



Bringing together ideas, people and resources... going beyond the red barn

Ag Tourism



A Consolidated Guide to Ag Tourism Cluster Projects in North America

Alberta

September 8, 2006

Mr. Bill Reynolds
Leader Ag Tourism Initiative
Rural Business Diversification Branch
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RE: FINAL REPORT

Dear Mr. Reynolds:

In accordance with the terms of engagement, the final report for the Consolidated Guide to Ag Tourism Cluster Projects in North America has been completed. The report was developed with assistance of MIH Consulting and the efforts of the individual Ag Tourism project coordinators and stakeholders who kindly participated in the interviews.

In 2005 Shirley Damberger, MIH Consulting administered the initial project research, which included interviewing eighteen pre-selected ag tourism project coordinators and stakeholders across North America. Through these interviews, the Alberta Ag Tourism team was able to identify four representatives to present in Alberta at the Harvest the Talent Grow the Cluster, one-day conference showcasing ag tourism cluster successes.

In the summer of 2006, as a follow up to the 2005 preliminary interviews, Zapisocky Consulting re-interviewed thirteen of the original eighteen participants to create an updated report highlighting key areas of partnership and process development. Through this study, it is hoped that this group of participants and others will come together, continue to communicate and learn from each other, thereby creating, strengthening and enhancing North America's ag tourism products

Yours truly,

Principal, Zapisocky Consulting

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AGRITOUR

The Lower Ottawa Valley, Ontario, Canada



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Entering its' tenth year of operation in 2005, Agritour has become a successful self-guided driving tour through Eastern Ontario. This event takes place rain or shine on two consecutive weekends in September where farmers, 'welcome the public to open house visits'.

The initial conception of Agritour arose through a partnership between a College in Eastern Ontario and farmers from the surrounding five counties who desired to promote non-traditional agriculture via on-farm visits, under an Agritour banner. Over the years, the total number of farm operations has included anywhere from ten to eighteen sites. Although Agritour does not formally track the number of visitors, individual farm sites estimate having anywhere from 300 to well over a thousand visitors pass through their gates during the two weekends of the event.

For the 11th year of operation, Agritour has expanded to represent all five counties, nineteen farms and remains the longest running, bilingual, driving tour event in Canada.

Planning

- Initially Agritour encompassed a single weekend visit to participating farms, however as the number of participating farms and visitors grew, Agritour expanded to encompass two weekends
- The majority of Agritour farms are only open to the public during this event
- In the first four years of Agritour's conception, initial planning meetings required the participation of all operators, who routinely met once a month
- Because the group has been in operation for over a decade, the group feels it has more direction and knowledge over its planning process. Subsequently, meetings often occur only four times a year as the group, "knows where it is going and things fall into place"
- The four main meetings take place in
 - Winter - to present final budget from the previous year's event, to elect officers (chairperson, vice-chairperson, a recorder, a treasurer), to present the current years budget and to begin organizing for the new Agritour event
 - Spring – to finalize Agritour activities
 - Late Summer – to hold press conference
 - Late Fall – review the event, divide surplus funds and contract for a coordinator for the next year's event

- The majority of Agritour's meetings are now hosted at local farms participating in the event
- In the initial years, the local college was interested in spearheading the initiative. Through supporting Agritour, the college was able to maintain its mandate of promoting French language and culture within the area. Subsequently, for the first year the college provided a coordinator for \$2500 and meeting rooms
- In the second year of operation, economic development loaned a worker to help coordinate Agritour for two to three years
- From the eighth year of Agritour and into year eleven (2006), Agritour receives coordination help from Ontario's French Federation of Agriculture (L'Union Culturelle des Franco-Ontariennes or UCFO)
- Currently, the UCFO provides a coordinator who works approximately one day per week on Agritour
- The majority of the coordinators duties include:
 - I. Meetings
 - Organization and notification of all meetings
 - Keeping track of minutes and attendance
 - Drafting of budget for the winter meeting
 - Presentation of potential media purchases
 - Coordination of all press releases
 - Organizing the press conference meeting
 - Drafting and editing of any write ups
 - Printing and distribution of flyers
 - Delegating work to volunteers
 - II. Finances
 - Prepare budgets
 - Receive all monies
 - Make all payments
 - Disburse any monies remaining at the end of Agritour

Event Logistics

- Route logistics

- A logo and large signs were created for Agritour. Farms receive four signs and are encouraged to place signs at any major intersections leading to their farm.
- Signs are three feet high and four feet wide and are very durable (made out of coroplast)
- Signs are put up for about three weeks prior to the event
- The signs are paid for from membership fees, ultimately Agritour owns the signs and once an operator stops participating in the event, the signs are returned to the group

- Operational issues

- No overall admission fee is charged for the event, however most farms charge a modest admission fee onto their site
- If the farms choose to charge admission (\$2-\$6), then value-added activities must be added (*see creating a diverse mix for examples*)

- 25% of participating farms do not charge admission to their sites (often the handful of farms that are open year round)
 - Although certain farms do not charge gate admission, they may still charge admission into special activity areas once on site (family fun zone, maze, etc.,)
 - In 2000, a formalized list of standards was created for those operations interested in joining. This list includes:
 - Is the farm signed?
 - Is the farm clean and free of old equipment?
 - Are fences in good condition that will keep animals safe from visitors?
 - Is there adequate off road parking, washroom facilities and washing stations?
 - Has on site water been tested, do you have liability and do you know the health regulations for serving food?
 - To encourage on-site neatness a checklist is also provided highlighting ways to improve a site. This list, created by organizers includes putting up extra signage for washrooms and parking, using crowd control measure and providing ample parking
 - Operators who join the event are encouraged to develop a website (if they already do not have one), create business cards, provide a designated area for brochures and donate product for promotional events
 - Visitors can bring their own food for picnics as organizers feel permitting picnicking helps make the day a family event
 - The tour covers a large area, approximately 110km east to west and 100km north to south, therefore, farms that *cluster* together (5-6 farms located in close proximity) in outlying areas were found to increase their visitation
- ***Tracking participation***
- Over the years Agritour has changed the way they charge admission, directly relating to the accessibility of tracking participation numbers
 - Year one of the event had no admission charge and no formal way of tracking visitation numbers
 - Year two to year five implemented a passport system that included a listing of all the farm sites and a place for suggestions and comments. A fully stamped passport could be entered in a draw for prizes. Each farm donated a set amount of product, which was to be used for prizes, and served as a way of tracking visitors. The passport was dropped after three years as the cost for tabulation became too high
 - After year five, Agritour charged a general admission for adults, children and families which was not well received
 - Finally, for the last few years of operation, the group has gone back to a passport system where some farms charge admission and others are free. Completed passports can be entered into a draw, helping to track participants

Customer Focus

- Creating a diverse mix

- All farms are encouraged to have on site activities. Examples include: on site chefs, regional cuisine, storytellers, painters, wood carvers, musicians and guided or self guided tours. Organizers find on-site activities add interest and create a more personable, meaningful and interesting experience
- Local artisans display their work and do demonstrations to create a fresh look to the tour
- Each year the group finds a new operator to participate in Agritour which keeps the event slightly different year to year
- Types of farms that have participated in Agritour include:
 - Maple Sugar Bush Farm
 - Wineries
 - Duck, lama, deer, bison, emu, sheep and fish farm
 - Organic farm
 - Orchards
 - Activity farms (mazes, wagon rides, family fun area)
 - Farm machinery museum
- Because a large portion of visitors are from either French or English speaking backgrounds, Agritour finds it valuable to have brochures, press releases, guided tours, signage, etc. written in both languages to represent the needs of their diverse clientele

- Regional Cuisine

- During the first few years, members of Agritour and other invited, area farms hosted a food festival in May. Each farm had a local chef prepare samplings of their products that were then sold to the public through tickets. The event was held in a large hall and extra tents were put up to accommodate seating and booths. The event gave visitors the opportunity to talk with both the local chefs and farm operators about the food products and farm operations
- The food festival was extremely well received, however it was not continued due to the difficulty of organizing a large event
- During the last few years another food festival has started at a nearby college. Agritour operators are taking advantage of this event to promote their product, however Agritour is not the organizing body behind this event

Budget, Fund Raising and Sponsorship

- Agritour's budget steadily remains between \$15 000 and \$20 000
- Organizers found initial costs to be highest in the formative years of planning and implementation of the event
- Funding comes from membership fees (approximately one-third of budget) and sponsors (approximately \$10 000). Sponsors include provincial organizations,

- counties, chamber of commerce, local townships, occasional businesses, colleges and government grants
- UCFO maintains Agritour's website at a cost of \$500/year, paid for by membership fees

Promotion

- Media

- The group has tried to cultivate the media from year one to gain maximum exposure at a minimum expense. In the initial years, Agritour roused the media's attention simply by promoting the uniqueness of the event
- Having a new farm participate in Agritour each year helps give the media something new to report on
- Sending out press releases as milestones in planning are met helps to remind media of the event, arouse their interest and keep media informed
- Organizers host a press conference each summer at an Agritour member's farm. All media personnel are invited to the conference and each Agritour operator brings food products which are served to the press (wine, apple butter, cider, pate, tomato salad, etc.,)

- Publicity

- 'Get out' to get your message out - participate at community events and set up a booth to promote your event, arouse interest and recruit volunteers
- Because a handful of Agritour farms are open year round, these operators promote Agritour at their own special events

- Advertising

- The group has created a large green and black, bilingual brochure containing a short description of each farm, location, web page, phone number, admission price and area map
- Most flyers are distributed through local papers and target the five surrounding regions
- 150 000 flyers were printed and distributed in 2005 at a cost of \$11 000
- For 2007, the group is considering increasing their brochure size so they will be able to sell ad space to help pay for printing and distribution costs

- Group tours/packages/cross promotion

- By providing some advertising space in their brochure, Agritour promotes local B&B's and farmers' markets (at a reduced fee since the markets are only opened for limited hours during Agritour)
- Agritour operators make a point of recommending participating B&B's to visitors
- Farms that are open year round often carry brochures highlighting local attractions, events and activities found in the area

- Prizes/contests

- To help entice visitors to fill out passports, each farm will ask a written question about their site in the Agritour flyer. Answers are made available at respective operations and once visitors answer five questions, they can enter their passport for a prize
- Participating farms donate two \$25 dollar vouchers which are used as prizes for the passport draw
- Three winners receive \$275, \$250 and \$225 in gift certificates

Membership

- There is no group liability coverage. Each farm must have their own coverage
- Each participating farm pays a \$300 annual membership fee
- When looking for new farms to join, Agritour ensures new farms being considered to join are clean, well organized, interesting, have been in business for a few years and represent non-traditional farms
- Currently, farms interested in joining the event must be referred by an Agritour member
- In 2005, Agritour attempted to create some standards of participation to increase potential and existing operator buy-in and accountability. Participating farms now sign a code of ethics, helping ensure operators know their roles and what they must contribute to the event
- Farm operators who only open their doors to the public during this event are encouraged to visit with those farms that regularly welcome visitors to their sites. Farms having more experience working with the public are also invited to speak to the whole group offering suggestions and sharing words of wisdom
- All Agritour operators are expected to participate in meetings and commit to working with Agritour planning committees over a three year period
- Failure to participate in meetings and committees (over a three year period) can result in the removal from Agritour for the balance of the year and a forfeit of any fees paid for that year

Final Thoughts

- “Meeting our standard has become the greatest downfall of the organization. Because no initial guidelines were written in terms of farm-site standards required to participate in Agritour, in general it became a challenge to deny certain farms from participating in the formative years.” Organizers have now created recruitment strategies, a code of ethics and a formalized list of standards to help alleviate this issue
- Agritour organizers often found once a farm operator paid their membership fees, they felt everything would be done for them. Without having a fulltime coordinator it becomes difficult to find people able to devote their time to doing small jobs. Subsequently, the group is currently working on incorporating a higher fee structure to those members who want to participate in the event but cannot easily contribute their time to planning the details of the event, attending meetings, etc.
- Of the eleven original participating farms, only one farm has consistently remained a part of Agritour from year one. The prevalence of operator turnover has helped the group learn how vital it is to be open and adaptable to change in order to keep the event successfully running

CIRCLE FARM TOUR

Fraser County, British Columbia, Canada



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In 2003, the community of Agassiz-Harrison Mills started their own ag tourism initiative called the Mighty Fraser Country Circle Farm Tour. The Agassiz community developed a Circle Farm Tour template, marketing brochure and rallied the support of a number of operators and partners. Following the lead started by Agassiz, both the neighboring communities of Chilliwack and Abbotsford decided to build on the Circle Farm Tour Product and brochure template. Rather than “re-inventing the wheel,” community organizers developed a unified marketing program for ag tourism products with a regional scope.

Tourism Abbotsford and Tourism Chilliwack have played a strong role in developing the Circle Farm Tour brand to represent six community regions (Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Agassiz, Langley, Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows and Mission). Each community has created a unique and independent Circle Farm ‘tour’ and brochure connecting between eight and twelve operators on a self-guided driving route. Through the support of the partners from the six involved communities, over sixty Ag tourism operations and the regional tourism body (Vancouver Coast & Mountains), the Circle Farm Tour program will celebrate its first full year of operation in October 2006.

Planning

- Six communities who make up Circle Farm Tour are included because of their close geographic proximity to one another and diverse ag tourism product
- Organizers do not believe the Tour will grow to increase any other communities
- The Fraser Valley is a diverse area and by cooperatively working together at a regional level, organizers are able to promote a huge range of product and experiences to the visitor
- Regional tourism and/or economic development offices provide staff (executive directors and marketers) to represent each community. Office staff work towards the interests of their own community at the micro level (working with operators, printing and distributing their community brochure, etc.,) and the interests of the Circle Farm Tour brand at the macro level (regional marketing, planning, coordination, etc.,)
- Organizers endeavor to raise the operators’ level of professionalism and customer service skills through education. Ideally, organizers want to create a tourism product that can attract visitors and is sustainable for the operators, community and Circle Farm Tour brand

- By pooling resources Circle Farm Tour organizers were able to apply for a one time grant through Vancouver Coast & Mountain's provincial community foundation program
- Organizers successfully applied for marketing funds by matching dollars (1:1) and leveraged \$20 000
- Initial money was used to launch a Circle Farm Tour website, develop the brand and grow the program

Event Logistics

- Route logistics

- Road signage is a fairly political and challenging issue for the Fraser Valley area as each community can do slightly different things within their road signage legislation
- The province has released a new provincial signage program and so far organizers in Chilliwack have not been able to put up Circle Farm Tour signage
- If signage is put up, organizers need to coordinate with other operators and the six involved communities to ensure the signs make sense in terms of the larger Circle Farm Tour brand
- The six communities are within a close proximity so visitors can follow the driving route of one specific community or visit operations located in other Circle Farm Tour communities
- Travel distance between communities ranges from approximately 20km to 60km

- Operational issues

- All operators are in some way related to agriculture and the area's farming heritage
- There is no admission fee to participate in the driving route, however certain operations charge additional fees for tours, entrance fees and value-added activities
- Operators are either event based, have seasonal hours or are open year round
- Each community's brochure includes a map, contact information, operator description and a list of special events and accommodation options located along the route
- Operators are responsible for ensuring their site is customer friendly and has available amenities
- In British Columbia, the provincial organization BCATA (British Columbia Agritourism) developed a BC AgriTourism Code of Standards to promote the growth in BC's Agritourism industry and 'raise the bar' for Agritourism across the province. BCATA's Quality Assurance Program (QAP) is designed to raise the quality of Agritourism products and services in BC by certifying those operators who meet the minimum quality standards
- Although participating Circle Farm Tour operators are not required to be certified by QAP, in the future organizers plan to highlight those

