



Harvest the talent,
Grow the cluster.



What is an Ag Tourism Cluster?

An Ag Tourism Cluster is a group of like-minded stakeholders and operators who come together to increase the profile for their operations and geographic area with an ag tourism theme.

Why do Cluster Development?

There are six reasons to do cluster development.

- Link dispersed products = IMPACT
- Use Ag Tourism theme to tie assets together
- Tap into new markets
- Boost profile and awareness
- Build word of mouth
- Increase profit and generate new dollars

What Happens?

All groups go through the four-step cluster development phase.

1. Rally the troops
2. Seed with some ideas
3. Pick something and run with it.
4. Evaluate and follow up.

What Are Cluster Events?

FAM (Familiarization) Tours involve a van or bus tour on a predetermined route scheduled to showcase a select group of properties to a group of invited guests. Often, FAM tours are held for travel writers and agents but can also be held for local media, operators, and stakeholders. Examples are the FAM tours held for operators in the North Calgary Cluster.

Driving Route Events occur when a group of operators and municipal stakeholders partner to create and sell a regional map which offers a “menu” of destinations for visitors on a specified day or weekend. “Entres” include farm, ranch, garden, and food experiences. This concept is a “call to action” to encourage people to get in their cars and take a drive to the country to visit ag tourism operations. Examples include the Country Soul Stroll, Red Deer County Country Drive, and Visit The Country Spring Drive Launch.

Agri-food Events are an opportunity to expose prospective consumers to regionally grown and produced food that is prepared and tasted at one or a progressive series of sites. Two examples are Taste of the Stroll and Taste of the Lakeland.

Operator Showcase usually takes advantage of the attendees drawn to an existing major event when operators partner to create participatory display environment; allowing customers to have a “taste” of their product or experience. This type of event offers a method that “brings the product to the market”.

Driving Guides are colorful print pieces written to entice people to visit the inventory of diverse ag based and ag inspired places that they feature. Sylvan Lake Farmgate Guide and Visit The Country are examples.

Alberta Ag Tourism Clusters

Edmonton Region Cluster

Leduc, Strathcona, Sturgeon, Parkland and Lamont County

Northeast Region Cluster

Bonnyville, Cold Lake, Elk Point, St. Paul

Red Deer Region Cluster

County of Red Deer and Lacombe

North Calgary Region Cluster

Sundre, Olds, Cremona, Water Valley

Foothills Cluster

Okotoks, Black Diamond, Bragg Creek, Turner Valley, High River, Longview

South Central Region Cluster

Lethbridge, Fort Macleod, Picture Butte, Shaughnessy, Raymond, Coaldale and Taber

Southwest Region Cluster

Pincher Creek, Porcupine Hills, Cardston



Timeline of Ag Tourism Clusters in Alberta

Summer 2003

Opportunity assessment with Ag Tourism Guru; Ed Mahoney

2004-05

Initiated three pilot regions based on critical mass, proximity to major markets and interest and commitment of stakeholders.

