

# Ag Tourism CLUSTER

Ag Tourism news from around the province and beyond

Bringing Alberta to you!

# News

Volume 1, Issue 2  
Spring 2005

**Alberta**  
AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT

## WHY DO AG TOURISM CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT?

The basis of the Ag Tourism Cluster Development Project is to bring operators together in specific regions to discover ways of partnering along an ag tourism theme to:

- Increase exposure and awareness to their offerings
- Pool marketing resources
- And ultimately experience increased income at the farm gate

Why would you get involved? 3 Ways to think like a consumer:

- 1) Say you pass by a sign on the highway everyday for Joe's Jams and Jellies. Everyday you say to yourself, "One of these days I'm going to stop in there". Cluster activities like a "driving tour event" might just be that call-to-action that a customer needs to finally stop by.
- 2) Say there's a neat place that you've heard about out in the country but you're not exactly sure how to get there. Cluster activities that include directions and maps to ag tourism operations make it easy for the customer to find you without worrying that they might get lost.
- 3) Say you bought the best saskatoon pie or bison jerky you've ever had at last week's ag tourism cluster event. Now the customer knows where to find the product when they want it again. They may even know how to get to the place and may have even met the farmer or processor. Clusters can help you build loyalty with your customers!

**PINCHER CREEK/PORCUPINE HILLS CLUSTER**  
PARTNERS AND PEDDLERS COME TOGETHER

In true Ag Tourism Cluster style, the "Sierra West Peddler's Market" is a partnership event that takes place at the Lonesome Pine Ranch near Pincher Creek. This one-day event is a perfect fit at Lonesome Pine Ranch to accompany the existing Sierra West Antique store that is open year round. A partnership of about 15 peddlers came out and set up tables to sell their goods. You could find anything from farm direct-marketed products to jewelry. The vendors were charged \$25 rent for their spot & table. This money went straight to use in marketing the event. They provided a free pancake breakfast and a live band offered entertainment. The market was run once in the spring of 2004 and again in the fall. For the first run of the market about 300 people attended. The second run in September, which added ranch roping, attracted over 350 people. Site host, Ginny Donahue, sees a lot of opportunity to expand the one-day event into much more, and further showcase area operators.

*Make it happen!*

### CHALLENGES

Weather was the most challenging aspect of the first run of the event. The horse and wagon rides were cancelled due to poor early spring weather.

### SOLUTIONS/CHANGES

Ginny rented tents and gave the vendors an option of being under the tents for an increased rental price. Contingency plans for things like weather are a must in event planning.

From the first event to the second there were some additions and changes. One key change was to combine the Peddler's Market with the existing Sierra West Festival, extending the weekend market into a week long event creating even more impact. Plans to incorporate a rodeo with a cattle drive, competitions with prizes, cowboy poetry & campfire experiences are in the works for 2005.

### PARTNERSHIPS

Along with the vendors, the cowboys will be an important partnership in the events evolution, providing additional attractions and activities like the rodeo.

### NEXT STEPS

Now is the time to "Rally the Troops" and plan for the expansion into a week long rodeo and Peddler's Market for 2005. The market will go ahead on September 3 and 4, 2005.

### CONTACT

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The “Country Soul Stroll” is a flagship ag tourism cluster initiative in Alberta. With only about 2 months to plan, the group went to work on getting their first self-guided driving route event off the ground and came through with roaring results. That was back in July 2003. Now with 2005 upon us, the “Country Soul Stroll” has progressed and evolved to be a much anticipated annual event in Sturgeon County, just outside of Edmonton.

The event is set for a weekend in July and allows customers to see and do things at a variety of farms, from berries to potatoes to bison. They charge \$7 per person or \$25 per carload with children under 2 for free. The Stroll uses a colorful brochure to give out valuable information including a map, places to eat and a brief write-up about each destination so consumers can plan their route.

The “Country Soul Stroll” now has its own website [www.countrysoulstroll.ca](http://www.countrysoulstroll.ca), they have added “Stroll and Stay” overnight packages (a big hit at last year’s event) and have surpassed their goals to grow the event. Organizers were proud to report that the sales of farm products on-site went up, along with “pre-event” sale passes sold through a variety of local outlets.

The group is very proud of what they have created and were recognized by Growing Alberta this past fall with a Growing Alberta Leadership Award (GALA) for Innovation.