Circle Farm Tour operators who are certified in the program with a QAP logo decal that would be used in the brochure and on site

- ***Tracking participation***

- Operators are asked to track participation numbers and organizers will collect this information in October 2006

Customer Focus

- ***Creating a diverse mix***

- Because Circle Farm Tour is a joint initiative, visitors are offered a wide assortment of things to see and do (sixty plus operators)
- Operations include: historical/heritage museums and farms, nurseries, orchards, u-picks, wineries, equestrian facilities, farms with exotic and traditional animals, farmers' markets, apiaries, corn mazes, dairy farms, restaurants and bistros, bakeries, organic farms, etc.,
- Activities/special events include: rodeos, farm tours, trout fishing, corn festivals, behind the scenes curator tours, petting zoos, horseback riding, afternoon tea, pottery demonstrations, hay rides, a tour of a cheese operation, agrifair, etc.,

- ***Regional Cuisine***

- A culinary ag tourism operator (Vista Doro) included on the Langley Tour offers on-farm retail and a cooking studio featuring the areas finest chefs who create menus incorporating many local products
- Vista Doro also works with a non-for profit BC based organization called Farm Folk City Folk (www.ffcf.bc.ca) to host their "Feast of Fields" fundraiser event. For \$75 guests receive a linen napkin and wine glass and participate in a "wondering picnic," tasting the very best of BC from sixty participating chefs, wineries, breweries, farms and food artisans. 650 participants attended the event in 2005

Budget, Fundraising and Sponsorship

- The annual marketing budget for the Tour is approximately \$24 000
- As a group, coordinators use the marketing budget to create an introductory brochure highlighting each community (on separate panels), a website and lure brochures that drive people to the website (distributed in Vancouver and surrounding areas), participate in trade shows, and for purchasing individual brochure racks for each host operator involved in the Circle Farm Tour
- Organizers try to keep funding as simple as possible by creating a separate marketing fund each community must contribute a prescribed amount to and by charging operators the same annual fee across the board
- In addition to host site membership fees, each community must annually contribute \$4000 into the separate marketing fund or 'pot' (the \$24 000 marketing budget)
- Each community is responsible for generating their own printing and distribution costs (revenue from membership fees, fundraising and/or corporate sponsorship)

- If communities are not able to generate enough revenue from membership fees or fully cover the annual marketing fee, then the individual community is solely responsible for generating enough funding to offset these costs
- A ‘Corporate Partners’ section is listed on the Circle Farm Tour website under each community. Corporate sponsors include a local airport, golf course, museums and historic sites, a shopping co-op, etc.

Promotion

- Media

- Committee members organized a media launch in June 2006. Media and local dignitaries were invited and the tour received favourable mention in many local newspapers

- Publicity

- Two unique operations featured on Circle Farm Tour include Canada’s largest dahlia grower and Greenhill Acres, an award winning “Best in BC” story book farm

- Advertising

- Lure brochures are distributed more widely to include Vancouver (BC Ferry, restaurants, accommodations, etc.,) and surrounding areas
- Individual brochures are distributed in local VIC (visitor information centers)

- Group tours/packages/cross promotion

- Individual brochure racks are provided for each host site so members are encouraged to cross promote all Circle Farm Tour communities and supporting partners
- Each community offers accommodation options/savings with participating hotels (listed on the website and brochure)

Membership

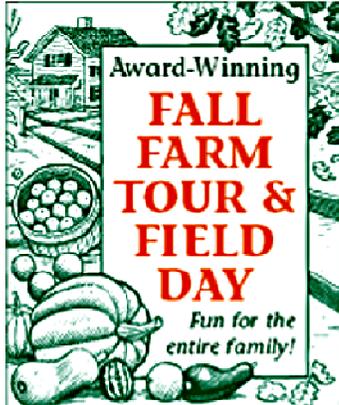
- Participating operators must pay an annual membership fee of \$450
- Operators join Circle Farm Tour to increase on-farm sales and visitation numbers by working within a cooperative marketing program
- When speaking to the operator from Vista Doro, she felt joining the tour was well worth her \$450 in terms of the additional advertising and marketing she now receives under the Circle Farm Tour brand

Final Thoughts

- The executive director from Tourism Chilliwack offers the following suggestion for creating a successful ag tourism event:
 - “...its really important that if it is a community that is trying to do this [an ag tourism guidebook], ensure they can offer quality products and are market ready”
 - “In the end, if it’s a marketing program geared towards tourists, make sure quality standards are in place”
 - “It’s important to have a solid plan and pull partners together to make the program viable; it’s an investment in the community”

FALL FARM TOUR

Fauquier County, Virginia, USA



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Partnership formed in 1996 when the County appointed an independent advisory committee (County Ag Development Advisory Committee) to focus on promotion of and education in the agricultural industry. Taking the lead, the committee partnered with the county extension office, the Soil and Water Conservation Department and the local visitor information center. As the committee continued to evolve, the County formed its' own tourism office to help promote ag tourism within the area.

Fauquier County Fall Farm Tour is the region's annual, self-guided, driving tour event. 2005 will celebrate this award winning events' tenth year of operation, presenting the opportunity for visitors to attend five host sites. Over the years the Fall Farm Tour has moved from a two-day weekend event to a one-day driving tour occurring on a Saturday in September. In 2005, the combined number of participants attending Fall Farm Tour was approximately 1500. The annual event budget remains under \$10 000.

Planning

- One county staff and an administrative assistant provide the majority of support and coordination for each Fall Farm Tour
- Statewide tourism stakeholders meet quarterly to coordinate the date of Fall Farm Tour and to develop cooperative initiatives
- Fall Farm Tour's focus remains on promoting an educational component and showing the public the 'real modern day' farm
- Four years ago, organizers decided to scale the event down from the original two days to one. Organizers made this change for a number of reasons including: the challenge of recruiting enough volunteers to staff the two-day event, decreasing attendance numbers due to overlapping/conflicting area events in the month of September and the impact of exceptionally bad weather forecasts around the event
- Organizers feel having fewer farms involved (those farms involved are located in closer proximity to each other) may help off set the rising cost of gas prices by minimizing driving distances between sites

Event Logistics

- ***Route logistics***
 - Directional signs and banners are stationed at strategic locations throughout the county
 - Standardized gate signage is provided by the county
 - Vineyards included on Fall Farm Tour have year round tours and sites are indicated by grape signs
- ***Operational issues***
 - No admission is charged for the event, however sites may charge for value-added activities
 - Fall Farm Tour is run on a Saturday in September from 10am till 5pm
 - Organizers are often challenged by visitors not always adhering to the specified hours of operations
 - Operations included in the Tour must have adequate onsite amenities such as parking, washrooms, waste disposal, etc., to be deemed appropriate for participation
 - Volunteers are recruited for the event (advertised on the website). Their duties include: acting as 'Greeters' to arriving visitors, counting the number of visitors in each carload, answering questions and directing visitors to parking areas
 - Tour brochures are available at the visitor information center, agriculture development office, cooperative extensions office, county libraries, all Farm Tour stops and on-line
- ***Tracking participation***
 - There is no formal method for tracking participants. Operators and volunteers count numbers of participants arriving on site and administer a basic survey

Customer Focus

- ***Creating a diverse mix***
 - Each operator offers a unique mix of interpretive tours, activities, demonstrations and products, including: farm machinery and equipment demonstrations; animal exhibits; training, dressage and milking demonstrations; hayrides; Grain Art for children; antiques and classic cars; archery demonstrations and tours of wineries, a retired world class Thoroughbred breeding operation and equestrian training center
 - Five farm operations are included in the 2005 Tour: a third generation Family Farm specializing in direct sales of beef and pick your own peaches and pumpkins, a llama farm featuring award winning animals, an equestrian training center, a grain and hay farm and a dairy farm (sells ice cream and has a corn maze)
 - Other operations included on the 2005 tour are: three orchards, two corn mazes, three area farmers' markets and eight vineyards (offering year-round tours)

- Past Farm Tours have included: a Farm Bureau Harvest Parade Food Drive, fiber processing and spinning demonstrations, dog and horse massage therapy and “ask the vet” information sessions, “story telling” in an old farm kitchen, an “old time Country Dance and Dinner”, making your own laundry soap and viewing a portable hen house (the egg mobile)
- ***Regional Cuisine***
 - During Farm Tour, visitors can sample ‘natural, free range’ beef at a beef farm
 - 4-H sells local beef at some of the other participating host sites

Budget, Fundraising and Sponsorship

- The majority of Fall Farm Tour’s funding comes from the county; approximately \$7000 annually which is used for marketing, printing and operational costs
- Both the county extension office and Soil & Water Conservation Department provide in-kind support for the event
- Approximately 10 000 brochures are printed and distributed in the county and Washington suburbs (about one hour south west of Fauquier County)
- Event organizers do not have access to a hotel tax and funding program
- The county tourism office assists with in-kind supplies, labor and joint marketing efforts
- Currently, Fall Farm Tour does not have corporate sponsorship. In years past, sponsors have included farm equipment dealers

Promotion

- ***Media***
 - Over the years, organizers have offered media FAM tours
 - Farm Tour is well support by the local media who often try to do a story before the tour date and interview farmers
- ***Publicity***
 - In 1997, Fall Farm Tour won a Tourism Award from the Commonwealth of Virginia for excellence in cultural tourism
 - Create newspaper, radio, and cable TV news releases for a community access channel (community calendar)
 - The Washington Post often includes seasonal articles on Fall Farm Tour
- ***Advertising***
 - A large portion of brochures are distributed throughout the local elementary school system
- ***Group tours/packages/cross promotion***
 - Several school tours are organized for staff and students to help show educators how agricultural topics can be adapted into their curriculum
 - Fauquier County Farm Bureau is stationed on a Farm Tour site and offers information about seeds used in local crops
 - 4-H youth provide refreshments on the Farm Tour

- Farm Tour organizers work closely with the county tourism office and other departments to cross promote events

Membership

- Handling of liability insurance is each individual operators responsibility and operators must show proof of coverage to participate in Farm Tour
- Operators who are deemed market ready are handpicked by the county staff and asked to participate in event
- Operators are not charged a membership fee to participate
- Operators who participate in the tour often share a general interest in educating the public about agriculture, what's involved in modern production and offer some type of on farm retail
- Over the eleven years of Fall Farm Tour, anywhere from five to ten operators have participated in the event

Final Thoughts

- Fall Farm Tour organizers feel the event has been successful in raising ag awareness within the area, however bad weather has often been a contentious issue, thus organizers continuously “hope for good weather”
- In the future organizers are keeping an eye on some producers (such as sheep, goat and organic associations) who may be starting to form their own specialty tours. Knowing what initiatives likeminded associations are doing may lend itself to partnership opportunities in the future



FAMILY FESTIVAL at the FARM
Frederick County, Maryland, USA

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A partnership was initiated in 2000 through a SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis carried out by the office of economic development (OED). One of the priorities identified by this analysis was the need to focus on farm direct marketing. Furthermore, the partnership also focuses on educating the urban population about where ones' food comes from and promotes a deeper understanding of agriculture as a way of life. The partnership includes members of the Frederick County Board of County Commissioners, the Business Development Advisory Council (BDAC) Agriculture Business Council (ABC) and the Office of Economic Development (OED).

In 2002, a group of ten farms identified by the county and its' partners as being 'market ready' became host sites for Frederick County's Family Festival at the Farm. The free, two-day, self-guided tour is offered over a single weekend in October and had 5 000 visitors attend year one of the event in 2002. The 2005 event (or year four) welcomed approximately 17 000 visitors to fourteen host farm sites. In 2006, the number of Family Festival host sites has increased to include nineteen operators. The total budget for the Festival is \$22 000.

Planning

- Partners meet at least quarterly to discuss ways in which they can improve regional efforts
- New for 2006, organizers have replaced their standard sixteen page Family Festival Guide with a new Farm Guide brochure. Frederick County's Farm Guide promotes thirty-five farms who sell directly to the consumer and/or are participants in Family Festival. The first half of the guide is dedicated to farm producers, agritainment operations, wineries, etc. and the second half is dedicated to the event (full page listing for each operation and driving map)
- The county provides one paid staff who allocates a portion of his time to work with Family Festival at the Farm. The county staff contributes his time to securing grants, host site applications and marketing the event (securing grants, host site applications, placing ads, creating promotional material, creating and distributing the brochure, etc.)
- Members from schools, newspapers, a university, TV station, etc., volunteer their time and expertise to sit on a public relations committee created by festival organizers. The PR committee has existed for a couple of years

- For 2007/2008 organizers will look at expanding the festival to include a spring/early summer festival focusing on flowers, strawberries, Mother's Day and baby animals. The long term plan includes having three Family Festivals (spring/fall/winter) so every operator and producer listed in the guide will be able to participate in a festival complimenting their product's peak season

Event Logistics

- Route logistics

- To complete the entire driving route takes approximately two days. For those who have limited time to complete the route, organizers have strategically selected and enlisted farm sites 'clustered' together throughout the county
- The county supplies Family Festival at the Farm operators with consistent signage
- Each farm host's an information booth (started in 2003) that provides visitors with 'direction packages' detailing specific driving instructions to the next farm. Organizers find taking the extra time to verbalize how close the neighboring operator is helps to boost overall, site visitation numbers

- Operational issues

- There is no entrance fee to participate in the festival. Organizers feel operators can increase their revenue by charging for value added activities on site rather than creating a predetermined fee structure
- Some operators sell tickets that are then exchanged for activities and others charge visitors directly at each activity
- Operators are open 10:00 am - 4:00 pm on the Saturday and Noon - 4:00 pm on the Sunday
- County staff created an 'informal' checklist of standards to help host sites prepare for the festival. The list includes: a time line check list, memorandum of understanding, summary including goals of the festival, activity guidelines, regulations, insurance and codes, staffing, port-a-potty rental information, a section on marketing and running an information booth, information and explanation of required permits and a 'day of' reminder list
- Waste management, hiring port-a-potties, providing tents, etc., are the responsibility of each site, however equipment and rentals must comply with the county's list of standards
- For 2006, operators who have on-site livestock must provide a hand sanitation system (either gel sanitizers or rented water station)
- Operators must provide adequate off-road parking space for a minimum of fifty cars
- Approximately 100-150 volunteers are recruited (by host sites) to help with the event
- For the past two years, festival volunteers are supplied matching hats to wear during Family Festival. For 2006, organizers will supply volunteers with t-shirts

- ***Tracking participation***
 - Organizers find tracking participants a necessity if applying for grants (track return on investment)
 - Head counts, surveys and informal polling is used to track numbers and where visitors come from
 - In 2005, 20-25% of visitors were from outside of Frederick County (up from 15% the year before. Organizers attribute this increase in numbers to joint advertising efforts targeting visitors outside the county)
 - Over the last two years website hits have been up 81%

