

# ZONING REGULATIONS

297 Attachment 21

## Charles County

### Appendix K

#### **Pilot Ag Tourism Sign Program** [Added 5-1-2012 by Bill No. 2012-07]

#### **Forward**

The County Commissioners approved a “Pilot Ag Tourism Sign Program” for Charles County to allow a period of time to develop a prototype sign, a proposed process and procedures for an Ag tourism sign program, install immediately several signs to evaluate the placement and effectiveness of the proposed signs and seek approval from the State Highway Commission to install these signs in their right-of-way. The pilot program will also allow Charles County to work with the Southern Maryland Agriculture Development Commission (SMADC) to pursue a standardized Ag tourism sign program for all of Southern Maryland. Eventually, it is hoped that an Ag tourism marketing program can be implemented using these signs to provide directions to the traveling motorists.

#### **Charles County Department of Public Works** **Standard Operating Policy and Procedure**

**Title:** Ag Tourism Sign Program

**SOP #:** DPW.

**Effective Date:**

**Division:** Roads

**Revision Date:**

**Purpose:** To allow installation of agricultural tourism directional signs to qualifying agricultural businesses providing the facility meets all criteria set forth in Zoning Regulations and the criteria herein. The Agricultural Tourism Signage Program is a joint venture between Charles County Government and the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC). Signs shall be located and erected according to the standards of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), the Charles County Road Ordinance and in compliance with federal and state laws and policies.

**References:** \* Charles County Zoning Ordinance  
\* Charles County Road Ordinance  
\* Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)

**Policy:** An Ag tourism facility is an agricultural business located on a farm that is open for customers and tourists for at least six months of the year, for at least four days a week, and which provides tours and on-site sales or samples of primarily Charles County and/or Maryland grown agricultural products. Sales must come from primarily farm products generated on the farm.

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### **Procedure: CRITERIA**

1. Any Ag tourism farm that meets the definition contained in the Zoning Regulations is allowed up to three off-site directional signs to direct the traveling motorist to their farm.
2. These signs will be designed, constructed and sized in accordance with Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).
3. These signs will be generally located within the road right-of-way. Where it is not possible to locate these signs in the road right-of-way, signs may be placed on private property with permission of the property owner.
4. The owner of the business whose name appears on an agricultural tourism sign shall certify in writing that the business is in full compliance with all applicable federal, state and local laws, rules and ordinances, including all applicable license and permit requirements.
5. All safety, sign spacing, and application criteria shall be satisfied.
6. Signs must be located at intersections.
7. The agricultural tourism facility shall be open for customers and tourists six full months per year, and at least four days per week.
8. The agricultural tourism facility shall offer a tour to the public. The term “tour” is defined as an activity that is:
  - (a) Directed by a knowledgeable representative of the business.
  - (b) Educational, informative, and entertaining in nature.
  - (c) Of sufficient length to clearly describe the materials, equipment, and processes used in the production of agricultural products by the facility.
9. The agricultural tourism facility shall have a permanent sign posted in a prominent and visible location that states the name of the business with the days and hours of operation. The agriculture facility shall also have a permanent sign posted on the premises stating the times that tours are offered, or stating that tours are available upon request. The sign shall be posted in a conspicuous location that is visible to customers entering the facility.
10. The agricultural tourism facility shall provide on-site public restroom facilities and drinking water suitable for public consumption.
11. The agricultural tourism facility shall offer samples and/or sales of Charles County agricultural products.
12. The agricultural tourism facility shall be able to accommodate customers in a permanent, all weather structure, and have adequate on-site parking.

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13. The agricultural tourism facility shall maintain a web site with the hours of operation and directions to the facility, preferably including a map, posted. The hours of operation specified on the web site must meet minimum requirement.
14. If the Department of Public Works determines that a sign replacement or modification is required, a new application may be required. At that time, the Facility will be required to meet all current program criteria and requirements.
15. All manufacture and installation costs associated with the requested agricultural tourism signs will be at the expense of the requestor. The Department of Public Works will provide an estimated cost for the initial installation after approval of the application.
16. A participating agricultural tourism facility that changes ownership shall provide written notice to the Department of Public Works within 30 days of the transfer of ownership. To retain signs, the new owner is required to submit a new application to the Department of Public Works. The facility is required to meet all current program criteria and requirements.
17. Should a participating agricultural tourism facility cease to be in compliance with this policy and/or the criteria herein, the DPW shall notify the business applicant that it will be given 30 days to bring the facility into compliance or its agricultural tourism signs shall be removed. If the signs are removed and the facility later applies for reinstatement, the request will be handled in the same manner as a request by a new applicant. If it is determined that a facility is not in compliance twice within a two-year period, its agricultural tourism signs shall be permanently removed.
18. In the event that a facility is removed from the program, the DPW shall not be required to refund any program costs paid by the facility.
19. The DPW reserves the right to cover, relocate, or remove any agricultural tourism signs for maintenance or construction operations, or when deemed to be in the best interest of the DPW or the traveling public, without advance notice.
20. The DPW reserves the right to remove signs when roadway improvements or changes in the roadway cross section or configuration will no longer accommodate the existing signs. If existing signs no longer meet the DPW's size and design requirements for an upgraded roadway and existing signs are removed, the facility may request to upgrade their signs, provided that minimum spacing is available on the upgraded roadway and the facility meets all current program criteria and requirements. All upgrade costs shall be paid for by the facility. A new application will be required.
21. The DPW has the responsibility and authority to relocate or remove agricultural tourism signs if a need for a higher priority regulatory, warning, or guide sign is identified.
22. The DPW reserves the right to terminate this program or any Agreement for agricultural tourism signs, or any portion thereof, by furnishing the business written notice of such intent not less than 30 calendar days prior thereto.

