

DEVELOPING QUALITY STANDARDS FOR AGRITOURISM

by

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Abstract

As the agritourism industry in the province of British Columbia (BC) has developed, concerns have been raised about the issue of product and service quality control. To address this issue, the BC Agritourism Alliance has chosen to establish a voluntary Quality Assurance Program. This research represents the first step in the establishment process. The purpose of this research was to generate quality assurance criteria and standards for agritourism, and make recommendations for the development of a Quality Assurance Program for agritourism in BC.

A pilot study was conducted in the Lower Fraser Valley, BC; a stretch of fertile farmland that supports a variety of agritourism businesses. To achieve the objectives of this study, three phases of research were used. The first phase involved a review and content analysis of literature relating to agritourism and the development of standards. The second phase was a series of five stakeholder workshops within the study area. The third phase was a mail-back questionnaire administered to agritourism operators within the study area.

The study revealed a desire amongst stakeholders for clear, simple standards that would assess customer experiences at agritourism businesses. The Code of Standards developed contains criteria that assess quality in the areas of hospitality and customer service, safety, professionalism, accessibility, business operations, environmental impacts, and partnerships. Recommendations were made relating to the development and administration of the Quality Assurance Program, including the application, assessment and renewal process, and membership benefits that agritourism operators would like to see offered. Some concerns were raised regarding several of the standards and the recommended application process. Overall, however, stakeholders expressed enthusiasm for the development of a Quality Assurance Program, the Code of Standards, and the Recommendations made from this study.

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List of Acronyms

- AAP – Approved Accommodation Program (BC Tourism)
- ANSI – American National Standards Institute
- AP – Accreditation Program (Tourism Tasmania)
- BBTAP – Better Business Tourism Accreditation Program (Tourism Victoria, Australia)
- BCATA – British Columbia Agritourism Alliance
- CEPCO – Chilliwack Economic Partners
- CGSB – Canadian General Standards Board
- ISO – International Organization for Standardization
- NEAP – Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (Australia)
- QA – Quality Assurance
- QAS – Quality Assurance Standards (English Tourism Council)
- QTS – Quality Tourism Services (Hong Kong)
- SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Study Context and Significance

Tourism has long been an option for farmers wishing to diversify and potentially increase business revenues. Agritourism ventures such as direct farm sales, bed and breakfasts, corn mazes, farm tours, and winery tours have been established throughout the world. With declining farming revenues and increasing economic uncertainty, farmers in BC have followed the trend of diversification into agritourism. Recent studies have examined the development of agritourism and the status of the industry in BC (Lack, 1997; Strategic Partnerships, 1997; Williams et al., 2001), and elsewhere in the world (Gladstone & Morris, 2000; Kentucky Agri-Tourism Working Group, 2002; Oppermann, 1996). Williams et al. (2001) note that some of the challenges in the BC agritourism industry centre around industry recognition, supportive policies and regulations, training programs, liability and risk management, marketing programs, as well as product and service quality control.

The British Columbia Agritourism Alliance (BCATA) was formed to address the challenges identified by Williams et al. (2001). One of BCATA's goals is to address the issue of product and service quality control by developing "an agritourism code of standards for agritourism products and services" (BCATA meeting notes, February, 2003). Achievement of this goal is intended to increase the quality of agritourism products and services offered, enhance the product and service quality reputation for agritourism experiences in BC, and strengthen local, regional and international agritourism markets (BCATA meeting notes, February, 2003).

To help accomplish BCATA's goals, the Quality Assurance Program developed must be applicable to all agritourism businesses in the province. Currently, there is no quality assurance program that is applicable to the wide variety of agritourism businesses in BC. One program used by some agritourism operators is Tourism BC's Approved Accommodations program. This program is designed for fixed-roof accommodations, and is not applicable to the many agritourism businesses where accommodations are not offered. There is a need for quality standards that can incorporate all the different types of agritourism within the province. This study was intended to help fill this gap by exploring options for quality assurance standards, gathering stakeholder feedback on these options, and developing an Agritourism Code of Standards and Recommendations for the administration of the Quality Assurance Program. The findings from this study will be used to guide the development of a Quality Assurance Program for agritourism in BC.

1.2 Research Purpose, Scope and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to develop quality assurance criteria and standards for agritourism, and to make recommendations for the development of a Quality Assurance Program for agritourism in British Columbia (BC). Throughout the study, agritourism stakeholder input was used to guide the development process. The objectives of this study were to develop standards and recommendations for a quality assurance program that would: 1) have credibility with tourism operators and tourists; 2) be supported by the stakeholders; 3) provide a mechanism for increasing agritourism product and service quality; and 4) promote consumer recognition of the agritourism industry.

This study focused specifically on developing a Quality Assurance Program appropriate for and supported by agritourism operators in British Columbia. An

agritourism business is defined as “any tourist or recreation enterprise on a working farm” (Dartington Amenity Research Trust, in Busby & Rendle, 2000: 636). The stakeholders involved in the project were those who have the most influence on, and who will be most affected by the development of the Quality Assurance Program: agritourism operators, BCATA, and local economic development agencies within the study area.

To guide the development of the Quality Assurance Program, several research questions were addressed:

- 1. How is an effective quality assurance program developed?**
 - How are quality assurance and certification programs developed?
 - What makes a certification program effective?
 - What questions need to be addressed when developing a certification program?
- 2. What tourism certification programs are already in existence?**
 - What are the primary concerns of these programs?
 - Can they be linked to or incorporated into an agritourism Quality Assurance Program?
- 3. What are the concerns of the stakeholders?**
 - Who are the stakeholders?
 - What is important to stakeholders in the development of a Quality Assurance Program?
 - What standards should be used to measure quality for agritourism in BC?

1.3 Study Method

A case study approach was used to investigate stakeholder preferences for agritourism quality standards. The case study area chosen for the research is the Lower Fraser Valley, in Southwestern BC. This rich farmland supports many agritourism businesses, and is increasingly recognized as an agritourism destination in BC. To develop this case study, the research followed three phases:

Phase 1 - Literature Review and Analysis: An exploration and content analysis of literature relating to tourist motivations and expectations, agritourism development, and quality assurance programs provided the information necessary

to formulate a list of sample standards for inclusion in the Code of Standards. Freeman's (1984) Stakeholder Theory was used to focus the case study and determine which stakeholders should be involved in the standards development process.

Phase 2 – Stakeholder Workshops: Workshops in the study area provided stakeholders with the opportunity to participate in the development of the Quality Assurance Program. Analysis of the comments recorded during these workshops provided further focus to the Code of Standards and was used to formulate Recommendations for the Administration of the Quality Assurance Program.

Phase 3 – Follow up Questionnaire: To further assess stakeholder opinions, and to provide more stakeholders with the opportunity to participate in the development of the Quality Assurance Standards, a mail-back questionnaire was administered within the study area. Responses were analyzed and used to indicate stakeholder attitudes towards the development of a Quality Assurance Program for agritourism.

1.4 Report Organization

This report is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the report, and contains a short description of the study context and significance, study methods, and research objectives and questions. Chapter 2 provides a review of several issues relevant to the development of quality standards for agritourism: agritourism development, consumer expectations, the role of quality assurance and certification, development of quality assurance standards, and stakeholder involvement in standards development. The last two sections of Chapter 2 provide a list of questions that need to be addressed in the development of a quality assurance program, and a discussion of existing programs that are relevant to quality assurance for agritourism. Chapter 3 outlines the research methods

and describes the project study area, research questions, and limitations of the research.

The analysis and results from the workshops and follow-up questionnaire are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the results, future directions and management implications of the research project. In Chapter 6, conclusions are presented, and recommendations are made for future study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Developing quality assurance standards for agritourism requires a review of literature and concepts relating to agritourism, consumer expectations, the role of quality assurance standards in tourism, and issues pertaining to standards development. This chapter provides a review of each of these components. The chapter is divided into eight sections. Each section provides a discussion of aspects relating to this study. The first section deals with agritourism development, and describes the development of agritourism in British Columbia (BC). The second section describes agritourism consumers; who they are and what their expectations are when they visit the farm. The third section explores the development of quality standards for tourism, and provides an overview of the steps to creating successful quality assurance programs. The fourth section provides a discussion of important elements in the standards development process. The fifth section examines stakeholders in the standards development process: who they are, why they are important, and how to contact them. The sixth section describes processes for involving stakeholders, and the seventh section explores questions that need to be addressed by stakeholders. The eighth, and final, section provides an overview of current quality assurance programs and codes of conduct in Canada.

2.2 Agritourism Development

Agritourism is increasing in popularity, and is sought by many farmers as an alternative source of on-farm income. Though it is a relatively new phenomenon in

Canada, European farmers have been welcoming guests on to their farms for nearly a century (Busby & Rendle, 2000). Defined as “any tourist or recreation enterprise on a working farm” (Dartington Amenity Research Trust, in Busby & Rendle, 2000: 636), agritourism can include:

- **Attractions** – e.g. visitor centres, museums, guided walks and petting animals
- **Activities** – e.g. horseback riding, fishing, fruit picking and wine tasting
- **Accommodations** – e.g. bed and breakfast, self catering, and camping
- **Amenities** – e.g. restaurants, cafes, farm shops and fruit stands
- **Access** – e.g. trails and bridleways (Clarke, 1996; Hilchey, 1993; Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, 2002; Strategic Partnerships, 1997).

In the tourism literature, two primary reasons are cited for the recent increase in agritourism development. The first reason is linked to a growing interest amongst tourists for on-farm experiences. As people have moved into cities and away from farms and rural areas, they have experienced a sense of nostalgia and a desire to return to an idyllic country lifestyle, if only for a short time (Iakovidou, 2002; Kneafsey, 2001; Nilsson, 2001; Wicks & Merrett, 2003). Many agri-tourists are also looking to ensure that their children experience farm life, and have the opportunity to learn about farming heritage (Kentucky Agritourism Working Group, no date). In addition, as consumers have grown increasingly aware of the negative impacts of large-scale, industrial farming, there has been growing support for small-scale, local farmers and a desire to ensure that the food they produce is of high quality and has been grown in a sustainable manner (Gilg & Battershill, 1998; United Kingdom Cabinet Office, 2002). Concerns about food-borne diseases and bacteria have caused consumers to seek trustworthy food sources (Youngs, 2003). The ability to purchase high quality food directly from the farmer has motivated many agritourism consumers (Gilg & Battershill, 1998). The second primary reason for increasing agritourism development is related to the state of farming in modern society. Changes in farming practices make it increasingly difficult for farmers to support themselves solely through farming.

2.2.1 Agritourism as an Economic Development Tool

“Driven by global trends associated with intensification, concentration and specialization, agricultural businesses and the activities associated with them have been evolving in British Columbia (BC)”(Williams et al., 2001:1). This statement summarizes the situation faced by many farmers around the world. As technology and innovation modernize farming, many small farmers and traditional family farmers are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain the viability of their businesses (Busby & Rendle, 2000; United Kingdom Cabinet Office, 2002; Wilson et al., 2001). Changing agricultural policies and dwindling financial support from governments have forced farmers to seek opportunities for diversification and alternatives for economic development (Lack, 1997). Tourism is increasingly looked to as a tool for economic diversification, and a means of providing on-farm jobs for family members (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Evans & Ilbery, 1989; Scott et al., 2004, Youngs, 2003).

2.2.2 Agritourism Development in British Columbia

With declining farm revenues and increasing economic uncertainty, farmers in BC have followed the trend of diversification into agritourism. In 1997, there were approximately 499 agritourism businesses in BC (Strategic Partnerships, 1997). Though the full extent of agritourism development in the province is not currently known, research suggests that it is a growing industry (Williams et al., 2001). For example, survey results suggest that approximately 39% of agritourism businesses in BC have been in operation for less than five years, 41% for over ten years, and 22% of businesses have operated for over 15 years (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, 2002a). About, 69% of the respondents in the same survey also reported year over year revenue growth in their agritourism businesses since the previous season. Approximately 61% of

respondents expected further growth the next season (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, 2002a).

Agritourism businesses in BC are very diverse, with over 30 different types of activities offered to tourists (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, 2002a). The five most commonly offered activities are farm stores or stands (61% of businesses), school tours (34%), educational tours/workshops (30%), self-guided tours (25%), and farmers' markets (22%) (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, 2002a). The diversity of agritourism businesses is likely related to the varied climate and geographic zones across the province. Different regions support different types of farming, and thus different types of agritourism (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, 2002a; Williams et al., 2001).

As the industry has developed, the BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries has commissioned several studies to examine the current state, and the future of agritourism in BC (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, 2002a, 2002b; Williams et al., 2001). These investigations identified several recurring issues of concern to future agritourism development in BC. One issue is the need for product and service quality control (Williams et al., 2001). To address this issue, Williams et al. recommended the development of province-wide quality assurance standards, and a system of administering the standards (2001).

To facilitate the development of quality standards and address other challenges related to the development of agritourism, the BC Agritourism Alliance (BCATA) was established. This industry-led group of agritourism operators and BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries representatives has taken the lead role in developing BC's agritourism industry. BCATA has focussed some of its resources on a Code of Standards Project. Two main goals guide this project:

- “Develop a quality standards system to guide agritourism operators to attain recognized quality product/service standards, thereby providing a measure of quality control and recognition for the industry.”; and
- “Encourage the use of quality standards for agritourism products and services” (BCATA meeting notes, February, 2003).

The expected outcomes of this project are to provide:

- “Increased farmer and consumer awareness regarding quality codes of standards”
- “Enhanced customer service and quality reputation for BC agritourism products and services”
- “Increased quality of product and service safety and health standards”
- “Increased local, regional and international market coverage” (BCATA meeting notes, February, 2003)

The next two sections of this chapter contain discussions of consumer expectations, and the role of quality standards in tourism. They are intended to provide guidelines for the development of quality assurance standards for agritourism in BC.

2.3 Consumer Expectations

Consumer expectations provide information about which elements of agritourism are important to consumers. Research shows that agri-tourists in Canada expect good customer service, pleasant guest-host relations, customer safety, clean facilities, value for money, authenticity, fresh produce and natural settings when they visit farms (see Dernoï, 1991; Murphy & Williams, 1999; Williams & Kelly, 2001; and Williams et al., 2001, for examples). To better understand consumer expectations, a brief overview of agritourism consumer groups is provided, followed by a discussion of what agri-tourists expect when they visit farms. This information is intended to provide an indication of those market-driven elements that might be included in a comprehensive agritourism Quality Assurance Program.

2.3.1 The Consumers

From school-tour groups and organised bus tours to older couples seeking a relaxing weekend and relatives visiting local families, agri-tourists in Canada are not a homogeneous group. Researchers have identified two important segments of agri-tourists: middle-aged couples and family groups. Researchers at Simon Fraser University's Centre for Tourism Policy and Research identified the typical agri-tourist in British Columbia as being a middle-aged resident of BC who has had at least some post-secondary education (2001). Dernoï found that agri-tourists in Canada tended to be middle-aged couples or families traveling with children within their own province (1991). Murphy and Williams found that Japanese rural tourists in Canada were often middle-aged married women who did not work outside the home (1999). They were well-educated and came from higher-income households, and a relatively high proportion of them could read and write English (Murphy & Williams, 1999).

2.3.2 Travel Expectations

Many researchers have examined what tourists expect from an agritourism experience. To get a better idea of what others have found, this researcher examined a selection of agritourism and rural tourism-related literature and compiled a list of the most commonly mentioned tourist expectations (see Appendix A for full list). This analysis shows that agri-tourists are typically looking for:

Table 2.1 Agritourist Expectations

| Expectations |
|---|
| Opportunities to rest and relax |
| Value for money |
| Activities that are good for the whole family |
| Interaction with hosts |
| Safety and security |
| Environmentally responsible businesses |
| Scenic areas |
| Opportunities to learn about local culture and heritage |
| Safe but adventuresome activities |

Sources: Boyd, 2002; Busby & Rendle 2000; Centre for Tourism Policy and Research, no date; Charters & O'Neill, 2001; Clarke, 1999; Derno, 1991; Gilg & Battershill, 1998; Gladstone & Morris, 2000; Hilchey, 1993; Hill & Busby, 2002; Jago & Issaverdis, 2001; Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, 2002a; Murphy & Williams, 1999; Opperman, 1995; Opperman, 1996; Williams & Kelly, 2001; Williams et al., 2001; and Youngs, 2003.

In general, consumers are looking for a safe, clean and healthy environment in a natural setting where farming is actually happening – they want an authentic country experience (Boyd, 2002; Clarke, 1999). Uniqueness and authenticity of individual operations are important to tourists (Boyd, 2002; Clarke, 1999). At the same time, customers are looking for regional consistency in the products and services offered (Clarke, 1999). Customer service is also very important to them. In some places, tourists rated service and hospitality as the most important aspects of a quality experience, regardless of the condition of other attributes they considered important (Charters & O'Neill, 2001).

Tourists may participate in several travel activities in one day, or stop at an agritourism business while en-route to another destination. Because of this, accessibility and availability of other nearby activities are important features of agritourism businesses (Williams et al, 2001). Many tourists are looking for an opportunity to learn while they

travel (Boyd, 2002; Busby & Rendle, 2000; Williams et al., 2001). Education opportunities are an important aspect of activities-based agritourism businesses.

For accommodations, tourists are looking for comfort and convenience in rural settings where they can interact with their hosts (Beioley, 1999). Fresh produce and tasty foods are important in direct-farm marketing businesses that build overall satisfaction for their travellers (Williams et al., 2001; Youngs, 2003). Ideally, these products should be grown or made in the local area (Gilg & Battershill, 1998). Tourists are looking to experience local culture and foods.

2.4 Quality Assurance and Certification

To provide a guarantee of quality to tourists, many tourism organizations have developed quality assurance programs. These programs range from a simple code of conduct that tourism operators agree to follow, to a complex system of quality standards, evaluation and certification. Typically, organizations will provide a logo, label or sign to 'certified' tourism operators so that tourists are able to differentiate between members and non-members of the quality assurance program. For the purposes of this study, the term quality assurance program refers to the more formal certification program where standards and evaluation determine eligibility for membership. This section describes the development of typical certification programs, and how quality assurance certification programs can help agritourism businesses.