Customer Focus

- ***Creating a diverse mix***
 - The 2005 Family Festival at the Farm has fourteen host sites participating in the driving tour. These sites represent a plethora of diverse operations including: a pumpkin farm, an alpaca farm, a vineyard, U-Picks, a dairy farm (home to a country bakery), a beef farm, an aquatic plant farm, a turkey farm, plant nurseries and greenhouses, a tree farm, orchards and the Schifferstadt Architectural Museum
 - Commodity groups such as dairy farms generate revenue by having pumpkin u-picks, selling decorative corn and providing straw and old clothes for visitors to make authentic scarecrows (\$20/scarecrow)
 - Each farm has unique activities, on site demonstrations, events, seminars and/or unique items for sale:
 - Hay and wagon rides
 - Fall decorating shopping spree (the farms supply materials which include: pumpkins, gourds, corn stalks, straw, carving supplies, etc.)
 - Petting zoos and pony rides
 - Face painting
 - “Kids Get to Know Your Grain Party” (make pictures using local grains)
 - Spinning, weaving and knitting demonstrations
 - Art and craft vendors
 - Grape pressing demonstrations and wine tasting
 - A life size replica of a dairy cow for kids to milk
 - Scarecrow making
 - A picture taking area
 - Milking facility and bakery tour
 - Cooking and cake decorating demonstrations
 - Beef cattle displays and learning sessions
 - “Farm Safety Just 4 Kids” display
 - Corn maze and kid play area
 - Bird feeder making, bird tours and scavenger hunts
 - Greenhouse and garden tours

- Antique John Deere Tractor display
 - Orchard tours
 - Apple butter, apple and cider tasting
 - About half the farms provide concession booths and this information is listed within the guide
 - Many farm sites have formed partnerships with like-minded organizations to help provide visitors with a range of services and activities. These include:
 - Face painting and refreshment stands provided by 4H
 - Champion and Alpaca demonstrations by 4H
 - Information session by the Grape Growers Association of Maryland
 - Petting zoo and pony rides provided by neighboring farms
 - Baked goods provided by a local bakery
 - Concession sold by a United Methodist Church
 - A Farm Guide (product guide) is created by Frederick County that promotes 35 farm operations. This guide is useful throughout the four seasons, promoting spring (flowers), summer (fruits and vegetables), fall (pumpkin patches, corn mazes and Family Festival) and winter (Christmas trees) activities hosted by local farms
- ***Regional Cuisine***
- Organizers and partners are currently working on developing a winery tour event for September. A number of interested wineries are listed in the product guide and participate in Farm Festival

Budget, Fundraising and Sponsorship

- Family Festival at the Farms' annual budget is \$22 000
- The annual budget is primarily spent on marketing - approximately \$12 000 is spent on advertisement (\$6 000 contributed by Family Festival at the Farm and \$6 000 from the Tourism Council of Frederick County)
- The Tourism Council's contribution is made available through Frederick County's 3% hotel tax
- \$1 250 is spent on bookmarks and the rest is spent on directional signs, staff t-shirts and miscellaneous items
- The State of Maryland and Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit sponsor give-aways
- The 2006 Farm Guide budget (\$15 000) is separate from the Family Festival at the Farm budget
- The cost for the printing and distribution of the Farm Guide is split by the County (50%) and Tourism Council (50%)
- Rather than asking for monetary sponsorship, organizers created the public relations (PR) committee where partners with diverse backgrounds, expertise and contacts can provide in kind support to assist the organization

Promotion

- ***Media***
 - Having media members in the PR committee helps garner media support
 - Because organizers regularly pay for ads in local papers, media personnel often give additional editorial space for the Festival
- ***Publicity***
 - The marketing and promotion of the local branding campaigns of: 'Home Grown Here in Frederick County,' a Virtual Farmers' Market, and having Family Festival 'piggyback' with another neighbouring campaign ('Maryland with Pride') has helped create interest, attention, advertisement and support for Family Festival at the Farm
 - The local Fair and schools work together to promote agricultural awareness and education. Schools close for one day during the Fair and school children learn about agriculture in practical, hands on ways that complement the curriculum – this mandate to support and promote agricultural awareness helps garner support and interest for the Festival
- ***Advertising***
 - Marketing campaign includes newspaper, radio and print advertising
 - Family Festival's target audience is families with elementary-age children. Subsequently, the majority of marketing efforts target this demographic (bookmarks distributed in schools, ink pens with themed tops, paid ads in parenting publications, working with schools and the fair to promote agriculture awareness, etc.,)
 - Organizers are partnering with the tourism council of Frederick County to increase advertising efforts to target and retain audiences outside of the county
 - 30 000 product guides (Farm Guides) with information on Family Festival will be distributed at tourism centers, Universities, extension offices, libraries and ordered online
 - To encourage word of mouth advertising, organizers create:
 - Farm Festival bookmarks that direct people to the website and are distributed in schools (organizers recommend distributing bookmarks two weeks before an event, so they stay fresh in people's minds)
 - Ink pens with the Family Festival website and shaped tops correlating with host farm themes (corn, grape, tractor, cow, alpaca, fish, potted plant, sheep). Pens have been a great investment and are distributed at the County Fair
- ***Group tours/packages/cross promotion***
 - Regularly organize tours for school teachers, students, and leaders in the County
 - Wine tours, County Fairs, Farmers' Markets, Home Grown campaign, Family Festival, etc., all work to raise agricultural awareness and support one another

Membership

- Organizers were not successful in securing a group insurance rate for the single weekend event. Farms are responsible for ensuring they have adequate coverage
- Applications to be a host farm for Family Festival go out in November
- Host farms do not pay any membership fees to participate in the festival
- The county staff is responsible for coordinating details up until the Festival and then responsibility is turned over to the operators. Operators' primary responsibility is to coordinate and successfully run their site the day of the Festival

Final Thoughts

- Organizers find the key to Family Festival's success is:
 - **Having minimal operator turnover** – Of the original ten operators, eight continue to participate in the Festival and all thirteen operators from the 2005 festival have come back for 2006. Organizers attribute low turnover to focusing on sites that are already open and market ready and then offering them extra promotion at very little cost
 - **Having the budget to do new things** – “Your event can go nowhere but up...and then ask yourself what can we do better each year, the event will slowly grow”
 - **Matching event goals with operators' goals** – If an event primarily focuses on education...“the event will have to be heavily subsidized.” If the event is supported primarily around “farms selling things” then the event will require less funding



FRUIT LOOP

Hood River County, Oregon, United States

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The Hood River County Fruit Loop was organized in 1992 and the first Fruit Loop driving map was printed in 1993, showcasing sixteen participating operators. The Fruit Loop becomes a *circuit* for operators to promote and celebrate their products via on-farm sales, organize retail opportunities, develop marketing and public relations campaigns and educational forums. The creation of the Fruit Loop has helped preserve Hood River County's rich agricultural heritage, raise public awareness and ultimately keep growers in the area.

The Fruit Loop has become a popular weekend destination for families and fruit connoisseurs alike and the thirty-five mile Loop has grown over the years to accommodate its rise in popularity. Subsequently, in 2005 a collection of 28 farms, orchards, vineyards and value-added, agricultural businesses participated in the self-guided circular route and thirty-one operators will participate in the 2006 season.

Planning

- The Fruit Loop was modeled after the Apple Hill Association (Camino, California), which developed in 1964 as a way to protect the growers and the areas' agricultural history by working under a united theme and inviting the public to spend a day at the farm.
- The Fruit Loop is a non-for profit organization run by a dedicated group of volunteers
- A consistent area of focus has been towards putting on a handful of annual special events that will invite visitors out to celebrate specific harvests and agricultural themes
- A steering committee of five meet once per month and also set operational standards

Event Logistics

- Route logistics

- In the *frequently asked questions* section on the website, the Fruit Loop offers advice on the duration of the trip. The average trip is one day, however a shorter trip can be done in a morning
- The map has been an ongoing challenge because it is not to scale and only shows roads directly pertaining to the Fruit Loop. Some visitors have offered negative feedback on this use of space

- The main route is thirty five miles long and has many side routes for visitors to explore
- ***Operational issues***
 - Admission and parking have remained free
 - Each site must meet specific criteria for membership which includes cleanliness of site and accuracy of information presented to the public
 - The group chose to include a “things to remember” list directly on the map that offers an explanation of appropriate farm friendly behavior:
 - Please park in designated areas...so vehicles necessary for the operation of the farm will be able to get through
 - Leave pets in the car...or better yet, at home. Many farms along the Fruit Loop have resident pets and farm animals
 - U-Pick...bring containers or boxes for flowers or fruit. Also wear shoes for climbing ladders
 - Etc...
 - The brochure includes seasonal event listings, a harvest schedule, a detailed map with legend and travel distances, a history and story of the area and some tips on proper farm etiquette
 - Not all participating sites offer the same hours of operation which becomes an obstacle to offering a consistent customer experience
 - The operators have included free picnic sites for the visitors to enjoy their own meal

Customer Focus

- ***Creating a diverse mix***
 - The Fruit Loop has created four official, two-day special events that run along a specific fruit theme. These include: “Hood River Cherry Days” in July, “Gravenstein Apple Days” (now in it’s 13th year) in August, “Pear Celebration” in September and “Heirloom Apple and Cider Festival” in October
 - During the special events, the majority of operators offer themed activities, value-added products and entertainment
 - Some unique products created by operators for the four special events include: apple cider doughnuts, a taste of over sixty varieties of apples (for only \$1), corn mazes, barbequed apples, eighteen varieties of pears, including pear wine and pear desserts and along the cherry theme, visitors can try cherry cookies, cherry wine, cherry smoothies, cherry cobblers and cherry pies
 - During the year many Fruit Loop sites host their own special events and information is listed on the back of the map (in the form of a Calendar) or on the website. Other special events include: A Country Fair, a Blossom Festival, a Craft Show, Summer Sensations Festival, Festival of Local Art, a Fathers’ Day celebration, Fiesta Days, Van Gogh Days, Italian Style Chestnut Roast with Red Wine, Lavender Daze, Thanksgiving Extravaganza and Pumpkin Funland to name a few

- A number of farms specialize in shipping fresh fruit and other gourmet food products across North America
- The Fruit Loop driving map includes listings of “Great Places to Eat,” “Unique Places to Shop From,” “Area Attractions” and “Places to Stay”
- ***Regional Cuisine***
 - Specific sites offer regional cuisine celebrations:
 - ‘Apple Valley’s Artisan Food Fair’, a two-day celebration of great local food in September. Visitors can enjoy a glass of wine with their lunch and listen to live music in a covered picnic area
 - ‘Desserts Galore!’ takes place the same weekend as the Artisan Food Festival and visitors can enjoy desserts made from a team of local bakers using season ingredients such as apples and pears

Budget, Fundraising and Sponsorship

- In the formative years to help get the Fruit Loop up and running, an operator and member of the Grower and Shipper Association applied for an Ag Development grant (administered by the Hood River Grower-Shipper Association)
- The received grant was used to fund both the first local Hood River Farmers’ Market and the ‘leftover’ money was used to promote local agriculture through the creation of the first Fruit Loop map in 1993
- Subsequent grant funding for the Fruit Loop is provided by the Hood River Chamber of Commerce Visitor Council and the Hood River Grower-Shipper Association
- The majority of funding for the operation of the Fruit Loop is from government grants, membership fees (\$10 000) and selling advertising space in the brochure to local businesses (over \$11 000 raised in 2005)
- The production of the driving map is subsidized by annual funding from the chamber of commerce
- A Hood River Fruit Loop cookbook is sold as a fundraising activity (over 2500 copies sold)

Promotion

- ***Media***
 - The group sends out regular press releases for the four, main, special events
- ***Publicity***
 - The Fruit Loop is known throughout Oregon as one of the most recognizable and successful agricultural marketing groups
 - In June 2006, the New York Times ran an article on the Fruit Loop
- ***Advertising***
 - 75 000 maps are printed and distributed in a 200 mile radius

- The majority of maps are distributed in State and most places that distribute the maps often run out
 - The brochure cost \$1000 for design and \$13 500 to print 75 000 color copies
 - If additional funds were available, the group would like to print more maps and possibly distribute them out of state
- ***Group tours/packages***
- Organizers offer a 'behind the scenes' tour of Fruit Loop operations

Membership

- All operators must carry proper insurance or they cannot participate
- The first year of the Fruit Loop had 16 operators participate and has now grown to include 28 operators in 2005
- 2006 will include 31 operators on the Fruit Loop map
- The majority of sites are open anywhere from six to nine months of the year with a few sites open year round
- Host sites must sign off on meeting all predetermined standards of operation or they are not able to join the Loop
- Host sites function independently and are only loosely affiliated with each other. Each member site is directly responsible for their own operation
- Fruit Loop operators are charged a \$400 membership fee which includes a listing on the driving map brochure and live website link
- Members are charged \$50 per special event listing in the driving brochure
- Income tracking has shown members of the Fruit Loop see on average a 20-30% increase in gross income on a monthly basis (tracking started in 2000)

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The idea of promoting ag tourism in the area was initially discussed in 2002 and Kawartha Farmfest subsequently arose out of a partnership between the City of Kawartha Lakes, farms and rural businesses. Supported by a grant, ag tourism 101 workshops were offered and Farmfest was developed for those farms primarily interested in using ag tourism to enhance their existing businesses and/or create new businesses.

Kawartha Farmfest is a two-day, driving tour occurring the weekend before Thanksgiving (in Canada, Thanksgiving occurs the second Monday in October). Approximately 1530 people attended the second annual Farmfest event in 2004, with an average of 500 visitors to each site. The average adult visitor spent \$105 over the two days and over six hundred adult buttons were sold at \$5 a piece (children fourteen and under are free).

The 2005 event hosted approximately 600 visitors (430 adult buttons were sold) who experienced the twelve themed 'mini festival sites,' a Saturday night Harvest Celebration Dinner & Dance (put on by the local ag society) and two farmers' markets.

Planning

- One full time staff working for the City of Kawartha economic development contributes approximately 1/10th of her time to organizing, planning and implementing Farmfest
- In terms of event planning, Farmfest organizers recommend:
 - Planning should create a consistent overall theme encompassing all operators and their goals/expectations
 - Matching goals/expectations of the organization with those of the marketing campaign
 - Establishing a task list at the beginning of planning to serve as a guide line
 - Having a way of monitoring short and long-term outcomes/benefits
 - Starting early...do as much as possible in the off season
 - Having clear goals of what the organization want to accomplish and ways to monitor progress
 - Keeping on going evaluations rather than a single evaluation at the end of the event/program
 - Remembering May, June and July are often the busiest months for operators and trying not too schedule too many meetings or seminars during this time
 - Providing ag tourism 101 seminar/workshop with key speakers to maintain high standards of practice by current members, bring new members on board and help operators become 'farm-ready' for the public.