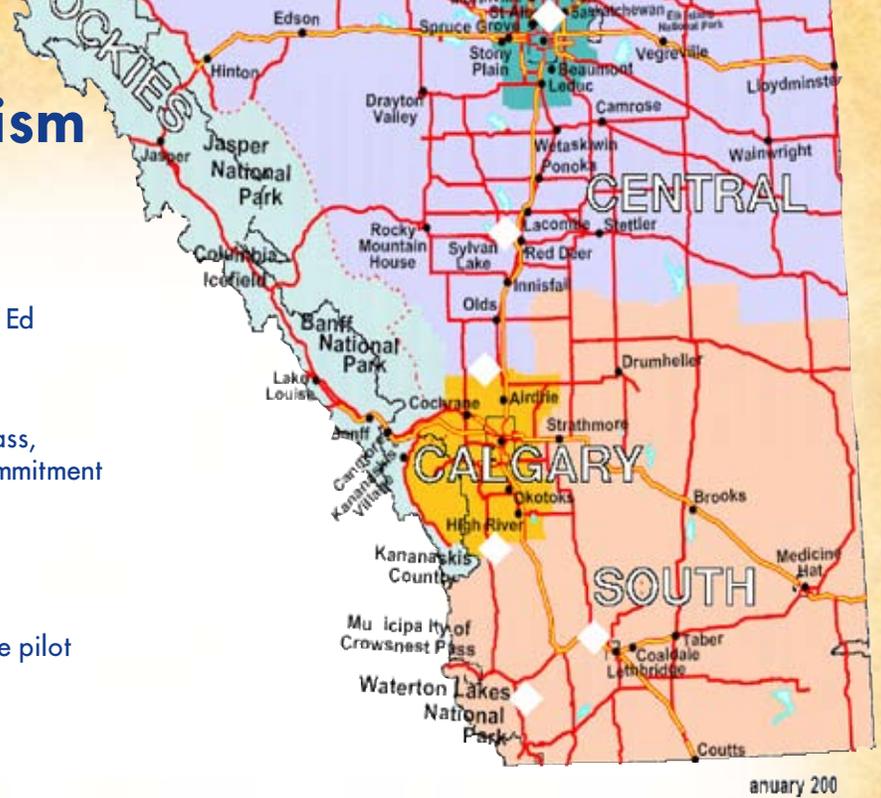
- Edmonton Region
- Southwest Region
- Foothills Region

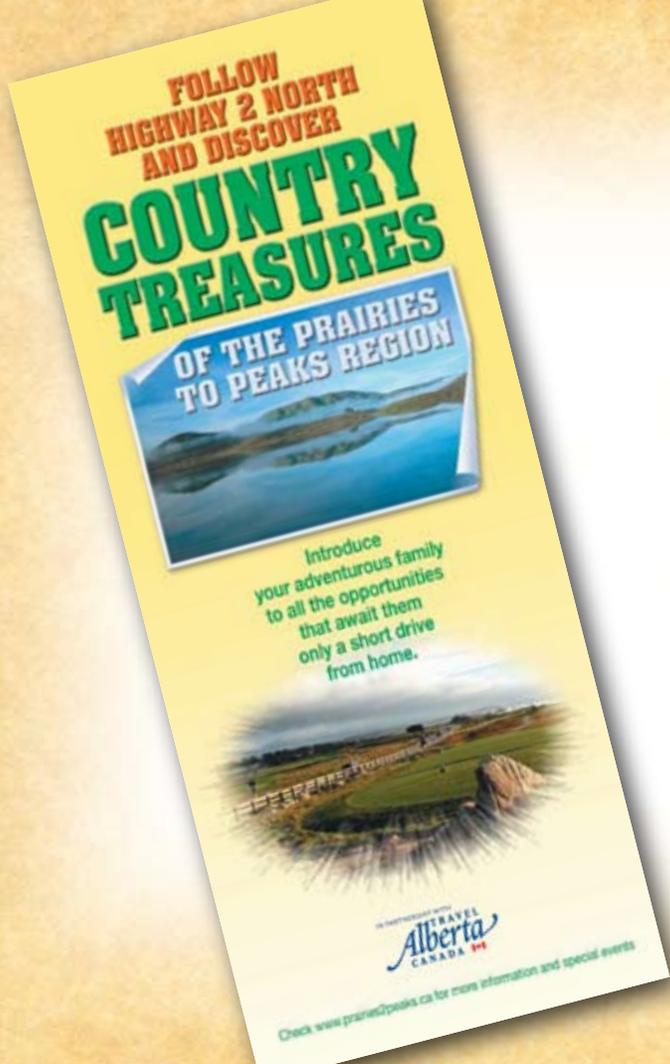
Four more regions were added as a result of the pilot project

- Calgary Northwest Region
- Red Deer Region
- South Central Alberta Region
- North East Region

2006

Many exciting Ag tourism cluster events and initiatives took place this year. Please see contents of this publication for details.





North Calgary Ag Tourism Cluster Country Treasures Guide

In January of 2006, a group of ag tourism operators within a one hour radius of Calgary

came together to discuss how they might work together to better promote and bring awareness to the urban and rural public of the wonderful and vibrant experiences that awaited them in their own backyard. As a result, two FAM tours took place in March; one representing the B&B and food service industry and another to encompass all other operations.

