

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Agriculture

BILL: SB 1106

INTRODUCER: Senator Hays

SUBJECT: Agritourism

DATE: March 7, 2013

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Akhavein	Halley	AG	Pre-meeting
2.			CA	
3.			RC	
4.				
5.				
6.				

I. Summary:

SB 1106 states that it is the intent of the Legislature to eliminate duplication of regulatory authority over agritourism. It prohibits a local government to adopt ordinances, regulations, rules, or policies that prohibit, restrict, regulate or otherwise limit an agritourism activity on land that has been classified as agricultural by a property appraiser. The bill clarifies the definition of “agritourism activity” and creates a new definition for “inherent risk of an agritourism activity.” It establishes a limitation on liability for the land owner, agritourism professional, and employees if a notice of risk is posted on the land, with exceptions. The bill provides the specific warning language that must be posted in a clearly visible location at the entrance to the agritourism location and at the site of the agritourism activity. Each agritourism contract with the participant must also include the warning language in clearly readable print. Finally, the bill denies use of the limited liability defense if the owner, agritourism professional, or employee fails to post the sign as required by this act or fails to place it in the contract.

This bill amends sections 570.96 and 570.961 of the Florida Statutes. This bill creates sections 570.963 and 570.964 of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Agritourism is the practice of attracting visitors and travelers to agricultural areas, generally for educational and recreational purposes. For many farmers, the only way to continue farming is to find ways to diversify and expand their incomes, either through new enterprises on the farm or off-farm employment. One diversification strategy some U.S. farmers are beginning to explore is the “cultivation” of tourists in addition to growing crops. Referred to as “agriturismo” in Italy,

“sleeping in the straw” in Switzerland, “farmstays” in New Zealand, and “farm holidays” in England, agritourism is well established throughout Europe and in many other countries.¹

Agritourism has an extensive history in the United States. Farm-related recreation and tourism can be traced back to the late 1800s, when families visited farming relatives in an attempt to escape from the city’s summer heat. Visiting the country became even more popular with the widespread use of the automobile in the 1920s. Rural recreation gained interest again in the 1930s and 1940s by people seeking an escape from the stresses of the Great Depression and World War II. These demands for rural recreation led to widespread interest in horseback riding, farm petting zoos, and farm nostalgia during the 1960s and 1970s. Farm vacations, bed and breakfasts, and commercial farm tours were popularized in the 1980s and 1990s.²

Agritourism allows people who have little knowledge of agricultural lands to experience intrinsic agricultural practices and the culture of those lands. Agritourism can help people reconnect with agricultural practices that have changed with the rise of heavily-industrialized farming methods and can build relationships between the producer and consumer. This type of tourism could include farm tours or farm stays, fishing, hunting, festivals, historical recreations, workshops/educational activities, wildlife study, horseback riding, cannery tours, cooking classes, wine tastings, barn dances, and harvest-your-own activities. The use of these resources can have a positive effect on both the agricultural enterprise and the surrounding community. Not only does this tourism have the potential to add value to the operations themselves, but it also creates an awareness in people about the importance of agriculture.³

Under Florida’s Greenbelt Law, properties that are *bona fide* agricultural operations are taxed according to the “use” value of those operations, rather than the development value. The property appraiser of each county in Florida must classify every piece of land in their county as agricultural or non-agricultural in order to get the *bona fide* status. This is known as the land’s “Greenbelt” assessment.⁴ To make this determination, the appraiser must consider factors such as the length of time the land has been used for its current purpose, whether that use has been continuous, the price paid for the land, the size of the land in relation to its specific agricultural use, the effort made to care sufficiently and adequately for the land, whether the land is leased, and if so, the terms of the lease, and finally, any other factors that may become applicable. When a piece of land is classified as agricultural/Greenbelt, it is given a property value based upon its agricultural use rather than the market value of the land. Such a classification provides the property with a lower property tax assessment. The type of agricultural use also impacts the assessment within the Greenbelt classification. This means that land used to grow pine trees may receive a different value than land used to produce fruit, so different types of agriculture receive different property value levels.

The 2007 Legislature passed House Bill 1427 which authorized the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to assist agritourism operators with marketing and permitted the conducting of agritourism activity on a *bona fide* farm or on agricultural lands classified as such

¹ Curtis E. Beus, “Agritourism: Cultivating Tourists on the Farm,” (July 2008): 5.

² Considering an Agritainment Enterprise in Tennessee? (Agricultural Extension Service, The University of Tennessee, PB 1648)

³ Analysis of SB 2754, (2007)

⁴ Section 193.461, F.S.

pursuant to s. 193.461, F.S. It also specified that the practice of agritourism shall not limit, restrict, or divest the land of that classification.⁵

Several states have enacted laws that support farmers involved in agritourism. For instance, Louisiana passed a law in 2008 that affords limited liability protection to agritourism operators. Oklahoma currently has a bill before the Legislature cited as the “Oklahoma Agritourism Activities Liability Limitations Act.” Agritourism operators in Florida do not have a statutory defense for injuries occurring from inherent risks. These risks involve dangers associated with natural conditions of premises, natural responses of animals, and ordinary dangers of structures and equipment.

The 2011 General Assembly in North Carolina passed legislation allowing “*Bona Fide* Farm Operators to be exempt for zoning regulations by city governments. County government were already unable to zone *Bona Fide* Farm Operators. At this time, Florida law only promotes the use of land for agritourism activities. It does not provide for a preemption of local governments, an affirmative defense for agritourism activities, or a specific limitation on liability for agritourism activities.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1 amends s. 570.96, F.S., to provide that it is the Legislature’s intent to eliminate duplication of regulatory authority over agritourism. It prohibits a local government to adopt ordinances, regulations, rules, or policies that prohibit, restrict, regulate or otherwise limit an agritourism activity on land that has been classified as agricultural by a property appraiser. However, it does not prohibit a local government to address an emergency.

Section 2 amends s. 570.961, F.S., to clarify the definition of “agritourism activity” and create a new definition for “inherent risk of an agritourism activity.”

Section 3 creates s. 570.963, F.S., to establish limitation on liability for the land owner, agritourism professional and their employee if a notice of risk is posted on the land, except where there is actual knowledge or where the owner, agritourism professional or employee reasonably should have known of the risk. In any action for damages, it requires a pleading of the affirmative defense of assumption of risk by the owner, agritourism professional, or employee.

Section 4 creates s. 570.964, F.S., to provide the specific warning language that must be posted in a clearly visible location at the entrance to the agritourism location and at the site of the agritourism activity. Each agritourism contract with the participant must also include the warning language in clearly readable print. The bill denies use of the limited liability defense if the owner, agritourism professional, or employee fails to post the sign as required by this act or fails to place it in the contract.

Section 5 provides that this act shall take effect July 1, 2013.

⁵ Section 570.962, F.S.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

SB 1106 should encourage the creation of new agritourism businesses and create a caveat emptor situation for the participant at an agritourism activity.

C. Government Sector Impact:

Local government impact by the provisions of the bill is indeterminate.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.