Organizers believe providing these opportunities enables the group to work collectively to develop ideas and strategies in a non competitive environment

- Partnering with different businesses (such as farmers' markets, local ag societies, retail and commodity groups) to increase the variety of services and attractions offered; creating more "sizzle" and an increase in awareness
- In the initial planning years, Farmfest operators participated in more frequent meetings focused on the planning and development stages. Now the event has been running successfully for a number of years, operators meet less often (generally 2-3 times per year)
- Organizers feel the majority of Farmfest visitors who purchase their tickets in advance also plan their trip in advance through visiting the Farmfest website. Therefore, in 2006 organizers plan to cut back on costs by printing a 'place-mat' type brochure that will have less detail than the current eight-page brochure
- Complimentary detail about the operators and festival will also be accessible on the website
- The 'place-mat' format will include a map on one side with advertisements to pay the printing costs. The back side will include a brief description of each farm
- For 2006, Farmfest has added two more host sites and is exploring how to bring in more commodity groups (dairy, beef and pork). These groups are a challenge to get on board as they may not have clear revenue generating options, and incur bio-security issues
- To alleviate the latter problems, organizers are working with a dairy farm who will sell ice cream and organizers may help implement bio-security mats and fencing systems

Event Logistics

- Route logistics

- An accurate, up to-date map is available on the website
- Farmfest provides consistent signage for each host site. For 2006 organizers have received a grant and a portion of this grant will be used to upgrade Farmfest host-site signage

- Operational issues

- Buttons are used for proof of admission. Visitors can purchase buttons in advance at municipal service centers, City Hall, the Chamber of Commerce, a local library, farmers' markets and a country store
- Adults are charged \$5 and children fourteen and under are free
- Each site designates spaces for special parking
- Organizers recommend host sites be prepared for bad weather and have back up plans. For example, some operators provided hot beverages at their sites to help keep visitors warm after battling poor weather
- Sites must be clear if their operation will proceed rain or shine prior to the day of the event

- Farmfest organizers recommend having a coordinator visit each site to make sure sites are operational for the day of the event
- In the initial planning years, organizers developed a rating system used to evaluate potential host sites
- Ultimately, each host farm is responsible for ensuring their on-site appearance
- To ensure visitors enjoy the festival organizers provide an information sheet with *Trip Planning Tips*:
 - Give an approximate time people should budget in for each stop (they recommend one hour for each site)
 - Remind people to visit sites which may be slightly out of the main circuit
 - Bring a cooler for purchased produce and baked goods
 - Remind people of any contests
 - Remind city dwellers to dress for all weather and have appropriate footwear
 - Remind people to leave their pets at home
- ***Tracking participation***
 - Each site has a guest book to assist in tracking the number of participants
 - In 2004, operators recorded most visitors attended seven of the twelve sites

Customer Focus

- ***Creating a diverse mix***
 - Each of the twelve host sites has a special Farmfest theme (Cheesefest, Troutfest, Thanksgivingfest, Pumpkinfest, Horsefest, Applefest, etc.)
 - Out of the ordinary - the festival offers visitors the opportunity to visit two local farmers' markets, a dinner & dance, a boutique shop, meet a farm family living in a solar powered home, learn about 'Farmers Feed Cities' ag awareness group, try squash bowling and watch various demonstrations (pumpkin carving, soap and candle making, etc.)
 - Host sites are required to have on site activities and sites are permitted to charge additional fees for select activities. If a site charges an activity fee, this information is included in the Farmfest brochure
 - Kawartha Farm Fresh (*see Regional Cuisine section*) operators work with Farmfest to sell and promote their local food products during the driving tour event
- ***Regional Cuisine***
 - Kawartha Farm Fresh is a year round joint initiative that helps Kawartha Lakes' producers and small food processors market their products directly to the consumer. These products include berries, vegetables, pumpkins, herbs, maple syrup, baked goods, honey, dairy and meat
 - Kawartha Farm Fresh was initiated in 2003 by the City of Kawartha Lakes with funding and support from Agriculture & Agri-Food

Canada, the Victoria Haliburton Federation of Agriculture and many of the local producers are involved in both Farm Fresh and Farmfest

Budget, Fundraising and Sponsorship

- The annual marketing and advertising budget for Kawartha Farmfest is \$1300
- For 2006, Kawartha Farmfest successfully received a \$3500 cultural grant to be shared between Kawartha Farmfest, a local Art Gallery and Studio Art Tours
- Revenue generated from button sales and Farmfest membership fees is used to run the event, cover advertising fees and print brochures
- Local sponsors are listed on the website. Sponsors predominantly consist of small, local businesses who represent farms and farm related associations
- All sponsorship is through in-kind support
- After the event, organizers recommend communicating outcomes to appropriate partners and sponsors

Promotion

- Media

- Farmfest uses radio, television, newspaper and magazine advertisement to promote Farmfest to the City of Kawartha Lakes, Toronto, the Greater Toronto Area and Ontario
- The group takes advantage of free media exposure by putting out press releases about new, developing and updated initiatives

- Publicity

- Kawartha Lakes Tourism creates seasonal, tourist brochures that have a large distribution channel and highlight events, activities and accommodations. Farmfest is promoted in this guide at no cost

- Advertising

- Libraries and municipal offices promote Farmfest through posters and brochures
- A promotional rack card, a poster, brochures and a website have been used to promote Farmfest
- An identifiable logo has been designed for use in the brochure and host site signage
- A newspaper insert featuring the host farms and businesses involved in the event is distributed to approximately 6500 people. The local paper sells advertisement space for the insert which pays for printing and distribution costs
- Organizers found success in advertising the event in a more general nature in spring and early summer and then going into greater detail in August and September as the festival date draws nearer
- Being flexible allows organizers to make adjustments such as confirming host sites up to one month prior to the event

- ***Group tours/packages/cross promotion***

- By working with the local art gallery and Art Studio Tours to secure a cultural grant, the 2006 Farmfest event encourages visitors to spend a 'Day in the Country' by participating in the driving tour, Art Studio tour and visiting the local art gallery
- A variety of rural businesses from Kawartha Farmfest and Kawartha Farm Fresh benefit from the joint marketing and advertisement of the two initiatives
- The Kawartha Farmfest Logo has been adapted and used to create a similar, complimentary logo for Farm Fresh
- Farmfest promotes the local fair that runs around the same time as the festival

Membership

- Kawartha Lakes confirmed with their insurance provider that the city's insurance would provide coverage for the event, however participants were recommended to have \$2 million dollar liability coverage for their site
- Although people's intentions are often good - communication problems, lack of participation at meetings and last minute operators backing out of the event has been a reality for Farmfest organizers. For the first year, Farmfest did not charge the host sites a fee to participate in the event and at the very last minute two sites closed their doors to the public
- Organizers now charge host sites a mandatory membership fee of \$50
- Farm Fresh membership is also \$50 and some host sites belong to both organizations. If a Farm Fresh member would like to join Farmfest strictly for the single weekend, no additional fee is charged
- Host farms earn revenue through charging for select activities, on farm retail (Farm Fresh or their own) and food concession
- The majority of Farmfest sites are open to the public during the summer and/or fall months as well
- The agriculture development officer (Farmfest coordinator) organizes Farmfest meetings and beyond attending meetings and having their site ready for the event, operators are not required to perform any other Farmfest related duties
- Currently, because only a small number of new sites join Farmfest each year, the paid coordinator will visit new operations and provide operators with information sheets to help them prepare for the event
- In 2006, an agri-food education staff will offer a presentation for operators on how to successfully work with volunteers and children

Final Thoughts

- "The greatest benefit of the Farmfest program expressed by participants was it gave their business tremendous exposure that would not have been possible in individual and unconnected on-site events"
- It was estimated 65% of Farmfest visitors were from the local area. The event allowed locals residents to visit many businesses they normally didn't frequent in a non-pressure environment

LOUDOUN FARM TOURS

Loudoun County, Virginia, USA



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Loudoun County Department of Economic Development in coordination with other public and private agencies has created a number of initiatives to help engage both traditional and alternative and/or market direct farmers. These initiatives include a wine trail tour, spring product guide, a forum for rural innovation, twilight tours and a fall and spring driving tour. By promoting farmers and helping them explore other avenues of income, these initiatives help farmers and producers ultimately preserve their livelihood.

Both driving tours are self-guided, free events taking place over a single weekend. Loudoun Farm Color Tour started in 1993 and takes place the third weekend in October. Spring Farm Tour started in 1995, taking place the third weekend in May. Events draw anywhere from 4000 – 15000 visitors and are largely funded through the county. In 2005, the combined budget for the two driving tours is approximately \$36 000.

Planning

- Loudoun County has been the third fastest 'population growth county' in the USA in the first half of the 1990's and the second fastest in the latter half. Subsequently, the county government is working to develop strategies to help preserve the rural landscape, culture and producers
- Wineries have become more self sufficient and sophisticated in the last few years, so efforts and marketing funds is gradually being spent on developing and promoting less known agritainment operations
- County government created one full time position (agriculture marketing manager) and two part time positions (extension officer and administration assistant) in the agricultural development office to help promote Loudoun Farm Tours
- Originally, Farm Tour's primary focus was on educating the public with some entertainment added for good measure. Over the years the focus began to shift to entertainment and now organizers are consciously moving the event's focus back to agricultural education

Event Logistics

- Route logistics

- Directional signage is located approximately 100 yards from a participating property's entrance
- Operators are permitted to develop and use their own small gate signage
- No other signage is provided or permitted as local by-laws prohibit the use of almost all outdoor advertising
- Organizers have found visitors do not readily visit new farms that join the tour. To encourage visitation, organizers try to recruit new farms who are in close proximity to existing, veteran farms

- Operational issues

- Organizers developed a policy statement to ensure farms meet a high quality of service. This statement is sent out to perspective operators and includes information on what the county expects of Farm Tour operators and what Farm Tour operators can expect of the county
- New Farm Tour sites are inspected by organizers to ensure these sites will be market ready for the event. County workers address issues such as: parking, appearance, safety hazards, physical layout, if sites have a health permit for food sales and ensure sites provide port-a-johns (potties)
- Brochures for Farm Color Tour are available one month prior to the event. Brochures can be requested or printed off the website
- Farm Tour brochures are available at county libraries, community centers, a convention and visitors' association and area businesses. Interested visitors can also call the areas' economic development office
- Both two-day tours operate between 10 am and 4 pm (May and October)
- Both events are free, however certain operations charge gate admission for value added activities (noted in the guide)

- Tracking participation

- Nothing formal is captured – the three county staff gather and extrapolate anecdotal information from operators based on counting guests, visitors signing books and returned forms (approximately 15%)
- Approximately 4000-8000 visitors attend the spring event and 5000-15000 attends the fall event. The divergence in participation numbers is largely attributed to the more favorable weather Loudoun experiences in the fall season

Customer Focus

- Creating a diverse mix

- Approximately twenty three farms are involved in both Spring and Fall Tour. Year to year operator turnover is common

- Creating a diverse activity mix is somewhat limited by insurance costs. For example, getting coverage for farms offering hayrides, pony rides, etc. can be difficult
 - Unique sites featured on the 2005 Farm Color Tour include: an Equine Rescue League, a flower farm, a Heritage Farm Museum and the Chile Man Farm (offers a selection of gourmet food made from organic peppers, berries and herbs grown and processed on the farm)
 - Unique sites included in the Spring Farm Tour include: a farm and forest reserve, vineyards, a herb farm, u-picks, a certified organic farm, an alpaca farm, Heritage Farm Museum, Loudoun Valley Sheep Producers, an equestrian facility, 18th century family farm and B&B, a llama farm, etc.
 - Activities/special products offered during either tour include: purchasing heirloom vegetables, herb plants and cut flowers; wine tours and wine tasting; sampling natural sauces and salsas; blacksmith, sheep shearing and riding demonstrations; pony rides, corn mazes and pig races; learning about water and soil conservation efforts; visiting an “outdoor classroom” and participating in hiking and educational walks
 - In 2006, Twilight Tours will highlight three of Loudoun County’s innovative farm operations by offering small, informative and educational tours that share marketing, product, business, ag tourism and customer service ideas
 - These tours occur during one evening and begin at 5:00 pm. Tickets are \$20 per person (purchased through Loudoun Economic Development) and include a guided tour of one of three operations followed by a dinner
 - Twilight Tours grew out of the county sponsored ‘Forum for Rural Innovation’ and offer the public an opportunity to learn about cutting edge agricultural initiatives
 - Operators involved in 2006’s twilight tours include: a farm that uses hydroponic technology to produce pesticide free lettuce, specialty greens and herbs (Endless Summer Harvest), a nursery farm showcasing intensive container tree production (Loudoun Nursery,) and a family run ag tourism farm (Great Country Farms)
- ***Regional Cuisine***
- Twilight Tours are followed by a twilight dinner featuring locally produced meats
 - Local wineries are included in both Spring and Fall Farm Tours

Budget, Fundraising and Sponsorship

- The annual festival budget in 2005 is approximately \$36 000
- All funding comes from the county with dollars from the Tourism Opportunity Fund (dollars collected through the Loudoun County Restricted Transient Occupancy Tax – 8% charge added to meals, accommodation, etc.)

- The Tourism Opportunity Fund, approximately \$1.5 – \$2 million annually is divided between tourism, ag tourism and non for profit groups
- The county also provides in kind office support and a small annual contribution to initiate projects (\$10 000 in 2006)
- Marketing budget is approximately \$12 000 - \$18 000 per farm tour
- Organizers do not pursue corporate sponsorship

Promotion

- Media

- Organize FAM tours for: Ag Council of Virginia, all new employees of the county, Discover Loudoun, Loudoun Leadership, and media
- Send regular press releases and personally contact media. Organizers have the support of sympathetic local reporters from the Washington Post on down to local newspapers and often reporters call organizers prior to the tours to get pitches

- Publicity

- Consistently offering both tours the third weekend in each respective month has helped garner word of mouth support as people are conditioned to expect the tours and remember the dates year after year

- Advertising

- The brochure for both spring and fall Farm Tour is funded by Loudoun County Restricted Transient Occupancy Tax Fund
- 12 000 Spring Farm Tour brochures, 30 000 wine trail guides and 20 000 Farm Color Tour brochures were printed for the 2006 events
- Hours, directions, contact name and number, on-site retail, a map and a brief description of each site is included in the spring and fall driving tour brochures
- Organizers buy panel space from a local bus company for three to six months during the summer time to advertise both Farm Tours

- Group tours/packages/cross promotion

- Loudoun Spring Farm Tour is listed in The Loudoun Farm Fresh Product Guide. This guide works with the Loudoun Valley HomeGrown Market Association (sponsoring body of five strictly 100% HomeGrown farmers' markets)
- Local Girl Scouts can earn badges by visiting participating farms
- Farmers' markets, roadside stands (guide), Loudon Farm Fresh Product Guide and the Loudoun Wine Trail are all promoted in conjunction with Farm Color and Spring Tours

- Prizes/contests

- Have done a few with mixed success

Membership

- If admission is charged there is a substantial increase in the premium cost for operators (premiums of \$600-\$800 for the two day policy). After several claim free years, liability costs may decrease
- If no admission is charged, the local farm bureau can help operators receive a lower cost group insurance
- Operators are not charged a membership fee to participate in the driving tour events
- Operators must write their own promotional pieces, which are then submitted into the Spring Product Guide and Fall Farm Color Tour
- County workers provide the majority of support in terms of planning, organizing and implementing the Farm Tours. Operators have a degree of input in the planning process and organizers believe they have a good working relationship with operators
- Many operators are seasoned veterans when it comes to working with Farm Tours and the county (know what is expected of them)
- Operators are requested to fill out evaluation forms after the events which are then given to organizers for review

Final Thoughts

- Loudoun Farm Tour organizers believe weather is the number one key factor contributing to the success of an event, “lousy weather equals lousy attendance”
- Second, organizers believe an event is successful only when educational elements are combined with hands on activities involving children. For example, Loudoun wineries will often pair up with local sheep associations so children can interact with the animals and parents can still purchase a nice bottle of wine
- Lastly the success of an event is determined by “...a good give from farmers and a good take from visitors” where operators ultimately enjoy interacting with the public, look forward to the event and create hands on opportunities for participation

PLACER FARM AND BARN TOUR (highlighting AGROart™ Competition)
Placer County, California, USA



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Originating in 1994, a partnership developed between Placer County organizations and key individuals who shared a unified desire to focus on the value of agricultural-based production and educating the public about ‘where ones food comes from.’ Over the next decade the partnership organized a handful of interactive festivals and events focusing on reconnecting consumers to agriculture and food production in a ‘hands on way’.

In 1995, a very successful festival, AGROart was launched by Placer County Arts Council and in 2004, the AGROart™ competition was incorporated into the newly created Placer Farm & Barn Tour. Placer Farm & Barn tour is a one-day, self-guided, experiential driving tour taking place on the first Sunday in October. The festival is a celebration of Placer County’s agricultural heritage and “all things PlacerGROWN.” During a time of increasing developmental pressure, festival organizers feel at the grassroots level, the festival helps to improve visibility and awareness of Placer County agribusinesses while helping to ensure farmers continue to remain on the land.