2.4.1 Going Beyond Consumer Expectations

Quality assurance programs involve more than simply catering to the desires of consumers. Helping businesses develop better management practices and providing a means for them to participate in continuing business improvement can be added benefits of certification (Jago & Issaverdis, 2001). Management practices that can be considered for inclusion in a quality assurance program include:

- Business plans
- Insurance programs
- Human resources development initiatives
- Management training programs, and
- Responsible marketing plans (Better Business Tourism Accreditation Program, 2002; Prairie Global & Associates, 2003)

Agritourism operations often contain aspects of culture and heritage tourism. For example, many farm tours and attractions depict farming as a way of life and/or demonstrate traditional farming techniques. Researchers have identified several elements of heritage/cultural planning and management that are important to the sustainability of such attractions. For instance, Boyd's four principles of heritage tourism are applicable for many agritourism attractions (2002). They include:

- **Maintaining authenticity and quality:** highlighting and protecting the authenticity of an object, building or site
- **Learning:** educating tourists and providing interpretation through on-site literature, displays, visitor centres, re-enactments or guided tours
- **Conserving and protecting resources:** using integrated planning approaches, providing diversity in the types of attractions offered, and respecting zoning and acceptable limits of use
- **Building partnerships:** working with other parties to address common heritage and cultural issues, as well as supporting tourism marketing and growth.

2.4.2 Effective Quality Assurance Programs

A well developed quality assurance program helps businesses by clarifying and documenting policies, improving control over operations, improving understanding of expectations, and providing a framework for continual improvement (Jago & Issaverdis, 2001). Toth identified that individual operators may participate in quality assurance programs in order to meet one or more of the following objectives (2002):

- Increase customer satisfaction
- Increase sustainability of businesses
- Maintain or expand markets
- Increase profitability
- Strengthen public image
- Develop dialogue with other businesses

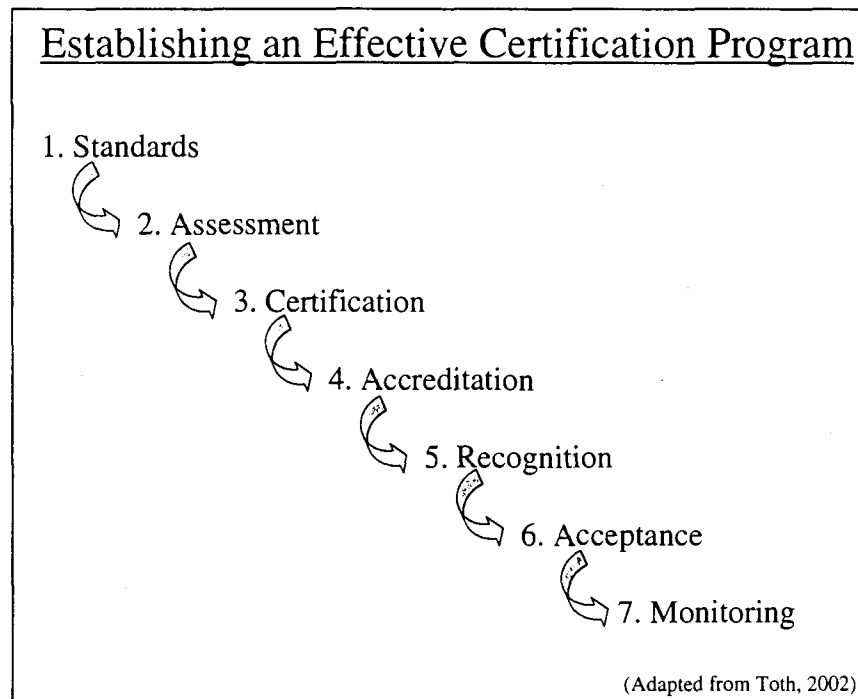
- Improve credit opportunities
- Decrease insurance costs
- Reduce business liability
- Attract capable and dedicated workers

An effective quality assurance program may help to fulfill all of the preceding objectives. However, in order to be effective, the program must be credible and supported by stakeholders (Toth, 2002). For instance, tourists must use and trust the program, while tour operators should feel that it represents what is important and valuable to them. It must be worth their time and resources to participate in the program. Toth (2002) notes that establishing a credible certification program typically involves a six-step process;

- **Standards** – specify requirements for businesses to achieve
- **Assessment** – determine level of conformance to standards
- **Certification** – provide documented assurance that a product conforms to a standard
- **Accreditation** – ensure certifier is capable of performing certification procedure
- **Recognition** – earn acceptance in the marketplace on the basis of credibility
- **Acceptance** – persuade operators and consumers of the benefits and credibility of the certification

Other research suggests the need for a seventh step that involves **monitoring** (Chester & Crabtree, 2002; Koeman et al., 2002). This would entail regularly monitoring and assessing the validity of the certification, as well as adapting the program for changing products and markets.

Figure 2.1: Steps to Establishing an Effective Certification Program



The focus of this research project is on the first step of the development process: developing standards. The following sections provide a discussion of key concepts for the development of standards.

2.5 Development of Quality Assurance Standards

For an agritourism certification program, the first step toward achieving recognition and acceptance amongst stakeholders is to develop credible standards. This section contains an overview of the three types of standards that can be established and the keys elements for developing credibility with tourists and tourism operators.

2.5.1 Types of Standards

There are three types of standards for assessing businesses; each with benefits and disadvantages (Honey & Rome, 2001; Honey & Stewart, 2002; Toth, 2002). It must be decided which type, or combination of types, is most appropriate for an agritourism

quality assurance program. The three types of standards, and some of their main advantages and disadvantages, are described in the following paragraphs.

Performance standards specify which “functional or operational characteristics are to be achieved not how to accomplish them” (Toth, 2002: 80). Developing methods for meeting these standards is left up to the individual businesses. Agritourism operators can design the best (most economical, most appropriate) way for their business to meet the standards. Performance standards are often used in tourism. For instance, many accommodations standards and quality assurance programs exist for hotel accommodations. Performance standards are beneficial because they measure achievement, not intent; they are less expensive and more applicable to small businesses than the other two types of standards; and they better meet consumer demand because they can measure performance inside and outside the business (Honey & Stewart, 2002).

Prescriptive standards prescribe how a product will be made and used, or how specific performance standards are to be achieved (Toth, 2002). The final product is not usually tested for conformance with any standards. An example of a prescriptive standard is: “Each guest room shall have a master switch so that all electrical circuits are activated only by insertion of the guest’s key and are turned off when the guest departs with the key” (Toth, 2002: 80). Prescriptive standards are beneficial because they clearly define a process; however they can restrict innovation and alternative solutions to problems (Toth, 2002).

Management system standards stipulate processes to be used in businesses (Toth, 2002). They do not evaluate the quality of products or services. Rather, they provide standardized approaches for conducting management studies, putting together a program plan, training staff, and setting up systems for on-going monitoring and attainment of critical performance targets (Honey & Rome, 2001). These process guidelines provide systematic and consistent approaches for answering the questions – where are we now?,

where do we want to go?, how will we get there?, are we getting there?, is it still where we want to go? (Wildensen, 2000 in Honey & Rome, 2001). Management system standards are versatile and are applicable across many sectors of the tourism industry; however their disadvantages include the high cost of certification, their inability to guarantee quality, and their limited applicability to small businesses (Honey & Stewart, 2002). An example of management system standards is provided by Toth: "The hotel shall undertake a detailed assessment of energy use throughout its operations, establish the type and amount of energy required for all activities, and monitor and review use on a regular basis" (2002: 81).

Performance standards, or a combination of performance and management system standards, appear to be the most appropriate standards for an agritourism quality assurance program. These standards can help to provide quality assurance for consumers while remaining flexible enough for operators to design their own ways of meeting the standards.

2.5.2 Standards Development Process

The development of standards extends beyond the tourism industry. Indeed, product quality standards have been developed for a wide variety of products and industries. The most widely recognized standards have been developed by the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO). The ISO has even developed standards for the process of developing standards!

National standards agencies in Canada and the United States conform to ISO standards for developing standards. CGSB, the Canadian General Standards Board and ANSI, the American National Standards Institute both follow ISO guidelines and have laid out policies and procedures for standards development (American National Standards Institute, 2003; Government of Canada, 2002a; Government of Canada, 2002b). There

are differences in the two national institutes, but each conforms to core principles of *representativeness, transparency* and *due process* in standards development.

Representativeness means that participation is open to all who are directly affected; in other words, all stakeholders must have the opportunity to participate in decision-making (American National Standards Institute, 2003; Government of Canada, 2002b). Transparency means that the development process is open, clear and understandable (American National Standards Institute, 2003; Government of Canada 2002b). Due process is achieved through balance, consensus and a public review. Balance can be accomplished by ensuring that no single interest category dominates the standards development process, and that those participants who develop the standards represent a variety of interests (American National Standards Institute, 2003). Consensus occurs when all views and objections are considered and all participating parties reach an agreement (Toth, 2002). A public review gives those who were not directly involved in the standards development process an opportunity to have input into the program (American Petroleum Institute, 2001).

Tourism researchers recommend that the core principles of representativeness, transparency and due process be used when developing standards in tourism (Font and Tribe, 2001; Toth, 2002). Incorporating the views of various stakeholders in an open and transparent manner can be a challenging task. It must be determined who the stakeholders are, what their interests are, and how to involve them in a meaningful manner. Involving stakeholders must occur in an organized, transparent manner so that balance is achieved and so that every stakeholder has an opportunity to participate in the development process. To ensure that the agritourism standards development process adheres to the core principles of standards development, three issues must be addressed.

- Who should participate in the standards development process?
- What is the best method for involving stakeholders in a standards development process?
- What questions need to be answered when developing effective agritourism standards?

The next sections of this chapter address these three issues.

2.6 Stakeholders in Standards Development

One of the difficulties when including stakeholders is deciding who, exactly, is a stakeholder. There are many definitions of who is considered a stakeholder. However, Glicken emphasizes that, “[o]ne common feature of all definitions is that they identify and define groups *relative to* a specific issue”; individuals and groups “become stakeholders *only in reference to a particular issue*” (original emphasis, 2000:307). Understanding that different situations and decisions will impact different stakeholders is key to understanding the difficulty in identifying stakeholders for the development of quality assurance standards. Remembering that one of the core elements of a standards development process is transparency, an open and transparent method for identifying stakeholders must be used. In order to develop a transparent method for determining who should be included in the standards development process, literature relating to standards development and stakeholder theory are explored in this section.

2.6.1 Standards Development Guidelines

International standards development guidelines state that participation shall be open to all who are *directly and materially* affected by the standards being developed (ANSI, 2003; Government of Canada, 2002a). Toth also suggests that participation in standards development in tourism is limited to those who are directly and materially affected by the standards (2002).

There is a need to understand who will be affected by the standards developed. The standards will certainly affect those people or businesses that will be required to conform to the standards. The standards will also affect consumers of the products for which the standards are being developed. Toth (2002) has suggested that those affected by standards development can be divided into four interest categories:

- **Suppliers** – hotels, tour operators, tour boats
- **Users** – tourist and consumer associations, travel agents
- **Directly affected public** – persons and organizations within local communities
- **General interest publics** – governments, universities, consultants

CGSB guidelines state that the opportunity to participate in standards development should be open to “any individual or organization that has a direct interest in decisions,...an expressed interest in standards development and the demonstrable ability to make an active contribution” (Government of Canada, 2002a: 3). The CGSB guidelines open participation in standards development to more than those who are directly affected, while limiting participation to those who can make a contribution. In the case of quality standards for agritourism, those who can make an active contribution may be academics, researchers and consultants familiar with customer motivation and satisfaction research, individuals who can provide technical information on existing rules and regulations, and the agency who will be responsible for funding and administering the Quality Assurance Program.

The preceding definitions of who should be involved in standards development fail to provide an objective method for determining whether or not a person, or group of people, is directly affected by the standards. To gain a better understanding of who is directly affected, that is, who is a stakeholder, business stakeholder theory literature is reviewed.

2.6.2 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory was introduced in Freeman’s publication *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (1984). According to Freeman, a stakeholder is “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization’s objectives” (1984: 46). Freeman’s definition of stakeholders has since been adopted by many researchers and theorists (such as Jones, 1995; Harrison & St. John, 1996; and Mitchell et al., 1997).

Freeman's ideas of stakeholder theory and including stakeholders in the decision-making of firms and large corporations sparked an on-going debate in the business literature (Freeman, 1994; Mitchell et al., 1997). Freeman emphasized the importance of stakeholder involvement in management decisions (1984, 1994). He suggested that different types of stakeholders should be involved in decision-making in an organization. While recognizing that not all those who have an interest in the activities of an organization should be included as stakeholders, Freeman did not provide a means to discern stakeholders from other groups of individuals. Deciding which groups or individuals are stakeholders was left to the discretion of organizations. In short, there was no consistent method to determine 'Who and What Really Counts'. Organizations used the principle of 'Make It Up As You Go Along' to determine who should be involved in decision-making within organizations (Freeman, 1994).

Mitchell et al. recognized this inconsistency, and constructed a model for determining 'Who and What Really Counts' in stakeholder management (1997). They determined that there are three attributes that stakeholders may possess:

- **Power** – ability to carry out one's will;
- **Legitimacy** – perception that their actions are desirable, proper or appropriate;
- **Urgency** – situation requiring immediate attention.

Potential stakeholders can be assessed and ranked in importance on the basis of how many of the three attributes each possesses (Mitchell et al., 1997). Stakeholders who possess all three attributes (Definitive Stakeholders) are the most important, and should be given priority consideration in management decisions. Stakeholders who possess two of the three attributes (Expectant Stakeholders) are moderate in their importance, and should be considered in management decisions. Those stakeholders who possess only one attribute (Latent Stakeholders) have low importance, but still may be considered. It must be understood that the ranking of stakeholders is not static. Any stakeholder can gain importance or lose importance over time.

Mitchell et al.'s theory for deciding who is important can be applied to the development of quality standards in agritourism. The three attributes can be used to assess potential stakeholders and determine who should be included in the standards development process. Definitive and Expectant Stakeholders can be involved in the decision-making process. As the standards development proceeds, some Latent Stakeholders may become Expectant Stakeholders. Latent Stakeholders, therefore, should be kept informed throughout a standards development process.

By integrating Mitchell et al.'s model for stakeholder identification (1997) with Toth's interest categories (2002), key stakeholders in the development of quality assurance standards for agritourism can be identified. Table 2.2 illustrates the interest categories, attributes and ranking for several stakeholders (not an exhaustive list).

Table 2.2 Selected Potential Stakeholders

| Interest Categories | Stakeholder | Attributes | Ranking |
|----------------------------|--|---|------------------------|
| Producers | Agritourism business | <i>Power</i> – if they choose not to support the standards, the mark of quality assurance (QA) will not be recognized <i>Legitimacy</i> - the standards will directly affect their businesses <i>Urgency</i> - their support is needed from the beginning to ensure success | Definitive Stakeholder |
| Users | Tourists | <i>Legitimacy</i> - the standards are created for their benefit | Latent Stakeholder |
| Directly affected public | Members of the local communities | <i>Legitimacy</i> - a pilot project in their community should consider the local people | Latent Stakeholder |
| General interest | Tourism organization (BCATA) | <i>Power</i> – their continued support is necessary for project to continue <i>Legitimacy</i> - they initiated the standards project <i>Urgency</i> - their support is needed from the beginning to guide and finance the project | Definitive Stakeholder |
| | Government | <i>Power</i> - can choose to provide financial support for the project | Latent Stakeholder |
| | University | <i>Legitimacy</i> - academic involvement increases credibility | Latent Stakeholder |
| | Business Improvement Association/ Economic Development Organization | <i>Power</i> - if they choose not to promote the standards, tourists will not recognize the QA mark <i>Legitimacy</i> - they have knowledge of local businesses, and what attracts customers | Expectant Stakeholder |

From the above table, one can see that the most important stakeholders are the agritourism business owners and BCATA. They need to be given the opportunity to fully participate in the standards development process; they will have decision-making power. Other groups, such as business improvement associations or economic development organizations should also be given the opportunity to participate. The remaining group,

the Latent Stakeholders, should be kept informed of the development process, and may be called upon to provide input or technical information, but do not need to be given decision-making power.

2.6.3 Contacting Key Stakeholders

When developing standards, the stakeholders involved in the development process must be a balanced and representative group. Font and Tribe (2001) suggest that an initial group of stakeholders should be contacted with information regarding the standards development, invited to participate, and asked for suggestions of other potential stakeholders. This is an efficient method for gathering key stakeholders in the agritourism industry. BCATA, CEPCO (Chilliwack Economic Partners) and the South Fraser Community Futures Development Association have contacts and lists of agritourism businesses in the Fraser Valley. Information gathered from these contacts can lead to other potential stakeholders who can then be assessed through Mitchell et al.'s stakeholder identification model (1997). Once key stakeholders have been identified, they can be brought together to develop the quality assurance standards.

2.7 Involving Stakeholders

There are many methods for involving stakeholders in policy and decision-making. Public information sessions, surveys, interviews, and advisory groups are commonly used methods for gaining stakeholder input that have been successful in other tourism-related research (Parks Canada, 2002). These approaches are criticised, however, for not allowing the public to have any real influence on decision-making, only a superficial showing of public consultation (Buchy & Hoverman, 2000). Other techniques that have been used in decision-making are interactive workshops, collaborative problem solving, assisted negotiation, and joint decision-making. These

techniques allow stakeholders to have input during decision-making, and gives them power in making decisions (Buchy & Hoverman, 2000; Selin & Chavez, 1995).

2.7.1 Agritourism Stakeholder Involvement Process

Involving stakeholders in collaborative decision-making increases stakeholder recognition and acceptance of decisions – factors that are vital to the success of the agritourism standards program. One successful example of collaboration in setting standards in tourism is the Johnstone Strait Code of Conduct for commercial whale watching tour operators (Gjerdalen, 1997). Operators of whale watching tours worked together in workshops to reach consensus on a code of conduct for the whale watching industry in their community. A draft code was circulated to a wider audience of researchers, educators and other area operators for comments and suggestions, then the final document was signed and agreed to by all whale watching tour operators in the community.

Another alternative to the customary stakeholder involvement techniques is that used in the community planning process for the Resort Municipality of Whistler (Gill, 1996). Members of the community were invited to participate in small 'living room meetings' as a way to gather information in a less intimidating, and more social setting than the usual public town hall meetings. Results from the meetings were circulated to all participants and presented to the town council. This technique was felt to encourage greater participation and a perception that public input had an influence on the planning process (Gill, 1996).