It was decided that a publication to showcase the area would be produced. A total of 22 participants were included in an attractive brochure including B&B's, nurseries, DMO, U-picks, guest ranches, Farmers' Markets, recreational sports, livestock enterprises, and golf course. All participants made a financial contribution to the initiative and partners included individual operators, Alberta Ag Tourism, and Travel Alberta.



The project has brought an awareness and willingness among operators to cross promote what they have to offer visitors. The Country Treasures Guide will be one of the key components to be used in the planning for 2007 when the group meets again in October of 2006.

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Edmonton Region Ag Tourism Cluster

Country Soul Stroll

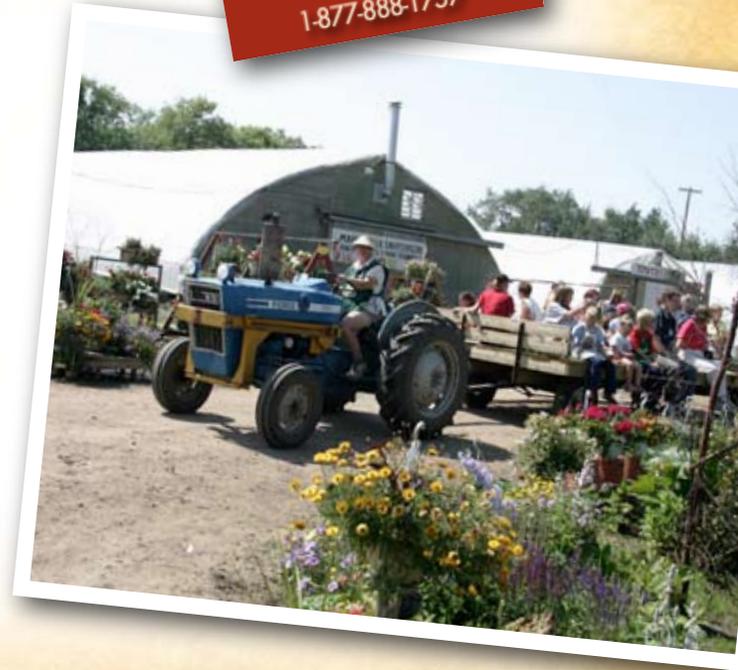
Recipient of Growing Alberta Leadership Award for Innovation 2005

Running since 2003, the Country Soul Stroll offers the public a two-day self-guided driving route extravaganza through Sturgeon County. From bison to blueberries, the Stroll offers 20-plus rural destination experiences. This is an excellent entry-level event for new operators considering ag tourism as part of their market mix.

In 2004, 582 passes were sold at \$7 per person or \$25 a carload. The 2005

Stroll saw 375 passes sold despite unfavorable weather conditions. In 2006, over 500 people attended the Pancake Breakfast hosted by the Namao United Church Women and many more participants took part in the drive.

In its second year of operation, the Taste of the Stroll sold out two weeks prior to the Event. An evening of local food and wine sampling features the flavours of the country prepared by top chefs from Edmonton, St. Albert and area. This popular event provides excellent media coverage and photo ops to promote regional cuisine and the upcoming Stroll.



2006 saw an expanded media campaign with an upscale, full color brochure and circulation of 40,000 copies as compared to 25,000 in 2005. A half page ad was also placed in Visit The Country Guide which had a circulation of 50,000 copies this year. The Edmonton Journal Country Asides gave the Stroll a full page of editorial and local media were very supportive with coverage of the events. Sales at individual sites were up considerably and participants learned that their market is definitely mature couples and groups of female friends out for a day of fun and travel.

Sponsors included Agrium, City of St. Albert, Sturgeon County, Travel Alberta, grafikom, Namao Agricultural Society, Redwater & District Ag Society, Morinville & District Ag Society

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www.countrysoulstroll.ca





Red Deer Region Ag Tourism Cluster Country Drive

In 2004, the Red Deer Cluster set the stage for partnering by running two successful FAM tours which introduced operators to each other's businesses. From this event came the Country Drive '05; a self-guided route through rural Red Deer County countryside. Come alive on the Country Drive! was the theme for 2006 and the mission statement was: To provide an opportunity for visitors to explore, experience, and become educated about agricultural businesses and rural lifestyles in the Red Deer Region.