With an annual festival budget of approximately \$30 000, Farm & Barn tour attracted 2 000 visitors in its first year of operation (2004) and 4 000 visitors in 2005. The Farm & Barn tour is presented cooperatively by the Arts Council of Placer County, Foothills Farmers Markets, Placer County Agriculture Department, Placer County Visitors Council, PlacerGROWN, Placer Valley Tourism and the University of California Cooperative Extension

Planning

- *Placer Farm & Barn Tour*
 - One full time paid staff (executive director) sits on the Farm & Barn Tour steering committee as a volunteer representative for the arts council; serving as a fiscal receiver for the event (sponsorship, ticket sales, financial transactions, etc.,)
 - Farm & Barn Tour steering committee is comprised of four to five representatives who regularly communicate (weekly e-mails) and plan for the upcoming tour
 - Involved consortia members include: an ag commissioner and ag marketing director representing the County of Placer, a farm advisor

- representing University of California Extension Services, rotating farmers representing Foothills Farmers Markets and/or PlacerGROWN
- Other volunteers form a larger subcommittee (eight to twelve members) and meet monthly from February to July and twice in August and September and help with festival logistics
 - All organizations involved in the Farm & Barn Tour consortia use their contacts to help bring in adequate volunteers for the day of the event. Each site (twelve to fourteen) needs five to six additional volunteers to help run the festival
 - *AGROart™ Competition*
 - The AGROart™ competition was piloted at the Mountain Mandarin Festival in 1995. From 1996-1999, AGROart became a full scale, stand alone festival attracting up to ten thousand visitors each year
 - Organizers found the festival model was difficult to sustain, in that large sponsorship in a small rural community was difficult to ensure and maintain
 - Organizers then took AGROart competition to the Gold County Fair to build up enough support and coalition to sustain the joint ‘ag and arts’ movement. A consortium of interested agencies was developed and the AGROart™ competition was moved and incorporated as a feature event of the newly created Placer Farm & Barn festival in 2004
 - *Additional Events*
 - Other festivals and programs the partnership has helped create include: Mountain Mandarin Festival (1994), PlacerGROWN brand (a non profit organization formed to assist Placer County farmers with marketing their locally grown farm produce) an ag marketing program (2001), Mountain Mandarin Tour (2004) and Placer Slow Food Convivium (2004)

Event Logistics

- *Route logistics*
 - During the Placer Farm & Barn Tour, host sites are open on the Sunday from 9:00 am till 5:00 pm
 - Farm & Barn tour’s brochure includes a map detailing where each site is located
 - Each Placer Farm & Barn Tour site is marked with three to five large orange signs with an identifying logo
- *Operational issues*
 - In the first year of the driving tour (2004), organizers charged by the carload. In the second year, organizers charged \$5 donation for adults and in 2006, organizers will charge \$10 for adults with students and children continuing to be free
 - Organizers raised admission fees in response to informal, visitor exit surveys which indicated people would be willing to pay more money because they valued the experience of the tour
 - Ticket packages are generally not sold on site and must be ordered by telephone through the Placer Arts Council or purchased at select

county businesses. For the day of the tour, each site will have a small supply of tickets for those visitors who ‘happen’ along the event

- Visitors wear Farm & Barn Tour ‘sticker tickets’ which also serve as a visible reminder to surrounding businesses (i.e. restaurants, other operations, gas stations, etc.) indicating Farm & Barn Tour has an economical impact on the local economy
- Each visitor receives a coupon worth \$3 that can be redeemed at any Placer County farmers’ market
- Some locations have limited parking available and to encourage car pooling, cars with five or more passengers will be given additional coupons that can be exchanged for their dollar value, again at Placer County farmers’ markets
- Restrooms are available at each site and select sites have handicapped accessible washrooms (listed in the brochure)
- Those sites that can accommodate tour buses are listed in the brochure
- Bottled water is available at most sites
- In 2006, AGROart™ Competition will be moved into a restored fruit shed building. Organizers feel renting the historical agricultural building for the competition supports AGROart’s mandate of, “celebrating the history and progress of Placer County’s agricultural and arts industries”

- ***Tracking participation***

- Host sites track numbers by using simple visitor intake forms that tell organizers numbers, demographics and asks people: where did you hear about the event and where did you stay overnight?
- Organizers are working with the visitor authorities to articulate the number of ‘out of towners’ and set up data collections with hotel partners

Customer Focus

- ***Creating a diverse mix***

- Fourteen hosts sites were featured in the 2005 tour and twelve are on board for 2006
- Several farms host local artisans who draw pictures, paint on canvas and sell their art
- Over the years, Farm & Barn Tour host site activities have included:
 - Wagon rides
 - Traditional farming and antique tractor displays
 - Animal and herding demos
 - Visual and performing arts demonstrations
 - Cooking demonstrations
 - Zen gardens, bonsai plant demonstrations and persimmon drying
 - Fly fishing
 - Historic county school classes

- Period costume competition
 - Wine and food tasting
 - A haunted box car
 - Blacksmithing
 - Pumpkin u-picks
 - Live music
 - Available farm direct PlacerGROWN product
 - AGROart™ Competition
 - Produce Playground - where young children can let their imaginations run wild by creating art out of a plethora of PlacerGROWN produce and toothpicks
- Organizers ask host sites to not charge visitors for additional value added activities
- ***Regional Cuisine***
 - Farms bring in local chefs to put on cooking demonstrations and offer samples of creative recipes using fresh, locally grown produce
 - Some of 2005's tastings include locally cured olives, olive oils, wine, fresh persimmons, several varieties of pears and apples, persimmon cake and squash soup
 - Several farm stands and produce markets along the tour route provide the 'raw' materials so visitors can cook up similar recipes when they return home
 - Lunch tickets are \$8 and must be purchased in advance (or while quantities last). These tickets can be redeemed at three predetermined host sites (four in 2006) for lunches made using local produce
 - Food sale proceeds go back to each respective farm

Budget, Fundraising and Sponsorship

- Farm & Barn Tour's annual budget is approximately \$30 000. The majority of the budget is spent for the tour itself and operating the event:
 - \$2000 – Graphic design
 - \$4500 – Printing flyers, posters, maps
 - \$1000 – Port-a-Potty rentals
 - \$2000 – Signage and advertising
 - \$2000 – Hiring a publicist for farm brochures
 - \$600 – AGROart facility rental
 - \$5000 – AGROart cash prizes
 - \$3000 – AGRObucks and produce for Produce Playground
- Festival budget is secured via private business sponsorship (\$50 - \$5000), in kind support via the Arts Council and other members of the consortia, \$7000 from the county board of supervisors (not an annual contribution) and revenue from ticket sales
- Sponsorship solicitation is done by committee volunteers
- Organizers have been able to secure an increase number of sponsors for 2006's event by diversifying the website to include a section to recognize sponsors and adding a "Friends of Agriculture" sponsorship level beginning at \$50

Promotion

- Media

- Placer Tourism organizes a media day prior to the Mandarin Festival for approximately 60 participants. Farm & Barn Tour is able to utilize this event to gain media attention and interest as there is often cross over between the people involved in the Mandarin Festival and Farm & Barn Tour
- Placer Valley Tourism helps make media packages, organize a FAM tour during F & B tour and work with industry contacts to learn about possible promotional opportunities for the tour. For example, Placer Valley Tourism informed Barn & Farm Tour organizers about an opportunity to do a TV presentation in San Jose on AGROart (September 2006)
- Print media partners (Old Country Media) provide support through numerous pre & post event articles, discounted or contributed ad space
- T.V. and radio partners provide support through local talk show invitations, public service announcements, free calendar listings and discounted or contributed ad space
- Organizers send regular press releases
- To engage the media, organizers recommend:
 - Including local celebrities and well known community members at events to help attract extra buzz
 - Entice media personnel through their stomach by sending farm fresh products that visitors will enjoy during the event
 - Rather than only sending electronic attachments (via e-mail), copy media releases into the body of the e-mail document as well
 - Give advance notice and details to entice summer media cruisers to your event
 - Send thank you cards or telephone calls to media who attend and promote your event
 - Strive to build relationships, trust and support in an ongoing way

- Publicity

- Farm & Barn Tour is promoted in are magazines, at the University campus, local colleges, museums, historical societies, arts councils, etc. by utilizing each agencies free communication newsletters
- Festival organizers work with a community program called “Welcome Wagon” and help introduce new comers to the area while promoting regional agriculture

- Advertising

- AGROart™ Competition is advertised on a small, neon green brochure (golden color in 2006). 3000 copies are printed and distributed to all County schools

- 10 000 flyers are distribute at the California State Fair
- Organizers print 2500 Farm & Barn Tour posters
- 2000 maps/brochures are printed and sold along with ticket packages
- A full color page, dedicated to the advertisement of Placer Farm & Barn Tour is included in Placer County's Agricultural Guide (paid advertisement)
- ***Group tours/packages/cross promotion***
 - Organizers are trying to increase group tours and now include symbols on the driving map indicating which sites can accommodate small buses and coaches (senior tours, school tours, car clubs etc.,)
 - In 2006 a bike club wants to participate in the Farm & Barn Tour
 - Placer Farm & Barn Tour works with members from the "Slow Food Movement" and local schools to help encourage quality of life, pride and caring in the agricultural community
 - Nine area hotels offer 'discount rates' for exclusive Placer Farm & Barn Tour visitors - visitors just have to mention they are coming for the Tour
 - An information number for overnight accommodations is included in the brochure and in 2006, visitors can receive on line hotel specials
- ***Prizes/contests***
 - The AGROart™ competition is a feature event of the Placer Farm & Barn Tour, celebrating the amalgamation of agriculture and art
 - Participants must register in advance under the categories of *School-age* (Individual \$10 or Team \$10/person; three people max.) or *Adult* (Individual \$20 or Team \$20/person; three people max.)
 - School Age categories have three hours and Adult categories have five hours to create three dimensional artwork from fruits and vegetables
 - Fruits and vegetables must be supplied by participants
 - Volunteer judges are recognized professionals in the field of visual, culinary and/or design arts
 - For the Adult category: 1st place is \$1 000, 2nd place is \$500 and 3rd place is \$250
 - For the three levels of School Age Categories: 1st place ranges from \$300-\$100, 2nd place ranges from \$150-\$75 and 3rd place ranges from \$100-\$50

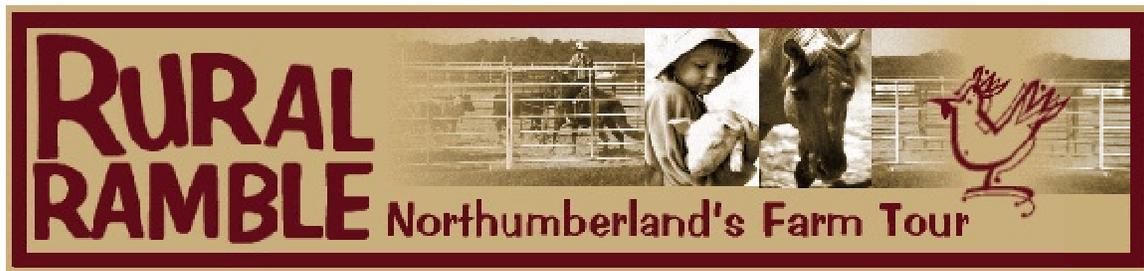
Membership

- Liability insurance is obtained for the day of the event. In 2005 insurance was taken out under the umbrella of the Resource Conservation District (RCD); this year, due to a change in the management at RCD, the Arts Council will secure liability insurance for the day of the event
- Host farms are handpicked by organizers - there is no formal standards checklist but participants must be market ready

- Host farms do not pay a membership fee to participate. In the future organizers are looking for an underwriter to support a \$250 honorarium for each farm as a thank you
- In 2005, host farms had one orientation meeting and two are organized in 2006 to help prepare operators for the big event
- Host farms are mainly responsible for the ‘day of’ aspects and some farmers have joined festival committees
- Farm & Barn Tour organizers help host sites increase their level of professionalism by hiring a publicist who creates brochures for newly joining sites, writes promotional pieces and take pictures
- Operators join Farm & Barn Tour to increase their visibility and livelihood by diversifying their operations

Final Thoughts

- The executive director of Placer Farm & Barn Tour shares five keys to success:
 - “Have a strong coalition of various organizations with different strengths and perspectives and ties to the community”
 - Utilize e-mail communication and determine communication protocol so committee members are not “bogged down” with unnecessary detail or “shot in the foot” with a lack of communication
 - “Take time to learn each other’s *language* (the language of agriculture, of arts, of business, of tourism) so members can better understand each other and work together more fluidly”
 - “Rotating leadership; we changed chairs this year, designating co-chairs. It’s an investment of time to ‘change the guard’, but it helps to ensure information is shared, and prevents burn out of one founding chair”
 - “Many hands make light work.” The benefit of having multiple agencies at the table is the varied expertise, resources, perspectives, and community connections. For example, no one staff person is dedicated solely to the Farm & Barn Tour



RURAL RAMBLE

Northumberland, Ontario, Canada

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The Rural Ramble self guided, driving tour originated in 1999, with five couples that were members of the Federation of Agriculture in Northumberland. The tour provides opportunities for non-farm people to learn first hand where their food comes from and to foster a broader understanding of the importance of present day agriculture. Subsequently, a strong focus of the group has been on educating the public on modern agricultural practices and in 2004, the Rural Ramble received a Canadian Agri-Food Award of Excellence in the area of 'Agriculture and Awareness Education'

The two-day driving tour occurs the third week of August and 2005 welcomed year six of the event with approximately twenty-two, ag-based sites and five commodity groups. Although there is no formal measurement of visitation growth, organizers believe numbers have reached approximately 4000 visitors annually (2005 and 2006). Furthermore, county tourism staff estimate that over the tour, visitor spending within the area exceeds \$350 000.