Recent work by Fall, Daust and Morgan (2001) outlined a framework for collaborative model building in resource management that can be applied to the development of quality assurance standards. The five-step collaborative framework involves:

- Holding a set of workshops to allow interested parties to participate in the initial steps of building a model
- Using a core modelling team to develop and complete a preliminary analysis of the model;
- Holding a second round of workshops to verify the model;
- Having the core team to update the model, run tests and analyze the model, then;
- Holding a final workshop to present results of the model (Fall, Daust & Morgan, 2001).

A collaborative approach for developing agritourism standards can be developed using elements from the three methods that were described above. Small workshops or coffee-table meetings with key stakeholders can introduce participants to quality standards and to gather input for the development of quality standards for agritourism. Participants in the workshops and meetings can work together to develop a Draft Code of Standards and Recommendations. Once a draft is created, it can be circulated to a wider audience for comment. As discussed previously, the stakeholders involved in the actual standards development are the Expectant and Definitive stakeholders. Latent stakeholders can be informed of the development process and given the opportunity to comment on the draft code of standards. Some Expectant and Definitive stakeholders may choose not to participate. However, they should also be kept informed throughout the development process and invited to comment on the draft code. Advice from experts may be sought in order to aid discussions of certain aspects of the Quality Assurance Program (for example, insurance advisors) but these experts should not be given a voice in the final decision.

2.7.2 Timing of Workshops

The day and time of meetings is important for achieving representative participation. Meetings during weekdays may exclude those with full-time jobs, while meetings in the early evening exclude those with young families who may not be able to afford child-care (Buchy & Hoverman, 2000). In the case of agritourism, weekend meetings during the summer will likely exclude most of the tourism operators, since this

is their busiest time of year. To compensate for schedules of different participants, several different days and times should be set aside for meetings. Participants should be encouraged to attend on the day and the time most convenient for them. To choose appropriate days and times for scheduling meetings, stakeholders can be asked to identify times and days that they are available during the initial contact and invitation to participate.

2.8 Questions Addressed

Decisions must be made on a variety of topics during the standards development process. To guide such decisions in ecotourism and sustainable tourism standards development, researchers have identified questions that need to be addressed (Koch, et al., 2002; World Tourism Organization, 2002). While many of these questions are applicable to the development of quality assurance standards for agritourism, not all of them can be directly used to guide this project. To pinpoint the issues, a review of current quality assurance programs provides a basis from which to focus the questions that need to be addressed in the development of quality assurance standards for agritourism.

2.8.1 Uniform vs. Varying Standards

An examination of current quality assurance standards shows that there are many different aspects that can be included in a quality assurance program for tourism. Many programs are specific to accommodations, for example:

- Austria's Farm Holidays Program (www.eco-tour.org/farmholidays/uab_en.html)
- BC Tourism's Approved Accommodation Program [AAP] (www.tourismbc.ca)
- English Tourism Council's Quality Assurance Standards [QAS] (www.english-tourism.org.uk)
- Farm and Cottage Holidays, UK (www.farmcott.co.uk)

Some programs are specific to retail stores and restaurants, for example:

- Hong Kong's Quality Tourism Services [QTS] (www.qtshk.com)

Other programs provide quality assurance for ecotourism businesses, for example:

- Australia's Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program [NEAP] (www.ecotourism.org.au)
- Saskatchewan's Horizons Accreditation Program (www.ecotourism.sk.ca/providers.htm)

While some quality assurance programs have been designed to encompass all tourism businesses in a region, for example:

- Australia's Better Business Tourism Accreditation Program [BBTAP] (www.tourismaccreditationvic.com.au)
- Tourism Council Tasmania's Accreditation Program [AP] (www.tctas.com.au/accreditation_4.html)

This final type of program is of the most interest for designing a quality assurance program for agritourism in British Columbia because they have overcome the obstacles in designing a program that is appropriate for many types of businesses.

One of the goals of the Quality Assurance Program is that it must be applicable to all agritourism businesses; from u-picks to wineries, and from bed and breakfasts to corn mazes. Determining how this will be accomplished is to up the stakeholders who participate in the standards development process. In order to encompass the many different types of agritourism businesses, there are several options for quality standards development. One of the most straightforward options is to keep the standards very general by creating evaluation criteria that can apply to every business. These criteria may include the presence of a business plan, operational procedures, and an accounting system (similar to Australia's BBTAP or Tasmania's AP). This approach is straightforward to design and manage, but it may not effectively evaluate quality from a customer's perspective.

Another possible solution is to design different criteria for each type of tourism product. For instance, accommodations, direct farm marketing, wineries and farm attraction businesses each would have different criteria. However, if a business has more

than one type of tourism product, they would need to meet the standards applicable to each product (Hong Kong's QTS utilizes this method). This solution is more complex, more difficult to design, and may be difficult to assess and operate, but it has the potential to be tailored to the needs of the various business types. The stakeholders, therefore, need to decide *Should there be specific standards for each agritourism product?*

2.8.2 Standards Rating Levels

Many existing quality standards, especially in the accommodations sector, are designed to provide different levels of quality assurance. A star rating or a diamond rating is a familiar signal to travelers looking to distinguish between luxury and budget accommodations. However, luxurious experiences and extra amenities are not necessarily what agri-tourists are looking for in a quality vacation experience. In addition to high quality customer service and hospitality, agritourism customers are looking for safe, clean, healthy holidays on an authentic farm (Charter & O'Neill, 2001; Hill & Busby, 2002; Murphy & Williams, 1999; Williams et al., 2001).

Designing a Quality Assurance Program that incorporates several rating levels can be accomplished. Nevertheless, caution must be used to ensure that the ratings measure the factors that are important to consumers, not simply extra amenities (Beioley, 1999). One method for doing this is to specify all the desirable characteristics for each aspect of the quality assurance program (i.e. safety, cleanliness, business plan). Businesses are required to meet a minimum set of criteria to be eligible for the program, and can then earn a higher rating based upon the percentage of desirable criteria they meet. Two examples of this rating system are the Australian NEAP and the English Tourism Council's QAS.

Some recently initiated quality assurance programs do not have different rating levels for the tourism products. Rather, they simply apply a mark indicating the presence or absence of compliance. Two examples of this are Hong Kong's QTS and Australia's

BBTAP. Providing only a pass or fail rating has one main advantage over a program that incorporates several different levels: the program is simpler to design and administer. A drawback to this system is that businesses that continually strive for excellence do not get more recognition than those who meet only the minimum requirements for entry into the quality assurance program. Stakeholders, therefore, must discuss in the workshops:

Should there be different levels of certification?

2.8.3 Evaluating Customer Experience vs. Management Policies

There are many possible methods for assessing quality in tourism. The key to creating effective quality assurance standards is to select measurable criteria that indicate quality (Beioley, 1999). Many quality standards schemes have set performance-based standards or a combination of performance based and management system oriented standards. The Australian BBTAP is an example of this type of scheme. The scheme specifies that business management policies and procedures must be in place (Better Business Tourism Accreditation Program, 2002). An example of this could be that a business plan and written procedures for dealing with customer complaints must exist. In the case of the business plan, BBTAP has stipulated elements that must be included. For instance, BBTAP indicates that a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis must be a part of the business plan (Better Business Tourism Accreditation Program, 2002).

The BBTAP has also set standards specifying written policies and procedures that must be in place for a tourism business to comply with its program (Better Business Tourism Accreditation Program, 2002). The benefits of this type of standard are that the criteria are objective and easily measurable. An assessor can review any business, examine its paperwork, and quickly assess the business's level of compliance to the standards. Another benefit is that the policies and procedures are useful for businesses to have, regardless of the type of product provided. The drawback to this type of standard is

that there is no way to determine the extent to which the written policies are being adhered. The presence of customer greeting or visitor complaint procedures may be a very objective method of determining potential management quality, but if they are not being used by staff and management, then this measure of service quality may not be appropriate.

Some other quality assurance programs, such as the English Tourism Council QAS and the Hong Kong QTS, have set quality standards for the elements of a business that customers encounter (English Tourism Council, 2001; Quality Tourism Services, no date a, no date b). The criteria relate to the presence or absence of high quality products, cleanliness, and friendly welcomes. The benefit of this type of standard is that it actually measures customer experiences. The difficulty of this type of scheme is that measurement of the criteria is subjective. It is up to the assessor to determine what a friendly welcome feels like, or what the definition is for a high quality product. Making these criteria more specific and objective may lead to a simpler and clearer evaluation. However, the risk increases that the scheme will be too narrowly defined and too focused on certain aspects.

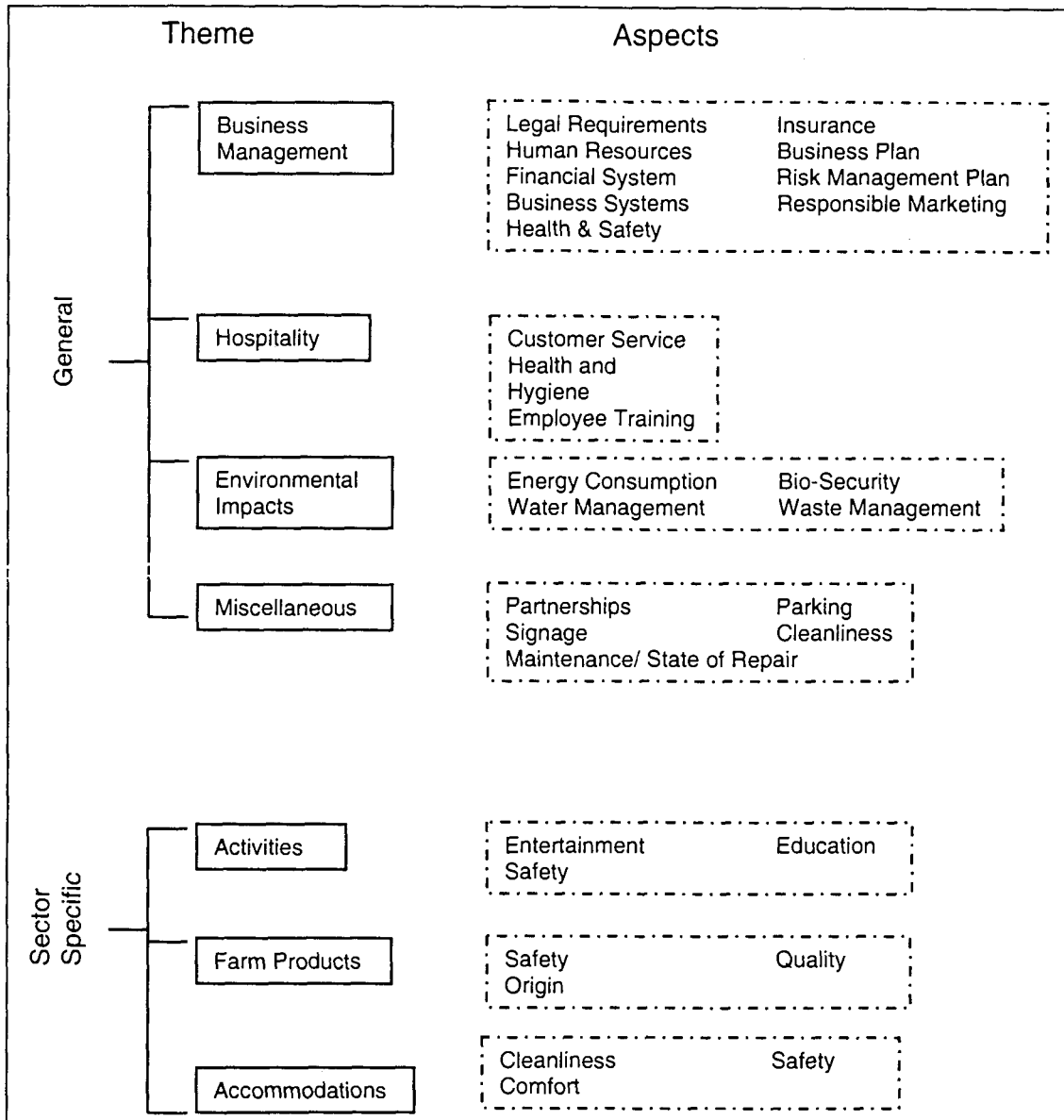
This researcher has not yet discovered a quality assurance scheme that effectively incorporates both types of criteria. The schemes either focus on written policies and procedures or on specific characteristics of the business that the customer experiences. The likely reason for this is that incorporating both types of performance standards would make an evaluation scheme too complex and difficult to manage, for both applicants and administrators. The stakeholders must discuss, therefore: *Should the standards assess written policies and procedures or aspects of the business that customers experience?*

2.8.4 Components to be Included

Related to the previous question is: *Which aspects of a business should the quality assurance scheme assess?* Currently, many quality assurance schemes focus

only on particular aspects of a business. Some schemes focus on sustainability and environmental management, some on customer service or products, while others focus on broad operational procedures. A selection of possible aspects upon which the quality assurance program can focus is shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Potential Components for a Quality Assurance Program



(Sources: Better Business Tourism Accreditation Program, 2002; Ecotourism Society Saskatchewan, no date; English Tourism Council, no date; Farm Holidays Australia, 2001; Kentucky Agri-tourism Working Group, 2001; Kuehn et al., 1998; Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program, no date; Quality Tourism Services, no date(a) and (b); Tourism BC, no date; Tourism Council Tasmania, no date.)

The four preceding questions serve to narrow the focus for the largest and most complex question that stakeholders will need to address. By narrowing down the options and reaching consensus answers to these four questions, it may be easier to answer: *What specific standards should be used to assess quality in agritourism businesses?*

2.8.5 Assessment of Standards Compliance

There are three methods for assessing compliance with standards. They involve first party, second party and third party evaluations (Toth, 2002). First party assessment, or self-assessment, involves applicants examining their own businesses to ensure that the standards are met. Business owners normally are asked to also sign a declaration of conformance to the standards. Self-assessment is useful because it can be less expensive to administer than other forms of evaluation. However, this method has the least credibility of the three options because there is no 'arms length' assessor ensuring conformance (Honey, 2002; Toth, 2002). Second party assessment is done by the purchaser. It usually occurs when products are sold to an intermediary before the public; for example, when tour operators organize tours for groups of people (Toth, 2002). This method of assessment, however, is not especially useful for agritourism quality assurance because not all agritourism businesses are visited by organized tour groups.

The final type of assessment is third party assessment. This type of assessment is completed by someone other than the buyer or seller. Typically it has the most credibility for consumers, but can be time-consuming and expensive (Toth, 2002). Most existing quality assurance schemes use third party assessment (e.g. Tourism BC's AAP) or a combination of self-assessment followed up by a third party assessment to confirm compliance (Australia's BBTAP and NEAP, Hong Kong's QTS, and Tasmania's AP). Stakeholders need to decide: *How will compliance with the criteria be assessed?*

2.8.6 Duration of Approved Status

The quality of a business's performance can change over time. In order to assure customers that high quality products and services exist, a quality assurance certificate should be subject to review on a regular basis. Most tourism quality assurance programs examined provide assurance for 1-3 years after the initial approval. After this time, approval expires, and the business is no longer permitted to display the quality assurance mark. Instituting a short assurance period ensures that an approved business will maintain high quality standards every year. However it may be time and resource-consuming to administer, especially if compliance is assessed by a third-party. At the end of the approved period, renewal of approved status is usually achieved by requesting a review for renewal. To give an idea of existing renewal policies: Australia's BBTAP accredits businesses for three years, subject to completion of renewal forms each year (Better Business Tourism Accreditation Program, 2002); Hong Kong's QTS qualification is valid for one year (Quality Tourism Services, no date a, no date b); and Tourism BC's AAP must be renewed every year with a full compliance assessment executed every two years (Tourism BC, no date). The stakeholders in this study need to decide: *For how long will the qualification be valid?* and *What should be the renewal process?*

2.8.7 Non-Compliance with Standards

In a quality assurance scheme, some businesses may apply that do not meet the requirements for approval. There must be a mechanism in place for how to deal with unsuccessful applicants (Koch, Massyn, & Spencely, 2003). In order to raise the quality of the agritourism industry across BC, unsuccessful applicants should be encouraged to improve their business and meet the standards. An examination of existing quality assurance schemes reveals that most have an appeals process in place for businesses that do not meet the standards. For instance, Tourism BC's AAP has a re-inspection policy in

place, whereby the inspector's report of observations and suggestions is provided to business owners (Tourism BC, no date). The business owners then have the option of applying for a re-inspection. The stakeholders in this study need to discuss: *What happens if a company fails?*

2.8.8 Support for Operators

Though many businesses may want to become part of the quality assurance scheme, not all will know how to achieve the standards. Many small business tourism operators have had very little business management training, and may not know how to write a business plan, use fair hiring practices, or deal effectively with customer complaints (Busby & Rendle, 2000). These business owners may require assistance in meeting the quality assurance standards. Some existing quality assurance programs direct applicants to contact a person directly for assistance. Others provide written explanations and suggestions within the application package. Yet another program advises applicants to attend a briefing and training session prior to completing application forms. The type of support provided to business owners will depend on the resources available to the program's administrator and the type of support required by business operators. Stakeholders in this study need to decide: *What sort of assistance should the scheme offer to businesses?*

2.8.9 Partnerships with other Tourism Organizations

The variety of businesses potentially involved in agritourism may lead to duplication in quality assurance program options for businesses. One that particularly comes to mind is Tourism BC's Approved Accommodation Program. Having many quality assurance programs potentially applicable to an agritourism business can be overwhelming for the business owner. The amount of time needed to apply for and comply with numerous quality assurance schemes may constrain agritourism operators

from engaging in all of the options available. One solution to this is to link the schemes in ways that make it simple to meet the needs of these options simultaneously, without a lot of extra work for the business owner. Careful consideration must be given to ensuring that the two schemes are compatible and that the administrators of the other scheme are willing to link the two together. Stakeholders need to decide: *Should there be links with other schemes?*

2.8.10 Membership Benefits

To encourage participation, most of the quality assurance programs examined offer membership benefits to all businesses who meet the standards (e.g. Australia's NEAP and BBTAP, and England Tourism Council's QAS). While these benefits may include the use of a logo, increased advertising and exposure to greater markets, other incentives may also be attractive to agritourism operators. Examples of such benefits include access to training programs, reduced fees for other tourism organizations, and opportunities to build partnerships (Toth, 2002). Stakeholders need to decide: *What incentives would they like to see offered?*

2.8.11 Willingness to Pay

A quality assurance standards scheme must be used by the businesses if it is to be accepted, and it must have enough funds to sustain itself into the future in order to be truly useful to businesses (Honey & Stewart, 2002). A final question addressed by stakeholders should be: *How much should certification cost?* Some quality assurance schemes set basic fees for all businesses, others scale fees according to gross income or number of employees, while even others scale fees according to the number of outlets operated by a business. Setting application and membership fees will likely be a contentious issue. Unless there is outside funding, the fees will have to cover

administration costs into the future, and yet must be low enough so that the cost does not deter businesses from joining (Honey & Stewart, 2002).

