions that can act as a hub and spoke model; and
- First Nations agritourism experiences that addresses sustainable and traditional approaches.



Whitton Malt House, Whitton. Credit: Destination NSW.

Target Market Research

Market research was conducted as part of the development of this strategic plan.

Method: Online, 402 respondents that:

- Had visited selected Australian food and wine regions in the past three years AND
- Had eaten lunch or dinner in one of Australia's food and wine regions or travelled to food and wine regions specifically to eat lunch and dinner featuring local produce.

The results showed that there is high demand for agritourism experiences from respondents. While the majority had experienced agritourism previously via a grape-growing winery visit, there was larger demand for dining experiences on-farm, as well as on-farm accommodation experiences.

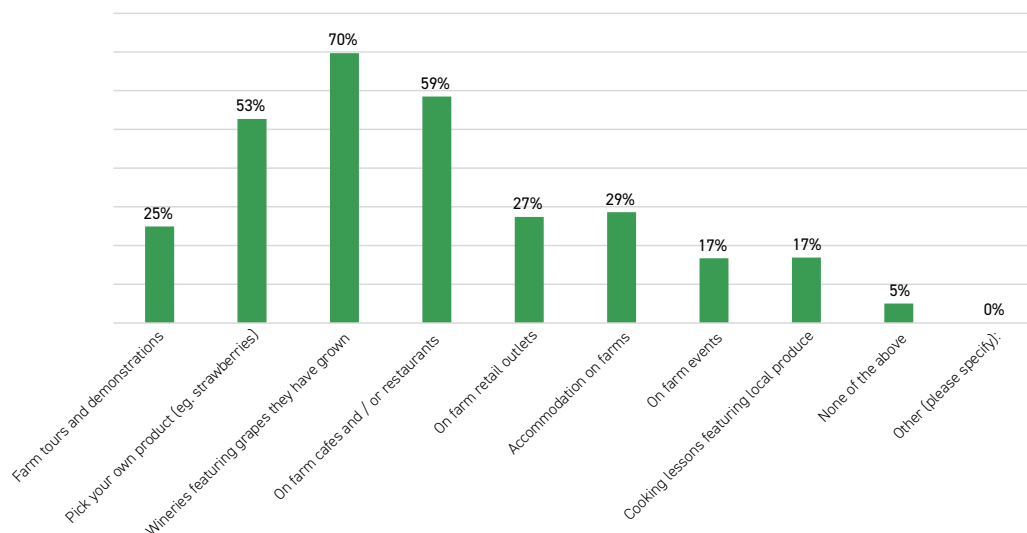


Figure 4. Agritourism experiences respondents *have undertaken*.

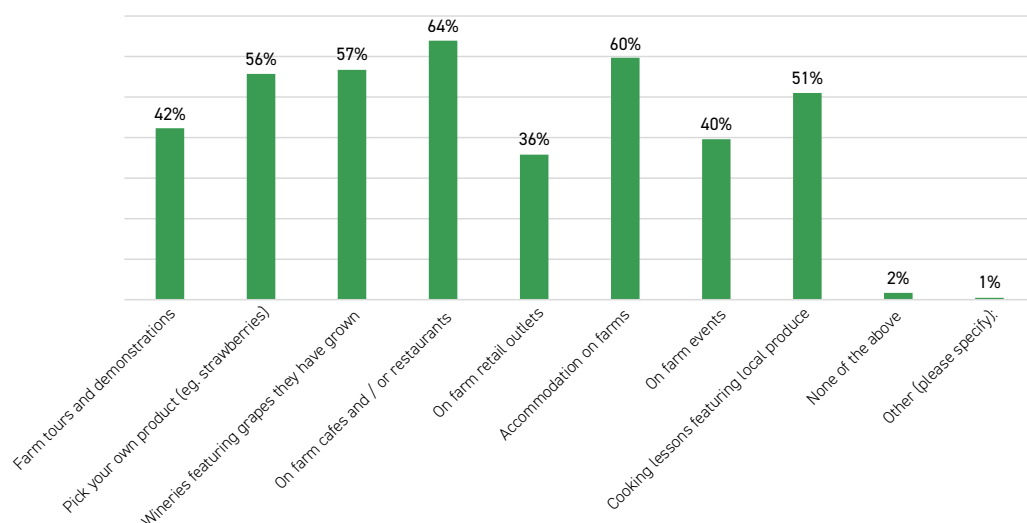


Figure 5. Agritourism experiences respondents *would like to experience*.