21 stops along the route included museums, farms, gardens, artisans, and cultural attractions. Registration costs for operators ranged from \$50 to \$250.

In 2005, poor weather conditions kept numbers down to about 140 people. The Country Drive '06 had over 500 evaluations filled out by visitors. There was also a means to track how visitors learned of the event on the form with newspaper ads and word of mouth in the lead. Over 90% of participants said they would come again.





A "Breakfast Media Launch" was held about one month before the Drive with all local media, elected officials, sponsors, and operators invited. 2500 color brochures with map, 2000 "lure cards", and 100 posters were printed and distributed in a variety of locations. The Country Drive '06 website was fully operational and a link to it was provided on the Tourism Red Deer and Red Deer County websites. Radio spots and newspaper display ads were purchased from local media. Organizers also sent out letters inviting participants from the '05 drive to come again and admission was free!

Sponsors included Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Cottonwood Gordon and Innisfail & District Agricultural Society, Community Savings, Copies Now, Glenn's Family Restaurant, KG Country 95.5, Parkland Garden Center, Pauline Mousseau Associates, Red Deer Express, Tourism Red Deer, Red Deer County, Voyager Art and Tile, and Travel Alberta Canada.

Contact (403) 346-0180 or (403) 215-8946
www.countrydrive.ca



Ag Adventures Passport

Text to come





South Central Ag Tourism Cluster Fun Farm Tour

The Fun Farm Tour is a self-guided driving tour of Lethbridge area u-pick farms, animal operations, regional cuisine, and ag-tourism destinations including a corn maze, museum, greenhouse, and soap-maker. This event is a great outing for families and singles alike and all 10 participating locations are within 30 km of Lethbridge. Anyone who takes in the tour and receives at least 8 stamps on their "passport" will be able to enter a draw for \$100 gift certificate from Gas King. Passes to participate in the tour are \$5 per carload (to a maximum of 8 people) and include discounts at participating locations. Planning for this event started in December '05.

There is a natural route for people to see all the locations and a map has been designed. Signage will assist people with directions. Numbers will be tracked with passports and effectiveness of \$100 gift certificate as an incentive to see all the locations will be based on the number of entries into the draw.





A \$100 sponsorship from RTL Agri-Services and in-kind services from Gas King were secured and each operator who had a product to sell, invested \$250 each. The marketing plan includes free promotion and very inexpensive advertising. A local farm news reporter has agreed to do three feature articles on three operators to go into three separate publications. Operator's websites and on LethbridgeLink.com — a popular source for news in Lethbridge also feature the event as well as participation in the Whoop Up Days tradeshow which sees about 56,000 visitors.

The organizers have run into some difficult barriers, from finding a date that would work, getting printing done in one day, finding operators to participate during harvest, and getting sponsorship in place, but have been able to work it all out, and offer a diverse tour.

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Foothills Ag Tourism Cluster

Flavours of the Foothills Harvest Festival

The first annual Harvest Festival for the Flavour of the Foothills group had two cream of the crop events in 2006. Introducing the public to unique harvest demonstrations and activities that they could participate in, the festival included spinning honey from the comb and a black currant “stomp” to produce black currant juice! The focus was on families, food enthusiasts and urban tourists wanting to “get natural”.

The two farms involved in the new initiative had individualized approaches to their specialized events but marketed the festival jointly. Maps were provided on all print advertising and a joint webpage with a single phone number was provided for contact information. Savings coupons were supplied in newspapers to track source of information and number of visitors. As well as radio spots in Calgary and Okotoks, flyers were circulated and an email campaign conducted with contacts provided by Slow Food and Nexen Inc.

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Northeast Ag Tourism Cluster.