The set of issues and related questions discussed in the preceding sections will be used to guide discussions during workshops and interviews in this research process. The answers to the questions will provide the framework for guiding the development of BCATA's Quality Assurance Program. It is important that the questions outlined above be discussed by the stakeholders, so that consensus concerning core components of BCATA's Quality Assurance Program can be achieved. The stakeholders will need to reach consensus on the preceding issues and answer the questions. The task of bringing stakeholders together and answering the questions is challenging. However, the guidelines suggested in this chapter may smooth the process considerably.

2.9 Existing Standards and Certification Programs

Many tourism codes of conduct and certification programs are already in place in BC and around the world. However, certification programs specifically designed for agritourism are few. The ones that do exist mainly focus on accommodations (e.g. *English Tourism Council, European Centre for Eco Agro Tourism, Farmstay UK*). In Canada, there is one quality assurance program that incorporates more than just accommodations; the *Fédération des Agricotours du Québec*. This quality assurance program encompasses 'Country-Style Dining', 'Farm Shops', 'Farm Explorations', and 'Bed & Breakfast on a farm' (no author, 2004).

Examining other codes helps to identify common themes covered by certification programs and provides an indication of what is important to include in the development of standards, and the level of detail necessary in a quality standards program. In addition to the quality assurance programs highlighted in the previous section, Appendix B highlights some Canadian tourism and agriculture standards, codes and certification

programs that provide examples for how a Quality Assurance Program for agritourism in BC might eventually look. Some tourism standards, such as Tourism BC's Approved Accommodation ratings and Canada Select Ratings may be included as part of an agritourism certification program. Agriculture standards are important to keep in mind as minimum safety and hygiene standards when processing food in an agritourism industry.

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 Research Questions

The main objectives of this study are to develop quality assurance criteria and standards for agritourism in BC, and to make recommendations for the administration of the Quality Assurance Program. These research objectives correspond with the goal set out by the BC Agritourism Alliance (BCATA); to develop a quality assurance standards system and provide quality control and recognition in the agritourism industry. To reach these objectives, several research questions and sub-questions needed to be addressed:

- 1. How is an effective quality assurance program developed?**
 - How are quality assurance and certification programs developed?
 - What makes a certification program effective?
- 2. What standards should be used to assess quality for agritourism in BC?**
 - Should there be specific standards for each type of agritourism business?
 - Should there be different levels of quality rating?
 - Should the standards assess written policies and procedures or customer experiences?
 - What components should be included in the standards?
- 3. What is important to stakeholders in the development of a Quality Assurance Program?**
 - How should compliance with the standards be assessed?
 - What happens if a business doesn't meet the standards?
 - For how long should the qualification be valid?
 - What should be the renewal process?
 - What sort of assistance should be offered to businesses?
 - Should there be links with other quality assurance programs?
 - What membership incentives should be offered to businesses?
 - Are agritourism business owners willing to pay for membership in the Quality Assurance Program?

3.2 Research Methods

To address these research questions, a case study method of investigation was used. Case studies are useful when the research topic is defined broadly, if the conditions are contextual or complex multivariate, or if the research is reliant on multiple conditions rather than a single source of evidence (Yin, 2003). The broad, exploratory focus of this research project (e.g. discovering what stakeholders desire in a quality assurance program), the contextual nature of the study conditions (e.g. the focus on agritourism in BC), and the reliance on multiple sources of information (e.g. existing literature, existing quality assurance programs and agritourism stakeholders) created a setting appropriate for a case study. As such, a descriptive case study method was used. This method is described by Yin (2003) as presenting a complete description of a phenomenon within its context. To investigate the case study, several research methods were used. They are described in the following section.

3.2.1 Research Phases

The case study incorporated several qualitative and quantitative research methods, including a review and analysis of literature, facilitation of stakeholder workshops, and the administration of a questionnaire survey to stakeholders. These methods were used in a three-phase process.

1. Literature Review and Analysis

The first phase involved determining how quality assurance programs are developed, establishing what makes these programs effective, and identifying what questions need to be answered when developing a certification program. To address these tasks, a literature review of books, academic journals, and Internet sites was conducted to gather information relating to the development of quality assurance standards programs. A content analysis of existing quality assurance programs was

conducted in order to discover the primary concerns of such programs. The positive and negative aspects of the various programs, were identified, and the programs were assessed in terms of their possible applicability to an agritourism certification program. The literature review also provided insights into the concerns and expectations of agri-tourists as identified by other tourism researchers.

2. Stakeholder Workshops in the Fraser Valley

The second phase of the research involved the facilitation of five workshops with stakeholders related to agritourism in the study area. Members from the two groups of Definitive stakeholders, local agritourism business owners and members of BCATA, were asked to participate in the workshops. Members of the Expectant stakeholder group, local economic development organizations, were also invited to attend (for a full discussion of stakeholder types, see Section 2.6.2 of this work).

In June, 2003, 77 invitation letters were sent to all known agritourism operators in the Fraser Valley. These farmers were then called two weeks later to confirm their participation and ask if they could suggest any other existing or potential agritourism operators who might be interested in participating in the workshops. As a result of these suggestions, 24 more invitations were extended to farmers. Overall, a total of 101 workshop invitations were extended to agritourism operators.

Five 1½-hour long workshops were held in the Fraser Valley during July and August, 2003. These evening workshops were held in Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Langley, and Agassiz with those invitees who voluntarily agreed to participate. In total, 38 farmers/tourism operators and 5 representatives from local economic development agencies attended the workshops. On average, approximately 8 stakeholders were present at each workshop. Workshop attendees represented a broad range of agritourism businesses in the Fraser Valley, with representation from bed & breakfasts, direct farm

markets, petting farms, wineries, u-pick berry farms and a local farming museum. The workshops were facilitated by this researcher, and were also attended by a member of BCATA's board of directors. Most of the workshops were hosted in local administrative offices within the study area. Sessions were also attended by representatives from Chilliwack Economic Partners, Chilliwack Agriculture Commission, North Fraser Community Futures Development Corporation, and the District of Kent. One unusual location for these events was the workshop held at "Flowers from a Country Garden", an agritourism business in Langley.

During the workshops, the BCATA representatives introduced their organization, and the notion of quality standards for agritourism. The workshop facilitator then shared a list of questions to be addressed when developing quality assurance standards (Appendix C), and a sample of what some quality assurance standards might look like (see Appendix D). This information sparked discussions, and though not all the issues were answered in every workshop, the facilitator was able to develop an understanding of what the participants were most concerned about and interested in incorporating into a Code of Standards. To record comments and discussions throughout the evenings, point-form notes were written on flip-chart paper.

3. Follow-up Questionnaire to Agritourism Operators

Responses from the stakeholder workshops were used to develop a 'Draft Code of Standards and Recommendations' (Appendix E). The Draft was sent with a questionnaire survey (Appendix F) to each of the agritourism operators in the Fraser Valley who were invited to attend the summer workshops. Initially, 22 completed surveys were returned in the first three weeks. Six surveys were returned incomplete due to undeliverable addresses (follow-up on these businesses did not uncover new addresses) and one was returned because the owner was selling the business. The overall response

rate (22%) was lower than expected, so each of the farmers who had not returned the questionnaires was called and encouraged to complete and return the survey. These phone calls resulted in 6 more completed questionnaires being returned. Overall, a total of 28 responses (28% response rate) were received.

3.3 Project Scope and Pilot Study Area

To test the viability of developing a Quality Assurance Program for agritourism in BC, BCATA decided to implement a pilot study in one region of the province. The intent was to build confidence in such a program in one region and then leverage its implementation into a province-wide agritourism initiative. The study area chosen for this project was within the Fraser Valley Regional District, with special emphasis on the communities of Langley, Mission, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, and Agassiz. Fertile farmland in this area supports many agricultural businesses, ranging from small hobby farms to large industrial dairy operations. The Fraser Valley was chosen as a case study because of its growing reputation as an agritourism destination in BC (Centre for Tourism Policy and Research, no date) and because operators in the area had previously expressed an interest in developing a quality assurance program. In addition, the agritourism growth in the Fraser Valley captured the attention of Chilliwack Economic Partners Corporation (CEPCO), North Fraser Community Futures Development Corporation, and Community Futures Development Corporation of South Fraser. When BCATA suggested the Fraser Valley area as a pilot study area, the three agencies agreed to cooperate with BCATA and Simon Fraser University in the implementation of this project. Throughout the research process, contact was maintained with BCATA and the other three regional economic development organizations; i.e. CEPCO as well as the North and South Fraser Community Futures Development Corporations.

Due to time and resource constraints, this research project's scope was confined to the first step of Toth's six step process for developing certification programs: developing standards. Steps two through four – assessment, certification and accreditation – are to be completed by BCATA during the implementation process. The outcome of the final steps related to recognition and acceptance will only become known with time. Recognition and acceptance will likely occur, so long as Definitive and Expectant stakeholders are involved in the standards development and people feel that BCATA represents their interests in the agritourism industry.

3.4 Research Ethics

Simon Fraser University's ethics policies and procedures (R20.01), required this research project to pass a university ethics review (Simon Fraser University, 2001). To fulfill the ethics approval requirements, all participants in the workshops were provided with information regarding the confidential nature of their responses during the workshops. Participants also signed an informed consent document which stated that they had read the information provided to them, understood the intent, content and procedures of the workshops, and that they were voluntarily agreeing to participate in the workshops. Respondents of the questionnaire survey were asked to read an enclosed letter that described the survey purposes and assured individual confidentiality. Respondents signed an agreement on the first page of the survey which stated that they had read and understood the enclosed information letter.

3.5 Study Limitations

Four main limitations that constrained this research project were:

1. Reluctance to be involved in a quality assurance program

Farmers involved in agritourism often have very limited budgets. Some of them may see certification as just another added expense they cannot afford. To address this concern, farmers must be informed of the benefits of participating in certification programs and developing partnerships within their community. Some farmers in the area were open to the idea of developing an agritourism certification program, and good results in the pilot area may help to convince reluctant tourism operators across the province to become involved in the certification program.

2. Diversity of agritourism industry

Like the tourism industry in general, agritourism is very diverse in its focus and operations. The challenge was to develop a Quality Assurance Program that was applicable to operations ranging from a road-side stand to a wine tourism attraction or a bed and breakfast business. To address this challenge, the program that was recommended addressed very general characteristics of any agritourism business – such as the availability of washrooms, cleanliness, safety, training and customer service skills. As the certification program grows in the future, it may become possible to add other levels of certification that are relevant to particular types of businesses (e.g. fresh produce and prepared food quality standards for roadside stands). The study's occurrence in the evolution of such a program made such detailed inclusions difficult to incorporate. There will likely be an ongoing evolution in the Program's criteria as the agritourism industry in the area matures.

3. Lack of existing agritourism certification programs

To avoid the difficulties associated with creating and marketing a new product, the ideal way to develop an agritourism Quality Assurance Program for BC would be to

adapt an existing certification program or to work in partnership with such a program to develop a certification program here. Making use of the standards of a well-established, recognized quality assurance program has the potential for increasing the credibility of a program developed in BC. Unfortunately, no certification program was discovered that could be applied directly to the needs of agritourism businesses in BC. Most voluntary certification programs are focused on accommodations or customer service. These standards can be adapted to form part of the certification program for BC, but they do not cover all of the issues BCATA wished to address.

4. Time

BCATA had a short deadline for funding the development of its Quality Assurance Program, so the standards needed to be developed by the end of 2003. Unfortunately, during late spring, summer and early fall, farmers have very busy work schedules. They work long days during this period, so did not have much time to spare for developing this program. Consequently, gathering them for extended discussions on the study's theme proved challenging. As a result, tight agendas were set for completion of all tasks in the workshops and important dialogue was perhaps constrained by the limited time frame provided.

5. Representativeness

Due to the time constraints mentioned in the preceding section, it was not feasible to include all potential stakeholders in the study. In recognition of the time and funding constraints, only the most legitimate stakeholders (i.e. agritourism business operators, BCATA, and local economic development agencies) were invited to participate in this first stage in the development of the Quality Assurance Program. Latent stakeholder groups, tourists, local community members, local governments and university academics were not invited to participate. The resulting limited representativeness during the

development phase may negatively affect the credibility and acceptance of the Quality Assurance Program in the future. To compensate for this limitation, BCATA should endeavour to include Latent stakeholders in assessing the next stages of the pilot project, and allow these stakeholders to have some input into the development process.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two major sections. The first section discusses and analyses the stakeholder workshops that were held in the Fraser Valley. The second section outlines the findings from the follow-up survey with these and other stakeholders. The focus is on identifying important factors to be included in the Quality Assurance Program, as identified by the agritourism operators.

4.2 Section 1: Workshop Analysis

From the general opinions and comments generated during the workshops, the facilitator recognized that the list of sample standards provided to participants during the workshops was more detailed and complex than what farmers wanted to see in their Quality Assurance Program. The farmers felt that short, simple, common-sense standards were the best way to raise the level of quality across agritourism businesses. Though they did have some concerns about the Quality Assurance Program, most participants were in favour of such a voluntary program for agritourism. A more detailed description of the issues and questions addressed in the workshops follows.

4.2.1 Identification of Standards Quality Themes

Because it was key to standards development, the identification of quality standards to be used in the Quality Assurance Program took the greatest amount of time to discuss during the workshops. To further focus discussion, several sub-issues were addressed:

Uniform vs. Varying Standards

This issue explored whether there should be a core set of standards that every business would need to meet, or if different types of businesses (accommodations, fruit stands, or wineries, for example) should have different standards. Some participants felt that there should be a range of standards for varying types of businesses because *“tourists expect different levels of cleanliness and standards from different businesses”*. A store, for example, would be expected to be cleaner than a barn or animal petting area. Similarly, while many tourists would expect that a winery where tours are provided would have a washroom available, they might not expect a small roadside fruit stand to have one. While discussing how the different standards might actually appear within a standards program, participants realized that it *“may not be possible to have standards for all types of businesses”*. For example, a business that gives tours, sells items in a store, and has rooms available for overnight guests would need to meet three different sets of standards to get a ‘quality assurance approved’ rating. In the end, most participants agreed that, though there should be some sort of concession for small businesses where tourists only stay for a short amount of time, any standards developed *“should overlap several sections”* of agritourism businesses.

Standards Rating Levels

Participants were initially enthusiastic about developing different levels of standards to rate businesses as one star (*), two stars (**), and three stars (***), etc. However, as they conceptualized how the different levels would be evaluated, people became less inclined toward the creation of such rating systems. Participants discussed how they would compare different businesses, such as a winery and a roadside fruit stand, without inherently giving the fruit stand a lower rating due to limited amenities at such facilities. However, many people recognized the need for a core set of approval

criteria applicable to all businesses, regardless of size. Some participants felt that there should be “*core criteria and bonus symbols*” for extra amenities. The other concern expressed about different rating levels for agritourism businesses was the ability of tourists to recognize what different ratings mean. For BCATA’s purposes, most participants felt that using simple, basic standards without different rating levels was the best way to develop an effective Quality Assurance Program in BC.

Standards Orientation

Most participants felt that the standards should assess elements of customer experiences (such as a warm welcome) at an agritourism business, rather than written management policies (such as the presence of a business plan). As they envisaged how to measure customer experience, most participants recognized that ‘quality of experience’ assessment could be very subjective. They felt that it was difficult to compare the experiences from different types of agritourism businesses. It was felt that the solution to this difficulty was to develop simple, measurable standards that could assess the quality of tourist experiences based on the presence or absence of specific attributes. A suggested example of such a standard was ‘guests are greeted and welcomed in a friendly manner.’

Components to be Included

This issue was tied to the previous three standards concerns, and was at the crux of the overriding quality standards issue examined in this section. What specific standards should be used to assess quality? As participants discussed what they felt should be included in the Program, elements for specific standards were recorded. The elements are summarized in Table 4.1, and sorted based on their frequency of occurrence in the workshop records.

The elements most often mentioned, and listed by many participants as especially important for a Quality Assurance Program, were:

- Legal requirements – all legal requirements are met, and necessary licenses and permits are obtained;
- Hospitality and friendliness – customers are welcomed; and
- Clean and safe environment – areas accessible to guests are free from hazards.

Table 4.1 Elements for Standards Provided by Workshop Participants

| Element | # times mentioned | Element | # times mentioned |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Legal requirements/permits | 7 | Hygiene | 1 |
| Hospitality/friendliness | 6 | Bio-security | 1 |
| Clean and safe environment | 6 | Energy | 1 |
| Parking – safe, adequate | 4 | Water | 1 |
| Washroom availability | 4 | Waste | 1 |
| Hours of operation - posted and adhered to | 4 | Owner should have SuperHost | 1 |
| Know business / know products | 4 | Fiscal Risk Management Plan | 1 |
| Signage | 3 | Responsible Marketing | 1 |
| Insurance | 3 | Representation of BC products | 1 |
| Maintenance/state of repair | 2 | Fast service | 1 |
| Belong to industry association | 2 | Interaction with owner | 1 |
| Quality products | 2 | Hand wash facilities | 1 |
| Physical contact with senses | 2 | | |

Participants responded negatively to some of the suggested standards because they were too detailed for small tourism business owners, and because they did not guarantee market-oriented quality assurance. These negatively perceived standards were related to: financial systems, business systems, as well as written descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of employees.

4.2.2 Assessment of Standards Compliance

During the workshops, three methods were suggested for assessing compliance with the standards: self, peer, and independent third-party assessment. Self-assessment was felt to be most equitable to business owners, but less credible to the public because the owners would be assessing their own business and therefore might be less objective than an outside assessor. Peer-review was felt to be too difficult because it may cause hard feelings among business owners in a community. Third-party assessment was felt to be the most credible form, but potentially costly. Overall, a combination of self-assessment and third-party assessment approaches was felt to be the best option for assessing compliance to standards in the Quality Assurance Program. A self-assessment component could be conducted by the business owner, followed by an independent third-party assessment.

