

Ag Tourism Cluster Development

**** The 4 Step Process ****

1. Rally the troops

2. Seed with some ideas

3. Pick something and run with it

4. Evaluate and follow-up



1. Rally the troops – Phase 1, Stakeholders

Be proactive. Someone has to take the initiative to bring people together.

What Alberta Agriculture did:

- **We chose 3 pilot regions for ag tourism cluster development based on the following criteria:**
 - Proximity to major markets
 - Critical mass of market-ready ag tourism product
 - Interest, commitment and time available of local stakeholders
- **Met with stakeholders for each region. Discussed opportunities and challenges facing ag tourism in the area.**
- **Allowed time for networking and building rapport. Gauged support and interest in working together.**
- **Discussed and agreed on the basic premise of ag tourism cluster development and a common, overarching goal (see below).**
- **Pulled together an ag tourism operator inventory for the area and list of other potential stakeholders.**
- **Determined next steps, ie. operator meeting date set, someone offered a venue for the meeting and pay for lunch, someone offered to send invitations and take RSVPs.**

Keys to Success:

- **Suggested stakeholder invitees:**
 - Municipal Economic Development staff
 - Community Futures staff
 - Ag Fieldmen
 - Travel Alberta In-province regional rep.
 - TDR (Tourism Destination Region)
 - DMO (Destination Marketing Org.)
 - Chambers of Commerce
 - Local colleges
 - Alberta Agriculture Ag Tourism Initiative staff
- **Stakeholder support is a major key to success. They provide:**
 - Knowledge of the local area and the ag sector
 - Knowledge and expertise in the tourism industry
 - Knowledge and access to local resources (ie. mapping, graphics, P.R., access to networks, places to meet, administrative support etc.)
 - The ability to help pull people together and keep a project progressing
 - Marketing dollars for group initiatives
- **Discuss and agree on the basic premise *“there is profit to be made through partnerships”*.**
- **Discuss and agree on the overarching common goal that *“Ag Tourism operators need to work together cooperatively to access new markets, boost profile and awareness, and increase their appeal/draw”*.**
- **Allow time to build rapport and excitement among stakeholders.**

1. Rally the troops – Phase II, Operators

Be proactive. Someone has to take the initiative to bring people together.

What the pilot clusters did:

- **Operator meetings were held.**
- **Discussed and agreed on the basic premise of ag tourism cluster development and the common, overarching goal (see phase 1).**
- **Used a Powerpoint presentation (see Resource Appendix) to define ag tourism, and demonstrate why clustering and partnerships were so important for ag tourism.**
- **Used Word of Mouth handout (see Resource Appendix) to show how to build sales reps and drive W.O.M.**
- **Allowed groups to network, get to know each other and the stakeholders, and build rapport.**
- **Discussed basic parameters involved in working together.**
- **Developed action steps to work together**

Keys to Success:

- **Suggested operator invitees (consider ag-based, market-ready operators):**
 - Start with the Alberta Agriculture Ag Tourism Directory (see Resource Appendix) for a list of operators in your communities. Use stakeholders and key operators to flesh out the list (ie. garden/center greenhouses, market gardens, food and agri-processors, other potential farms and ranches)
 - Ag Societies
 - Farmers' Markets
 - Other ag-based historic sites, museums, event organizers
 - 4-H clubs
 - Ag-inspired retailers and artisans
- **Take time to think about the process for these meetings. Determine your desired outcomes and ensure that the meeting is structured to achieve these outcomes. (ie. provide opportunities for networking, structured small group discussion , etc). *This meeting will lay the foundation for future initiatives!***
- **Success lies in the power and the passion of the people in the partnerships! Attempt to build excitement and reinforce confidence by offering support.**

2. Seed with some ideas

There are many sources for ideas. Look to other jurisdictions to see what they've done. Remember, good ideas are created, great ideas are stolen!

What the pilot clusters did:

- **In an attempt to get quick wins, we researched ag tourism cluster success stories from other regions and shared these ideas with the participants through handouts, websites, and brochure examples.**
- **We concentrated on market-focused projects that would result in increased word of mouth and creating "sales reps".**

Keys to Success:

- See Resource Appendix for Partnership Examples handout and suggested websites.**
- Pilot ag tourism cluster groups contacts:**
 - **Driving tour circuits:**
 - ◆ Country Soul Stroll (Edmonton area cluster - Sturgeon County) – contact Tam Anderson 780-939-4320 ext. 222, www.countrysoulstroll.ca
 - ◆ Fur and Feathers Farm Tour (Edmonton area cluster – Strathcona County) – contact Erica Robins, Strathcona County at 780-464-8259, www.furandfeathersfarmtour.com
 - **FAM (familiarization) tours:**
 - ◆ Porcupine Hills Guest Ranches (Southwest Alberta cluster – Claresholm) – contact Judy Lucas, Lucasia Ranch Vacations at 403-625-2295
 - ◆ Red Deer County Country Roads Tours – contact Elna Edgars, Edgar Farms at 403-227-2443
 - **Agri-food Events:**
 - ◆ Harvest Festival of Foods (Edmonton area cluster – Strathcona County) – contact Erica Robins, Strathcona County at 780-464-8259
 - ◆ A Taste of the High Country (Southwest Alberta cluster – Pincher Creek) – contact Colleen Cyr, Bloomin' Inn Guest Ranch at 403-627-5829
 - **Operator Showcase at existing event:**
 - ◆ Little New York Daze Ag Tourism Operator Showcase (Southwest Calgary cluster – Longview) – contact Longview Village Office at 403-558-3922
 - **Others:**
 - ◆ ERATACs – Edmonton Region Ag Tourism Action Committee project – Visit the Country driving guide of ag tourism attractions and events in Edmonton region municipalities – contact Erica Robins, Strathcona County at 780-464-8259
 - ◆ Country Christmas Getaway Packages of ag tourism attractions and events in the rural Edmonton municipalities – contact Sherri Levesque, Sturgeon County at 780-939-4321, www.countrychristmas.ca

3. Pick something and run with it

There are several projects to choose from. Decide what market you want to influence and pick an appropriate project. Remember the common, overarching goal is about building profile and awareness.

What the pilot clusters did:

- We knew that we needed to keep people engaged so we pushed for them to pick projects they could get started on right away.
- Groups set meeting dates, listed who else needed to be involved, and determined key project champions.
- Stakeholders offered venues for meetings and other support.

Keys to Success:

How to decide what project to pick:

- Decide what market you want to influence (see W.O.M. handout)
- Decide if you want to “take the product to the market OR the market to the product”
- Establish if the project is “do-able”
- Look for quick wins that will start to build cluster momentum

Tips for success:

- Start with the end in mind. Ask yourselves “**WHY are we doing this, FOR WHOM, and HOW**”
- Define the objectives for the project. For example:
 - o Raise profile and awareness
 - o Educate about local agriculture
 - o Increase cross-promotion
 - o Raise money
 - o NOTE: You may want to achieve a combination of these objectives – make sure you have strategies in place to achieve each of the objectives you choose.
- Identify one or more champions and get MANY helpers involved
- Don't reinvent the wheel – contact those who have already tried things and learn from their lessons
- Use your stakeholders (see Step 1 – Phase 1, under what stakeholders can provide)
- Go after sponsorship
- Promote, promote, and cross-promote (don't forget to post events on www.industry.travelalberta.com and notify stakeholders)
- Take time to continue to build relationships and trust along the way, remember its **the power and the passion of the people in the partnerships.** (ie. use work bees for specific activities, take time to celebrate)

4. Evaluate and follow-up

The pilot clusters discovered (in some cases after the fact!) that it's very important that you do some tracking to help you with future planning – learn from their experience!

What the pilot clusters did:

- **Meetings or conference calls were held with stakeholders after the first operator meetings were complete to:**
 - debrief
 - determine commitment in supporting initiatives
 - and discuss next steps.
- **Stakeholders split up responsibilities in following up and supporting groups, depending on their needs.**
- **Once all the projects were complete, operators were brought together again to:**
 - celebrate successes
 - discuss lessons learned
 - consider taking current projects to the next level
 - and consider taking on new projects

Keys to Success:

- **Determine how you will know if your project was successful (ie. Did you meet your objectives?)**
 - Think about the information you would need to “sell” a new operator or potential sponsor on the concept if you wanted to repeat the project.
- **Methods to obtain this information include:**
 - Collect financial data whenever you can – individually and for the partnership.
 - Collect attendance data whenever you can:
 - How many?
 - Who were they – demographics?
 - Where were they from?
 - How did they hear about it?
 - What improvements did they suggest?
 - Use a draw or some other means to establish a database of the people who came.
- **Take the time for recognition, celebration and continued opportunities to network.**

“Things may come to those who wait, but only the things left by those who hustle”
Abraham Lincoln

Resource Appendix

- ❑ **Alberta Agriculture Ag Tourism Directory** – www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/general/agritour.nsf
- ❑ **Documents available at www.agric.gov.ab.ca/diversify under Ag Tourism - Cluster Development:**
 - **Powerpoint presentation** to introduce the concept of Ag Tourism Cluster Development
 - **Alberta Ag Tourism hand-outs:**
 - Word Of Mouth (WOM)
 - Partnership Examples
 - ** watch for new handouts on Coordinating FAM tours, and Developing Driving Route Events – level one and two
- ❑ **Cluster Examples:**
 - www.rural-ramble.com
 - www.hoodriverfruitloop.com
 - www.gardeninspiredtourism.com
 - <http://discoverfrederickmd.com/funfarm/ffgi.html>

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