The Country Soul Stroll’s Tam Anderson and Cathy Kremer are seen here with their GALA Award along with Sharon Stollery and Bill Reynolds

## Congratulations!

### CHALLENGES

We interviewed Tam Andersen with Prairie Gardens and Greenhouses and she suggested that the hardest thing the group had to deal with is making sure that all the fine details are covered. They have an abundance of new ideas but don’t want to spread themselves too thin by taking on more than they can manage.

### SOLUTIONS

The organizers have worked hard to make sure that they focus on the things they have chosen to add and have made conscious decisions to park good ideas for another time, allowing them to grow at a manageable rate.

### PARTNERSHIPS AND NEXT STEPS

One partnership that is highlighted as a key to success for the “Country Soul Stroll” are the sponsors. Although time consuming to gather them, the additional funds provide income to help the event to grow at the same time providing profile for the sponsors. It’s also a good moral booster for the group! (check their website for a list of sponsors)

The “Country Soul Stroll” team is considering formalizing their structure. Creating a society or a cooperative out of the Soul Stroll would allow for a more formalized structure and help to ensure the long term stability of this fantastic ag tourism cluster initiative. The dates for this year’s event are July 23 and 24, 2005.

### CONTACT

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## FUNDING OPTIONS

Looking for financial support for your network, community or cluster initiatives? Check out these sources:

### AGRICULTURAL INITIATIVES PROGRAM

Funds are provided by the Alberta Lottery Fund to encourage improvements in agriculture, the quality of life in the agricultural community and to facilitate rural development.

For more information go to:  
[www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/rsv593](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/rsv593)  
or call 780.427.4311 (toll free via 310.0000)

### COMMUNITY INITIATIVES PROGRAM

This program will support project-based initiatives in areas such as arts and culture, education, health and recreation.

For more information go to:  
[www.albertalotteryfund.ca/grants/community\\_initiatives.asp](http://www.albertalotteryfund.ca/grants/community_initiatives.asp)  
or call 1.800.642.3855

### CANADIAN RURAL PARTNERSHIP - NETWORKING INITIATIVE

The Networking Initiative funds three types of rural community projects aimed at building community capacity: learning events, partnerships and networks.

For more information go to:  
[www.rural.gc.ca/programs/networking\\_e.phtml](http://www.rural.gc.ca/programs/networking_e.phtml)  
or call 1.888.781.2222

The Porcupine Hills region of Alberta has long been referred to as one of the province's best kept secrets. The area runs southwest of Claresholm between 2 major highways. It is located "off the beaten path" and holds a mystique that only the rugged, rolling Alberta ranchlands can provide. Not only is this a secret to many Albertans, but local town officials and businesses were also unfamiliar with what was in their own backyard. To aid in the discovery of this hidden gem, a group of guest ranch operators came together to build awareness of the area and their operations. The awareness group developed a FAM (familiarization) tour as a way to showcase their offerings. The "Porcupine Hills FAM tour" invited Travel Alberta representatives, town councilors and local businesses to come experience their operations. The awareness group's FAM tour has run twice now and may go again in the future. They had 16 people both times and felt that this was a successful turnout as the participants were key in helping to spread the word about the area.

*Keep spreading the word!*

#### CHALLENGES

Judy Lucus, of Lucasia Guest Ranch, was one of the organizers of the FAM tours. Judy noted that one of the

challenges was hoping for certain key people to attend only to learn they were unable to make it.

#### SOLUTIONS

The group made changes to the timing of the event by moving to a daytime event rather than an evening event. They found this change was appreciated by those attending.

#### PARTNERSHIPS

A key partnership identified by Judy was with the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber paid for the meal on the first FAM, which helped them get the event off the ground. Another partnership identified by Shaunere Lane from Brown Creek Ranch Vacations, was that of the operators themselves coming together and working towards a common goal.

#### NEXT STEPS

They are thinking about doing a progressive FAM tour for the next one, where they visit several places over the course of a meal, having a course at each place. Interesting idea!

