

Ag Tourism CLUSTER

AG TOURISM NEWS FROM AROUND THE PROVINCE AND BEYOND



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BRINGING ALBERTA TO YOU!

AG TOURISM CLUSTERS THE NEW PIONEERS

I wonder how many of you involved in ag tourism cluster projects in Alberta know that you are like a new breed of pioneer? As the ag tourism industry in this province continues to grow, the cluster events and activities that you are coordinating are on the forefront of the next stage of development. An industry begins with one operator at a time, growing to small organizations of operators (clusters), and eventually a larger cohesive group working together to everyone's benefit.

In light of this, we would like to remind you that there are other ag tourism clusters across the province working diligently towards similar goals. On one level it might be said, "That's nice to know". However, this little point holds in it an opportunity to show traveling consumers that what you are doing is no passing fad. By cross promoting other cluster events you lend credibility to your own activities. We encourage you to take this idea to heart and show that you are a part of a larger movement to showcase the many things that the ag tourism industry and their rural communities have to offer. How could you do this? For starters you could:

- Become familiar with what the other clusters are offering (see page 2).
- Put a link to other cluster events on your website and ask them to do the same.
- Request copies of other cluster project brochures and distribute them at your event (and vice versa).

Share your pride in Alberta's first class tourism products and in the meantime don't forget to celebrate your pioneer status. You are indeed ambassadors for your industry.

SOUTH CENTRAL AG TOURISM CLUSTER FUN WITH A FARM TOUR

When thinking about forming partnerships – the 'sky is the limit.' This is exactly what organizers of the Fun Farm Tour (South Central Cluster) learned. In offering a one day driving tour in the country, organizers felt the high cost of gas may be a deterrent for some families wanting to enjoy the event. Organizers approached Gas King (a local gas station chain in Southern Alberta) for a weekend discount to be made available to Fun Farm Tour visitors. Rather than a discount, Gas King sponsored a \$100 gift certificate which organizers used in a draw designed to track visitor numbers. Better yet, Gas King committed to selling passes at its' five Lethbridge locations and for one week, incorporated Fun Farm Fest into their regular advertising campaign.



For the first year of operation, organizers were able to offer a diverse mix of 10 ag tourism destinations including: two u-picks, animal operations, regional cuisine, a museum, corn maze, greenhouse and soap maker. For the 2006 event, organizers had a very short time frame to work within - only 39 days to get the event up and running.

LESSONS LEARNED

The event organizers felt the event was held a bit late in the season (second Saturday in September), as potential operators were tied up with harvest, farm produce was no longer at its peak and the risk of an early frost could have adversely effected on-farm produce sales. This year the organizers plan to host the Fun Farm Tour earlier in the season – on Saturday, July 7, 2007.

Contact: LanaRoberts, Coordinator, Phone: (403) 327-8900
E-mail: lanea@meetingsandevents.ca
Web-site: www.funfarmtour.com

CLUSTER HAPPENINGS

Ag Tourism cluster projects are now happening all across the province. Plans are now coming together for activities and events for the 2007 season. Here's a sneak peak of some of these events. Stay tuned for more details on these and other exciting ag tourism cluster events across the province over the next few months.

Red Deer's Country Drive

A Celebration Showcase Weekend will take place on Saturday and Sunday, July 14 and 15. Check out www.countrydrive.ca

Sylvan Lake Farmgate Guide

Watch soon for the launch of this group's website and for the 2007 edition of the Sylvan Lake Farmgate Guide.

Country Soul Stroll

The 5th anniversary of the Country Soul Stroll involves numerous events in addition to the actual Stroll on July 21 and 22, 2007. These activities include a motor-coach daytrip by Anderson Tours, a TASTE! of SUMMER event, and a TASTE! of FALL event. Check out www.countrysoulstroll.ca

Edmonton Countryside Spring Drive

The Edmonton Countryside Spring Drive will take place Mother's Day weekend, May 12 and 13. Check out www.visitthecountry.ca

Growing Rural Tourism Conference

When: March 5 - 7, 2007

Where: Camrose Regional Exhibition



This year's conference theme will benefit individual business owners, tourism committees, economic development officers, agriculture societies and municipal representatives by providing new initiatives, practical examples and thought-provoking ideas.

For more information on the scholarship or to register for the conference go to www.GrowingRuralTourism.ca or call 1-800-296-8112.

National Ag Awareness Conference Bursaries

Growing Alberta has announced that four bursaries, valued at \$2,000 each, will be awarded to assist with the cost of sending a delegate to the 2007 National Agriculture Awareness Conference (NAAC) in London, Ontario. These bursaries are available to groups operating in Alberta with a mandate to increase awareness about the agriculture and agri-food industry. Is this you? Ag awareness is often an objective for ag tourism clusters.



For information check out www.growingalberta.com or contact lisa.smith@growingalberta.com or phone (780) 466-7905, ext 221. The application form must be completed, signed and received by Growing Alberta by March 26, 2007.

