

# INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT TO ENHANCE LOCAL AGRITOURISM



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## Background and Objectives

In October 2019, Extension faculty from 14 different universities, including the University of Florida, embarked on a 10-day agricultural educational travel experience of Ireland, as part of NACAA's professional development tours. This opportunity was given to all members and their guests. Within UF/IFAS, it is encouraged to participate in international tours and conferences for extension programming enhancement, knowledge exchange and networking with other extension peers. Agritourism has become part of many small and large farms in Florida. This type of on-farm experiential learning has been on the rise over the last decade as people try to find a stronger connection between what they eat and how it is produced. Adding agritourism to an agriculture enterprise can be lucrative, but it requires a different business and marketing strategy that most farmers and producers might not have. Extension agents can be a valuable resource if they have the experience and knowledge in agritourism concepts. The objective of this international experience was to enrich our Extension programs by increasing our knowledge of sustainable farming practices and agritourism in Ireland.



## Engagement During Field Tours

The group traveled on two tour buses throughout Ireland and made multiple stops at college campuses, private farms and cultural sites. Each site was selected to enhance learning with farmers telling their side of the story; how they are adapting to climate change, fluctuating market structures and influences, political decisions such as Brexit, inter-generational farming and the decision to incorporate agritourism as an additional revenue stream. Tour sites included:

- Moorepark Animal and Grassland Research Center to view winter grains
- Local Holtstein dairy farm that produces Kerrygold butter and actively participates as a Nuffield Scholar
- Private beef cattle farm that also hosted events and tours
- Water buffalo farm that produces cheese and provides tours
- Potato farm that also produces onions, but does not fumigate their soil and captures runoff water

## Outcomes and Impacts

The knowledge gained from this experience, along with the personal interactions with Irish farmers and extension professionals from across the United States, have helped agents improve their own educational programming with innovative ideas and solutions for local farmers looking to add agritourism to their repertoire. Educational lectures have been given on the Irish agritourism experience to over 150 individuals including local producers and Master Gardener volunteers. These international experiences are invaluable to extension agents as they search for solutions to many of the agricultural and environmental challenges that face our farmers today.

## Conclusions

These international experiences are invaluable to extension agents as they search for solutions to many of the agricultural and environmental challenges that face our farmers today. The successes and failures of the farms toured can provide valuable feedback to our clientele to enhance their agritourism.

