

Ag Tourism CLUSTER

Ag Tourism news from around the province and beyond

Bringing Alberta to you!

News

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Alberta
AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND
RURAL DEVELOPMENT

WHAT THE HECK IS AN AG TOURISM CLUSTER ANYWAY?

The Ag Tourism Cluster Development project is an initiative that started in Alberta in the spring of 2003. The staff from **Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development** along with Travel Alberta and many other local stakeholders worked together in 3 pilot regions of the province to develop Ag Tourism Clusters. The basis of these clusters were 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

To date, the pilot region clusters (Pincher Creek/Porcupine Hills, Southwest Calgary, and Edmonton Region) have launched into some very exciting and innovative projects and are both meeting

and exceeding goals. The Red Deer area has also jumped on the bandwagon, kicking off a new cluster in their region just this spring.

A huge round of applause goes out to both the operators and the local stakeholders (County and M.D. staff, Tourism Destination Regions, Community Futures, Destination Marketing Organizations, and more) who have built these initiatives from the grass roots up. Kudos to all involved!

This newsletter is the first of which will bring you the “news and views” from the Ag Tourism Clusters around the province and beyond. Take a moment, grab a coffee and learn from your neighbors ... you never know what great ideas you might pick up that you can adapt for your own area!

The “**Taste of the High Country**” was an event that showcased producers and their products from Southwest Alberta. From meat to berries the event had much to explore. The idea behind it came from the producers wanting to know what their customers wanted. Rather than the group of producers taking their products to the urban market, they brought the urban market to them. The producers wanted to make contacts and develop relationships with these customers. Guests were encouraged to bring their coolers and stock up on product while at the event. The producers offered “tasters” or samples of their fine products for 50 cents during the event. The recipes for the various tasters were also available to the visitor. The group ran this event twice this past year, once in the summer and once in the fall. Attendance was good for both “**Taste of the High Country**” events. About 600 people came out for the August 8th date!



Yummy!

CHALLENGES

Trying to get busy people together. Colleen Cyr of the Bloomin’ Inn, suggested that sometimes it felt like it might be easier to just do things herself because the event was at her establishment and she was the main organizer.

SOLUTIONS

It helped that the people involved in the event were all on the same page, and had a common goal. This made it easier to get things coordinated. Many hands make for lighter work.

PARTNERSHIPS AND NEXT STEPS

Most valuable partnership recognized by Colleen was that with the Chamber of Commerce. The producers see the Chamber as becoming more involved as they try to get local products on restaurants menus and in the freezers of retail outlets. Is the Chamber of Commerce in your area a potential partner?

CONTACT

Colleen Cyr, Bloomin’ Inn, (403) 627-5829.

Email: bloominn@telusplanet.net

The "Red Deer County Country FAM Tour" (FAM stands for "familiarization tour") was an event to help the local operators get acquainted with each other. Over 20 operators participated in the tour. The places visited included u-picks, working farms, a zoo, a creamery and B&B's. The key goal of the tour was for the operators to see each other's operations and become more informed. This would build a basis for operators to work together in partnership and be better able to cross promote each other. Another goal was to see if the tour could be made into something the public could take part in. The one

time event took place over two days in June 2003.

Keep Exploring!

CHALLENGES

Everyone was energetic and excited to get this going. The operators drove the route to get the timing down before the



event and they had great County support including the cost of transportation. The next steps will be challenging as the group gets ready to take the project to the next level.

PARTNERSHIPS

The key partnership in this project as seen by Debbie Bonnett, Economic Development Manager with Red Deer County, was the relationship between the operators themselves. *They're a talented bunch!*

NEXT STEPS

The Red Deer Ag Tourism Cluster is new as of this spring. Exciting rumbles were coming out of fall meetings and it's possible a driving route aimed at the public may be in the works following more meetings in late 2004. Stay tuned...!

CONTACT

Debbie Bonnett, Economic Development Manager, Red Deer County, (403) 357-2368. Email: dbonnett@reddeercountry.ab.ca

Recently there has been talk of a possible FAM (familiarization) tour in the Calgary Southwest Ag Tourism Cluster. Dave Poulsen of the Bar U Ranch is a strong local stakeholder along with Monique La Blanc with the Town of Black Diamond, and Carol Robinson from the M.D. of Foothills. The FAM will be aimed at ag tourism operators themselves, and media, to spread the word about the great features of the region. Those involved are thinking the FAM will be the first of two or three. Another hope of the group is the potential development of a driving route event for the public. Details are building and interest is gaining in anticipation of these new plans.

Keep the ball rolling!



NEXT STEPS

"Pick Something and Run with it" - Gathering details and getting things in line for the FAM tour is what's ahead. The proposed time of year is late May and early June. Finding all the ag tourism operators and timing, along with advertising the FAM is on the agenda for the cluster.

CONTACT

Dave Poulsen, Bar U Ranch, (403) 395-2163. Email: dave.poulsen@pc.gc.ca



"WELL-ROUNDED" IDEA



Why not add to your driving route with a "bale art" contest? That's just what The Rural Ramble in Ontario has done. The contest is open to anyone in the area and drums up significant interest from both contest entrants (especially with a prize

of \$1500!), and those who drive the Ramble. There were big bales and small bales - round bales and square bales. They were used to make tractors, wagons, farmers, a pig, a watering can and flower pot - all with signs advertising the Rural Ramble Event.

What a great way to advertise a driving route event and create buzzzzz!