Barn Quilts of Grundy County

QUILTS ON BARNS? HOW EXOTIC. THE EFFECT COULD BE QUITE HYPNOTIC!

The Barn Quilts of Grundy County in Iowa create a unique type of art, reminiscent of the old Mail Pouch Tobacco advertisements of days gone by. This project was conceived as an excellent way to capture traffic off the busy highway to visit Grundy County. Using old and weathered tobacco barns, organizers encouraged local artists to paint traditional quilt squares on barns, similar to the way barns were once painted with logos. However, this project also pays tribute to the large number of crafters in the area and has begun to attract tourists and benefited the County economically, which ultimately fosters community enhancement on numerous levels.



Organizers feel the project presents a great opportunity to showcase local ag tourism and the various aspects of agricultural

production and business, not to mention the unique barn architecture that is illuminated through this project. Visitors also have chance to learn and witness the folk art of the Americana quilt and get a sense of the cultural identity of the area.

Thirteen barns became a part of the Barn Quilt Loop in 2004, and 12 more were added in 2005. Interest by barn owners to participate continues to grow year after year. Are you getting any ideas for your cluster?

Take a look at the Barn Quilts of Grundy County.

www.grundycountyya.com/Quilt_Website/Home%20Page.html

REGIONAL CUISINE – LOCAL FLAVOUR MEETS LOCAL APPEAL

A worldwide global phenomenon called Regional Cuisine is gaining wind and many of Alberta's ag tourism clusters and operations are partnering together to promote great Alberta products. Wes Johnson, with Alberta Agriculture and Food's Regional Cuisine Initiative, knows that the favourable appeal of Regional Cuisine is not going away anytime soon. Wes says, "Regional Cuisine is part of an overall trend of identifying what can be grown locally and gives consumers access to fresh food - grown, harvested and processed at it's peak time."

WHAT DOES ALBERTA HAVE TO OFFER?

Unlike France or Italy, Alberta does not have a 'signature dish', but an ingredient based regional cuisine, which is traceable back to the producer (think of sweet Taber corn, Alberta beef, or luminescent canola honey). Within Alberta, ingredients can be combined and used to help brand an area, create a sense of place, bring people together and contribute to a cluster's theme (i.e. Cowboy culture, Harvest festival, Berry festival, etc.)

A RECIPE FOR CLUSTER SUCCESS

Wes encourages clusters to tie regional food products into cluster development. Regional Cuisine is flexible and can fit many shapes, budgets and time frames. It can be presented in a simple, everyday form like serving Saskatoon syrup and local fruits on pancakes (even better if the flour is from a local mill) or a first class dinner at a B&B. Whatever your regional cuisine's event or budget looks like, Wes suggests, "the biggest thing is to identify who produced the food product and proudly brand its local connection."

For more information contact:

Wes Johnson

Phone: (780) 415-2321 (toll free via 310-0000)

E-mail: wesley.johnson@gov.ab.ca

Stakeholder Spotlight – Community Futures

With 27 offices throughout the province, Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC) is proud to be a 'driving forces that builds healthy, prosperous communities in rural Alberta'. Not only do CFDC's provide general business information including small loans and business plan assistance, these offices also provide support and leadership to Alberta ag tourism cluster projects.

Economic Development - Ag Tourism Clusters Make Sense

In terms of cluster development, Kathy Lineham, Manager of Community Futures Central Alberta or the Centre for Business Development (CBD) is excited with the their Board's commitment to include "increasing ag tourism activities for our region" as part of their strategic plan. Kathy sees working with ag tourism clusters as a great way to also expand partnerships with municipalities, Alberta Agriculture and Food and the region's cluster projects.

Growing Communities One Idea at a Time

In the past, Kathy's involvement with cluster projects has included supporting the marketing objectives of the Red Deer Country Drive by emailing and handing out brochures and hosting meetings.



Currently CBD is involved with the Sylvan Lake cluster project. According to Kathy, "support for this group includes developing proposal for rural Community Economic Development funding (CED)." The rural CED project can fund a proposal up to \$50 000.

Visit the Community Futures website to find an office near you and determine if your project is eligible for CED funding - www.cfnsa.ca

For more information contact:
Kathy Lineham
Phone: (403) 342-2055

LEARN FROM YOUR DVD PLAYER

Our new DVD, "Expecting Company? Preparing Your Site for Ag Tourism", is now available!

This new training tool is laid out to 'watch and learn' section by section, including probing questions and activities at the end of each segment. You'll discover ways to make the most of your farm or ranch by looking at it from your guest's perspective.



Learn how to:

- hone in on your target audience
- identify your key attributes
- offer "see, do and learn" activities
- have the best in amenities
- maximize visitor flow
- and, enhance your site's appearance and atmosphere.

Go to Publications and More on www.agric.gov.ab.ca or call 1-800-292-5697 to order your copy.

For more information on Ag Tourism development in Alberta go to www.agtourism.ca

or contact an Ag-Info Centre New Venture Specialist at 1.866.882.7677