

Fair Oaks Farms opens barn-shaped hotel with custom suites

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The popular agritourism destination Fair Oaks Farms has opened a new hotel to cater to visitors and wedding guests.

The farm in Newton County on Interstate 65 opened a 99-room Fairfield by Marriott, which will allow for overnight stays and is intended to boost the farms' special events business.

The \$15 million hotel was constructed partly because Fair Oaks has added attractions it hopes makes it more than a day-trip destination, and because it's built up a wedding business at its conference center, which opened in 2014. Before the new Fairfield was completed, there were no hotels in the immediate vicinity for overnight visitors and wedding parties to lodge.

The hotel's amenities include a spa, whiteboards for business meetings and for kids to write on in suites, and bridal party rooms with full-length mirrors and makeup stations. Fair Oaks Farms has been touting the hotel by encouraging visitors to "escape to the country."

"We are excited to open Fair Oaks Farms to overnight guests for the first time," Fair Oaks Farms Chief Strategy Officer Michael McCall said. "Directly connected to our Farmhouse Restaurant, conference center, and pub, the whole combination of hospitality provides travelers, groups and destination guests everything needed for an escape to the country."

The 80-foot-tall hotel is designed to resemble a contemporary barn, with a gambrel roof, weather vanes, two silos filled with guest suites, and an adjoining "milking parlor" with a gym and pool with a "cow tongue's slide." The hotel includes a Great Room with indoor and outdoor fireplaces, pool tables and a 2,100-square-foot patio.

Valparaiso-based Good Hospitality Services co-developed and will manage the hotel, which opened Thursday.

"It's another great addition to a wonderful asset down there," Good Hospitality Services President Jeffrey Good said. "It's a big step up for Fair Oaks Farms, to have people there 24/7. It's a natural advance of that project and shows how far that campus has come."

It's also the only Marriott hotel in the world that's shaped like a barn.

"When you do a specialty type of hotel, it takes a little longer to get the approval from Marriott," Good said. "They put you through the meat grinder. But one of the cool things is that the Fairfield name comes from the Marriott's family farm. Fast forward to today and they're opening a hotel shaped like a barn on a farm."

The hotel includes 31 suites that can sleep up to six people, including Bridal Silo Suites, Business Silo Suites, Family Bunk Silo Suites, and Entertainment Suites. It opens up into the 17,000-square-foot Farmhouse Restaurant and Pub and the conference center to accommodate special events and business functions.

The Fairfield by Marriott features agriculture-themed artwork from nationally acclaimed artists Michael Kessler, JD Dennison and R. Tom Gilleon.

Fair Oaks Farms includes educational exhibits The Dairy Adventure, The Pig Adventure, and The Crop Adventure. The "agricultural Disneyland" at 856 N. County Road 600 E. in Fair Oaks draws more than 600,000 visitors a year.

Founders Mike and Sue McCloskey opened the farm to the public in 2004 to people disconnected from rural life a chance to see modern farming operations firsthand and learn more about where their food comes from, such as by being able to watch live cow births.

Added attractions in recent years include a the farm-to-fork Farmhouse Restaurant and a u-pick-it apple orchard that's expected to open soon.

For more information or to book a room, call (219) 394-2100.