Apart from the three main options, participants made several other suggestions for assessment, which were discussed during the workshops. One option involved the use of a mystery shopper approach to assess businesses (a person is hired to pose as a tourist and to visit the tourism business in order to assess the business according to the standards without the owner knowing). This alternative was felt by some to be unnecessary, and perhaps expensive. Another suggestion was for BCATA to establish a paper or electronic standardized reporting system for collecting customer comments. In this approach, if several negative comments were received about a particular business, the operation would be investigated with the potential for the business to lose its 'Quality Approved' rating. Many participants suggested that in a third-party assessment approach, the assessor could recommend ways for businesses to improve in order to meet specific expected performance levels. A final suggestion was that such assessments should take place during the business's busy season, so the assessor would be able to truly experience and assess how the business was operating from a quality assurance perspective.

4.2.3 Duration of Approved Status

There was no real consensus for how often a 'Quality Approved' status should be renewed. Participant suggestions for the duration of Approved status ranged from 1-5 years. Those who desired a longer qualification status period were mostly concerned with the cost and hassle of the assessment. The reasons stated for desiring annual renewal were that businesses changed with time and should be re-evaluated often enough to reflect these shifts. Participants also suggested that if an annual publication featured approved businesses, those operations should be assessed before the release of the publication each year. Some participants suggested that established businesses, or those with a history of compliance to the standards, should not be assessed as often as new businesses or those businesses previously found to be in non-compliance with the standards during the third party assessment stage of the application process.

4.2.4 Non-Compliance with Standards

Participants felt that if a business did not meet the standards, they should be given a grace or probation period within which to meet the standards, and then be reassessed. Opinions varied regarding the length of the grace period. Some participants felt that 1-2 years would be fair, and would provide a long enough period for operators to make appropriate improvements to their businesses. Others felt that a shorter time (from one month to one season) was fair, especially if the approved status was valid for only 2-3 years. Several participants were concerned that businesses not meeting the standards might take advantage of a long grace period to use their approval rating as a marketing tool, possibly giving tourists an ill-informed impression of the Quality Assurance Program. Overall, there was general consensus that there should be a grace period, but no agreement as to how long this grace period should be.

4.2.5 Support for Operators

Several recommendations were made by the workshop participants in regards to providing support to those agritourism business owners who needed assistance during the application process, or who had questions about the Quality Assurance Program. These suggestions were to have:

- A website with access to the complete application form and information package so that farmers would be able to learn more about the Quality Assurance Program before making a financial commitment to the Program;
- A 'Frequently Asked Questions' section about the Quality Assurance Program posted on the website;
- Email links to ask program administrators questions about the Program; and
- A telephone help-line for people with questions about the Program.

4.2.6 Partnerships with Other Tourism Organizations

When asked, some participants did express an interest in linking membership with BCATA to other tourism organizations. Two organizations that were mentioned were the North American Direct Farm Marketing Association and the BC Tourism Approved Accommodation program.

4.2.7 Membership Benefits

Workshop participants had many suggestions for membership benefits that would be valued as incentives for joining the Quality Assurance Program. Their suggestions are summarized in Table 4.2, and are sorted by frequency of mention in the workshop notes.

Table 4.2 Incentives for Participation in the Quality Assurance Program

| Incentive | Frequency of Mention | Incentive | Frequency of Mention |
|---|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Marketing/ advertising (such as website, magazine & bags with BCATA logo) | 4 | Newsletter for tourists, to raise awareness of issues related to farming (e.g., BSE) | 1 |
| Increased signage on roads and highways | 2 | Group insurance policy – to provide coverage for 'approved' businesses | 1 |
| Branding/ access to BCATA logo | 2 | Networking opportunities between members | 1 |
| Access to training workshops (such as SuperHost, First Aid & Food Safe) | 2 | Membership package/ associate memberships with other agri-tourism organizations (e.g. Tourism BC) | 1 |
| Education/ information about how to improve business, how to meet standards | 1 | Business development assistance (e.g. a website with links to local small business associations) | 1 |
| Cooperative advertising – marketing in regional magazines | 1 | Assistance in attracting foreign tourists (links to translators, multilingual guides, signs) | 1 |
| Mentor program – providing new agritourism business owners with a link to an established agritourism operator | 1 | | |

Overall, marketing and greater access to potential tourist markets were seen as the most important incentives for farmers to participate in the Quality Assurance Standards Program. Increasing signage along roads and highways, access to the BCATA logo, and access to training were also membership benefits desired as part of the Program.

4.2.8 Willingness to Pay

Willingness to pay for membership in a Quality Assurance Program was tied to the value of membership benefits. Most participants agreed that they were willing to pay, so long as they received value for their money. The actual amounts participants stated that they were willing to pay varied (from \$25 to \$1000/year), but most agreed that as

long as they received greater benefits from BCATA than what their costs would be, they were prepared to pay for 'Approved' status.

4.2.9 Summary of Workshops: Draft Code of Standards and Recommendations

Information and comments provided by participants during the workshop provided a solid basis for developing a code of standards. The workshop findings were used in conjunction with findings from the analysis of existing standards to develop a Draft Code of Standards and Recommendations. Each of the most frequently mentioned elements for standards (mentioned 3 or more times in workshops) was incorporated in to the Draft Code. The remaining elements for standards were included if: 1) there was no opposition to the individual standard in the workshops, and; 2) the standard related to (or was found in) established standards programs elsewhere. Additionally, two standards relating to partnerships were included to reflect the importance placed on this issue by workshop participants and other quality assurance programs, and in tourism literature. Because the renewal process for the Quality Assurance Program was not fully addressed by workshop participants, the recommended application and renewal process was developed through an examination of existing quality assurance standards programs. Comments from workshop participants were also used to guide the development of the application process. Appendix E contains a complete copy of the Draft Code of Standards and Recommendation that were developed and circulated to agritourism operators as part of the questionnaire package.

4.3 Section 2: Questionnaire Analysis:

The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather feedback on the Draft Code of Standards and Recommendations developed from the workshops and to gain further insight into what agritourism operators felt was important for developing a quality

assurance standards program. The survey was divided into three main sections: Code of Standards, Recommended Steps for Becoming Approved, and Recommendations for the Standards Program. This format followed that of the Draft Code of Standards and Recommendations included in the package sent to agritourism operators. This analysis of the survey follows the same format.

4.3.1 Responses Concerning the Code of Standards

The first section of the questionnaire asked participants to examine the Code of Standards and to answer four questions relating to that portion of the Draft Code and Recommendations. Participant responses to these questions are discussed below.

Importance of the Standards

The first question concerning the Code of Standards asked respondents to rate how important they perceived each individual standard to be. Most of the standards scored very high in importance. Ninety-four percent of the total responses for all the standards were scored by respondents as either Somewhat Important or Very Important ($\bar{x} = 3.65$). Four of the standards scored significantly lower than the others in importance (>14% of respondents rated the standards as either Unimportant or Somewhat Unimportant). These standards pertained to First Aid training ($\bar{x} = 3.19$), SuperHost training ($\bar{x} = 3.11$), involvement in industry associations ($\bar{x} = 3.04$), and providing information about other local businesses ($\bar{x} = 3.25$). Table 4.3 shows the responses for each individual standard.

Table 4.3 Importance of Standards

| Standard | Mean Score | Number of Responses (% of responses) | | | | |
|---|------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| | | Unimportant 1 | Somewhat Unimportant 2 | Somewhat Important 3 | Very Important 4 | Don't Know 5 |
| Hospitality and Customer Service | | | | | | |
| Guests are greeted and welcomed in a friendly manner. | 3.93 | | | 2 (7%) | 26 (93%) | |
| Staff is knowledgeable and able to answer questions from customers. | 3.93 | | | 4 (14%) | 24 (86%) | |
| Hand-washing facilities are available – especially when touching animals. | 3.81 | | | 5 (18%) | 22 (82%) | |
| Clean toilet facilities with hand washing facilities are provided to customers. | 3.78 | | | 6 (22%) | 22 (78%) | |
| On-the-job training customer service training is provided to staff. | 3.73 | | 1 (4%) | 6 (23%) | 18 (69%) | 1 (4%) |
| Safety | | | | | | |
| Areas accessible to guests are well maintained and free from hazards. | 3.96 | | | 2 (7%) | 25 (89%) | 1 (4%) |
| At least one worker on site has basic (or higher) First Aid training. | 3.19 | 2 (7%) | 2 (7%) | 12 (43%) | 9 (32%) | 1 (4%) |

| Standard | Mean Score | Number of Responses (% of responses) | | | | |
|---|------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| | | Unimportant 1 | Somewhat Unimportant 2 | Somewhat Important 3 | Very Important 4 | Don't Know 5 |
| Professionalism | | | | | | |
| Employees are trained in duties necessary to perform their jobs. | 3.89 | | | 3 (11%) | 24 (89%) | |
| All areas that are visible or accessible to guests are clean and well maintained. | 3.71 | | | 8 (29%) | 20 (71%) | |
| Staff maintain a clean and tidy appearance when working directly with customers. | 3.71 | | | 8 (29%) | 20 (71%) | |
| All staff who handle food have attended the Food Safe Training Program. | 3.48 | 1 (4%) | | 11 (41%) | 15 (55%) | |
| Owner, manager, or at least one worker on site is trained in SuperHost. | 3.11 | 3 (11%) | 1 (4%) | 14 (52%) | 8 (29%) | 1 (4%) |
| Accessibility | | | | | | |
| Signage is well maintained and legible. | 3.89 | | | 3 (11%) | 25 (89%) | |
| Sign displaying business name is posted at the entrance. | 3.86 | | | 5 (18%) | 22 (79%) | 1 (4%) |
| Access road or driveway is well maintained. | 3.79 | | | 6 (21%) | 22 (79%) | |
| Safe, adequate parking is provided for customers. | 3.64 | | | 10 (36%) | 18 (64%) | |

| Standard | Mean Score | Number of Responses (% of responses) | | | | |
|---|------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| | | Unimportant 1 | Somewhat Unimportant 2 | Somewhat Important 3 | Very Important 4 | Don't Know 5 |
| Business Operations | | | | | | |
| The business has adequate insurance, including public liability. | 3.89 | | | 4 (14%) | 23 (82%) | 1 (4%) |
| Current marketing materials accurately describe business. | 3.71 | | | 8 (29%) | 20 (71%) | |
| Business hours are posted and adhered to. | 3.50 | 1 (4%) | | 11 (39%) | 16 (57%) | |
| Environmental Impacts | | | | | | |
| The business operates in an environmentally sensitive manner including taking steps to reduce: | | | | | | |
| Chemical use | 3.75 | | 1 (4%) | 8 (29%) | 16 (57%) | 1 (4%) |
| Solid and liquid waste | 3.71 | | | 10 (36%) | 16 (57%) | 2 (7%) |
| Water consumption | 3.50 | | 1 (4%) | 13 (46%) | 13 (46%) | 1 (4%) |
| Energy consumption | 3.46 | | 1 (4%) | 14 (50%) | 12 (43%) | 1 (4%) |
| Partnerships | | | | | | |
| Information about other local businesses and activities is provided to customers. | 3.25 | | 4 (14%) | 13 (46%) | 11 (39%) | |
| Business owner belongs to at least one industry association or has otherwise contributed to the growth of the industry. | 3.04 | 1 (4%) | 6 (21%) | 13 (48%) | 7 (25%) | 1 (4%) |

Responses from this survey question indicated that hospitality/customer service and safety were ranked as the most important aspects to be included in the standards. The standards that were ranked the highest were 'Areas accessible to guests are well maintained and free from hazards' ($\bar{x} = 3.96$), 'Customers are greeted and welcomed in a friendly manner' ($\bar{x} = 3.93$), and 'Staff is knowledgeable and able to answer questions from customers' ($\bar{x} = 3.93$). Other high-ranking standards were related to employee training ($\bar{x} = 3.89$), well-maintained and legible signs ($\bar{x} = 3.89$), adequate insurance ($\bar{x} = 3.89$), and business name posted at entrance ($\bar{x} = 3.86$).

The 25 individual standards were divided into seven thematic sets. According to the responses for Question 1, ranking of the thematic sets is as follows:

- Hospitality and Customer Service ($\bar{x} = 3.86$)
- Accessibility ($\bar{x} = 3.79$)
- Business Operations ($\bar{x} = 3.70$)
- Professionalism ($\bar{x} = 3.58$)
- Safety ($\bar{x} = 3.58$)
- Environmental Impacts ($\bar{x} = 3.61$)
- Partnerships ($\bar{x} = 3.14$)

When responses are grouped in this manner, hospitality and customer service again are ranked as the top most important element to be included in the Code of Standards.

Removal of Potential Standards

Question 2 in this section of the questionnaire asked respondents to list any standards that they would like to see removed from the Code, as well as their reasons for not wanting to incorporate them into the Quality Assurance Program. Only 6 of the 28 respondents indicated that they would like to see certain standards removed from the proposed code. In this regard, the customer service program SuperHost, was recommended for removal three times and compulsory First Aid training was suggested for deletion twice. Partnerships, handwash facilities, washroom facilities, and

environmental impacts standards were each recommended for omission only once by respondents. Open-ended responses explained reasons for removal as follows:

Table 4.4 Reasons for Removal of Standards

| Standard Recommended for Removal | Reason Stated |
|---|--|
| SuperHost Training | <i>"Not sure about benefits of Superhost training; curriculum? Investment of time/\$"</i> <i>"Often, through other work contacts, owners have already acquired these [customer service] skills and pass them on to their employees. These skills are not necessarily best learned through a course, but are modeled/mentored, or are learned through practical experience."</i> |
| First Aid Training | <i>"First aid training is not necessary when farm is near hospital/ ambulance service and the operation is relatively small or when parents are accompanying their children."</i> |
| Environmental Impacts | <i>"Not sure how you will be able to identify 'environmental impacts'."</i> |
| Partnerships | <i>"I believe this area does not belong in a code of standards, should be promoted in another way."</i> |

The respondent who wished to omit compulsory washroom and handwash facilities standards from the Code was concerned that farms open to the public for one-day annual events (e.g. multi-farm tours) would be required to have these facilities to achieve 'Approved' status. This was perceived by the respondent to be too onerous a cost for such infrequent events.

Top Three Standards

The next question asked respondents to list the top three most important items that they felt should be included in the Code of Standards. Despite the open-ended character of the question, two themes were repeated by many of the respondents. In particular, the need for standards associated with friendly staff and good customer service (16 times), and safety (13 times) was frequently mentioned. These two themes were perceived by farmers to be very important to any Code eventually developed for the agritourism

operators. In addition, the need for standards associated with professionalism, cleanliness and knowledgeable staff were also commonly mentioned for inclusion (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Top Most Important Standards

| Standard (# times mentioned) | Standard (# times mentioned) |
|--|--|
| Friendly Staff and Customer Service (16) | Signage (2) |
| Safety (13) | Environmental Impacts (2) |
| Professionalism (4) | Safe Parking (1) |
| Cleanliness (4) | Toilets and Handwashing Facilities (1) |
| Knowledgeable Staff (4) | Tidy Staff (1) |
| Accurate Marketing (3) | Partnerships (1) |
| Liability Insurance (2) | |

Ranking the Standards Categories

This question asked respondents to rank the thematic grouping of standards in terms of their relative importance to the proposed code. Table 4.6 shows the mean, median and mode scores for each of the categories.

Table 4.6 Rankings of Standards Categories

| Category | Mean* | Median* | Mode* |
|----------------------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| Hospitality and Customer Service | 1.48 | 1 | 1 |
| Safety | 2.57 | 2.5 | 3 |
| Professionalism | 3.38 | 3 | 3 |
| Accessibility | 4.05 | 4 | 3 |
| Business Operations | 4.67 | 5 | 5 |
| Environmental Impacts | 5.05 | 5.5 | 6 |
| Partnerships | 6.38 | 7 | 7 |

(scores based on a scale ranging from 1, most important, to 7, least important)

The responses from this question are similar to the rankings of the themes in the analysis of Question 1. Overall, standards associated with customer services and safety received the highest rankings. In contrast, standards linked to partnerships and

environmental impacts were ranked as the least important to the overall development of the proposed code.

4.3.2 Recommended Approval Process for Applicants

Appropriateness of Approval Process Steps

Respondents were asked to assess the appropriateness of a proposed approval process for new or renewing applicants to the Quality Assurance Program. Overall, most respondents felt that the proposed procedures were appropriate (Table 4.7). However, there was some concern about specific steps in the process.

Table 4.7 Fairness of Steps to Approval

| Step | Percentage of Responses (%) | | |
|---|-----------------------------|----------|--------|
| | Fair | Not fair | Modify |
| 1. Meet all legal requirements before applying | 67 | 4 | 29 |
| 2. Complete application form and submit to BC Agritourism with application fee | 84 | 0 | 16 |
| 3. Completed forms examined, approval rating given, access to logo and marketing provided | 92 | 4 | 4 |
| 4. Follow-up visit by an assessor and assessment report given. If needed, 30 days are given to upgrade to standard level. | 65 | 8 | 27 |
| 5. Approval rating is valid for 1 year, renewed rating valid for 2 years. Application begins anew after renewal period is complete. | 84 | 8 | 8 |

Procedures 1 and 4 received the lowest overall ratings. About 34% of the respondents felt that these two steps were inappropriate. Step 1 required that applicants meet all legal requirements and have all necessary permits and licenses. Several respondents were concerned that the complexity of government regulation would make it impossible for agritourism businesses to comply with all policies in every situation. Two comments that exemplified these feelings were:

- *"Some jurisdictions have no flexibility and one may never achieve full status of being completely legal – Remove some of the red tape and have a clearer understanding of what exactly the Agri-tourism umbrella covers"*

- *"Some farms do not have store fronts, but sell to a few customers out of the freezer – these (legal) requirements may be over the top"*

Step 4 dealt with the third-party assessment, and the actions to be taken if an Approved business is found to be non-compliant with the standards. In response to this proposed procedure, one respondent felt that 30 days was too long a grace period. However, several other respondents (4) were concerned that the 30 days given to upgrade non-complying businesses might not be enough. Comments that exemplified their concerns include:

- *"It will be impossible to bring facilities up to standard in 30 days. Need at least one year."*
- *"Maybe 60 days (?) 30 seems too short for some things."*
- *"Cost in some areas may be prohibitive – i.e. installing washrooms"*

Fairness of the Approval Process

Respondents were also asked to evaluate the overall appropriateness of the approval process. About 90% of the respondents indicated that they thought the overall approval process was fair. Examples of such positive responses include:

- *"Guidelines are fair and practical"*
- *"We need high standards to bring the industry up to a new level of professionalism & people need a higher set of standards so they can really get to work & be more successful. Process is thorough & fair."*

The respondents who felt that the approval process was unfair, stated that *"Very few will qualify due to step #1. Most small operators cannot meet all the legal requirements"* and that *"The requirements suggested are too extensive for the average farmer"*. One respondent felt that the approval process might be fair, *"Depending on the amount of fee levy"*. Overall, most respondents were very positive about the approval process.