Planning

- In the 5th year of operation (2004), the Rural Ramble committee created a new, easy to navigate website designed to provide information about the Rural Ramble annual event, background information on the area's farming heritage and balanced content with imagery.
- The event requires approximately 250 volunteers
- Volunteers are recruited from local High Schools (where student are required to volunteer for forty hours of community service), 4-H, Pony Clubs, Guides and Scouts, service clubs like the Rotary, Lions and Women clubs, church groups, and various friends, families and neighbors
- For the two day event, all sites are open from 10 am– 4 pm, sites are encouraged to be ready for early arrivers
- In 2004, the group hired a part-time coordinator and treasurer. After having a shift in management one part-time staff consolidated the role of coordinator and treasurer into one position in 2005 and 2006
- In 2007, the current coordinator is hoping to step down and become an assistant coordinator (to keep continuity of leadership and information). A new and involved committee member will transition into the coordinator position

- There is a volunteer committee of approximately five people. The committee helps to organize the tour, assist the host farm sites, promote the event, maintain the website and answer the 1-800 number. Committee members include those who are interested in agriculture, operators and members of Northumberland Federation of Agriculture
- Host orientation includes a meeting and overview of a two-page handout designed to prepare operators for the event. The handout briefly outlines consistent expectations of the operators (i.e. providing a greeter, carrying a float, having hands on activities and displays, hours of operation, ensure appropriate signage is displayed), highlights how operators can be prepared (ensure adequate parking is roped off, enforce 'no pets on site,' have adequate, friendly staff) and includes what operators should expect from the day (i.e. difficult and demanding people)
- The committee creates an evaluation report for Rural Ramble hosts to complete following the event. Completed forms are entered into a draw - dinner for two at a restaurant of choice

Event Logistics

- Route logistics

- Organizers recommend visitors allow approximately one hour to visit each farm and if visitors want to drive less, they should limit their trip to an east side or west side country tour
- Ontario provincial police and local police forces are provided with copies of the map so they are familiar with the area and where the sites are located as well as being prepared for an increase in highway traffic
- Rural Ramble signage is placed along the route by volunteers and taken down by volunteers after the event; mileage and the cost of signage is paid out of the event budget

- Operational issues

- Co-ops, farmers' markets and CIBC provide sales locations for admission packages (passport)
- Each admission package contains:
 - A route map
 - Information brochure about the host sites
 - A listing of sponsors at all three levels
 - An identifying wristband for visitors to wear and show at each gate
- Packages are sold on site during the event and are also available on line - adult \$10 in advance and \$15 day of; ages 6-12 are \$5; under 5 are free
- County maps are also available for purchase at designated host sites
- Each site must provide a greeter to check wristbands
- Portable toilets are provided by Rural Ramble
- Staff wear matching Rural Ramble T-shirts to help the public readily identify operators and volunteers
- In the brochure, each site is given a designation or 'key' that classifies the farms' theme (i.e. **T** for Traditional farm, **UV** for unusual or added

value, **C** for a commercial site and **K** for kid appeal), amenities and service points (**t**- toilette, **e**-evaluation forms, **s**-sales, **f**-food, **rr**-rural ramble CD's and souvenirs)

- ***Tracking participation***

- Participants are encouraged to sign guest books at each site and complete an evaluation form that can be entered into a draw
- The greatest number of visitors through a single site in 2004 was 1 800
- Most individual farms report attendance is up and most host between 300-1 500 visitors
- Visitors who fill out evaluation forms are added to the Rural Ramble mailing list and are also entered into a draw to win a one hundred dollar gift certificate

Customer Focus

- ***Creating a diverse mix***

- The group has created a comprehensive souvenir program consisting of a custom made CD with songs about the country and the Rural Ramble, T-shirts, pin buttons, hats and mugs
- Souvenirs are sold at a handful of sites identified in the passport. It is not uncommon for a site to sell out of souvenirs
- A variety of the activities visitors can learn about, watch or participate in include:
 - 'Cows and Cowhands' team penning events
 - Farm machine displays and farm safety exhibit
 - Historical review of the Alderville First Nation and wild rice harvesting demonstration
 - Wagon rides, corn and bale mazes
 - Quilt displays
 - Spinning, butter making and milking demonstrations
 - Learn about horse care, nutrition, training and saddle types
 - Observe old fashioned wheat harvesting with both antique and modern machinery
 - Ride a 1906 CW Parker Carousel with forty brass horses and a 1934 Wurlitzer band organ
- Rural Ramble host sites have included: a non profit organization dedicated to the rehabilitation and placement of abused/neglected animals, machinery displays, museums with agricultural artifacts and stops at rural businesses
- Rural Ramble host farms have included: dairy, beef feedlots, horses, bees, llamas, goats, sheep, bison, trout, pigs and apple cider operations, fruit and vegetable farms, crops, a microbrewery and a maple syrup operator (to name a few)
- Each year the Rural Ramble tries to add 30-50% new host sites

- *Regional Cuisine*

- In 2006, the coordinator tried to organize a dinner on the Saturday evening of the event. Unfortunately she had to cancel due to a lack of interest from both the public and the ag community

Budget, Fundraising and Sponsorship

- The annual budget is contingent on the amount of sponsorship the Ramble is able to secure. In 2006, the budget was approximately \$30 000
- The annual marketing budget is often \$10 000+
- The majority of the Rural Ramble budget is designated towards advertising costs
- Other areas that tap into the budget include:
 - Signage for the route
 - Part time coordinator
 - Port-a-potty rentals and wash stations
 - Printing and distribution
 - Souvenir development (in 2006 organizers attempted to sell Rural Ramble posters, however these were not well received)
 - Website
 - Media hosting
 - 1-800 number
 - Prizes and Host Appreciation dinner
 - Host orientation
- Initial funding was secured through the Federation of Agriculture who exchanged business sponsorship dollars in return for passes to the event
- A local radio station is the official sponsor of the event, covers the cost of wristbands and provides a deal on 'spots'
- CIBC provides annual cash donations and sells admission packages
- In the past the group was able to secure provincial funding. In 2007, the group will look into applying for provincial funding
- County Dairy provides free milk and ice cream at each of the dairy farms
- The Beef Farmers Association provides product for 'giveaways'
- The local Co-op provides each host site with a package of sunflower seeds. Host sites plant these seeds at their entrance to 'great the public' and the tour map reminds visitors to "look for the sunflowers at each host location"
- Hamilton Twp Insurance provides each host site with a 'No Smoking' sign
- Rural Ramble receives three levels of sponsorship support (**Gold \$500+** with 13 sponsors, **Silver \$350-\$499** with 7 sponsors and **Bronze \$100-\$349** with 40 sponsors)
- Sponsors include commodity groups, local agri-businesses, various small to medium sized local businesses (regional economic development, Townships, associations, municipalities), the Federation of Agriculture and the occasional individual sponsor
- Sponsorship letters are sent out in January for the August event

Promotion

- Media

- In 2004, Ramble organizers hosted 'media days' where media personnel, local politicians, sponsors and host families are treated to a BBQ, demonstrations and farm animal exhibits, the announcement of Bale Display winners and media are given an opportunity to interview host operators
- The Ramble did not host a media day in 2005 or 2006. Many operators feel they are already too busy organizing for the big event while others feel the cost of hosting media days may not be the best allocation of the Ramble's budget
- For 2007, the coordinator is looking at other ways to engage the media. Ideas include leaving gift baskets filled with local produce with media personnel or organizing a low key media event
- The coordinator would like to reach out and attract media attention from Toronto by targeting morning/breakfast shows and having reporters/weather persons report at a host farm
- Local media are provided with a Rural Ramble package and free passes for reporters

- Publicity

- In 2004, the Ramble received a Canadian Agri-Food Award of Excellence in the area of 'Agriculture and Awareness Education'
- The Rural Ramble signature CD features 12 songs written and performed by Northumberland County's own James Gordon of CBC's Hometown Tunes
- The CD is also sold at a number of commercial places including three farmers' markets, Co-op stores, a café, gift shop and the local Chamber of Commerce
- Organizers participate in various Canada day promotions and parades, Heritage Days Exhibits and community events. Organizers bring signs, posters and help inform and excite the public about the Ramble

- Advertising

- Rural Ramble asks host sites to help advertise and promote the event at all opportunities. Organizers feel having operators help with promotions makes it feasible to not charge members an annual advertising/ promotional fee
- Radio advertising includes giveaways of admissions to the tour
- Rural Ramble print advertisement includes a glossy brochure (in 2005), bookmarks, posters and admission packages
- Approximately 10 000 passport packages are produced annually and are handed out at sales location
- Approximately 30 000 brochures and posters are distributed through VICs (Visitor Information Centers), Chamber of Commerce, schools, and at local businesses
- Organizers sell advertising space to local businesses throughout their print material and on their website (for local accommodations)

- In 2006, the Ramble’s printing company made a mistake on the date of the event and had to re-print at no extra cost. The coordinator took advantage of the situation by correcting the dates with a pen and handing out the extra brochures in the local schools
- The coordinator received permission to mail the brochures through the school courier system which sent the brochures to all the different schools, saving organizers time and money
- A newspaper company prints the posters, brochures and passports. The company also sells ad space within the Ramble’s print pieces which covers the cost of printing
- ***Group tours/packages/cross promotion***
 - Partnered with outside groups such as women’s institutions, local artisans, performers, church groups, 4-H and commodity groups. For example, a local women’s institution and 4-H host a canteen at two separate sites
 - Some B&B’s offer weekend packages including passes to the Ramble, accommodation and meals
 - The Ramble advertises local accommodations on their website
 - A local camp site off a major highway allows the Ramble to put up signs for the event
 - Rural Ramble encourages visitors to explore the various farmers’ markets located within the area (as the Market’s accommodate hours outside of the Rural Ramble and offer visitors something else to see and do)
- ***Prizes/contests***
 - Completed evaluations can be entered into a draw for cash prizes
 - The group organizes both a bale and photo contest to help the public get involved, build up hype around the event and attract media attention and publicity. Cash prizes are awarded to winners of both contests
 - The Bale Art annual contest is open to anyone (not just host families). Rules are posted on the website and the Ramble partners with the local art galleries to find judges. The Bale Display is promoted as the “largest art exhibit in the region”
 - The photo contest is only open to amateurs. Rules are posted on the website and the contest is advertised in the brochure. Winning photos are used in future promotions of the Rural Ramble

Membership

- Two million dollar insurance is a minimal requirement and a copy of the confirmation form from the insurance provider must be faxed to the coordinator. There is no group coverage plan
- Host sites are not charged a fee to participate in the event, however commercial sites are charged \$150
- Commercial sites have included local farmers’ markets, ag businesses, an antique store, a brewery and cheese shop

- New operators who want to join must meet certain criteria. Onsite inspections are completed by the coordinator to ensure informal criteria is being met
- Host sites of repeat commodity groups (beef, dairy and specific crop industries) are rotated, usually through their industry association group
- The operation where the winning, completed evaluation form is drawn from wins a cash prize
- Host sites are encouraged to enlist volunteers to help at their operations

Final Thoughts

- The coordinator of Rural Ramble offers the following key insight into running an event:
 - “Create a good impression and show visitors farmers are food and land stewards, (in Canada) look into the Farm Animal Council Video for advice”
 - “A challenge is to be self sustaining with admissions and to be able to complete the large amount of work required with volunteers and part time staff”
 - “The strength of the Ramble lies in the members of the community and their desire to continue to educate the public about the ag industry”

Strolling of the Heifers



STROLLING OF THE HEIFERS

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Website: www.strollingoftheheifers.org

Taking place the first weekend in June, the Strolling of the Heifers Parade and Festival is Vermont's light-hearted version of Spain's running of the bulls. The idea of walking heifers down main street and celebrating local agriculture in a family-fun festival was discussed in 2001 and the first annual event occurred in 2002. Organizers feel *the Stroll* helps raise public awareness around the importance of sustaining agriculture and family owned farms that maintain Vermont's rural way of life. Ultimately, the Stroll originated as a 'rejuvenation project' and organizers continue to fulfill this mandate by providing funding for agricultural programs targeted towards youth.

For 2005, (year four), the Stroll's budget is approximately \$140 000 and over 40 000 visitors attended the festival. Brattleboro (the site of the event) is located two hours from Boston and three hours from New York, giving organizers a large metropolitan area to draw from and advertise to. The 2006 Stroll was very successful with approximately 50 000 visitors attending the rainy event. Each year, the Stroll stays fresh by changing up its' mix of activities during the four day festival.

Planning

- Orly Munzing, a local from Brattleboro came up with the idea of Strolling of the Heifers in hopes it would put the town on the map. Working with a team of enthusiastic civic boosters, she helped fundraise more than \$70 000 for Brattleboro's first Stroll event
- The event strategically occurs in June, coinciding with National Dairy Month
- In 2001, the event had 10 000 visitors, 20 000 in the second year, 30 000 in the third year and approximately 40 000 attendees in the fourth year. Organizers attribute the unique, unusual flavor of the event, good marketing and good word of mouth promotion as factors that keep visitors coming back year after year
- Organizers have found success by intertwining the two themes of celebrating agriculture and celebrating the arts
- The event has been successful in fully incorporating the 'cow theme' and keeping it fresh by playing on words: "You'll have an *udderly* great time," "Bodacious Bovine Block Party," "Funky Heifer Contest," etc.
- In 2005 the event had no paid staff, however organizers believe a paid coordinator is becoming a necessity. Thus, for the 2006 event, organizers were able to hire a part time Executive Director and Media Director

Event Logistics

- Operational issues

- Two bus companies provide free transportation (nine buses in total) to the Parade and Dairy Fest & Marketplace from various Brattleboro parking lots in order to reduce traffic congestion. Buses run from 8:00 am till 4:15 pm
- Designated parking outside of the town is also available for RV's and the thousands of cars
- Designated parking space is reserved for those with limited accessibility
- Organizers rent twenty port-a-potties, eighty tables, six hundred chairs and one big tent. The Stroll owns 99% of the tents, purchased through a number of substantial grants (\$25 000 worth of tents)
- Organizers hire a huge dumpster for site cleanup and waste disposal
- Ensure adequate policing by paying actual police to be present at the festival
- Firemen, first aid and approximately one hundred volunteers are present at the festival
- Spotters and clean up crew walk the parade route
- Rain has been a contentious issue for the Stroll. Organizers are always worried about the rain. However when it does rain, it does not keep the crowds away. It rained for the 2006 event and organizers had to pull one of the events indoors. Although the Stroll owns many tents, it is never enough for when it rains

- Tracking participation

- Guest books are available for visitors to sign at various site events
- For the Sunday Farm Tours the number of visitors passing through each host farm differs. Determined through their own means of tracking, host farms receive anywhere from one hundred visitors to as little as a dozen

Customer Focus

- Creating a diverse mix

- The four day event begins on a Thursday evening and runs till Sunday afternoon
- Thursday evening begins with Farm Summit, an agricultural discussion led by experts representing a cross-section of professions. The 2005 discussion focused on addressing "youth's key role in assuring agriculture's future"
- Friday night begins with the Gallery Night Walk & Festival Kick off event, which is a monthly celebration of the arts, featuring a number of activities specifically related to Strolling of the Heifers. The event also includes a farmer's market, live entertainment and an assortment of street performers
- Strolling of the Heifers Parade begins at 10:00 am Saturday where 75 flower-bedecked bovines, a world famous Bread & Puppet Theatre

troupe, acrobatic baton twirlers, 4-H, Fife & Drum Corps, colorful floats, miniature horses, oxen, baby water buffalo and costume clad pooper-scoopers will parade down main street

- Dairy Fest & Marketplace is a fun-filled festival running after the Strolling of the Heifers parade. For 2005, the festival will feature a celebrity milking contest, a children's entertainment tent, a cheese tasting pavilion, craft building area for kids, a display of the Funky Heifers contest contenders and free ice cream provided by the Stroll's lead sponsor - Turkey Hill Dairy. Live performances will include a jazz band, a unicycle show, a puppet theatre show and jugglers.
- On Sunday, 16 host farms open their doors to the public for self-guided tours and nine additional farms are open by appointment. Farms host special activities such as hay rides, petting zoos, sheep shearing and goat milking demonstrations and showcase gift shops filled with local products. Host farms raise dairy cows, poultry, pigs, alpacas and sheep, grow vegetables; include honey, cheese and maple syrup operations; orchards and wineries.
- Farm Tour maps and information is available at area Chamber of Commerce and on the Stroll's website
- In 2005, the Stroll launched a new special activity geared towards those with a 'green thumb.' Special activities including gardening demonstrations and a kids planting area will occur during the Dairy Fest & Marketplace on the Saturday
- The 2005 Saturday evening Heifer Ball, a self-proclaimed, 'tongue in cheek' gala featured dancing, cocktails, appetizers and desserts created by Vermont's leading chefs. Participants bid on tabletop-sized cow statues decorated by area artists in the evening's silent auction. Tickets were \$40 and include admission to the museum's exhibit of "Fun & Funky," a collection of humorous, large scale sculptures and installations created by local artists
- With the exception of the Heifer Ball, all 2005 events and activities were free and open to the public
- In the past, The Stroll has also included a Bovine Block Party and antique show of 'old farm pieces and implements'
- For 2006, organizers put the Heifer Ball to rest and had a Vermont Jazz Concert (all proceeds go to the Jazz Center), a Heifer Ha Ha Contest, Hammy Award Ceremony and a family friendly Contra Dance. The Heifer Ball has been going for years and organizers decided to do something different. In the future, organizers have not ruled out reviving the Heifer Ball
- For 2006, event organizers continue to plan new events to keep the festival fresh. These include: Organic Valley Farmers' Breakfast, three stages with various entertainment, a farm fashion show, a Heifer Fiddler Festival, a basketball shoot out and The Hammys. The Hammys is an "anything goes" award ceremony to roast the winners of the 2006 *Heifer Ha! Ha!* Joke Contest

