North Carolina Department of Transportation
Division of Highways
Traffic Engineering and Safety Systems Branch

STANDARD PRACTICE for Agricultural Tourism Directional Signage

It is the standard practice of the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to allow installation of agricultural tourism directional signs to qualifying agricultural businesses providing the facility meets all criteria set forth in General Statute 106-22.5 and the criteria herein. The Agricultural Tourism Signage Program is a joint venture between the NCDOT and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA & CS). Signs shall be located and erected according to the standards of the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD), *North Carolina Supplement to the MUTCD, NCDOT Standard Specifications for Roads and Structures*, *North Carolina Roadway Standard Drawings*, and in compliance with federal and state policies.

CRITERIA

- 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.

- All safety, sign spacing, and application criteria shall be satisfied.

- For sign locations on freeway or other grade separated interchanges*, the maximum distance that an agricultural tourism facility may be located from the initial interchange containing an agricultural tourism sign shall not exceed fifteen (15) driving miles via paved public roads. If requested and approved, freeway or expressway signs shall be located at the nearest interchange to the facility. Requests for signing at additional interchanges within fifteen (15) driving miles of the facility will be reviewed and approved on a case by case basis by the State Traffic Engineer. Additional signed interchanges shall not be located along the same route. Consideration may be given to a facility where less than ¼ mile of the driving miles is via an unpaved publicly maintained gravel or soil road.

  * Grade separated interchanges are defined as fully-controlled access interchanges that do not have intersections or driveways within the limits of the interchange.

- For sign locations on all other roadway types, the maximum distance that an agricultural tourism facility may be located from the furthest agricultural tourism sign shall not exceed five driving miles via a paved public road. Signs must be located at intersections. Consideration may be given to a facility where less than ¼ mile of the driving mile is via an unpaved publicly maintained gravel or soil road.

- Agricultural tourism signs are not allowed at interchanges where a full control-of-access roadway exits or merges onto another full control-of-access roadway (freeway to freeway facilities).

- Agricultural tourism signs that are installed on exit ramps shall have a panel with the mileage to the facility and a directional arrow. Mileage panels and directional arrows are also required on sign installations (which display the facility name) used as trailblazers on conventional roadways.

- The agricultural tourism facility shall be open for customers and tourists ten (10) full months per year, and at least four days per week to total a minimum of 32 hours per week.

- In the event that a facility is not open 32 hours per week year-round, a supplemental sign will be required at all ramp and selected trailblazer sign locations stating when the facility is closed. These supplemental signs will prevent motorists from needlessly traveling to a facility that is not open. The Department will determine the location, design, and number of these supplemental signs.

- 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 employee (tour guide) 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.
  (d) Conducted regularly during open business hours or, in the absence of regular tour times, upon customer demand within a reasonable time [within thirty (30) minutes of request]. "Conducted regularly during open business hours" is defined as a minimum of two (2) regularly scheduled tours during each day the facility is open to the public.

- 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.

- The agricultural tourism facility shall provide on-site permanent public restroom facilities and drinking water suitable for public consumption.

- The agricultural tourism facility shall offer samples and/or sales of North Carolina agricultural products.

- The agricultural tourism facility shall be able to accommodate customers in a permanent, all weather structure, and have adequate on-site parking.

- 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.

- The names of all agricultural tourism facilities using the same intersection, freeway interchange, or ramp for access shall appear only on a single sign for each direction of travel. In order to ensure the safety of the travelling public by limiting distractions and confusing signage, a maximum of four (4) qualifying agricultural facility names may appear on the sign. Multiple

agricultural tourism signs shall not be allowed for any direction of travel of an interchange, intersection, or ramp.

- A qualifying agricultural tourism facility may apply to have their name added to an existing agricultural tourism sign, providing the maximum number of four facility names has not been met. The replacement sign(s) will include the names of all the agricultural facilities that were previously displayed, in addition to the new facility name. The requesting facility will be required to pay the entire cost of the updated replacement sign(s) and supports. All facilities listed on the sign will be required to equally share maintenance costs, as well as any sign and support replacement costs required to repair damage or deterioration.