The Taste of the Lakeland

The Taste of the Lakeland is a “super Farmers’ Market”, designed to help producers promote and direct market their traditional and exotic agricultural products as well as showcase new diversified services and tourism and consumers enjoy the educational experience of learning how their food is grown and raised. Vendors are encouraged to create a “show atmosphere” and many offer demonstrations and displays.

The initiative involves two local Farmers’ Markets. One general meeting is held and most of the planning is done in 2 or 3 meetings where committee members brainstorm new and inexpensive ideas.

In 2004, over 1300 people attended. In 2005, there were 600, and in 2006, the attendance was about 300. Organizers recognized that in their first year, they embarked on a more comprehensive advertising campaign than in the following years. Due to decreased sponsorship and a deficit, paid advertising was limited in 2006. On the positive side, the goal of organizers is to promote the



Farmers' Market and to increase the number of people who shop there. They feel they are accomplishing this as vendors say they are meeting and talking to new people and in most cases, expanding their customer base. Vendors also report that they are selling sufficient goods to make it worth their while.

Partners include the Cold Lake Ag Society whom donate the use of their facility and sound equipment to host the event and a local furniture store supplies a fridge and stove for the weekend.

Lessons learned? "Fresh advertising is key. Organizers must offer something new to keep the media interested so the public can hear about the event. There must be a willingness to expand, add something new, and be creative to keep the buzz going."

Marianne Price, Alberta's Lakeland DMO
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Red Deer Region Ag Tourism Cluster

Sylvan lake Farmgate Guide

The Sylvan Lake Farmgate Guide is a year-round brochure providing a detailed description and map of farm businesses in the Sylvan Lake area, designed to keep the plentiful tourist population and locals in the area informed of the diverse rural experiences they offer.

Driven by a strong belief in farm diversification and working together to promote one another, each business paid a membership fee of \$25 and received support from their local UFA and Travel Alberta to launch the initiative. Members did a FAM tour to familiarize themselves with each other's operations. With all of the farms in such close proximity, the map appears to be a driving route and visitors are treating it as such. The colorful brochure is available through Visitor Information Centers and various businesses in the area including participating farms. The group has recently partnered with Alberta Farm Fresh Producers whom have linked the guide to their website.



“Wow! I honestly cannot believe the level of success we are experiencing with this brochure! We have definitely hit a nerve with people and have given them exactly what they have been looking for. I wanted to hit the market with a brochure that would stand out from the rest with not so much “pop” but “WHAM” when it hit the market. We nailed it! I love it when a plan comes together!”

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www.albertafarmfresh.com

Go to Related Links, then to Events and Travel and click on our guide for your downloadable copy.



Edmonton Region Ag Tourism Cluster

Visit The Country Guide & Edmonton Countryside Spring Drive

Recipient of

In its second year of publication, Visit The Country is a full-color, glossy guide that invites you to visit Edmonton's Countryside. Its pages offer 57 opportunities to explore farms, ranches, greenhouses, gardens, and artisans. The guide also lists 43 special events happening throughout the year. To launch this year's guide, The Edmonton Countryside Spring Drive was held on the Mother's Day weekend. Over two days, 30 operators opened their doors and provided a chance for the public to take behind the scenes tours, to create special mementos, and to experience a variety of gardening demos from the professionals. There was no additional cost to operators in the guide to participate and the weekend was an overwhelming success.

The guide is affordable to market-ready operations of all sizes. The cost is \$200 for a descriptive listing in the guide and its website. Events are \$50. In 2006, a coordinator/copy writer was hired and the guide doubled in size to 48 pages.