- ***Regional Cuisine***

- Using local ingredients, the Vermont Fresh Network will offer gourmet samples and cooking demonstrations by the State's finest chefs at the 'Best Chefs of Vermont Pavilion', on the Saturday afternoon
- The Vermont Fresh Network (www.vermontfresh.net) is an organization that builds partnerships among farmers, chefs and consumers to help strengthen Vermont's agricultural industry
- Local restaurants feature best 'chefs of the month' who use local products

Budget, Fundraising and Sponsorship

- The annual Budget for the Strolling of the Heifers is \$140 000. The total budget comes from sponsors through in kind and monetary support
- Turkey Hill Dairy is the Stroll's lead sponsor donating \$25 000 annually
- Holstein Association is a key player and for the past five years they have done all the printing for the event through in kind sponsorship - saving organizers approximately \$20 000
- In past years, the Stroll has received \$2 000 from the Department of Agriculture, however for the 2006 season, organizers were only able to secure \$1 000
- The local municipality contributes \$500 through in kind support
- The Stroll has approximately 150 sponsors
- Sponsorship levels range from \$100 to \$10 000 (platinum). Each sponsorship level incorporates various benefits including:
 - Name on stationary
 - Logo on press release
 - Pre-approved use of *Strolling of the Heifers* Logo in your advertising
 - Radio commercial, print ads and event flyer recognition
 - Logo recognition on website
 - Sponsor ad in parade program
 - Banner displayed in parade and/or Dairy Fest
 - Product sampling
 - VIP passes
 - Logo on parade T-shirt and/or logo on merchandising T-shirt
- The events founder, Orly Munzing is the sole fundraiser for the event and her success can be attributed to her tenacity, perseverance and belief in the event's mandate, "It is a passion for me and since it is an innate feeling I think my sponsors feel it. I could not sell something else the way I do the Heifer project. It is hard work and lots of calling. No one calls you. I send out the sponsorship packet and wait a few days and then start dialing the phone. It takes patience and enthusiasm"
- A mandate of the Stroll has been to raise money to underwrite projects to increase public awareness regarding the importance of farming and local agriculture. Therefore, in 2005 the Stroll awarded \$20 000 in funding to twenty projects,

- teaming local young people with farmers for agriculturally related learning experiences
- Additional funds from the event also pay for annual farm summit, grants for farm/school collaborations and for consultants to help farmers incorporate agtourism into their survival strategies

Promotion

- Media

- In 2005, the event attracted international attention and reached over seventy five million people through the support of national and local TV (CNN World Wide, TEEN KIDS NEWS, etc.), radio, newspapers and magazines
- Through in-kind sponsorship from the local regional papers, organizers are able to send out press releases to major papers (NY Times, Wall Street Journal, etc.)
- Organizers have built and maintained a good relationship with their media personnel by continuously mailing out information and making telephone calls

- Publicity

- Organizers are sure to include the fact their event is non profit to gain additional publicity and support
- In 2004, organizers created a promotional video at a cost of \$1 000
- Each year, event organizers hire a professional photographer to take footage of the parade
- 2005 is the third year in a row where the event has been named one of Vermont's 'Top Ten Summer Events' by the Chamber of Commerce
- The event founder, Orly Munzing was named one of Vermont's "heroes" in an issue of *Vermont Life* magazine

- Advertising

- A famed author/illustrator, Skip Morrow was asked to create the Stroll's logo. Skip feels the logo he created appeals to baby boomers and Generation 'X'ers alike and defines the event as a fun event, not strictly about agriculture
- In terms of advertisement, Strolling of the Heifers uses brochures, leaflets, a flyer, newspaper articles, posters and some paid radio time to help inform the public about the event. Organizers have found radio to be a great channel for spreading the word
- The event poster is colored and printed on a high quality paper. The poster includes a list of sponsors, a calendar of events, the Stroll's non-profit status and a large image of their logo. Two thousand posters are printed through in kind support. Organizers pay \$300 to distribute posters to the surrounding New England area
- The Stroll's sixteen page, colored newspaper flyer is filled with information on the event, its organizers and sponsors, colored pictures from prior years, maps of the various site activities, a list of the Farm Tour operations and plenty of paid advertising. The Brattleboro

Reformer, a paper for the South East Vermont region, prints and distributes 40 000 flyers in exchange for selling advertisement space

- ***Group tours/packages/cross promotion***

- In 2005, the Brattleboro area's farmers' market hosted several events in conjunction with the Strolling of the Heifers to help celebrate local agriculture
- The Farm Tour guide provides advertisement space for the areas surrounding farmers' markets and farm stay accommodations
- At this time, organizers do not package or work with local hotels, however some hotels have created their own packages during the event

- ***Prizes/contests***

- Create a Funky Heifer Contest where 'Heifers' can be between four and seven feet tall and made out of any material. Cash prizes include \$200 for first place, \$150 for second place and \$100 for third
- A Dairy Princess Pageant is held and the winner is recognized in the parade

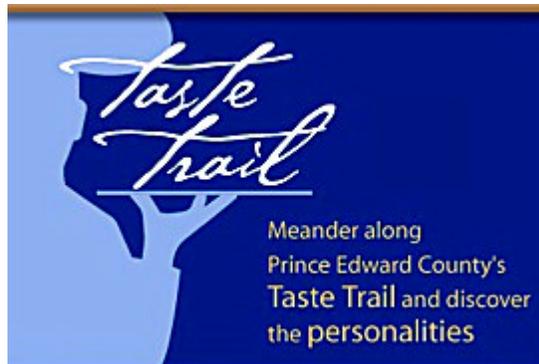
Membership

- Strolling of the Heifers has private insurance for the event
- Individuals need to apply to participate in any event activity (Farm Tour, the parade, etc.)
- A parade marshal reviews all parade entries. All parade entries must be ag-related
- Farms do not pay any membership fee to participate as a Farm Tour host
- Organizers pay farmers a hundred dollar honorarium and cover trucking expenses for the loan of heifers during the parade. Organizers feel giving farmers an honorarium helps to make the farmers contribution worth their time, keeping everyone happy
- Twenty five committee chairs, around one hundred volunteers and the two paid staff are responsible for organizing and coordinating all aspects of Strolling of the Heifers
- The twenty five organizers behind the Stroll represent diverse educational backgrounds, expertise and networks, offering a variety of skills that benefit the development of the organization
- Committee members include: an educational consultant, a communications specialist, a professional parade consultant, a rural development specialist, a sales manager, owners of various retail businesses, farmers, representatives to the Vermont Downtown Development Board, an executive director from the Chamber of Commerce, a web developer, a director of a theatre company, a designer, the town manager and those with special event planning, consumer branding, training, entrepreneurial, sponsorship and ag tourism skills
- The twenty five Committee chairs receive a stipend

Final Thoughts

- Orly Munzing believes the key to the Stroll's success is:
 - Honoring those people who work and volunteer their time for the Stroll by creating opportunities for volunteers to “shine” first and foremost
 - Creating a non exclusive event where organizations and associations who share and promote a similar mandate with the Strolling of the Heifers are included

TASTE THE COUNTY (highlighting the TASTE Trail)
Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada



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www.tastetrail.ca
www.thecounty.ca/taste

In 1998, a group of community entrepreneurs came together to identify the need for an organization to assist with the marketing and economic growth of Prince Edward County, resulting in the development of Taste the County™. Under the sponsorship of the Prince Edward County Chamber of Tourism & Commerce and the Prince Edward Federation of Agriculture, Taste the County™ accessed funding from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food through their Rural Job Strategies program. In 1999, \$500 000 was committed to Taste the County™ over a three-year period to assist with the organization's objectives.

The mission of Taste the County™ is to promote agriculture, tourism, arts & culture and consumerism in Prince Edward County, and to contribute to the quality of products and services available in the County. As of January 1, 2002 Taste the County™ is a self-sustaining, not-for-profit organization. In June of 2002 Taste the County™ incorporated and managers launched TASTE! *a celebration of regional cuisine*.

In 2004, with funding assistance from the Ministry of Tourism, the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Council and the local municipality, Taste the County™ helped launch the Taste Trail, a regional culinary tourism product featuring 24 regional food and beverage businesses. The Taste Trail is a series of businesses that meet the set criteria to participate and are linked via the Taste Trail theme, route signage, an annual bilingual guide book and website.

Planning

- Taste the County™ has found success by having a general focus (theme) but going beyond expectations by also promoting other areas of agricultural richness (i.e. history and heritage, culinary tourism, hospitality, antiques, culture, nature, recreation, etc.
- Taste the County™ oversees all aspects of the Taste Trail with the assistance of an Advisory Committee made up of Taste Trail business owners
- Taste the County™ is the event manager for TASTE! *a celebration of regional cuisine*

- Taste the County™ consists of two full time staff, one part time employee and a volunteer Board of Directors. Paid staff do ninety five percent of the work behind the Taste Trail and regional cuisine event
- Under Taste the County™, both the Taste Trail and Taste! *a celebration of regional cuisine* have helped broaden the shoulder season, increase tourism visits, attract more culinary tourism investment and grow the local economy
- The Taste Trail is open to both members and non members of Taste the County™

Event Logistics

- Route logistics

- The Taste Trail route is marked year round and includes signage on the 401 (a major Highway). The cost for the route signage is incorporated into the annual membership fee
- In addition to the available Taste Trail route signage, operators may pay for additional fingerboard signs on their establishment

- Tracking participation

- Each Taste Trail operator is asked to track how consumers find their business and how it relates to Taste Trail marketing effort, however the organization has not successfully implemented a tracking system
- Taste the County™ organizers are in the process of creating and implementing a tracking system

- Operational issues

- TASTE Trail participants are businesses in Prince Edward County that meet the following criteria:
 - Must be open for the majority of the year (6-8+ months)
 - Must provide an added value experience such as a tea room, a sandwich bar, tasting area and/or on site entertainment
 - If they manufacture/retail goods, these products (food and crafts) must be from either local ingredients or have a unique offering “made” in Prince Edward County
 - Must operate regular hours for the public
 - Restaurants must feature and promote county ingredients and menu items (or extremely unique county offering) on a regular basis. This includes offering county wines, ciders and beer

Customer Focus

- Creating a diverse mix

- Farms offering added value experiences, restaurants, inns, wineries and specialty shops are all included on the Taste Trail
- Other destinations on the Trail include: an ice cream shop, cafes, bistros, a marketplace set-up in a restored red barn, a chocolatier and restaurants with children friendly menus

- Cleanliness, Safety, Amenities

- On site amenities for each operation are listed in the annually distributed guide

- ***Regional Cuisine***

- Restaurants use county ingredients to create diverse menu items
- In 2002, Taste the County™ organized TASTE! *a celebration of regional cuisine* showcase.
- In 2005, the event celebrates its' fourth annual year of offering great food, wine and all things culinary to approximately 2 500 visitors over the Thanksgiving weekend (October 6-7th)
- The event has incrementally grown each year, now incorporating over 50 regional food and beverage partners
- In 2005, the event had an economic impact of over \$450 000 into the area's local economy.
- TASTE! *a celebration of regional cuisine* stays fresh by annually presenting new themes and increasing the "quality" of the show experience
- Admission is \$12.50 per person (restricted to adults only, with no infants or pets permitted) and includes a souvenir wine glass, event parking, free cooking seminars and demonstrations, a silent auction, door prizes and live jazz
- Sampling tickets cost 50 cents a piece; delicious foods and wine cost anywhere from one to six tickets

Budget, Fund Raising and Sponsorship

- Initially, Taste the County™ grew under the sponsorship of the Prince Edward County Chamber of Tourism and Commerce, the Prince Edward Federation of Agriculture and accessed funding from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture
- Through funding, Human Resources Development Canada assisted the group to hire an event coordinator for a temporary eight month position
- The Chamber provides assistance through producing area maps
- The TASTE Trail has received funding from the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation to build the infrastructure needed to implement the Trail and from the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Council to assist in creating marketing materials
- The TASTE! *a celebration of regional cuisine* is the biggest fundraising event for Taste the County™
 - The group has the support of 225 partners representing a wide variety of sectors

Promotion

- ***Media***

- Taste the County™ has hosted writers from both newspapers and diverse 'lifestyle' magazines, generating thousands of dollars in media coverage
- County businesses give free meals to writers, the county assists in the costs of rental vehicles and artists are available for demonstrations

- Regularly distribute press releases about new Taste Trail and TASTE! *a celebration of regional cuisine* developments to provincial media contacts
 - A fifteen-minute promotional video was made for the 2004 Taste! *a celebration of regional cuisine* event. The video helps capture the ‘feel’ of the event (<http://www.visionandvoice.ca/samples.htm#event>)
- **Publicity**
- On-line response grew by 500% one week after the redesign of the Taste the County™ website. It is now viewed by approximately 800 000 people annually
 - The Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation has invited the Taste Trail to participate in its Great Fall Drives campaign which is directed at getting consumers out and exploring Ontario’s fall season
 - The Taste Trail won a silver award for the best marketing campaign under \$100,000 at the 2005 Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation awards
- **Advertising**
- Use ‘Taste Trail’ billboards in the area
 - 30,000 bilingual Taste Trail booklets are produced annually
 - The Taste Trail guide includes a brief half page description of each site and a colored photo creatively showcasing the operator (often with their signature product)
 - The Taste Trail guide also includes a listing of local accommodations (B&B’s and Manor houses) and specialty shops
 - Visitors can purchase a variety of Taste! souvenirs (including ball caps and T-shirts) at Taste! *a celebration of regional cuisine*
- **Group tours/packages/cross promotion**
- Taste! *a celebration of regional cuisine*, offers (over the Thanksgiving weekend) a variety of different specialty packages visitors can choose from
 - Packages include two or three nights of accommodation at a choice of spas, Inns, B&B’s and Guesthouses. All accommodation packages include breakfast, dinner and tickets to Taste! *a celebration of regional cuisine*
- **Prizes/contests**
- In the 2005 Taste event, VIA rail donated a round trip ride for two that organizers used as a door prize

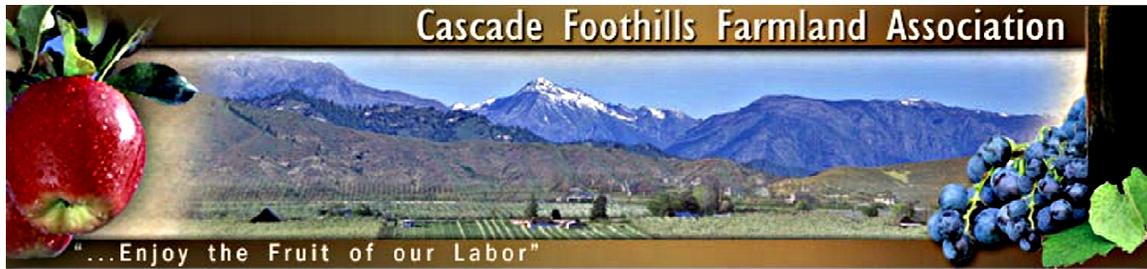
Membership

- Operators pay \$190 annually to join Taste the County™
- Operators pay \$1100 annually to join the Taste Trail program
- The membership fee includes a management fee so operators are not required to participate or volunteer their time towards the program, allowing the three paid staff to do the majority of the work
- In 2005, twenty four operators participate in the Taste Trail

- Taste Trail operators receive:
 - Eighty Taste Trail route signs
 - A description of their operation on the Taste Trail website, including a detailed map highlighting where to find each host site
 - Taste Trail cooperative advertising opportunities
 - Media writer tours
 - The organization makes a point to host a volunteer and partner appreciation night
 - Taste the County™ partners (spanning a variety of sectors) pay an annual partnership fee and receive the following benefits:
 - Complimentary listing in the annual Prince Edward County ‘A Beautiful Island Adventure’ visitors guide
 - Listing on the www.pec.on.ca website
 - Cooperative and promotional advertising discounts generated by Taste the County™ brokering efforts
 - Quarterly newsletters
 - Additional fee for service for listing in annual Roadside Stand Map & Directory (non-partners can participate at an increased cost)
 - Reduced booth fee at TASTE! event
 - Use of logo in marketing materials
 - Ability to purchase flags and product stickers with logo
 - Subsidized or no-cost educational workshops designed to benefit partners and their employees
 - Up front involvement in new initiatives by Taste the County™ such as the Taste Trail and access to government funding

Final Thoughts

- Take the time and effort to design a good looking, friendly and useful website and logo
- Celebrate past accomplishments but don't stay stale. Keep working on and creating new accomplishments that can better the cluster, it's members and the community



VISIT WASHINGTON FARMS, Cascade Foothills Farmland Association
Chelan County, Washington State, USA

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The Cascade Foothill Farmland Association (CFFA) was formed as a means to help those operators in Chelan County who were increasingly finding it difficult to sustain their farming businesses. A chair of the local ag tourism committee brought together ten growers, members of the Chamber of Commerce and members from the local transit company to form a non-profit society that would oversee the development and marketing of ag tourism within the two counties.