- Should a facility choose to upgrade existing agricultural tourism signs, the facility will be required to upgrade all existing interchange and intersection signs including all mainline, ramp, intersection, and trailblazer signs to meet current standards. The Department will require the facility to enter into a new agreement, which will include all the upgraded signs. The facility must meet all current program criteria and requirements, before the facility will be approved for upgrades or additional signs. Additional signs will not be approved unless existing signs are also upgraded to meet current standards. An all-inclusive new Agreement covering all signs for that facility will be required.

- If the NCDOT determines that a sign replacement or modification is required, a new Agreement may be required. At that time, the Facility will be required to meet all current program criteria and requirements.

- All costs associated with the requested agricultural tourism signs will be at the expense of the requestor. This includes administration, investigation, design, materials, equipment, fabrication, inspection, installation, and maintenance, as well as any replacement costs as required to repair the signs and supports due to damage or deterioration. The NCDOT Traffic Engineering Branch will provide the estimate for the initial installation after approval by NCDA & CS. The cost estimate will include sign installation on steel supports for freeway and expressways and sign installations on u-channel posts on ramps and conventional roads, except where due to the sign message, the size of the sign requires steel supports. Sign locations behind adequate guardrail may be installed on non-breakaway steel supports. The requester may elect to hire a qualified contractor to install the signs rather than reimbursing NCDOT for the installation. The NCDOT Division Engineer may require the requester to hire a qualified contractor to perform the installation of the signs. The selected contractor shall be approved and licensed to do work in the State of North Carolina and shall follow all federal and state standards and specifications. Such a contractor must obtain prior approval from NCDOT of the materials and methods to be used. Sign installations are subject to inspection, approval, and acceptance by NCDOT.

- If the initial agricultural tourism sign request is for multiple agricultural facility names to appear on a shared sign, the facilities will be required to equally share the initial cost of the sign installation, maintenance costs, as well as any replacement costs required to repair damage or deterioration.

- Agricultural tourism sign designs shall conform to NCDOT standards. The word "TOURS" is required on the signs that include the name of the business. The NCDOT reserves the right to disallow words or messages if deemed inappropriate. Attached are example Agricultural Tourism sign designs and cost estimates for your reference. The actual department furnished sign designs and cost estimate will vary depending on the name of the facility (which determines the size of the sign) and type of installation(s).

- Standard logos or emblems designed by the NCDA&CS and approved by the Department are allowed on agricultural tourism signs. The standard logo or emblem must represent the type of business, products, and tours offered to the public. If a standard logo/emblem does not exist for a type of approved business, the NCDA&CS will determine and design the appropriate logo or emblem. Businesses may not design their own unique logo. The size of the logo/emblem will not exceed 30"x 30" on freeway and expressway sign installations and 15" x 15" on conventional and ramp installations.

- A participating agricultural tourism facility that changes ownership shall provide written notice to the NCDA & CS and the appropriate NCDOT Division Engineer within 30 days of the transfer of ownership. To retain signs, the new owner is required to sign a new agreement with the NCDOT and the facility is required to meet all current program criteria and requirements. The new owner shall be responsible for all maintenance and replacement costs associated with the signs and supports due to damage, deterioration or loss, or name change at no expense or liability to the NCDOT. If the signs include other facility names or are later upgraded by other facilities, all maintenance and replacement costs required to repair damage or deterioration shall be shared equally by all facilities listed on the signs.

- An agricultural tourism signage agreement is not transferable to another business, facility, or location.

- Agricultural tourism signs shall not be placed where prohibited by local ordinance. If a trailblazer sign or other required sign cannot be installed due to a local ordinance or other limitation, no agricultural tourism signs will be allowed and the facility cannot participate in the program. All required signs must be installed to provide guidance to the facility.
- The NCDOT shall not maintain a waiting list for the program if the maximum number of four facility names has been met.

- The NCDOT will not require removal or covering of agricultural tourism signs if the facility is closed for 3 months or less for renovation, remodeling, or repair providing all program criteria will be met upon reopening. In cases where the facility is closed for more than 3 months but less than one year, the NCDOT will require temporary removal or covering of the signs, providing all program criteria will be met upon reopening. If the facility is closed more than one year, the signs shall be removed and the facility will be required to re-apply. The new request (application) will be handled in the same manner as a request from a new applicant. All costs for sign coverings, removals, and re-installations shall be paid for by the agricultural facility.