4.3.3 Recommendations for the Quality Assurance Program

How Well Concerns Were Addressed

Respondents were asked to rate how well the Recommendations for the Standards Program addressed their concerns for the Quality Assurance Program. Overall, most respondents (81%) felt that the Recommendations reflected their concerns either fairly well (44%) or very well (37%). Another 11% stated that the Recommendations only somewhat reflected their concerns.

Addition or Removal of Recommendations

Respondents were then asked to list additional items they would like to see added to the proposed Recommendations and Code of Standards, as well as those items they would like to see removed. From their responses it was apparent that they wished to see standards that pertaining to the use recycling boxes and bags, the amount of products for sale that originate on the farm, safe growing procedures, educational opportunities and security issues such as adequate night lighting for evening functions and theft from parked cars. Other additions to the Recommendations included a rating system (one star, two stars, three stars), and a clear description of the facility in the guide books. Similarly, some of the respondents wanted specific items removed from the Code; *“Partnerships”*, *“Environmental Impacts”*, and having *“At least one person trained in SuperHost (they wouldn’t be in the business if they weren’t naturally hospitable)”*. Two respondents suggested other changes to the Recommendations, including removal of *“Government inspectors”* and the need to *“delete or clarify step # 1”*.

4.3.4 General Comments

The final section of the questionnaire asked respondents to provide their overriding comments about the Quality Assurance Program. Many of the comments

were positive, and included thanks to BCATA for initiating the Quality Assurance Program. Two statements that exemplify these positive comments are:

- *"I would just like to encourage your group for taking this type of initiative. It is so important in this day and age to have organizations to assist the development of this type of industry. Under the umbrella of Agritourism, small farmers have resources, partnerships & assistance in starting or expanding their businesses."*
- *"I am very impressed with the work done here and look forward to being a part of a group with a set of standards as I have felt out on my own winging it & I know I have room to improve so thank you for this very important body of work. I look forward to the progression of it."*

Not all comments were positive. Some of the concerns expressed by respondents were that the approval process did not become "bogged down in a bureaucratic morass", that the standards were too difficult to meet, and that any fees to participate in the Program should be nominal. Two comments that show respondents concerns follow.

- *"We sponsor a one day visit to 12 host farms. We do not expect them to offer hand wash facilities & washrooms as they do not serve food & only open their farms for this one day. A different list is needed to encompass facilities like this. Note that we do offer toilets & handwash facilities at 3 stops that serve food. As different farms open their gates each year, we cannot expect them to have 1st Aid or SuperHost."*
- *"I agree with the standards set down, however I have been 2 years+ into making many of the physical improvements that B.C. Agritourism expects...Hopefully I have jumped through all the hoops that Health, Sewage & Rezoning & Building require. At this time I do not believe I could be a member in good standing."*

4.3.5 Types of Agritourism Businesses

To obtain insight into who responded to the surveys, the final question asked respondents to state their business type. Of 23 responses, 17(74%) had farm gate sales, 11(48%) had farm tours, 3(13%) had accommodations, 2(9%) served food, 1(4%) organized a one-day self-guided tour, and 1(4%) had a museum. As can be seen from the above responses, agritourism business owners often run more than one type of business at the same farm. This emphasizes the need for standards that are applicable to more than one type of business.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Management Implications

5.1 Introduction

When making the change from producer to tourism service provider, farmers need to learn a new set of rules and expectations for their businesses. Agritourism operators need not only know how to grow high quality farm products; they must also understand how to provide their customers with the service and activities expected from a tourism business. In the next few years, BCATA will play a leading role in the education of agritourism operators in the province of British Columbia. Two of BCATA's strategies are to "Develop a quality standards system to guide agritourism operators to attain recognized quality product/service standards, thereby providing a measure of quality control and recognition for the industry" and to "Encourage the use of quality standards for agritourism products and services" (Meeting notes, February 2003). Findings from this research can help guide the development of a province-wide Quality Assurance Program. Administered by BCATA, the Quality Assurance Program may help farmers learn what tourists expect in an agritourism experience, and provide them with an assurance of quality for their tourists.

5.2 Standards Development

5.2.1 Implications of Standards Developed

A variety of different standards exist that can be applied to agritourism. These standards provide benchmarks that can be used to measure the quality of such business aspects as customer safety, hospitality, and business management practices. Based on the literature and an exploration of existing quality assurance programs, this researcher felt

that the most useful agritourism standards in the long-term would relate to both customer experiences at the farm and business management practices. The researcher developed a sample of 55 standards that might be useful for measuring quality in agritourism businesses. These sample standards ranged from business and environmental management practices, to hospitality and farm product quality. The agritourism operators who participated in this study, however, expressed a desire for clear, simple standards that would fairly assess the quality of their goods and services, and help them learn which areas of their businesses needed improvement. Participants' desires for simplicity and clarity resulted in the final list of standards being significantly shorter and less comprehensive than the original list. Notably, the final Code of Standards does not contain any assessment of business management practices, such as the presence of a business plan, risk management plan, operations manual, or financial system.

Excluding business management practices from the Code of Standards has both benefits and drawbacks for the Quality Assurance Program. Many of the farmers who attended workshops were put off by the perceived complexity of written business management practices, and the indirect link between these practices and product or service quality. Participants' negative reactions to business management practices would likely have discouraged them from participating in the Quality Assurance Program. Removing these management standards from the Code, may initially attract more participants to the Program, increasing its visibility and usefulness to tourists and tourism operators. While the presence of a business management plan may not directly affect product and service quality in the short term, the absence of these practices can have an effect on long-term quality and business viability. Banks often request written business management plans before approving loans. Without financial assistance, it may not be possible for a business owner to make many of the improvements necessary for continued improvement in product and service quality. Insurance premiums and eligibility for

coverage may depend on the presence of business management or risk management plans. In light of recent changes in the insurance industry, tourism operators without these plans may find themselves with greatly increased insurance premiums, or possibly without any liability insurance available to them. The quality and sustainability of any business depends on the wise use of financial resources and sufficient insurance coverage to protect the business if a customer should become injured or ill from their agritourism experiences.

The presence of basic standards, such as cleanliness, hospitality, safety, and environmental impacts will provide a measure of quality assurance for agritourism businesses, and is essential to the credibility of the Quality Assurance Program. The absence of business management practices in the Code of Standards may be beneficial to the Program in the short-term. However, these practices should be included in the future. For now, encouraging tourism operators to participate in the Program is very important to the Program's overall success. Once operators are familiar with the Program, and are convinced of the benefits that they receive by participating, they may be more open to adding business management practices to the Code of Standards.

5.2.2 Rating levels

Not every agritourism business will meet the quality assurance standards to the same degree. Some businesses may greatly surpass the standards, while others will barely meet them. Though there was some interest in a multi-tiered approach, participants decided that a one-tier system of basic standards was the most appropriate for the Quality Assurance Program at this time. The benefit of keeping the standards simple is that they will be easier to understand, for both tourism operators, and tourists. Adding a multi-tiered rating system to the Quality Assurance Program will increase the complexity of the Program. This increased complexity may make it more difficult for tourists to recognize the 'quality approved' label and they may be unable to distinguish

between the different rating levels. For the present, keeping the Program clear, simple, and easy to understand is important for attracting more businesses to the Program, and for increasing recognition of the 'quality assured' label among tourists. In the future, to give credit to those businesses that surpass the basic quality assurance standards, BCATA may want to develop another tier, or several other tiers for rating the quality of businesses.

5.3 Future Directions

In order to be useful for agritourism operators, the Quality Assurance Program needs to be effective. It needs to be credible and supported by both tourism operators and the tourists. As discussed in Chapter 2, the seven steps to establishing an effective certification program are (Chester & Crabtree, 2002; Koeman et al., 2002; Toth, 2002):

1. **Standards** – specify requirements for businesses to achieve
2. **Assessment** – determine level of conformance to standards
3. **Certification** – provide documented assurance that a product conforms to a standard
4. **Accreditation** – ensure certifier is capable of performing certification procedure
5. **Recognition** – earn acceptance in the marketplace on the basis of credibility
6. **Acceptance** – persuade operators and consumers of the benefits and credibility of the certification
7. **Monitoring** – monitor and assess validity of the certification, adapt the program for changing products and markets

Toth (2002) noted that addressing each of the steps is important for achieving the fundamental goal of a cost-effective, credible certification program. The first step of this process, standards, was described in the previous section. The next six steps for establishing an effective certification program guide the following discussion of the implications of this research project.

5.3.1 Assessment

To increase credibility of the Quality Assurance Program, study participants stated a preference for a combination of self-assessment and third-party inspection of their businesses. Some participants were concerned about the higher costs of third-party

inspection when compared to self-inspection. Inspectors will need to be trained and must travel to the farms, and there will be extra administrative costs for arranging the inspections. In the short-term, these costs may seem prohibitive. However, the long-term benefits to the credibility of the Quality Assurance Programs should outweigh the costs. To reduce the costs of inspection, BCATA should partner with an existing tourism approval program, such as Tourism BC or BC Fairs and Exhibitions, to share inspectors, administration and inspection costs. This partnership approach to administering the Quality Assurance Program is recommended by tourism researchers, and has been found to be successful in other tourism certification programs (Font & Mihalič, 2002).

5.3.2 Certification

BCATA will provide documentation that approved agritourism businesses have met all the quality assurance standards. Toth recommends that this documentation be in the form of a label, certificate, or listing in a publicly accessible register (2002). Study participants expressed specific interest in developing a 'quality assured' label that could be used in marketing. When certifying approved agritourism businesses, BCATA will need to ensure that the label developed is simple, easily recognized, and readily accessible to qualified business owners. In addition, tourism business operators should be provided with an official certificate of approval that they can post inside their businesses. Provision of visible certification documentation will help to increase the visibility of the Quality Assurance Program, and in turn may increase tourist recognition of the Program.

5.3.3 Accreditation

In many sectors, there are organizations that oversee training and certifying the certifiers. Currently, there is no organizational body to oversee accreditation for quality assurance in tourism. There is a movement towards creating global accreditation

standards for ecotourism and other forms of sustainable tourism certification programs (Honey, 2002). These standards, however, will likely not be available to agritourism operators for several years, and may not be applicable to an agritourism-focussed quality assurance program. Though accreditation may become more important in the future, for the present, BCATA should focus on increasing interest in its own Program and educating tourism operators and tourists about the importance of quality assurance.

5.3.4 Recognition and Acceptance

Consumer recognition is key to the long-term success of BCATA's Quality Assurance Program. To make participation in the Program worthwhile for agritourism businesses, the potential benefits of participation, such as increased sales and revenues, must be realized by businesses. Tourists may use the quality assurance rating to assist them in their travel decisions. The Program should provide them with added confidence in the accuracy of the 'quality assured' label. Toth noted "certification and accreditation systems earn acceptance in the marketplace on the basis of their credibility and reputations of the certifiers" (2002, p. 90).

As discussed in previous sections, credibility of the Quality Assurance Program is increased through the use of third-party assessment initiatives. Also contributing to the credibility of the Program is the process used to develop the standards. Emphasis on representativeness, transparency and due process during standards development can help to ensure that the standards are supported by stakeholders. The approach used in this research should aid in building acceptance of the standards in the future. Though only time will truly tell if the Quality Assurance Program will be recognized and accepted by tourists and tourism business owners, third party assessment and the adherence to a recognized standards development process should promote acceptance.

5.3.5 Monitoring

Monitoring the validity of the certification program will be important for the continuing success of the Quality Assurance Program. Developing standards is just the first stage in the process of developing a successful Quality Assurance Program. The next step in the development process for BCATA is to test the Code of Standards and Recommendations for Administration of the Program in a pilot project. Findings from the pilot project must be used to adapt the Quality Assurance Program before it is expanded province-wide. As time progresses, the validity of the standards and the effectiveness of the Program will need to be monitored. Consumer preferences shift, businesses change, and the Quality Assurance Program will need to adapt to these movements over time. Some of the components of the Program that BCATA should monitor and adapt as needed with time are;

- **Standards** – e.g. Do they accurately indicate product and service quality? Are they measuring what tourists feel is important? Are they appropriate for all agritourism businesses?
- **Membership fees** – e.g. Do the fees adequately cover administrative costs? Are the fee levels attainable for agritourism businesses?
- **Rating levels** – e.g. Should a multi-tiered rating system be developed? Do the tourists and tourism operators see a value in having different levels?
- **Incentives and benefits** – e.g. Are the tourism operators experiencing the potential benefits of the Program? Are there other membership incentives that should be offered?
- **Approval/renewal process** – e.g. Are the processes fair? Are the processes efficient?

5.4 Lessons Learned

Several lessons of importance to future initiatives of this type emerged from this study. They are discussed in the following sections.

5.4.1 Lessons Learned from the Development Process

The first lesson learned from the standards development process is that there is a lot of interest in an agritourism Quality Assurance Program in the Fraser Valley. Many

agritourism operators were willing to participate in evening workshops, in spite of the fact that these workshops took place in the summer, tourism and agriculture's busiest season. The operators had many ideas that they were willing to share with the researcher. The standards development process was also a learning experience for many of the farmers who participated in the study. Learning to look at their businesses from the viewpoint of the tourist helped participants recognize the importance of basic needs such as safety and customer service. One of the future roles of the Quality Assurance Program should be to further educate agritourism operators about how they can make their businesses better from a tourist's perspective.

Another lesson learned from the development process was that the summer was not an ideal time to attract agritourism operators to participate in the study. Many of the operators who did not attend stated that they were simply too busy to participate in the workshops, and asked that they be kept informed of the Quality Assurance Program as it was developed. One tourism operator questioned why the study was being performed in the busy season, and not in the winter, when he would have had time to participate. In the future, any study that asks tourism operators to participate in workshops should be performed in the off-season (November-April for many businesses), when the operators have more time available.

5.4.2 Lessons Learned from Other Jurisdictions

Lessons learned from the development of other tourism certification programs can be used to identify areas of potential difficulty for the Quality Assurance Program. In the concluding chapter of her book, Honey (2002) developed a 'list of ingredients' that should be included in a tourism certification program. These elements are:

- **Award achievement, not just process:** certification programs based on process or commitment are insufficient. "Any credible certification programs must include publicly stated performance standards and benchmarks" (p. 358)

- **Independent assessing and auditing:** Self-assessment is open to abuses, and lacks credibility. A conflict of interest can occur when a certification program is responsible for recruiting applicants and the auditing and awarding of certification logos. There is a trend towards independent third-party assessment in addition to written self-assessment checklists.
- **Control and integrity of the logo:** The most public symbol of certification is the logo; it is what consumers look for to identify a business that has met the standards. To maintain the integrity of the logo, it should only be used after a company has met the standards, it should be dated and issued for a specific period of time, and it should be withdrawn if a business fails to meet the standards or to renew.
- **Act locally, think globally:** Certification programs work best if they are implemented on a regional, rather than a global or continental basis. Travel expenses are reduced, regional stakeholder involvement is more likely, and the program can be tailored to the needs of the region.
- **Promote improvements within the tourism industry:** "Programs should include a consultative process to encourage continual improvement"(p. 361). Some businesses sign up for certification programs as a way to learn how to make the businesses better. Improvements can be promoted by providing advice to businesses, and by awarding multiple levels of certification.
- **Backward/forward and horizontal linkages:** Certification programs can improve their effectiveness by forming alliances with other certification programs.
- **Ensure transparency in methodology:** The steps in the certification process should be clearly laid out, and available for public access. Results of assessment should be made public so that tourists can make more detailed comparisons and informed decisions.
- **Multiple criteria:** Different categories of criteria should be included. At a minimum, the criteria and standards should meet government regulations.
- **Broad-based stakeholder involvement:** A credible certification program must involve a wide range of stakeholders.
- **Effective branding and good marketing strategy:** Consumers need to understand what the certification means, and what the logo promises. Certified businesses need to know that they will gain a market advantage by participating in the program. "A sound marketing strategy must be built into any successful tourism certification program"(p. 363).

The recommendations made from this study include many of Honey's ingredients for success. The standards developed should guide assessment of quality for agritourism businesses and can be used as a benchmark for quality assurance. The Program thus conforms to Honey's 'ingredient' of awarding achievement, not just process. BCATA is developing a logo that it will use to identify businesses that have met the standard. For now, BCATA's goal is to make the Quality Assurance Program a voluntary provincial

standard for agritourism. This goal corresponds to Honey's recommendation to keep certification programs at a regional level. The incentives for participation that were recommended include educational opportunities for agritourism operators and suggestions from inspectors regarding how operators can improve their businesses; promoting improvements within the industry.

Suggested links with other programs such as Tourism BC's Approved Accommodations program will strengthen the Quality Assurance Program as well as meet Honey's recommendation of having linkages with other programs (2002). Details of the certification process and the Code of Standards were recommended to be made available to the public via mail or on-line, helping to ensure transparency in the certification approach. The multiple standards developed cover different aspects of the tourism business, and the minimum standard is for these ventures to meet government regulations. Finally, stakeholders were involved throughout the standards development process, and will continue to be involved as the standards are tested in the upcoming pilot project.

Most of the items on Honey's 'list of ingredients' are present in the recommendations for the Quality Assurance Program (2002). However, several potential limitations become apparent through this comparison. The first limitation is associated with the assessment process. The recommendations made from this study are to have third-party inspectors assess compliance with the standards. BCATA will need to ensure that these inspectors are properly trained in the quality assurance standards, are able to evaluate compliance, and are fair in their assessment of businesses. If BCATA directly employs the inspectors and is responsible for judging the quality of a business, there is potential for a conflict of interest. It may be difficult for an organization to objectively assess businesses, and refuse to certify non-complying tourism businesses, if a concurrent goal is to increase membership in their organization. Ideally, the inspectors will be hired

through another agency, and BCATA will not be responsible for refusing to certify a non-complying business.