#### CONTACT

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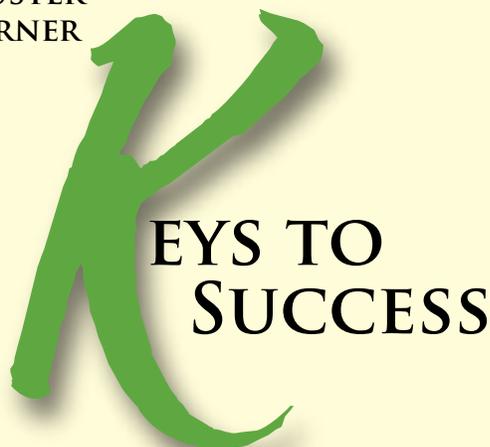
### THE ALBERTA AG TOURISM SCENE IS CREATING QUITE THE BUZZ . . . DO WE KNOW HOW TO CONTACT YOU?

The Ag Tourism team will be contacting operators in the next few weeks by telephone to update your business information on our Ag Tourism Directory. The update process will be completely painless and hopefully . . . a little Fun! Just a heads-up so our phone call is not a total surprise. Thank you!

*Web Watch:*

Check out [www.visitthecountry.ca](http://www.visitthecountry.ca)

#### CLUSTER CORNER



#### TIPS ON MEETING AGENDAS

The fundamental plan for a meeting should include:

- Call to order
- Approval of the agenda
- New business
- Unfinished business
- Assigned tasks
- Reports from committees
- Time limits

#### GENERAL TIPS

- Places key items for discussion at the beginning
- Start and end meeting with topics that unite the group
- Keep to the time limits set out by the agenda

## AG TOURISM CLUSTERS BEYOND BORDERS RYDER LAKE RAMBLE

Back in 1998 a group from Ryder Lake, British Columbia came together with the idea of creating a one-day farm and garden tour. This group of twelve operators annually provides to visitors a look into the rural BC landscape and an area that has become a hotbed of ag tourism activity. Many of the operators are mainstays on the “Ryder Lake Ramble”, but there are a few new changes or additions every year. In its first year, the Ramble attracted 300 visitors. As word spread the event grew with each passing year and now boasts around 1200 participants. This year the Ramble will be 2 days and will take place on June 11 and 12, 2005.

One of the interesting and unique attractions of the Ramble is Canada’s most rare orchid, the Phantom Orchid. It grows in the valleys and you can see it in its natural habitat.

### *Lesson Learned*

After the first few years the group decided to raise the price of the Ramble, recognizing that there was good value in what they were offering and that they needed to ensure they covered all their costs.

Marketing for the event has evolved over the years as well. Originally the group used posters to advertise, but came to realize that they were ineffective. Signage has become a priority and efforts have been made to increase the sign program to run as far as Vancouver.

They have also taken part in an annual parade. During the parade they handed out bookmarks as advertising. This marketing idea has been effective for the group and they intend to continue to use it as a tool.

### *Still to come*

The “Ryder Lake Ramble” organizers are currently looking into opening up volunteer opportunities to the local high school. This would cut down on some of the tasks that operators have to do and give the high school kids an opportunity to get community volunteer hours that are required for them to graduate.

For more information on the “Ryder Lake Ramble” contact the Chilliwack Visitor Information Centre at 604.858.8121 or 604.858.7089 or call toll free to 1.800.567.9535.

## STAKEHOLDER SPOTLIGHT

### *Travel Alberta - In Province*

Travel Alberta In-Province offers a variety of services to Alberta’s tourism industry including: marketing expertise and programs, packaging knowledge, service and training sophistication and assistance in preparing emerging products, like ag tourism initiatives, for targeted markets.

Travel Alberta In-Province Alberta is divided into 3 areas; Alberta North, Central and South. Each area has a regional marketing director. Nancy Frost-Smith is the director for Alberta South.

Nancy has participated in the Southwest Calgary and Porcupine Hills/Pincher Creek Ag Tourism Clusters. When asked what her role has been in regards to the clusters, she stated that it is to link operators to the variety of marketing services available from Travel Alberta, primarily acting as a resource for market ready products that need to be communicated to the public. She also suggested that her role is to educate the operators about what Travel Alberta does and doesn’t do. Nancy’s experience and expertise in the tourism industry has been very valuable to these groups.

The most challenging thing about being a stakeholder for Nancy has to do with helping groups to see that their efforts don’t always come with immediate results. Commitment is required to see the long term benefits of partnerships and cooperative marketing ventures, but in time they can pay off in a big way. Patience and persistence are key.

In speaking about the clusters she has worked with, she said these areas are “rich with ag tourism resources. This initiative (the cluster program) enables partners to talk about a common goal” and that “we all learn from one another.”

### CONTACTS:

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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 1.866.882.7677