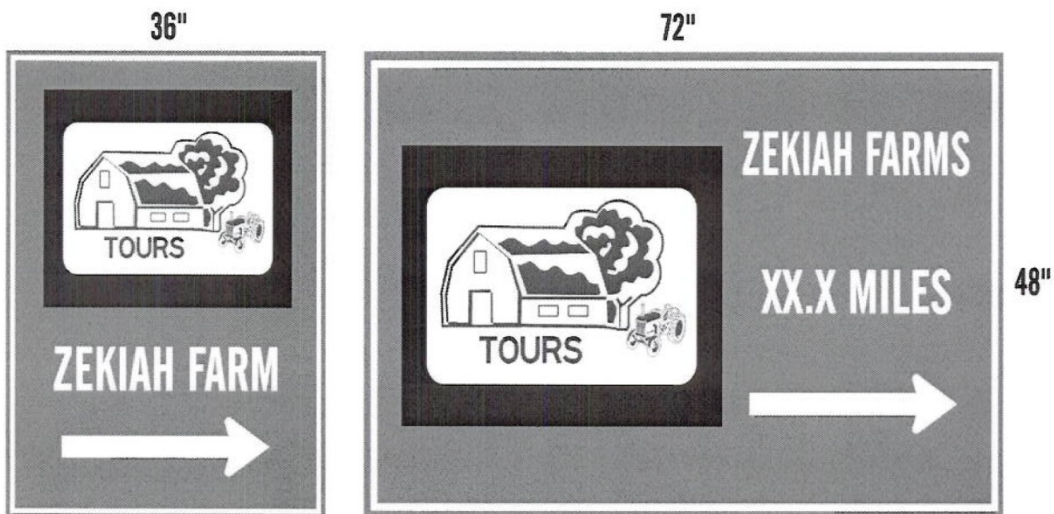
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**APPLICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES**

1. An agricultural facility seeking agricultural tourism signs or revisions to existing signs must complete an application form available from the DPW (Attachment A). The application form must be completed in its entirety.
2. The applicant shall include a map clearly depicting the requested sign location(s), the location of the agricultural facility, and the distance from each sign location to the facility. The distances can be handwritten on the map.
3. The agricultural facility must submit the application form with appropriate documentation to the Department of Public Works, 1001 Radio Station Road, La Plata, Maryland 20646.
4. The DPW will review the application, visit and inspect the agricultural facility, verifying facility accommodations, days and hours of operation, appropriate tours are offered, and that all other criteria are met. DPW will make a decision based on fulfillment of the program requirements.
5. If the agricultural facility is recommended for the Agricultural Tourism Signage Program, DPW will conduct a field investigation to verify that adequate spacing, right-of-way, and sight distance are available to safely install the signs. The DPW will prepare the cost estimate and agreement.
6. The DPW will administer the agreement, and after receiving payment, will manufacture and install the sign(s).
7. Any appeals to decisions shall be made in writing to the Director of Public Works.

**EXCEPTIONS**

Any and all exceptions to this policy/procedure must be approved in advance by the County Administrator.



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**Attachment A**

**Agricultural Tourism Signs  
Application**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Business \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Fax \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Internet Site \_\_\_\_\_

Requested Location of Sign(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

1. Location of agricultural marketing facility

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What are the months, days, and hours you are open for sales to the public?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What percent of your total annual sales comes from Charles County-grown agricultural products? \_\_\_\_\_ %

4. List the agricultural products sold to the public at this facility \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. List nonagricultural products sold at this facility \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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6. Do you provide tours for the public at this facility?  Yes  No

**Note: To qualify for this program, the agricultural facility is required to conduct tours of the growing area, as well as any production area located on the farm or vineyard.**

If your answer is **No**, you are not eligible for the Agricultural Tourism Signs program. If yes, describe the type of tours, who directs the tours, and when the tours are provided.

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7. Do you provide samples of your products?  Yes  No

List the types of samples:

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8. Do you have a permanent sign near the roadway entrance to the premises with the name of your business and the days and hours of operation?  Yes  No

9. Do you have a permanent sign near the front door of your facility that states the times of scheduled tours, or that tours are available upon request (within 30 minutes of request)? Per program requirements, this sign shall be posted in a conspicuous location that is visible to customers.  Yes  No

10. Is this market operated in a permanent structure?  Yes  No

11. Do you have restrooms available to the public?  Yes  No

12. Do you have an on-site telephone available for emergency public use?  Yes  No

13. Do you have drinking water available for public consumption?  Yes  No

14. List any local or state business licenses you are required to have to operate this business.

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15. What is the distance from this agricultural facility to the closest major highway interchange? \_\_\_\_\_ miles

16. Attach a map clearly depicting the requested sign locations(s) and the location of the facility. The Department of Public Works will determine the acceptability of requested sites.