

# Ag Tourism CLUSTER

AG TOURISM NEWS FROM AROUND THE PROVINCE AND BEYOND

BRINGING ALBERTA TO YOU!

# News

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Alberta

## KEEPING IT RURAL AND REAL

*Provide visitors a place play and engage all of their senses...*

Enhance your visitors' experiences by engaging all five of their senses. At the November cluster muster Ma Dame Debbie Webster shared how she uses sound to create lasting memories for her guests.

I take guests to the edge of the valley or to the top of the ridge and encourage them to hear their voices. I challenge them to listen to themselves yell YAHOO at the top of their lungs for all the world to hear. Their reactions are inspiring. It's almost like a burst of power. The first YAHOO is followed by other, louder YAHOOs until they can time them to hear themselves. Every group seems to stand up just a bit straighter upon hearing themselves. Ultimately each experience ends with lots of laughter.

Last summer we had a couple return to our farm with their grandchildren, four girls aged 10 to 18. Just before they left I lined up all the gals, including Grandma, at the edge of the escarpment overlooking the creek and proceeded to teach

them how to YAHOO! All were brave enough to step up and give it a try. After three attempts we had a YAHOO chorus that would make any cowgirl proud. Even Grandma enjoyed the opportunity to play. About two weeks later I received an email from the grandparents thanking us for the holiday experience and recounting how the girls couldn't stop talking about roasting marshmallows over the fire and YAHOO-ing into the foothills.

As hosts to urban visitors we need to be aware of the sensory experiences we can share: the satisfying exertion of climbing those steep hills, the smell of sweaty horses, the sound of grass as it rustles in the wind and the creek slapping against rocks as it tumbles along. These sounds of quiet all conflict with the usual sensations we've learned to ignore like the roar of traffic, the whirring of the refrigerator, and the ringing of phones. Encouraging someone to test themselves, offering another perspective or simply paying attention to their excitement adds a whole new dimension to the experience they share with us. I've learned that most folks want to play but many have forgotten how. If we can, they will!

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## THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF RURAL TOURISM

*ERTG Tool Measures Impact on Rural Economies*

The Edmonton Region Tourism Group (ERTG) is working with Econometric Research Limited to create an Economic Impact Assessment Tool. The new assessment tool will quantify the impact of tourism dollars on our rural economies.

Researchers are now gathering information on both the supply (operator) side and demand (visitor) side to run through the assessment tool to establish a base measurement year. Rural and ag tourism operators are providing survey information as the first step in establishing the supply side baseline. The demand side, represented by potential and existing visitors, is being measured in a number of ways.

ERTG is conducting random telephone surveys in Edmonton to determine public awareness and preferences. In addition, visitors can complete an online survey at <http://www.edmontonscountryside.com>. Although they are getting good feedback from the online surveys it doesn't tell the whole story. If folks have already found the website then they likely have some level of knowledge of ERTG and what it has to offer.

One of the best things about this research is ERTG will make the model available for projects in other parts of the province. Sharing is a very good thing!

Aussi disponible en français.

## SPRING/SUMMER CLUSTER EVENTS:

### Edmonton Area experiences

Rural Rendezvous:

- Mother's Day Rendezvous - May 9 & 10
- Summer Rendezvous - August 16

Visit: [www.ruralrendezvoustour.com](http://www.ruralrendezvoustour.com)

Edmonton's Countryside:

- Edmonton's Countryside Spring Drive, Kicks off May 9 & 10, running until June 21
- The Country Soul Stroll, Kicks off July 18 & 19, running with Sweet Summer Drives until September 7.
- Country Cuisine: Taste of Summer - July 12
- Country Cuisine: Taste of Summer - August 16 features the tomato!

Visit: [www.edmontonscountryside.com/](http://www.edmontonscountryside.com/)

### Central Alberta experiences

Country Drive:

- Spring Time Country Drive May 30-31
- Summer Time Country Drive Aug 1-2
- Harvest Country Drive October 10-11

Visit: [www.countrydrive.ca](http://www.countrydrive.ca)

### Southern Alberta experiences

Flavours of the Foothills:

- Harvest Festival August 22

Visit: [www.flavoursofthefoothills.com](http://www.flavoursofthefoothills.com)

Dames on the Range:

- Horse Power (Look out!) May 22-24
- Soul Power (Look In!) May 22-24
- Heritage Plant Day June 7
- Herbal Tea Day June 14
- Native Plant Day June 21
- Partnership Learning and Enrichment Tour August 9-13

Visit: [www.damesontherange.com](http://www.damesontherange.com)

### Kalyna/North East Alberta experiences

Buffalo Adventures:

- Based in Wainwright, Buffalo Adventures is running May through August. Availability may vary, most adventures will be available during these weeks.
- May 18-23; June 8-13; July 13-18; August 10-15

Visit: <http://www.buffaloalberta.ca/>

Dine Kalyna:

- August 6, 2009, Vegreville Social Centre

Visit: [www.kalynacountry.com/Dine-Kalyna](http://www.kalynacountry.com/Dine-Kalyna)

## DAMES GAIN FAME ON YOUTUBE

### *Networking is Critical*

Travel Alberta took advantage of the rising popularity of social networking sites by posting over 50 videos on YouTube. Our very own Dames on the Range is featured. Ma Dame Debbie Webster tells how it happened. "Networking is so critical," says Deb. "I met a woman from Travel Alberta International last spring at the Growing Rural Tourism conference. We spoke briefly about marketing Dames on the Range."