- Should a participating agricultural tourism facility cease to be in compliance with G.S. 106-22.5 and/or the criteria herein, the NCDA & CS shall notify the business owner 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.

- The NCDOT reserves the right to permanently remove any facility from the Agricultural Tourism Signage Program if the NCDOT determines that the facility has installed unapproved, illegal advertising signage within the roadway right-of-way. In the event that a facility is removed from the program, the Department shall not be required to refund any program costs paid by the facility.

- The NCDOT 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 NCDOT or the traveling public, without advance notice. The NCDOT reserves the right to remove signs when roadway improvements or changes in the roadway crossection or configuration will no longer accommodate the existing signs. If existing signs no longer meet the Department'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 Agreement will be required.

- The NCDOT 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.

- The NCDOT 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.

- As described in General Statute 136-30, the NCDOT has the authority to control all signs within the right-of-way of the State Highway System.

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 NCDA&CS. The application form must be completed in its entirety. Applicants must review all qualification criteria, estimated sign costs, and other program information located on the Agricultural Tourism Signing Program website to verify they are completely qualified and interested.
https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/safety/Teppl/Pages/Teppl-Topic.aspx?Topic_List=A07

(2) The applicant shall include an official 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. An official county map can be obtained from your local NCDOT Division office. A list of these office locations is provided as "Attachment 1" in this document.

(3) The agricultural facility must submit the application form with appropriate documentation to the NCDA&CS, Agritourism Office, 1020 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1020. Any additional paper correspondence shall also be directed to this address.

(4) The NCDA&CS 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. NCDA&CS will make a recommendation based on fulfillment of the program requirements to the NCDOT State Traffic Engineer or designate.

(5) If the agricultural facility is recommended for the Agricultural Tourism Signage Program by NCDA&CS, the NCDOT Division or Regional Traffic Engineer (or designate) will conduct a field investigation to verify that adequate spacing, right-of-way, and sight distance are available to safely install the signs. If these installation criteria are met, the NCDOT Division Traffic Engineer (or designate) will perform the field work to gather the survey data for the sign supports. The NCDOT Signing and Delineation Unit will design the signs, support systems, and prepare the cost estimate.

(6) The NCDOT Division Engineer (or designee) will administer the agreement, and after receiving payment, will order and coordinate the installation of the signs.

(7) The NCDA&CS Agritourism office will handle all verbal and written correspondence with the facility concerning the application and qualifications, as necessary. The applicant may be referred to NCDOT for questions regarding NCDOT responsibilities, such as designs, agreement, and installations.

(8) Any appeals to decisions shall be made in writing to the NCDA&CS. NCDA&CS will coordinate with NCDOT to determine final decision of appeal.

NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL STATUTES

§ 106-22.5. Agricultural tourism signs.

(a) The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall work with the Department of Transportation to provide directional signs on major highways at or in reasonable proximity to the nearest interchange leading to an agricultural facility that promotes tourism by providing tours and on-site sales or samples of North Carolina agricultural products to area tourists. The Department shall follow the sign location and placement rules of the Department of Transportation's Tourist-Oriented Directional Signs and Logo Signs programs.

(b) An agricultural facility must be open for business at least four days a week, 10 months of the year in order to qualify for the directional signs provided for in this section. The Department shall assess the facility the actual reasonable costs of the sign and its installation. (1999-356, s. 1; 2014-58, s. 2.)

§ 136-30. Uniform signs and other traffic control devices on highways, streets, and public vehicular areas.

(a) State Highway System. – The Department of Transportation may number and mark highways in the State highway system. All traffic signs and other traffic control devices placed on a highway in the State highway system must conform to the Uniform Manual. The Department of Transportation shall have the power to control all signs within the right-of-way of highways in the State highway

system. The Department of Transportation may erect signs directing persons to roads and places of importance.

(b) Municipal Street System. – All traffic signs and other traffic control devices placed on a municipal street system street must conform to the appearance criteria of the Uniform Manual. All traffic control devices placed on a highway that is within the corporate limits of a municipality but is part of the State highway system must be approved by the Department of Transportation.