The Edmonton Region Ag Tourism Cluster has had a good year and half of working together. Sub-committees have held a number of successful events for the second year including the "Country Soul Stroll", the "Fur and Feathers Farm Tour", and "Harvest Festival of Foods". This year's cluster activities expanded to include "Stony Plain's West Fest" cross-promotion, and the "Country Christmas" packaging promotion. The group's rapport and confidence has grown along with their ambitions. This spring a new initiative call "Visit the Country" was started by a sub-committee dubbed the Edmonton Region Ag Tourism Action Committee (or ERATACs).

"Visit the Country" is a full color driving guide and website for ag tourism attractions, events and services in the greater Edmonton region. Operators in Parkland, Sturgeon, Lamont, Strathcona and Leduc counties were offered the chance to take part in this informative magazine for as little as \$50.

To be on the shelves by March of 2005, this magazine will be accompanied by postcards promoting the magazine and website. The planned distribution of the 12 000 full color magazines is to visitor information centers, the AMA and other related tourism destinations in and around Edmonton. Fifty thousand postcards will boast of the great ag tourism opportunities around Edmonton and will be distributed on an even wider scale than the magazines.

Keep up the great work!

CHALLENGES

The biggest problem the group encountered was the awareness and understanding by the operators of the need for this new opportunity.



SOLUTIONS

They decided to divide and conquer and approached the people currently involved in other ag tourism cluster projects first.

CHANGES

The group evolved bringing in more operators on the committee in addition to the area stakeholders. As well they started to do presentations in each individual county to expose the program to more operators.

PARTNERSHIPS

The most valuable partnership recognized by Erica Robins is with Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. She says that Alberta Ag staff brings great ideas and important experience to the table.

NEXT STEPS

The Visit the Country Driving Guide is destined to go to print very soon to be on shelves in March of 2005.

CONTACT

Erica Robins, Coordinator, Business Development and Marketing, Strathcona County, (780) 464-8259.
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CLUSTER CORNER



TIPS ON GROUP DISCUSSIONS

- Allow all members to have input and feel part of the decision
- Before moving on to the next topic, get everyone to "sum-up" there views in one sentence
- Take a quick survey, show of hands, after each short discussion
- Break into smaller groups to help break the ice and encourage ideas

GROUND RULES FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS

- No ideas should be criticized
- All ideas are acceptable
- Build on existing ideas
- The more ideas the better
- Make sure all ideas that are mentioned are recorded

AG TOURISM CLUSTERS BEYOND BORDERS

THE RURAL RAMBLE

One of the Ag Tourism Events that has been used as a successful example for the Ag Tourism Clusters in Alberta has been the **Rural Ramble**. Located in the Northumberland County of Ontario, the Rural Ramble started in 1999 and has only missed one year, 2001, because of Hoof & Mouth disease. This self-guided driving tour is held yearly at the end of August, with the goal being to offer an opportunity to learn about rural life and the importance of agriculture. A small group of farmers organized the first **Rural Ramble Farms Tour**.

KEY CONTACTS

Key partnerships were created almost immediately with organizations such as 4-H clubs, Junior Farmers, Church and Community Groups, local B&B's, tourism advisory committees and Stewardship Councils. Along the Ramble attendees can find all kinds of things to do and see. Demonstrations, hayrides, mazes, educational exhibits and hands-on activities are among the many wonders to discover at the more than 20 sites.

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Over the years the Ramble has made only slight changes to the running of the event. They are always looking for new places to include and have started using not only agricultural

working farms but museums and old farmsteads in their weekend long event. They attract international visitors and have increased their attendance to over 4000. Last year they did evaluations with a sampling of their visitors and 100% of them stated that they would come back to the **Rural Ramble**. As well, last year a local celebrity, James Gordon of the CBC's "Home Town Tunes" classed the tour as song worthy. He produced a 12 song promotional CD that is available for purchase.

ESTABLISHED!

The Rural Ramble is now a widely recognizable event in the province of Ontario. It has made a valuable contribution to the tourism industry and the farming community in the county and the entire province. "**Rural Ramble Week**" is proclaimed in the County to its citizens and marks the week of the event. This year brought the Rural Ramble recognition from the National stage. The Ramble won the Award of Excellence for Agricultural Awareness and Education from Agriculture and Agri-food Canada. This award gives the Ramble new energy and allows more exposure of the event throughout the country.

Already planned for summer 2005, the **Rural Ramble** will surely be another huge success.

Visit: www.ruralramble.com

STAKEHOLDER SPOTLIGHT

Ag Fieldman Profile

The Red Deer Ag Tourism Cluster has a unique resource in the form of an Ag Fieldman as a stakeholder. Art Preachuk has been involved with an Ag Service Board led event called the Enterprising Ag Tour and also helped the cluster put together their FAM tour. Both tours were about learning what was around the area and who your neighbours are.

For his role in ag tourism he feels that the major things he has to offer are advice and time to help with planning. Another link to the ag tourism sector in Red Deer County, is that the Ag Fieldmen are now working under a new

directive for "Ag Education and Awareness". This new program could potentially mean monetary support for things like promotion for cluster projects that also have ag awareness as a goal.

Art has a very positive outlook on ag tourism development in Red Deer County. Obviously Art's extensive experience with the agricultural scene in Red Deer County is a tremendous asset to the cluster.

Have you contacted the Ag Fieldman in your area?

For more information on Ag Tourism development in Alberta go to www.agtourism.ca or contact an Ag-Info Centre New Venture Specialist at 1-866-882-7677