Bidgee Strawberries. Credit: Visit Wagga Wagga.



Strategic Directions

For further details on the proposed initiatives for each strategic direction, refer to the full strategy available on the Destination Riverina Murray website.

1. Build capacity across the region's local governments and agritourism sector

Building capacity across the region's local governments and agritourism sector received the most support from stakeholders participating in consultation for this Strategy.

To strengthen the competitiveness of the region requires more differentiated agritourism product, which requires capacity building to:

- help existing and emerging agritourism businesses determine the scale and form of agritourism that is likely to be attractive to the agritourism target markets and can be accommodated within their agricultural core business;
- help local governments to understand the state agritourism reforms and to undertake development approvals for agritourism proposals in a timely and constructive manner;
- support development of incubator and mentorship programs for agritourism operators.

2. Focus support for agritourism development and marketing on emerging agritourism hubs

The Riverina Murray DMP recognised a major constraint to growing the visitor economy as being the region's large size and the significant distances between its regional service centres (where most of the accommodation, food and beverage is located). The Riverina Murray region is too large to try and develop and promote every local area as an agritourism feature. Trying to attract multi-night stays within this constraint is challenging, but it can be overcome when there is a cluster of complimentary experiences within an agritourism hub area.

The most successful hub areas are where there is a cluster of complimentary anchor attractions comprehensively reflecting the brand, supported by agritourism food, drink and accommodation, and other experiences. In this way, a visitor can stay immersed in agritourism across all their experiential and basic visiting needs.

3. Develop lead agritourism products

Following on from the development of agritourism hubs, is the development of lead agritourism product within these hubs. The region needs a set of lead agritourism experiences that comprehensively reflect the region's strengths and positioning, to attract visitors to the region. The lead product sectors proposed are a mix of:

- anchor attractions.
- guided tour product.
- agritourism food and drink experiences; and
- farmstay and agritourism accommodation.

By developing these lead products within the agritourism hubs, a visitor can stay immersed in agritourism across all their experiential and basic visiting needs. The following sub-sections propose prioritised developments and their supporting processes to further detail their concept and attract funding.

4. Lead the Region's Marketing with Agritourism

If agritourism is going to be a lead sector for the region, then it must also lead the region's marketing. As the region's agritourism sector is further developed and positioned to feature its strengths, then a consistent approach to marketing needs to be agreed and the required marketing assets need to also be developed to showcase it and generate demand.

The following initiatives address gathering consumer insights, aligning the industry and driving demand for further details refer to the full strategy available on the Destination Riverina Murray website:

- Activate an agritourism visitor monitoring program.
- Align the tourism and agriculture sectors on a consistent consumer facing name for the category to support growth.
- Activate a consistent agritourism focused positioning for the Riverina region.
- Elevate the agritourism focus for the Murray region.
- Develop an Agritourism Marketing Toolkit – LGAs and LTOs.
- Develop an agritourism website or portal for the region.
- Establish a seasonal produce interactive calendar.
- Build awareness among operators to promote each other's product.
- Establish dedicated agritourism content capture.



Agricultural Tours Riverina. Credit: Destination NSW

ACTION PLAN

This section provides an individual action plan for each of the four strategic directions. Each action plan is a list of actions against which is a prioritisation, suggested year of implementation and suggested lead and support organisations.

Some actions, especially those involving major new works, will need to firstly source funding. Major funding applications may require a business case, from which the proposal would be further defined and costed, and the economic and cultural / social benefits identified. There could be merit in packaging several similar proposals into the one funding proposal or business case.