(c) Public Vehicular Areas. – Except as provided in this subsection, all traffic signs and other traffic control devices placed on a public vehicular area, as defined in G.S. 20-4.01, must conform to the Uniform Manual. The owner of private property that contains a public vehicular area may place on the property a traffic control device, other than a sign designating a parking space for handicapped persons, as defined in G.S. 20-37.5, that differs in material from the uniform device but does not differ in shape, size, color, or any other way from the uniform device. The owner of private property that contains a public vehicular area may place on the property a sign designating a parking space for handicapped persons that differs in material and color from the uniform sign but does not differ in shape, size, or any other way from the uniform device.

(d) Definition. – As used in this section, the term "Uniform Manual" means the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways, published by the United States Department of Transportation, and any supplement to that Manual adopted by the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

(e) Exception for Public Airport Traffic Signs. – Publicly owned airports, as defined in Chapter 63 of the General Statutes, shall be exempt from the requirements of subsections (b) and (c) of this section with respect to informational and directional signs, but not with respect to regulatory traffic signs. (1921, c. 2, ss. 9(a), 9(b); C.S., ss. 3846(q), 3846(r); 1927, c. 148, s. 54; 1933, c. 172, s. 17; 1957, c. 65, s. 11; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 1977, c. 464, s. 7.1; 1991, c. 530, s. 1; 1991 (Reg. Sess., 1992), c. 818, s. 2; 1993, c. 51.)

§ 136-32. Regulation of signs.

(a) Commercial Signs. – No unauthorized person shall erect or maintain upon any highway any warning or direction sign, marker, signal or light or imitation of any official sign, marker, signal or light erected under the provisions of G.S. 136-30, except in cases of emergency. No person shall erect or maintain upon any highway any traffic or highway sign or signal bearing thereon any commercial or political advertising, except as provided in subsections (b) through (e) of this section: Provided, nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit the erection or maintenance of signs, markers, or signals bearing thereon the name of an organization authorized to erect the same by the Department of Transportation or by any local authority referred to in G.S. 136-31. Any person who shall violate any of the provisions of this section shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor. The Department of Transportation may remove any signs erected without authority or allowed to remain beyond the deadline established in subsection (b) of this section.

(b) Compliant Political Signs Permitted. – During the period beginning on the 30th day before the beginning date of "one-stop" early voting under G.S. 163-227.2 and ending on the 10th day after the primary or election day, persons may place political signs in the right-of-way of the State highway

system as provided in this section. Signs must be placed in compliance with subsection (d) of this section and must be removed by the end of the period prescribed in this subsection.

(c) Definition. – For purposes of this section, "political sign" means any sign that advocates for political action. The term does not include a commercial sign

(d) Sign Placement. – The permittee must obtain the permission of any property owner of a residence, business, or religious institution fronting the right-of-way where a sign would be erected. Signs must be placed in accordance with the following:

(1) No sign shall be permitted in the right-of-way of a fully controlled access highway.
(2) No sign shall be closer than three feet from the edge of the pavement of the road.
(3) No sign shall obscure motorist visibility at an intersection.
(4) No sign shall be higher than 42 inches above the edge of the pavement of the road.
(5) No sign shall be larger than 864 square inches.
(6) No sign shall obscure or replace another sign.

(e) Penalties for Unlawful Removal of Signs. – It is a Class 3 misdemeanor for a person to steal, deface, vandalize, or unlawfully remove a political sign that is lawfully placed under this section.

(f) Application Within Municipalities. – Pursuant to Article 8 of Chapter 160A of the General Statutes, a city may by ordinance prohibit or regulate the placement of political signs on rights-of-way of streets located within the corporate limits of a municipality and maintained by the municipality. In the absence of an ordinance prohibiting or regulating the placement of political signs on the rights-of-way of streets located within a municipality and maintained by the municipality, the provisions of subsections (b) through (e) of this section shall apply. (1921, c. 2, s. 9(b); C.S., s. 3846(r); 1927, c. 148, ss. 56, 58; 1933, c. 172, s. 17; 1957, c. 65, s. 11; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 1977, c. 464, s. 7.1; 1991 (Reg. Sess., 1992), c. 1030, s. 39; 1993, c. 539, s. 981; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 24, s. 14(c); 2011-408, s. 1.)