"The experience was great, the crew wonderful and even the weather cooperated!" exclaims Deb. "The feedback from the crew as we filmed the various sites taught us lots about preferred views, tones, angles and more. It was all foreign territory for us Dames! In the first month of its posting on YouTube the clip received over 200 hits.

Experience the Real West on YouTube at:

[www.youtube.com/profile?user=TravelAlbertaCanada&view=videos](http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=TravelAlbertaCanada&view=videos)



For more information on Ag Tourism development in Alberta go to [www.agtourism.ca](http://www.agtourism.ca)

or contact an Ag-Info Centre New Venture Specialist at 310-FARM (3276)

## CO-HOSTING EVENTS - ARE WE BETTER TOGETHER?

*Careful tracking gives potential insight...*

Recent research examined the costs and benefits of working independently versus as a cluster to host an event. This Cluster Benchmark project compared the Flavours of the Foothills Harvest Festival to their individual farms' events. One of the major findings of the research was the importance of tracking and evaluation. Flavours of the Foothills coordinator Carmen Ditzler shared some of the group's learnings:

- **Decide what to track.** Create a checklist of items to keep track of during the actual event. Consider tracking attendance, survey responses, sponsor revenue, marketing expenses, operator time, staff hours, and website hits.
- **Keep it short.** A written survey should be no more than one page single sided. Use a checklist format. If it's simple and quick more visitors will complete it.
- **Be specific.** Link how visitors heard about the event to specific promotions and media channels. "A lot of money goes into marketing," says Carmen. "So, instead of asking generally where visitors heard about your festival list the places you had ads, signs, and other media."
- **Grab 'em when you have them.** Survey response rates are always much higher on site during an event than online afterwards. Flavours online survey response rate was so low they believe it wasn't worth doing. Online surveys can still be a useful option for some.
- **Track staff and owner hours.** "Many of the expenses with a big event like the Harvest Festival occur before the actual day. Our operators didn't track the time they spent preparing for the festival because their prep was mixed in with their day to day business. Tracking these lost hours may reduce you to tears or open your eyes to the cost involved," says Carmen.
- **On site survey stations don't require staff.** "Operators need to know that they can collect good information using an unmanned table, good signage and a great prize." Unmanned survey stations leave your staff and volunteers available for other tasks.

Another tip the Flavours group gleaned from the research was the value of a clicker or handheld counting device. They're great for tracking gate attendance, itemized retail sales and where people come from. The operator/cluster tracking tool and survey template can be found online at [www.agtourism.ca](http://www.agtourism.ca) in the Cluster Development Section under the Cluster Benchmark Project.

## WHERE FOOD FITS

*Two Themes to Consider...*

During the Food Cluster Review interviews two separate themes emerged: local food and culinary cuisine. Think about the food elements of your cluster's activities. Which theme is your group more aligned with?

### Local Food Focus:

- Local food for local people
- Educates about local food and agriculture issues
- Concerned with the sustainability and security of the food supply
- Offers cooking demonstrations, tips and food for sale
- People learn new ways to source food in their area
- After the event participants shop differently
- Food producers and processors increase direct local sales.

### Culinary Cuisine Focus:

- Local food enhances visitors' experiences
- Assumes people have money to spend on experiences and souvenirs
- Builds regional identity on local ingredients, food preparations and cultural traditions
- Chefs headline and showcase food
- White tablecloth events often include wine and beer
- Might be more expensive with some snob appeal
- After the event visitors find new restaurants to try, restaurants increase sales and profile which creates pull for local food.

To learn more about what other groups are doing in food clusters check out the full story in the Food Cluster Review. This pdf report is posted online at [www.agtourism.ca](http://www.agtourism.ca). You'll find it at the bottom of the Cluster Development section.



## Investor Spotlight

### The Rural Community Adaptation Grant Program (RCAP)

There is a new \$15 million fund to be used to increase the capacity of rural communities and regions to transition and adaptation. This grant is part of a Government of Alberta Community Adaptation and Transition Initiative to support communities.

#### Eligible Activities

The program will support eligible projects that are community-based and focus on creative community driven actions and solutions, including: assessment and planning, capacity building, rural economic development and unique community solutions.

#### Eligible Applicants

Incorporated community organizations (e.g. not-for-profit organizations, industry associations, or regional organizations) that are collaborating with a rural community are eligible to apply for program funding. For information visit: <http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/general/progserv.nsf/all/pgmsrv366>

## ODDS AND ENDS

*The Cluster Road Show starring Mark, Tim, and Gail...*

Two days in March, two locations. These events ran March 3 and 5, 2009. Designed for existing clusters to gather, learn together and take home ideas for implementation in the coming year, their three foci make for an action packed day. The clusters asked for expertise in experience development, sponsorship attraction and media relations. We were able to enlist the help of three awesome speakers.

- For media relations advice we called on **Mark Saunders**, the Director of Fun at the family-run Saunders Farm. <http://www.saundersfarm.com/>
- For insight into the world of sponsorship we invited **Tim Haak**, an Edmonton based consultant who instructs part time at Grant MacEwan College.
- To help us with a hands-on learning lunch we asked food activist **Gail Hall**.  
<http://www.seasonedsolutions.ca/>

**Stay tuned as we share learnings from these two exciting events!!**

### Where in the World is Carmen Andrew?



*Carmen with her husband and two daughters!*

These days our Carmen Andrew is taking a little road show of her own! In early February Carmen and her family began their journey travelling all across the USA in a RV. They plan to be back home to Alberta at the end of July. Carmen will be keeping her eyes and ears open on the ag tourism front so stay tuned for her findings when she returns to work in August. If you are interested check out their blog as they keep us informed of their travel adventures - <http://ournorthamericanrvadventure.blogspot.com/>