The timing refers to year from start of implementation of the Strategic Plan. To assist with budgeting and implementation the actions are clustered with alike / sequential items, then roll out from the earliest to latest start year, rather than the priority. Major new works will also require detailed site planning, which could be integrated with a business case process. These projects may also require stakeholder consultation, environmental reviews and approvals.

1. Build capacity across region's agritourism sector

Actions	Priority	Timing (year)										Lead and support organisations
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1.1. Develop an agritourism section of the DRM website	High											Lead: DRM Support: Local government, agritourism operators in the region
1.2. Conduct a road tour addressing agritourism approvals with local government	High											Lead: DRM Support: NSW Dept Planning & Environment, MRT, local governments within focus areas and across region
1.3. Develop DA Approval flowcharts and educational toolkits for agritourism proposals	High											Lead: DRM & planning / approvals consultant Support: NSW Dept Planning & Environment
1.4. Develop a list of consultants that could assist with agritourism product development and approvals	Low											Lead: DRM Support: Australian Regional Tourism, DNSW
1.5. Develop a schedule of workshops to promote opportunities under the NSW state reforms to primary producers and farm owners	High											Lead: DRM Support: Local government, agritourism operators in the region
1.6. Develop an agritourism network	High											Lead: DRM Support: Local government, RTOs and agritourism operators in the region
1.7. Develop a local food and beverage distributor	Moderate											Lead: DRM and consultant Support: Food distribution and business case consultant

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Actions	Priority	Timing (year)										Lead and support organisations
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1.8. Develop guidance for maximising inclusion of local produce	Moderate											Lead: DRM Support: NSW Restaurant & Caterers Association, restaurants across the region, local producers and distributors
1.9. Work with NSW Dept Planning & Environment to further enhance agritourism policy for development approvals	Moderate											Lead: DRM Support: NSW Dept Planning & Environment, DNSW, RTOs, other Destination Networks
1.10. Assist lead agritourism operators to act as inspiration and mentors for the region	Moderate											Lead: DRM Support: RTO's, Lead agritourism operators
1.11. Continue to support the development of visitor experiences at wineries, breweries and distilleries in the region that use and actively promote the use of local produce												Lead: DRM Support: DNSW, RTOs, local operators, Industry associations and peak bodies
1.12. Research and share alternative sources of capital and insurance to support agritourism development	High											Lead: DRM Support: DNSW
1.13. Lobby the State government for an agritourism development fund	High											Lead: DRM Support: Other Destination Networks, Australian Regional Tourism
1.14. Seek funding to run a Destination Inspiration Program especially for agritourism	Moderate											Lead: DRM Support: Other Destination Networks, RTOs, Australian Regional Tourism
1.15. Continue to engage with agricultural peak bodies related to agritourism	Low											Lead: DRM Support: Charles Sturt University, Department of Primary Industries Wagga Wagga Agricultural Institute, Local Land Services Riverina Office, AgriFutures, NSW Farmers, Ag Peak Bodies

Table1. Actions to build capacity across the region's local governments and agritourism sector (lighter shade suggests a continuous or as needs implementation).

2. Develop and support agritourism hubs

Actions	Priority	Timing (year)										Lead and support organisations
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
2.1. Concentrate product development support on agritourism hubs	Moderate											Lead: DRM Support: DNSW and DRNSW
2.2. Concentrate marketing on agritourism hubs	Moderate											Lead: DNSW Support: DRM
2.3. Promote the focus area selection to operators in the region	Moderate											Lead: DRM Support: DNSW
2.4. Review the suitability of the agritourism hubs to determine whether any changes are needed	Low											Lead: DRM Support: DNSW
2.5. Maintain and further develop relationships with key agricultural stakeholders and peak bodies to assist with promotion of agritourism development opportunities throughout their networks, including cross-border stakeholders	High											Lead: DRM Support: NSW Farmers, Ag Peak Bodies, Local Land Services, LGAs, RTO's

Table 2. Actions to focus support for agritourism development and marketing on emerging agritourism hubs (lighter shade suggests a continuous or as needs implementation).

