



## **MFBF Discusses Agtourism Study Commission Act At New England Marketing**

STURBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS - March 9, 2017 - Agritourism is a growing business in Massachusetts, but it continues to run up against conflicts with local zoning, agricultural preservation restrictions and more. To consider methods to overcome these barriers, Representative Stephen Kulik has filed on behalf of the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF) HB2715 in the 2017-2018 legislative session, which is an act to establish an agricultural tourism study commission.



This bill would create a committee of farmers, municipal officials and tourism experts to look at the opportunities, challenges and conflicts posed by agritourism. This group would also make recommendations to the legislature and others on how to appropriately support and shepherd this growing segment of the agricultural economy.

"Let's put DAR (the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture), farmers, local officials, tourism boards and other concerned parties on a panel to explore what to do to resolve the issues that arise with agritourism," said MFBF Deputy Director Brad Mitchell during a panel discussion at the 2017 Harvest New England Conference. "This is a huge opportunity for farmers as the act, if passed, will keep farmers farming and keep open space available."

Examples of agritourism events, includes everything from haunted hayrides to weddings and obstacle courses to campouts. Activities often include the preparation and serving of food.

"The object isn't always to generate revenue from the event," said MFBF Promotion and Education Committee Chair Mike Davidian, who farms in Northborough and panel participant. "Customers who return to your farm following the event will generate income, making the function a success."

Davidian went on to discuss the challenges he faced when implementing an obstacle course on his farm, as the town had a zoning issue with the event. To overcome this barrier, Davidian said he had to restructure the course to focus it around a healthy lifestyle that includes locally-grown food.

In another case study, Davidian discussed hosting on-farm weddings. To help stay in compliance with zoning, Davidian suggested utilizing home-raised produce in wedding events.

Ultimately, both Mitchell and Davidian agreed that agritourism in Massachusetts is growing in importance and as such, MFBF has to be at the forefront of the discussion on how to regulate these activities.

"Anything you can do to supplement your income will make you more viable as a farm," Mitchell said. However, you have to stay within the definition of agriculture, which at this time doesn't include agritourism.

For more information on MFBF, please visit [www.mfbf.net](http://www.mfbf.net).

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*The Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation is a non-profit organization representing nearly 6,000 family members across the Commonwealth. MFBF is an advocate for farmers, run by farmer members who develop policies through its grassroots process. Its mission is "to protect the rights, encourage the growth, and be of service to its members, in the best interest of agriculture."*

For more information about the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation, please visit [www.mfbf.net](http://www.mfbf.net).

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