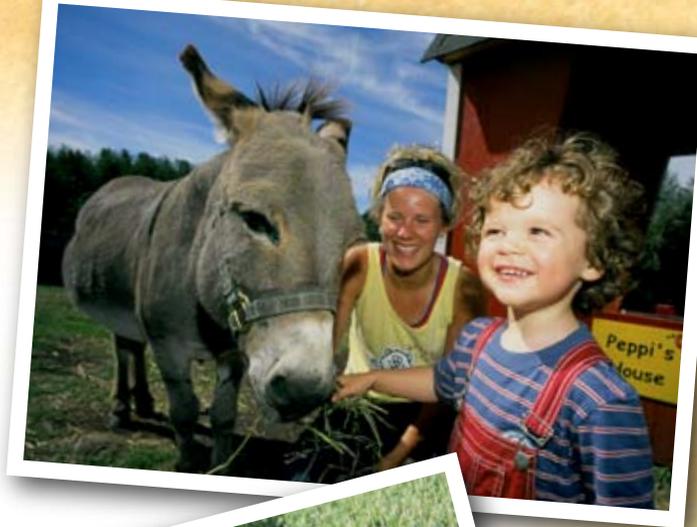


A well-attended media launch luncheon was held in early May. Visit The Country once again appeared in Tourist Information Centers, hotels, campgrounds, and at numerous events and attractions. Hits on the website were up dramatically this year. Circulation increased from 15,000 to 50,000 copies and a partnership with the Edmonton Journal resulted in the distribution of guides as well as a special edition of Visit The Country in the Journal's CountryAsides publication with a circulation of 140,000.

Partners included Edmonton Journal, icangarden, Northlands Park, Edmonton Journal, Counties of Strathcona, Sturgeon, Leduc, Parkland and Lamont, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Edmonton Economic Development and Tourism, Travel Alberta, WHERE Magazine, The Catalyst Agriculture and Food Council, McCallum Printing Group Inc., Westgro Horticultural Supplies Inc., Air Products.

"Visit The Country is the one and only place we advertised this year so we know it is working. We have seen a huge increase in traffic to our farm. We are definitely in for next year!" Leah Milligan, McLeod Creek Farm and Campground

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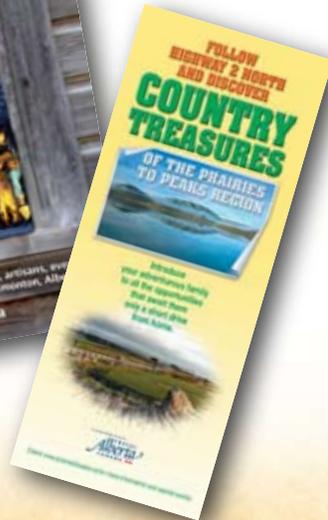
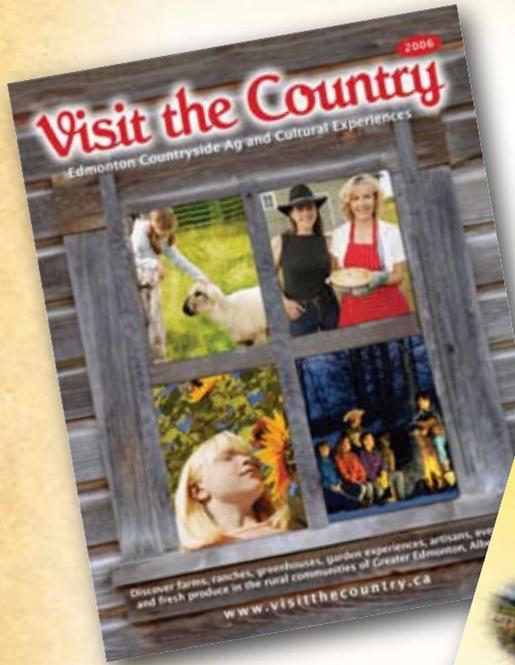
Free Publications

The following ag tourism cluster publications are available through Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development Publications Office: Establishing Ag Tourism Routes. 2005. (FS888-5) and Co-ordinating Ag Tourism Familiarization Tours. 2005. (FS888-6. You may order them by the following methods.

Calling 1-800-292-5697

**Online order form at www.agric.gov.ab.ca
(see Publications & More on the right hand side)**

There are also several other publications that may be of interest to up and coming ag tourism operators. Please see www.agtourism.ca for further information.



What's new and exciting in the world of Clusters?

Plenty! From all directions!

Successful events and initiatives happened in the Ag Tourism Cluster this summer. Plans are already underway everywhere for 2007 so stay tuned for more exciting news throughout the province. Check out all the latest and greatest growth in ag tourism at www.agtourism.ca.

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The Catalyst

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