

Farm diversification new business ideas – Tourism and Leisure

Riding centres

Key points to consider

- Planning permission is required for the building of stables.
- Many centres run as clubs with fees to cover the rates and minimise risk.
- Good business management skills are needed to organise a varying range of activities throughout the year.
- A licence issued by the local Divisional Veterinary Office is essential.
- Trekking can be marketed as a tourist attraction.



Market overview

Riding centres offer a variety of services to the horse-riding public. These will include full exercise livery, riding lessons and horse shows. There is a growing market for all-weather covered facilities that can be used at night, and a covered arena can contribute significantly to the success of a riding school enterprise. This can be hired out for individual or group use as well as being used by the riding school.

A new riding school will have to compete with established riding schools and purpose-built livery stables. To attract business it is best to consider a location not too far from towns. Access to scenic rides is an important factor affecting the feasibility of a pony trekking enterprise. If your farm is in an area of natural beauty you will be able to market it as a tourist enterprise. Alternatively, farms nearer to towns and cities could provide standard riding school facilities.

There are several different groups that could be targeted including private individuals, community and youth club groups, disabled groups and schools. Specialist instruction such as carriage driving classes and cross-country tuition could also be offered.

Service delivery requirements

Location

The ideal location is within reach of a centre of population but with access to good riding country.

Facilities

Buildings should be warm and dry and stalls should have partitions high enough to protect animals from reaching each other and biting. Stabled animals should have adequate bedding to allow them to lie down comfortably, and to prevent them getting chills from concrete floors. Loose boxes should be large enough for horses and ponies to move about easily. There should also be a tacking-up area and storage area for tack and feed as well as a water supply.

Ideally facilities would include indoor and outdoor arenas, a covered warm-up area, viewing galleries, catering facilities, toilets, car park and good vehicle access. It is also advisable to have changing rooms, showers and a waiting room. However, smaller enterprises might not offer all of these.

For riding lessons an enclosed space is required, preferably covered to allow for all weather conditions.

It's important to be able to give horses and ponies good grazing if they live out. The amount of land required is estimated at one to two acres grazing per horse.

Equipment

Saddlery should be soft and supple and in good repair. To keep it in good condition it should be cleaned several times a week. Worn or brittle stirrup leathers and girths may result in a serious accident.

Horses and ponies

Animals used in riding schools should be over three years old and in good condition. There should be a regular worming programme and proper records kept on each animal.

Food

Feeding is most easily and economically supplied by pasture, hay or haylage. Growing, breeding, or working horses may require a supplement of concentrate to meet their additional nutrient requirements

Legal requirements

Under the Riding Establishment Acts 1964 and 1970 a licence is required from the local Divisional Veterinary Office. Applicants must be over 18 and suitably qualified.

The standards of teaching and facilities must meet current health and safety legislation and comply with local council environmental health targets. An 'Approved School' is one that has been inspected and found to be satisfactory by the Association of Irish Riding Establishments or the British Horse Society.

Planning permission is required for buildings connected with commercial enterprises and for change of use of commercial buildings. It is advisable to consult your local planning office to check whether permission is needed before carrying out any development.

Financial considerations

Capital costs

Capital costs are variable depending upon the site but the following gives a general estimate of cost. A new covered shed will cost around £100 to £120 per/m². An ideal size is 80m x 50m but may be smaller. The minimum acceptable size is 25m x 40m.

If you can re-use existing sheds this will cut down on cost but the shed must be of the correct height as well as span. Loose boxes cost around £1000 each, but savings can be made if conversion of existing farm buildings is possible.

To surface an area for use as a car park will cost around £7.20 per /m² using purchased hardcore and blinding.

Ponies in the 13.2hh - 15hh size range can be bought for around £900 each. Smaller ponies cost about £550.

Running costs

The labour input will vary depending on the number of horses and services offered. At least one qualified instructor will be required but mucking out, feeding and grooming can be done by young riders or using casual labour.

About £15-20 per horse per week should be allowed for feeding and sundries. Other costs per horse per year will include farrier (£32/set of shoes) and vet & medicine costs.

Stables are liable for rates and the total rates bill will depend on the size and range of facilities offered.

Returns

Riding instruction can be charged at around £8 to £15 per hour. Hire of safety equipment (hat and back protector) can be charged at £1 to £3 per item. Arena hire can generate an income of £10 - £20 per hour.

Further contacts

For further information contact:
Your local Divisional Veterinary Office

Enniskillen College
Levagh, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh, BT74 4GF
Tel: 028 6634 4853
Fax: 028 6634 4888
Website: www.enniskillencollege.ac.uk

British Horse Society,
House of Sport, Upper Malone Road, Belfast, BT9 5LA
Tel: 028 9038 3816
E-mail: bhsireland@aol.com
Website: www.bhsireland.co.uk

The Association of Irish Riding Establishments
11 Moore Park, Newbridge, Co Kildare, Ireland
Website: www.equine-net.com/AIRE

Publications

Horse Business Management Handbook, Warwickshire College of Agriculture, 3rd Edit (1990).

Running Stables as a Business. Janet MacDonald
(British Horse Society).

This information sheet has been compiled by Rural Enterprise Advisers.

For advice and guidance on your farm diversification idea contact your local Rural Enterprise Adviser. For details of the adviser in your area:

Tel: 028 9052 4406.

E-mail: ruralenterprise.afds@dardni.gov.uk

Website: www.ruralni.gov.uk/farmdiversification

Note: the information provided herein is for general information only. It is not necessarily complete and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any proposed enterprise. The market and circumstances may change substantially. Further research will be required before embarking on any new enterprise.

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