Another area for potential difficulty relates to the integrity of the logo. Use of the logo by non-complying businesses can reduce credibility. To maintain control and integrity of the logo, BCATA will have to ensure that only businesses that qualify for approved status are using the logo. BCATA should have in place a mechanism for withdrawing a business's rights to use the logo if the operation is found to be in non-compliance with the standards. An example of such a mechanism is to have a signed agreement with the business owner that the logo can only be used for as long as the business complies with the standards. If the business is found to not meet the standards, or does not renew the quality-approved status, they would no longer be eligible to use the logo.

The final area of potential difficulty for BCATA concerns creating a brand, and marketing of the logo. If no one recognizes the logo and what it stands for in terms of Quality Assurance, it is of little use to consumers and tourism operators. BCATA will need to ensure that they have in place a good marketing strategy that educates consumers about the meaning of the Quality Assurance label. An example of a good marketing program is that of Tourism BC's Approved Accommodations Program. Tourism BC publishes a yearly approved accommodations guide, makes the guide available in tourism information booths, and has a website from which tourists can book their stays at any of the Approved Accommodations.

5.5 Summary

This research project is only the first step of many in the establishment of an effective Quality Assurance Program for agritourism in BC. By involving stakeholders from the beginning of the development process, this study should provide a solid base for

BCATA to develop an effective Program. As discussed, there are some potential limitations to the Program; however, BCATA should be able to address these areas, and avoid any of the potential difficulties identified. Additional benefits of the standards development process were that it opened dialogue between tourism operators, provided them with some insight into what is important for their businesses, and produced the most comprehensive and up-to-date list of agritourism producers in the Fraser Valley. Overall, the standards developed, and the recommendations made in this study should provide BCATA and the tourism operators with the tools they need to continue to develop the Quality Assurance Program in the future.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The focus of this research project was to develop quality assurance criteria and standards, and recommendations concerning the establishment of a Quality Assurance Program for agritourism in BC. The objectives of this study were to develop standards and recommendations for a Quality Assurance Program that:

- Has credibility with tourism operators and tourists
- Is supported by the stakeholders
- Provides a mechanism for increasing agritourism product and service quality
- Will help promote consumer recognition of the agritourism industry

A review and analysis of literature provided the first step in achieving the objectives of this research project. Analysis of stakeholder responses from the second and third phases of research, stakeholder workshops and a mail-back questionnaire, furthered the research process. This chapter summarizes the major conclusions from the findings. Opportunities for further research are also proposed in this chapter.

6.1 Summary of Findings

This research project addressed three key questions related to the development of a Quality Assurance Program. The first question was: How is an effective quality assurance program developed? The second question was: What standards should be used to assess quality for agritourism in BC? The third question addressed was: What is important to stakeholders in the development of a Quality Assurance Program? The findings for each of these questions are summarized in the following sections.

6.1.1 Developing an Effective Quality Assurance Program

This research question was divided into two sub-questions that were investigated during the literature review phase of the study. The questions and the findings from this study are summarized in Table 6.1

Table 6.1 Research Question 1 - Developing a Quality Assurance Program

| Research Questions | Findings |
|---|---|
| What makes a certification program effective? | A program must be credible and supported by stakeholders |
| How are quality assurance and certification programs developed? | They are developed through a seven-step process that involves standards, assessment, certification, accreditation, recognition, acceptance, and monitoring Stakeholders must be involved in the development process The development process must conform to standards of representativeness, transparency and due process |

6.1.2 Standards for Assessing Quality

To address this research question, participants in the stakeholder workshops were asked four sub-questions. The standards developed from the stakeholder workshops were then assessed in the mail-back survey. Findings from these questions are summarized in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Research Question 2: Developing Standards

| Research Questions | Findings |
|--|--|
| Should there be specific standards for each type of agritourism business? | Participants desired a basic set of standards that could be applied to all agritourism businesses |
| Should the standards assess written policies and procedures or customer experiences? | Agritourism stakeholders expressed desires for simple, clear standards that would measure customer experiences, not written policies |
| What components should be included in the standards? | Participants felt that the standards should relate to hospitality and customer service, safety, professionalism, accessibility, business operations, environmental impacts, and partnerships |
| Should there be different levels of quality rating? | Participants felt that different levels of quality ratings were not necessary at this time There was interest in developing multiple tiers in the future |

6.1.3 Other Issues in the Development of a Quality Assurance Program

This final research question was mainly addressed during stakeholder workshops. Recommendations made from the workshop findings were assessed by respondents in the mail-back questionnaire. Again, the research question was divided into sub-questions. These sub-questions and the findings from the study are listed in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Research Question 3: Other Issues

| Research Questions | Findings |
|---|--|
| How should compliance with the standards be assessed? | Stakeholders felt that compliance should first be assessed through self-assessment, followed by third-party evaluation. |
| What happens if a business doesn't meet the standards? | Participants felt that there should be a grace period for the business owner to make the necessary improvements, followed by another third-party assessment. A 30-day grace period was initially recommended from the stakeholder workshops, but was increased to 60 days to reflect concerns raised by questionnaire respondents. |
| For how long should the qualification be valid? | An initial qualification period of one year, with a two-year qualification period after renewal was felt by respondents to be fair. |
| What should be the renewal process? | Respondents felt that it was fair to send in a renewal form and fee after one year of qualification. The renewed membership would be valid for 2 years, after which the business owner would begin the application process from the beginning. |
| What sort of assistance should be offered to businesses? | Stakeholders felt that assistance should consist of a telephone help-line, a web-site with frequently asked questions posted, and email links to BCATA for assistance. |
| Should there be links with other quality assurance programs? | Stakeholders felt that there should be links with other programs, and suggested Tourism BC's Approved Accommodations program for a partnership. |
| What membership incentives should be offered to businesses? | Stakeholders felt that BCATA should offer membership incentives including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marketing and advertising (such as website, magazine & bags with BCATA logo)• Increased signage on roads and highways• Branding/ access to BCATA logo• Access to training workshops (such as SuperHost, First Aid & Food Safe) |
| Are agritourism business owners willing to pay for membership in the Quality Assurance Program? | Participants stated a willingness to pay for membership, as long as they receive benefits that are equal to, or are more valuable to their businesses than the cost of membership. |

6.2 Recommendations for Further Study

As this research has progressed, several areas for further study have become apparent. The first area is associated with the implementation of the Quality Assurance Program. The next step in the development process is a pilot implementation project in the Fraser Valley. Following the pilot implementation, there will be a need for further analysis of the Code of Standards and the Recommendations to determine if they are feasible and appropriate for agritourism in BC.

The second area for further study relates to continual monitoring and analysis of the Quality Assurance Program as it is implemented across the province. The Code of Standards and Recommendations will need to be assessed over time to ensure their continuing relevance, and their ability to measure product and service quality for agritourism. As time progresses and the industry changes, the Quality Assurance Program will need to evolve to reflect these shifts.

The third recommended area for study consists of implications that the Quality Assurance Program may have for agritourism development elsewhere in North America. In Canada, two other quality assurance programs for agritourism currently exist or are in the process of being developed. The Federation des Agricotours du Quebec is a quality assurance label that has been developed for agritourism in Quebec. Travel Country Roads Canada is in the process of developing a quality assurance program for agritourism in Manitoba. A direction for future research is to investigate and compare these programs in terms of the standards they use to assess quality. The programs can also be evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in increasing product and service quality in agritourism. A researcher can also investigate how the quality assurance programs are being used: if tourists are using the quality ratings to plan their visits, and if agritourism operators are using the ratings to promote their businesses.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consumer Expectations

This summary of what customers are looking for in agritourism experiences is based on an analysis of existing literature. The number of times a characteristic is mentioned is not necessarily indicative of its importance, only the selection of literature examined.

| Characteristics (General) | Frequency of Occurrence |
|--|-------------------------|
| Customer Service (friendly faces, welcome smile, courtesy) | ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ |
| Hospitality | ◆◆ |
| Interactions with host | ◆◆ |
| | |
| Open spaces/country feeling | ◆◆ |
| Natural setting/scenery | ◆◆◆◆ |
| Authenticity/traditional ambience/working farm | ◆◆◆◆◆ |
| Uniqueness | ◆◆ |
| | |
| Parking | ◆ |
| Accessibility (easy to find, near highways, convenience) | ◆◆◆ |
| Cleanliness | ◆◆◆◆◆◆ |
| Safety/sanitation | ◆◆◆ |
| Washrooms and handwash facilities | ◆ |
| | |
| Good signage | ◆ |
| Experience lives up to advertising | ◆ |
| | |
| Care for the environment | ◆◆ |
| Value for money | ◆◆◆◆ |
| Other activities nearby/variety of things to see and do | ◆◆◆◆◆ |
| Sense of adventure (able to explore on own a bit) | ◆◆ |
| Consistency with other businesses (i.e. consistent customer service) | ◆◆ |
| Opportunity to shop | ◆ |

| Characteristics (Activities) | Frequency of Occurrence |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Education | ◆◆◆◆ |
| Family-oriented | ◆◆ |
| Entertaining | ◆◆ |

| Characteristics (Accommodations) | Frequency of Occurrence |
|---|-------------------------|
| Personal contact with family | ♦ |
| Warm accommodation | ♦♦ |
| Comfortable beds | ♦♦ |
| Plentiful hot water | ♦ |
| Ensuite bathrooms | ♦ |
| Peace and quiet | ♦♦ |

| Characteristics (Direct Marketing) | Frequency of Occurrence |
|---|-------------------------|
| Fresh produce | ♦♦♦ |
| Quality | ♦♦♦ |
| Local origin | ♦♦♦ |
| Taste | ♦♦ |

Sources consulted: Boyd, 2002; Busby & Rendle 2000; Centre for Tourism Policy and Research, no date; Charters & and O'Neill, 2001; Clarke, 1999; Dernoï, 1991; Gilg & Batterhill, 1998; Gladstone & Morris, 2000; Hilchey, 1993; Hill & Busby, 2002; Jago & and Issaverdis, 2001; Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, 2002a; Murphy & Williams, 1999; Opperman, 1995; Opperman, 1996; Williams & Kelly, 2001; Williams et al., 2001; and Yongs, 2003.

Appendix B: Existing Tourism Codes and Standards

Appendix B: Existing Tourism Codes and Standards

Tourism Codes and Standards in BC

Several agencies in British Columbia have developed codes of conduct and/or standards to guide business practices in tourism.

BC Fishing Resorts and Outfitters Associations – www.bcfishingresorts.bc.ca/code.htm

This group established a Code of Conduct to guide members in:

- *Products and services* – high quality services, safety, staff training, fair exchange on dollar
- *Resource use* – adhere to regulations, responsible use of resource, enhance and protect resource
- *Marketing* – truth in marketing, clearly advertised rates and taxes
- *Member Responsibilities* – cooperation and ethical behaviour, professional growth

Johnstone Strait Code of Conduct

This code was developed by and for commercial tour operators, resource guides and visitors.

The code of conduct is as follows:

- *Communication* – co-operate and communicate with other parties, co-ordinate use of resource
- *Wildlife* – approach all wildlife with care and sensitivity, rules for observing orcas
- *Safety* – crew training and certification, maintenance of boats, safety equipment
- *Professionalism* – accurate and responsible marketing, leadership, professional development
- *Cultural Sites* – respect cultural sites, gain permission from First Nations before entering sites
- *Camping* – reduce impact, no-trace camping
- *Local involvement* – work with local communities, buy locally, hire locally
- *Garbage* – no-trace practices, burn or pack out garbage

Tourism BC SuperHost – www.tourism.bc.ca

This program is designed to teach front-line employees service professionalism skills and techniques through workshops.

Objectives of the SuperHost Fundamentals workshop:

- Provide participants with an understanding of the importance of excellent customer service skills;
- Help participants make their communication with customers more effective and efficient;
- Help participants demonstrate their attentiveness to customer needs;
- Provide participants with an understanding of the social and economic contribution that a healthy tourism industry makes to their home communities and to the province as a whole;
- Teach the five key SuperHost Fundamental commitments that help BC's tourism workforce 'go that extra mile':
 - Give fully
 - Respect everyone
 - Empathize with others
 - Excel at your job
 - Teamwork works

Tourism BC Approved Accommodations – www.tourism.bc.ca

Through this program, accommodation properties are rated through this province-wide inspection and registration program. Approved accommodations are included in the annually published Approved Accommodation Guide. Tourism BC also rates for Canada Select, a national star-rating program, and Access Canada, which rates accessibility for mature travellers and persons with disabilities. Ratings are based on:

- General – guidelines for safety, access to management, cancellation policies, and government requirements
- Sleeping units – criteria for furnishings, convenience and amenities
- Bathroom units – criteria for facilities and amenities
- Cleanliness/state of repair – criteria for cleanliness and maintenance
- Driveways, walkways and parking – must be well-lit, clean and in good repair
- Guest complaints – operators must respond to guest complaints in a timely manner

Agriculture in Canada and BC

Agriculture and food production in Canada is controlled by many governmental standards that agritourism operators must consider in their operations. The following websites provide information regarding governmental regulations and standards, and contact information for farmers:

- Canadian Food Inspection Agency – www.inspection.gc.ca/
- Agriculture and Agri-food Canada – www.agr.gc.ca
- BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries – www.gov.bc.ca/agf/

Other agencies offering voluntary codes and/or standards for agriculture include:

Buy BC – www.bcac.bc.ca/buybc

This certification program is designed to increase consumer awareness of BC products and help consumers identify the products in store through three Buy BC labels:

- **BC Grown** – food, fish, beverages or agricultural products that are 100% grown, caught or raised in British Columbia.
- **BC Product** – processed food, fish, beverages or agricultural products that are made with a majority of raw materials (by composition) which ARE grown, caught, or raised in B.C., and are processed and packaged in B.C. with 51% or more of the direct cost of producing the product in its final form (raw materials, direct labour, variable processing and packaging) originating in B.C.
- **BC Made** – processed food, fish, beverages or agricultural products that are made with a majority of raw materials (by composition) which ARE NOT grown, caught, or raised in B.C., and are processed and packaged in B.C. with 51% or more of the direct cost of producing the product in its final form (raw materials, direct labour, variable processing, and packaging) originating in BC

Certified Organic Associations of BC – www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca

This system of accreditation and certification is administered under the Organic Agricultural Products Certification Regulation under the Agri-Food Choice and Quality Act. COABC certifies organic products using a detailed set of standards relating to:

- Land and Resource Management
- Crop Management
- Crop Production
- Product Processing

Other Tourism Codes and Standards in Canada

There are many tourism business codes of standards in Canada. Below are some examples:

Travel Country Roads Canada (formerly Country Roads Agritourism Product Club) – www.countryroadsagritourism.com

The aim of this group is to create and enhance the market readiness of agricultural based tourism products in Canada. One of the projects being undertaken is to develop quality standards for agritourism businesses in Manitoba. Based on research and consultation with rural tourism stakeholders, they have identified four core quality requirement areas;

- Customer Service
- Administration and Operations
- Risk Management
- Maintenance

Federation des Agricotours du Quebec – www.agricotours.qc.ca/

This quality assurance program is for agritourism businesses in Quebec. Quality is determined through a combination of on-site visits by inspectors and review of comments from guests. The quality accreditation is based on standards in:

- Hospitality
- Facilities
- Food Service

Canada Select – www.canadaselect.com

This quality accommodations program inspects and rates participating properties to ensure they meet consumer expectations. The higher the star rating, the more extensive the facilities, guest services and amenities. Ratings are based on:

- Extent and quality of facilities
- Services
- Amenities

Access Canada

This national program is designed to help accommodation businesses meet the needs of seniors and people with disabilities. Four disability groups are targeted: agility, vision, hearing and mobility. Four rating levels are available:

- Level 1 - for active seniors and people with minor disabilities
- Level 2 - for seniors and people with moderate disabilities.
- Level 3 - for people with advanced agility, hearing, mobility and vision disabilities, independent wheelchair users
- Level 4 - for people with severe disabilities

Sustainable Tourism Association of Canada

This national accreditation program is for sustainable tourism businesses that reflect the environmental, social and cultural diversity in Canada. Tourism businesses will first have to meet government regulations, then be assessed for a minimum level of criteria in order to participate in the program. The program is under final review, so a list of criteria is not yet available.

Marine Tour Operators Whale Watching Code of Ethics –

www.cec.org/databases/certifications/Cecdata/

This code for operators in the Bay of Fundy sets out guidelines under the following headings:

- Protection and Preservation
- Tracking
- Viewing

Saskatchewan Ecotourism Accreditation System – www.ecotourism.sk.ca

This initiative was developed in order to promote genuine ecotourism operations throughout Saskatchewan. Attractions, accommodations and guided tours can be certified under many categories of standards, including:

- Administration and Business Practices
- Interpretation
- Sustainable Accommodation
- Foods
- Community Economic Benefits

Appendix C: Questions Addressed in Workshops

Modified from Koch, Massyn, & Spence, 2003, pp. 257-258.

- *What standards should be used to assess quality in agritourism businesses?*
 - Should there be specific standards for each type of agritourism business?
 - Should there be different levels of quality rating?
 - Should the standards assess written policies and procedures or customer experiences?
 - What components should be included in the standards?
- *How will compliance with the standards be assessed?*
- *For how long will the qualification be valid?*
- *What should be the renewal process?*
- *What happens if a business doesn't meet the standards?*
- *What sort of assistance should the scheme offer to businesses?*
- *Should there be links with other schemes?*
- *What incentives would you like to see from BCATA?*
- *Would you be willing to pay for the quality standards program?*

Appendix D: Workshop Hand-outs

Sample standards for Agritourism

Listed in this document are some sample codes of standards that can be used for agritourism. These codes were compiled by adopting suggestions from several agritourism business owners in Chilliwack and the following existing quality assurance standards programs:

English Tourism Council - Quality Assurance Standards (Guest Accommodation)

Hong Kong Quality Tourism Services

Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (Australia)

Tourism British Columbia - Approved Accommodations Program

Tourism Accreditation Board of Victoria - Better Business Tourism Accreditation Program

This document is a guide for options that can be included in the Agritourism Code of Standards that will be developed through consultation with industry stakeholders.

General Standards: these standards apply to any agritourism business

Business Management - business management systems are in place to support daily operations and ensure consistency in products and customer service.

Legal Requirements

All necessary licences and permits have been obtained; for example, business licence, liquor licence, registration of food remises, zoning approval or building permits. List permit name, number, issue date and expiry date.

Insurance

The business has a minimum of \$2 million public liability insurance for all activities offered to tourists. Any contractors that are hired also have public liability insurance for at least \$2 million. List public liability insurance and all current insurance policies you require for your business (type of insurance, policy number, insurer, issue date, and expiry date).