Riverina Murray Agritourism Development Strategy

3. Develop lead agritourism products

Actions	Priority	Timing (year)										Lead and support organisations
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
3.1. Assist primary producers and farm owners to create farm stay accommodation	High											Lead: DRM Support: Relevant local governments, local planning consultant
3.2. Assist to develop existing farm stay product to agritourism accommodation	Moderate											Lead: DRM Support: LGAs, agritourism interpretation and development consultant, Farmstay operators
3.3. Assist Identified business to develop cabins on a farm featuring local produce / chefs to cook with to become a lead product	High											Lead: My Chef Support: DRM and agritourism development consultant, planning consultant, Wagga Wagga City Council and Junee Shire Council
3.4. Develop a regional agritourism tour operation	High											Lead: DRM Support: Tourism business case consultant, local tour operator(s)
3.5. Develop an agritourism experience of a processing plant(s)	Moderate											Lead: Southern Cotton Gin and Whitton Malthouse Support: DRM and tourism business case consultant, Leeton Shire Council
3.6. Develop an agritourism experience of aquaculture	Moderate											Lead: Aquana Murray Cod Support: DRM and tourism business case consultant, Griffith City Council or Leeton Shire Council
3.7. Develop an agritourism experience of sustainable agriculture	Moderate											Lead: Identified Riverina Murray regenerative farmers and Irrigation Research & Extension Committee (IREC) Support: DRM, MRT and tourism business case consultant, First Nations stakeholders, and Murray River Shire Council
3.8. Develop an Agricultural Centre of Excellence	Low											Lead: Charles Sturt University and partners Support: DRM and tourism business case consultant, Wagga Wagga City Council

Table 3. Actions to develop lead agritourism products to reflect the brand and maximise the region's competitive agritourism offering (lighter shade suggests a continuous or as needs implementation).

4. Lead the region's marketing with agritourism and its lead experiences

Actions	Priority	Timing (year)										Lead and support organisations
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
4.1. Activate an agritourism visitor monitoring program	Moderate											Lead: Local governments and LTO's within focus areas Support: DRM and agritourism operators within agritourism hubs
4.2. Align the tourism and agriculture sectors on a consistent consumer facing name for the category to support growth, prioritising local, regional and then State marketing organisations	High											Lead: DRM Support: DNSW, RTOs
4.3. Activate a consistent agritourism focused positioning for the Riverina region	High											Lead: DRM Support: LGAs, Visit Riverina, DNSW
4.4. Elevate the agritourism focus for the Murray region, including cross-border opportunities	High											Lead: DRM Support: Murray Regional Tourism, DNSW, Visit Victoria
4.5. Develop an agritourism marketing toolkit for LGA's	High											Lead: DRM Support: Local governments, RTOs, DNSW
4.6. Refresh local government visitor websites to highlight agritourism	High											Lead: Local government Support: DRM, RTOs
4.7. Develop an agritourism website or portal for the region	High											Lead: Visit Riverina Support: DRM, Local government and LTO's, DNSW
4.8. Establish a seasonal produce interactive calendar	High											Lead: Visit Riverina & DNSW Support: LGAs, DRM, Local government, event coordinators, local producers
4.9. Build awareness among operators to promote each other's products and experiences	Moderate											Lead: DRM Support: RTOs, Local government
4.10. Establish dedicated agritourism content capture	Moderate											Lead: Visit Riverina, MRT Support: DRM, DNSW, Local government, event coordinators

Actions	Priority	Timing (year)										Lead and support organisations
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
4.11: Review business and tourism signage related to agritourism, including barriers related to signage placement in rurally zoned areas.	Moderate											Lead DRM, MRT Support: LGAs and agritourism operators
4.12: Review opportunities to promote agritourism at consumer and industry events.	Moderate											Lead DRM, RTOs Support: LGAs, agritourism operators

Table 4. Actions to lead the region's marketing with agritourism and its lead experiences (lighter shade suggests a continuous or as needs implementation).



Shear Outback, Hay. Credit: Destin

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