With the help of a grant from the Port of Chelan County, the CFFA was formed March 2002. Representing the development and promotion of ag tourism in North Central Washington, the association provides support, training and event coordination for tourism destinations and related individual businesses. The Port of Chelan County estimates the CFFA drew \$10 million in extra tourism revenue to the county in their first year (2002).

The association participates in a number of initiatives and holds several events and festivals each year. This report will concentrate on the CFFA's ag tourism Driving Map (56 operators in 2005) and the Leavenworth Wine Tasting Festival. The launching of the festival had 6 000 interested participants in 2002. Over the years, numbers have declined to approximately 2 000 participants attending the one day festival in 2005. However, even with lower attendance numbers, over the years the dollars generated at the festival have increased.

Planning

- Washington State is the second largest premium wine producer in the USA with over three hundred and fifty wineries and grape growers. The total economic impact on the State is three billion dollars. Thus, a large component of ag tourism directly and indirectly relates to the wine industry
- The development of ag tourism in Chelan County has reaped benefits, but also has been a point of conflict. At times, neighbors of successful ag tourism operators have complained about the increase in noise and traffic tourists bring to the area. The Chelan County Planning Department held a series of meetings; together farmers and

members of the planning department rewrote the rules and regulations for growth management in Chelan County

- In the first year of planning (2002), organizers attracted 100 members, published a website and distributed over 75 000 driving maps
- The coordination and implementation of the CFFA's Driving Map and Wine Tasting Festival is through volunteer efforts headed by the President of the CFFA association and two other primary volunteers

Event Logistics

- Route logistics

- 100 product identification signs (3' x 18') with the association's logo were produced and placed in private roadside fields – this created a lot of interest and many more visitor stops
- Free ag tourism driving maps can be requested by phone or e-mail

- Operational issues

- Operators must meet health regulation standards to participate in the driving tour
- Beyond health regulations, there are no other formal 'standards of operation' that sites must meet to be listed in the Driving Map – each site is responsible for its' own operation
- The majority of operations represented on the Driving Map brochure are mature sites, open year round with plenty of experience working with visitors
- The 2005 Driving Map includes a contact number, address, driving directions, hours of operation and a brief description of each operation
- The 56 operations listed on the Driving Map (2005) are categorized as: Bakery, Cider, Fruit Stand, Nursery, Tourist Attraction, Winery/Tasting Room. Some sites charge a nominal fee for participation in value added activities (i.e. pumpkin cannon ball toss), however the majority do not charge admission
- 88 operators are participating in the 2006 driving map. An increase in numbers can be attributed to having more wineries come on board and a phenomenal growth in popularity of regional ag tourism products
- The 5th Annual Leavenworth Wine Tasting Festival charges a \$10 event admission fee. For \$20, visitors can purchase an admission ticket with five wine tasting tokens and a commemorative glass
- Approximately twenty additional volunteers are recruited to help run the Leavenworth Wine Tasting Festival

- Tracking participation

- The number of participants who visit operations located on the CFFA's Driving Map is not formally tracked or known
- Wine Tasting Festival participants are tracked through wristbands. For the 2006 festival, organizers have ordered 3 000 wristbands

Customer Focus

- Creating a diverse mix

- Operations listed on the Driving Map brochure include: fruit stands, farms and ranches, nurseries, museums, orchards, outdoor recreation, wineries and a farmers market
- Beyond the operations listed on the Driving Map, information on lodging, dining, tourist attractions, festivals, harvest dates, associate members and public transit is included in the brochure
- Value added activities offered by operators include: mazes, petting zoos, pony and wagon rides, guided tours through orchards, u-picks, on farm retail, wine tasting, etc.
- Beyond experiencing the tastes of premier wines from Washington State wineries, the Leavenworth Wine Tasting Festival includes retail booths, live music, gourmet foods and activities for the whole family

- Regional Cuisine

- 'A Taste of Leavenworth' draws about 300 attendees and features local food and wine, merchandise, a silent auction, art and music (this event is not directly related to the CFFA's Driving Map)
- Tickets are \$25 (no minors)
- 2006 is the event's fourth year running
- A Taste of Leavenworth is a fundraising event, supported by the CFFA and sponsored by the Leavenworth Rotary Club

Budget, Fundraising and Sponsorship

- In 2005, CFFA's annual budget was \$90 000
- \$25 000 came from the Port of Chelan County, primarily used by CFFA to create, market and distribute the driving map
- The remainder of the budget is raised through admission fees collected at the multiple CFFA festivals
- In 2006, CFFA was able to secure \$5 000 through the Port of Chelan Lodging Tax fund (2% from the County and 4% from the City) which was used towards marketing and distribution of the 2006 driving map
- The Leavenworth Wine Tasting Festival is a fund raising event for the CCFA. All proceeds go towards marketing local growers and ag tourism efforts in North Central Washington

Promotion

- Media

- The CFFA writes regular press releases, participates in interviews and has articles in newspaper and magazines

- Advertising

- 125 000 driving maps were distributed throughout Washington State in 2005
- Organizers created a TV ad that was advertised on a local Seattle station

- Purchase radio ad space in local and Washington state stations
- The CFFA website has been a great tool to help promote the Driving Map and Wine Tasting Festival
- ***Group tours/packages/ cross promotion***
 - Operations located on the Driving Map can accommodate bus tours
 - The Wine Tasting Festival has partnered with a local mountain retreat operator. The package includes two nights accommodation, four meals on site, lunch at the festival and admission passes
 - Information on the Driving Map and Leavenworth Wine Tasting Festival is linked online with other tourism websites

Membership

- Operators are responsible for general insurance coverage and for events the CFFA carries \$5 million in liability and board coverage. Organizers were able to secure a special insurance rate as a non profit group
- Cascade Foothills Farmland Association's Board consists of nine volunteers who represent diverse backgrounds including fruit stand operators, wineries and local businesses
- The Board is responsible for planning, organizing and coordinating all CFFA events
- In 2005 CFFA had 120 members
- The association offers two levels of membership: Agricultural member (\$150) and Non- Agricultural or association member (\$175). Membership includes a periodic newsletter, email updates, a live link on the website, a location listing on the Driving Map (or listing for non-agricultural members) and a twenty four word description in the brochure
- The primary role of CFFA members is to maintain their operation, promote ag tourism and work cooperatively to market the operations of all CFFA members involved in the Driving Map (including lodging, etc.) and the Leavenworth Wine Tasting Festival
- Non Agriculture members include: dinning establishments, gift shops and antiques, VIA 97 (gateway to Hwy 97 Corridor from Leavenworth to Vernon, BC), a humane society, winery associations, the Grape Growers Association, chamber of commerce, downtown associations, etc.
- Over the years the cost of membership has increased from the original fee of \$20 to \$100 to \$150 and now \$175 (with no decline in membership)
- Membership remains strong because operators understand the benefits of having their operation promoted through the Driving Map and CFFA's marketing plan
- Wineries pay \$100 each to participate in the Leavenworth Wine Tasting Festival and are accepted on a 'first come first serve' basis. The Festival has space for a possible twenty wineries out of the approximately thirty who show interest

Final Thoughts

- Be prepared for potential conflicts of interest between those farmers interested in becoming ag tourism operators and local residents who feel an increased amount of visitors to the area may increase traffic and noise pollution; detracting from the local residents quality of life. When planning, be sure to discuss the initiative with all farmers and players in the area (participants, potential participants and non-participants) and give others the opportunity to voice their concerns. Conflicting interests that go unnoticed may result in lengthy proceedings and subsequent changes to growth management regulations
- The president of the CFFA accredits the success and growth of the association to volunteers and members working together to promote CFFA operators, events, festivals, and complimentary ag tourism service industries (lodging, recreation, etc.)

Case Study I

AGRICLUSTER

Tioga County, New York, USA

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Website: www.agricluster.org

www.visittioga.com

In the early 1990's, the Central New York Resource Conservation & Development (CNY RC&D), a non-profit, USDA funded association wrote a proposal for Federal funding through the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). With funding secured, RC&D was able to begin developing an agricultural-focused, cluster initiative within Tioga County. A second staff member was hired and worked with RC&D to develop the AgriCluster Pilot Project. The pilot would follow a Three Phase plan that would aspire to link small family owned and rural micro-enterprises on a 'tourism trail'. Unfortunately, funding ran out before the AgriCluster was able to become sustainable and the program was turned over to a local tourism agency. This case study will look at the development of AgriCluster, examine the three program phases, identify factors leading up to the eventual stagnation of the pilot project and will conclude by identifying positive outcomes that have derived from the original community partnerships.

The AgriCluster project is a three-phase, Rural Economic Development project. The project relies on agricultural and non-agricultural organizational collaboration plus the cooperative commitment of small family owned and micro enterprises. Approximately \$125 000 was secured through ARC funding and non-profit associations provided in kind support through contributions of their time and resources. In the first year of developing the project, funding was primarily used to hire a coordinator (Linda LaRosa-Mosner), on

incidentals spent to improve each business and for hiring professional trainers and consultants. Linda's role provided leadership, advocacy, marketing and business development and she worked as a mediator between operators and service organizations.

Before operators were brought on board, RC&D spent the first year of the project working behind the scenes, creating partnerships with non-profit service organizations. Linda believes it is crucial to create a network of partners who will be able to provide the resources needed to help the operators grow their businesses as "micro enterprise owners can't do everything on their own, they just don't have the time." By identifying key players within the community, Linda was able to create a "one-stop-shopping" model future AgriCluster operators could use to connect with the resources they needed. Organizers were now ready to implement the first phase of the project.

The town and village of Candor, located in Tioga County was designated as the site for Phase I of the pilot project. Phase I of the project involves small business development through individualized assistance to fifteen rural enterprises. To ensure operators were committed to the program, they were first required to fast track five hundred dollars for attending information sessions and ultimately writing their own business plan. Upon completion of their business plan, all fifteen operators were reimbursed their five hundred dollars and were recognized for their achievements through a highly publicized "Graduation Ceremony." Senators and agricultural representatives were invited to the ceremony and with the 'graduates', participated in a formal bus tour of each farm operation (Hilary Clinton was in attendance and bought goat soap for the Whitehouse). Phase I of the pilot further encompassed the coordinator visiting each site, going through the operators' books, identifying strengths and weaknesses and then

connecting operators to the appropriate network of resources (specific non-profit service organizations) to find solutions to identified problems. Lastly, an important initiative that developed in Phase I was the formation of the Catatonk Valley Association. This association was to become the umbrella organization representing the AgriCluster operators. Catatonk Valley Association was intended to become a resource to support operators to keep the AgriCluster program sustainable once funding came to an end.

To develop Phase II of the AgriCluster Pilot, RC&D again secured approximately \$125 000 from ARC. A second community located in Tioga County, Owego was designated along with Candor for the site of Phase II. The goal of Phase II was to increase the ability of operators to successfully develop their business and make a link between AgriCluster I and AgriCluster II participating businesses, expanding the tourism product in Tioga County. All businesses were provided with assistance and resources to develop websites, a joint marketing brochure and co-marketing initiatives. Funding was used to create a business plan for Catatonk Valley Association. A business planning session was also organized to help the second community transition into the project, however, bringing in the second community created some friction between the two groups of operators. Some operators felt their sales would decrease with the new ‘competition’ and failed to create a partnership with the second community.

Phase III of the pilot included cluster development where operators from both communities would take ownership of Catatonk Valley Association by electing officers and establishing by-laws. Furthermore, in Phase III, AgriCluster participants would be provided with assistance in the development of their business image through various

forms of marketing. Unfortunately, funding ran out before Phase III could be fully integrated into the project and the pilot inevitably came to an end.

The greatest obstacle AgriCluster faced was the challenge of creating a sustainable initiative out of an unsustainable funding source which Linda attests to: "...but as always when working with grants and the goal isn't to become sustainable as a program, you put so much money into something and it's not going to necessarily be sustainable."

Through funding RC&D was able to keep the program successfully running for five years, but organizers felt ongoing guidance and resources were needed for upwards to eight or ten years. When funding ran out, organizers turned the project over to the local tourism authority. Although the tourism office felt they were able to support the pilot, in the end, the office lost a key player who was interested in maintaining the project.

Ultimately, the tourism office did not provide the necessary leadership to keep AgriCluster successfully running. Although the AgriCluster pilot was not able to sustain itself, many positive outcomes currently existing in Tioga County can be attributed to the project.

The AgriCluster pilot can be looked at as a success story in many ways and as a tool for ag tourism partnerships to learn from. Although the project may not have actualized into a sustainable program, through access to individual assessments and professional knowledge many individual operators have increased their sales, both during the pilot and after. "If fifteen businesses pick up in one year," Linda LaRosa-Mosner believes "you've done a lot". Linda remains in contact with many operators and can list success story after success story as many farms have continued to diversify their product, expand their businesses and grow their revenue streams. Secondly, a partnership between agriculture

and non-agriculture organizations within Candor and Owego has grown and evolved as both communities continue to work together and share a website. Currently, thirty four farms and rural operators are listed on Tioga County Tourism's website (including original operators involved in AgriCluster). Furthermore, a newly printed, thirty two page guide of farm tours, products, events and a harvest calendar has been created for 2006. Although AgriCluster has not been able to rebuild itself over the last decade and a half, AgriCluster spurred the development of many new initiatives that highlight and connect family owned and micro-enterprises with each other, local business associations and Tioga County Tourism.