Business Plan

A plan is in place that contains the following elements:

- Name of business
- Plan implementation date
- Review date
- History and background of business
- SWOT analysis
- Goals and strategies
- Competitor analysis and competitive advantage
- Financial analysis

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Marketing Plan | <p>The business has a marketing plan in place that includes:</p> <p>Target market analysis Situation analysis Marketing objectives/strategies Implementation</p> |
| Responsible Marketing | Current marketing materials accurately describe business. |
| Risk Management Plan | A risk management plan is in place that outlines potential risks, actions taken to reduce risks and proof of action. |
| Human Resources | <p>Fair and sensitive employment practices are used. Describe roles and responsibilities of employees, and the procedures used for:</p> <p>Recruitment Induction Appraisal Training and development - both owners and employees Personnel records Commitment and involvement in industry networks Communication with staff</p> |
| Business Systems | <p>The business has an operations manual (collection of procedures for daily operation) including:</p> <p>Ordering and purchasing procedures, records of purchases Managing of goods and services - written safety procedures for food, chemicals or heavy and awkward loads Cleaning and daily maintenance - checklist of daily cleaning routine, weekly, monthly, seasonal cleaning duties Scheduled equipment maintenance - document major maintenance</p> |
| Health & Safety | <p>The business complies with workplace health and safety regulations. Emergency and evacuation procedures are in place, and written information for customers and staff - what to do, who to tell and how to get out in case of danger. Proper management of hazardous chemicals is demonstrated - how chemicals are handled, used and stored.</p> |
| Financial System | <p>A reliable financial system is in place for keeping track of income and expenditures. Proper federal and provincial tax forms are submitted every year.</p> |

Hospitality - a system is in place to ensure consistent customer service and hospitality.
Customers experience high quality customer service and hospitality from knowledgeable staff.

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Customer Service System | A professional and consistent approach to customer service is demonstrated through: Written policies Staff training Log for bookings and cancellations Feedback and complaints procedure Customer greeting procedures |
|-------------------------|--|

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Hospitality | Customers are greeted with a friendly welcome. Staff is willing to answer questions from customers. Staff is knowledgeable and able to answer questions from customers. Staff is available to customers. 50% of staff is trained in SuperHost. On-the-job customer service training is provided to staff. |
|-------------|--|

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Health and Hygiene | Staff maintain a clean and tidy appearance when working directly with customers. Staff wash their hands on a regular basis – especially after working with animals. Hand-washing facilities are available to customers - especially when touching animals. Clean toilet facilities are available to customers. All staff who handle food have attended the Food Safe Training Program |
|--------------------|---|

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Employee Training | 50% of employees have First Aid Training Employees are trained in duties necessary to perform their jobs (may be on-the-job training). Employees are informed of opportunities for further training. |
|-------------------|--|

Environmental Impacts - business is committed to reducing environmental impacts

| | |
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| Energy Consumption | Steps have been taken to reduce energy consumption. Where possible, power saving devices are used. (ex., timers, low energy lightbulbs, energy efficient appliances) |
|--------------------|---|

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Water Management | Steps have been taken to reduce water consumption. |
|------------------|--|

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Waste Management | Where possible, water saving devices are used. (ex., water flow reducers, rainwater collection, recycling of waste water) Steps have been taken to reduce solid waste through composting, recycling, re-using and reducing packaging. |
|------------------|--|

Bio-security

Steps have been taken to protect crops and livestock from contamination, diseases and exotic plants. (ex., educational signs, marked pathways for customers, conveniently located garbage containers, hand-wash stations)

Miscellaneous - other standards need to be maintained for overall quality in any agritourism business

Maintenance/State of Repair

Equipment is maintained in good working order.
Areas accessible to guests are well-maintained and free from hazards - decaying wood, rusty metal, broken equipment.
Paths are in good repair - even surface, free from potholes, wide enough for 2 people to pass one another.
Buildings are well-maintained - sound, painted, repaired, safe for guests.
Buildings are well-ventilated.

Cleanliness

All areas that are visible or accessible to guests must be clean and well maintained - buildings, stairwells, grounds, signs, parking and garbage disposal areas
Standard for clean is:
tools put away, animal stalls cleaned frequently, grounds free from garbage, pathways free from animal waste
Guest shops are tidy with clean surfaces and clean floors.

Parking

Adequate parking is provided for customers.
Parking in a safe area.
Parking area is surfaced (gravel or asphalt)

Signage

Signs are well maintained and legible.
Sign displaying business name is posted at the entrance (for easy location of business).
Business hours are posted (regular hours or otherwise)

Partnerships

Business owner belongs to at least one industry association or has otherwise contributed to the growth of the industry.
Information about other local businesses and activities is provided to customers.

Sector Specific - these standards only apply to specific tourism businesses

Farm products - consistently high quality local farm products are available to customers

| | |
|---------|---|
| Quality | Produce is fresh and reasonably free from spots. Prepared food is made in a consistent manner, with recipes to guide preparation. Breads and baked goods are fresh. Handicrafts and other non-food farm goods are of high quality. |
| Origin | At least ½ of products are of local origin. |
| Safety | All staff who handle food have attended the Food Safe Training Program. Product labeling conforms to legal requirements. Perishable products are properly stored. |

Accommodations - high quality standards of cleanliness, comfort and safety are maintained throughout buildings

Accommodations are approved by Tourism BC Approved Accommodation Program.

Appendix E: Draft Agritourism Standards and Recommendations

Code of Standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Hospitality and Customer Service | ✓ | Guests are greeted and welcomed in a friendly manner. |
| | ✓ | Staff is knowledgeable and able to answer questions from customers. |
| | ✓ | On-the-job customer service training is provided to staff. |
| | ✓ | Clean toilet facilities with hand washing facilities are available to customers.* |
| | ✓ | Hand-washing facilities are available – especially when touching animals.* |
| Safety | ✓ | Areas accessible to guests are well maintained and free from hazards. |
| | ✓ | At least one worker on site has basic (or higher) First Aid Training. |
| Professionalism | ✓ | Staff maintain a clean and tidy appearance when working directly with customers. |
| | ✓ | All staff who handle food have attended the Food Safe Training Program. |
| | ✓ | Owner, manager, or at least one worker on-site is trained in SuperHost. |
| | ✓ | Employees are trained in duties necessary to perform their jobs |
| | ✓ | All areas that are visible or accessible to guests are clean and well maintained. |
| Accessibility | ✓ | Signage is well maintained and legible |
| | ✓ | Sign displaying business name is posted at the entrance. |
| | ✓ | Access road or driveway is safe and well maintained |
| | ✓ | Safe, adequate parking is provided for customers |
| Business Operations | ✓ | Business hours are posted and adhered to. |
| | ✓ | The business has adequate insurance, including public liability. |
| | ✓ | Current marketing materials accurately describe business |
| Environmental Impacts | | The business operates in an environmentally sensitive manner including taking steps to reduce: |
| | ✓ | energy consumption. |
| | ✓ | water consumption. |
| | ✓ | solid and liquid waste. |
| | ✓ | chemical use |
| Partnerships | ✓ | Business owner belongs to at least one industry association or has otherwise contributed to the growth of the industry. |
| | ✓ | Information about other local businesses and activities is provided to customers. |

* Not applicable to road-side stands staffed by a single person, and/or where customers stay for less than 5 minutes.

The BC Agritourism Code of Standards Project is designed to promote growth in BC's agritourism industry and 'raise the bar' for agritourism across the province. While recognizing that diversity and uniqueness are key to the success of this industry, there are some key standards of quality that can be applied to any agritourism business, regardless of its size and activities. It is expected that the code will help business owners emphasize some common and basic standards of quality that customers are looking for in agritourism products and services. Indeed, the key points of Safety, Hygiene and Customer Service were emphasized in our workshops as being key elements that a customer looks for when they visit an agritourism business. This Code of Standards reflects these concerns.

Recommended steps to becoming approved:

1. In order to apply for a '*BC Agritourism Approved*' rating, your business must meet all legal requirements. Similarly, all necessary licences and permits must be obtained.
2. The business owner completes an application and self-assessment form, and submits the package to BC Agritourism along with the application fee.
3. These completed forms will then be examined by BC Agritourism. If forms are filled out correctly and all standards are met, the business receives an *Approved* rating. The business owner is then given access to the advertising logo and the business is posted as an *Approved* business on the BC Agritourism website.
4. Sometime in the first year of approval, the business is visited by a follow-up assessor. The assessor will verify that the business adheres to the Code of Standards. If the standards are not met at that time, the business owner will be given an assessment report as to the area (or areas) in need of correction. The business will then have 30 days to upgrade the business to meet standards and confirm with BCATA office that this process is complete. If the business owner does not supply this confirmation or if upon a subsequent random site inspection the fault has not been corrected, membership will immediately be revoked. The owner must then submit a new application and payment in order to be considered for approval rating.
5. The *Approved* rating is valid for 1 year. It can be renewed by sending in a renewal form to BC Agritourism and paying the required fee. The renewed rating is valid for 2 years. For further renewals, business owners must fill out a new application form and begin the process again.

Recommendations for the Standards Program

It is essential to keep the bureaucracy to a minimum – people are interested in the program, so long as it is simple and straightforward.

Start with a simple code of standards – the program can be expanded in future years once consumers start to recognize the brand and the meaning of the symbols.

If a business is approved through another quality assurance program (e.g. Tourism BC's Approved Accommodation Program) it should be automatically eligible for BC Agritourism Approval rating, so long as the other approval rating is maintained.

Customer comment cards should be available for mailing to BC Agritourism, or comments can be made on-line. Comments should be reviewed and used to recognize excellence in the industry and to monitor complaints regarding businesses – if a business has several complaints, it should be investigated. (Comment cards can also be forwarded to Tourism BC for recognition of outstanding customer service).

Business owners are willing to pay a fee for an Approved rating, as long as they are getting value for their money. Here are some incentives that people would like to see from BC Agritourism:

- Access to training programs – SuperHost workshops, Food Safe, and First Aid
- Education about farm practices
- Education for owners in a modular format (e.g. marketing or creating a business plan)
- A tourist-friendly newsletter to raise awareness about farm issues (aimed at public)
- Cooperative advertising – marketing in regional magazines
- Directional Signage and a good map to the businesses
- Assistance in attracting foreign tourists – links to translators, multilingual guides/signage
- Mentor program – new businesses can learn from established businesses
- Shopping bags with BC Agritourism logo
- Marketing – through guidebook, Internet, travel agencies

A website should promote both the BC Agritourism Standards program and the businesses that are approved. Include links to individual websites, as well as a trip planner to cluster businesses by region or type of business.

A guide book should be published every year, identifying seasonal events and providing good maps, business descriptions, and hours of business. A chart can be used to describe additional amenities that are not covered by the code of standards such as:

- Credit card/ debit card acceptance
- Availability for private bookings
- Bus tours welcome
- Washrooms available
- Handicap facilities
- Educational tours
- Hours of operation
- Kids welcome/pets welcome
- Languages spoken
- Food service

The Code of Standards and the application form should be available to the public, either by mail or via the Internet, so that business owners can learn about the program. Business owners can determine if they want to participate and they can self-assess before they apply.

Follow-up assessment by another party should occur in the busy season, not in the off-season, to get the proper feel of how the business is run.

Appendix F: Questionnaire

Quality Assurance Standards Feedback

Please sign here to confirm that you have read and understood the enclosed information letter:

Signature _____

Date _____

This feedback form is divided into sections that parallel the *Code of Standards, Recommended steps to becoming approved* and the *Recommendations for the Standards Program* that were included in this package. This form is designed to address each of the sections separately, then provide space for any other comments at the end. **Your feedback is important.** Please help us to improve the Code of Standards and the Standards Program by completing this form and mailing it back to Alison Howell (address on last page). For your convenience, a pre-addressed stamped envelope has been enclosed in this package.

Code of Standards:

1.1 How important do you feel each standard is for creating a useful quality assurance standards program for agritourism? *Please circle one answer for each standard.*

| | Unimportant (1) | Somewhat unimportant (2) | Somewhat important (3) | Very important (4) | Don't know (5) |
|---|--------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Hospitality and Customer Service | | | | | |
| • Guests are greeted and welcomed in a friendly manner. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Staff is knowledgeable and able to answer questions from customers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • On-the-job training customer service training is provided to staff. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Clean toilet facilities with hand washing facilities is provided to customers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Hand-washing facilities are available – especially when touching animals. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Safety | | | | | |
| • Areas accessible to guests are well maintained and free from hazards. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • At least one worker on site has basic (or higher) First Aid training. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Professionalism | | | | | |
| • Staff maintain a clean and tidy appearance when working directly with customers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • All staff who handle food have attended the Food Safe Training Program. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Owner, manager, or at least one worker on site is trained in SuperHost. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Employees are trained in duties necessary to perform their jobs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • All areas that are visible or accessible to guests are clean and well maintained. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | Unimportant (1) | Somewhat unimportant (2) | Somewhat important (3) | Very important (4) | Don't know (5) |
|---|--------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Accessibility | | | | | |
| • Signage is well maintained and legible. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Sign displaying business name is posted at the entrance. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Access road or driveway is well maintained. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Safe, adequate parking is provided for customers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Business Operations | | | | | |
| • Business hours are posted and adhered to. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • The business has adequate insurance, including public liability. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Current marketing materials accurately describe business. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Environmental Impacts | | | | | |
| • The business operates in an environmentally sensitive manner including taking steps to reduce: | | | | | |
| • Energy consumption | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Water consumption | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Solid and liquid waste | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Chemical use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Partnerships | | | | | |
| • Business owner belongs to at least one industry association or has otherwise contributed to the growth of the industry. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Information about other local businesses and activities is provided to customers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

1.1 Are there any of these standards that you would like to see removed from the preceding list?

Yes

No

If yes, please indicate which ones _____

Why? _____

- 1.3 List the top 3 items that you feel are the most important for the proposed Code of Standards

- 1.2 The following seven key themes are found in the proposed Code of Standards. Please rank these themes from most important to least important for inclusion in the proposed Code. (1 is most important, 7 is least important)

- _____ Hospitality and Customer Service
_____ Safety
_____ Professionalism
_____ Accessibility
_____ Business Operations
_____ Environmental Impacts
_____ Partnerships

Recommended steps to becoming approved

- 2.1 Indicate how you feel about the fairness of each step in the approval process (*circle one answer for each step*). Refer to 'Recommended Steps to Becoming Approved' on page 3 for more details.

| | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|----------|--------|
| 1. Meet all legal requirements before applying | Fair <i>If modify, How?</i> | Not Fair | Modify |
| 2. Complete application form and submit to BC agritourism with application fee | Fair <i>If modify, How?</i> | Not Fair | Modify |
| 3. Completed forms examined, approval rating given, access to logo and marketing provided | Fair <i>If modify, How?</i> | Not Fair | Modify |
| 4. Follow-up visit by an assessor and assessment report given. If needed, 30 days are given to upgrade to standard level. | Fair <i>If modify, How?</i> | Not Fair | Modify |
| 5. Approval rating is valid for 1 year, renewed rating valid for 2 years. Application begins anew after renewal period is complete. | Fair <i>If modify, How?</i> | Not Fair | Modify |

- 2.2 Overall, do you feel that the recommended approval process is fair? Yes No

Why/ Why not?

Recommendations for the Standards Program

3.1 How well do the Recommendations for the Standards Program reflect your concerns for agritourism Quality assurance? (*Circle one answer*)

Not at all Only somewhat Neutral Fairly well Very well

3.2 Please list one thing that you would add to the recommendations for the Standards Program.

3.3 Please list one thing that you would remove from the recommendations for the Standards Program.

More information:

If you have any more comments to make about the Code of Standards, the Recommendations, or the Quality Assurance Standards project, please write them here.

Please tell us what type of tourism business your farm offers (e.g. tours, animal petting, farm gate sales, accommodations)

Thank you for taking the time to complete these feedback forms. Your comments and opinions are appreciated!

Please return this feedback form to:

Alison Howell
Research Assistant, BC Agritourism Alliance
School of Resource and Environmental Management
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby BC
V5A 1S6

Appendix G: Ethics Approval Letters

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS



BURNABY, BRITISH COLUMBIA
CANADA V5A 1S6
Telephone: 604-291-3447
FAX: 604-268-6785

July 4, 2003

Ms. Alison Howell
Graduate Student
School of Resource and
Environmental Management
Simon Fraser University

Dear Ms. Howell:

Re: Developing quality standards for agritourism

I am pleased to inform you that the above referenced Request for Ethical Approval of Research has been approved on behalf of the Research Ethics Board. This approval is in effect for twenty-four months from the above date. Any changes in the procedures affecting interaction with human subjects should be reported to the Research Ethics Board. Significant changes will require the submission of a revised Request for Ethical Approval of Research. This approval is in effect only while you are a registered SFU student.

Your application has been categorized as 'minimal risk' and approved by the Director, Office of Research Ethics, on behalf of the Research Ethics Board in accordance with University policy R20.0, <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/research/r20-01.htm>. The Board reviews and may amend decisions or subsequent amendments made independently by the Director, Chair or Deputy Chair at its regular monthly meetings.

"Minimal risk" occurs when potential subjects can reasonably be expected to regard the probability and magnitude of possible harms incurred by participating in the research to be no greater than those encountered by the subject in those aspects of his or her everyday life that relate to the research.

.../2

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Please note that it is the responsibility of the researcher, or the responsibility of the Student Supervisor if the researcher is a graduate student or undergraduate student, to maintain written or other forms of documented consent for a period of 1 year after the research has been completed.

Best wishes for success in this research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director
Office of Research Ethics

c: Dr. Peter Williams, Supervisor

/jmy

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS
ROOM 2105 STRAND HALL



BURNABY, BRITISH COLUMBIA
CANADA V5A 1S6
Telephone: 604-291-3447
FAX: 604-268-6785

September 22, 2003

Ms. Alison Howell
Graduate Student
School of Resource &
Environmental Management
Simon Fraser University

Dear Ms. Howell:

Re: Developing quality standards for agritourism
Revision

In response to your request dated September 18, 2003, I am pleased to approve, on behalf of the Research Ethics Board, the minor revisions in the research protocol of the above referenced Request for Ethical Approval of Research originally approved on July 1, 2003.

Best wishes for success in this research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director
Office of Research Ethics

c: Dr. Peter Williams, Supervisor

/jmy