

# Ag Tourism CLUSTER

AG TOURISM NEWS FROM AROUND THE PROVINCE AND BEYOND

BRINGING ALBERTA TO YOU!



Volume 2, Issue 2  
Fall 2006

Alberta

## REST, REFLECT, REJUVENATE

As a season of ag tourism cluster activities wrap up, it's time to take a step back and put the three 'R's into practice. We've seen some new events and great progress this past year.

We all know that hind sight is 20/20. Looking back, what are the key things that your ag tourism cluster learned this year about your events or initiatives? What went well that you will be sure to do again or build on? What would you do differently? It's important to capture these thoughts while they're still fresh in your mind. By the time spring rolls around it might be difficult to recall those specific details.

In our discussions with most clusters we've discovered one particular thing that seems to come up over and over again – and that's tracking. As you try and attract new funders, sponsors, operators and stakeholders to your projects you probably notice that you need to sell them on why they should get involved. Wouldn't it be great if you had the hard numbers to say, "We had 'x' number of participants last year", or "We sold an average of 'x' dollars per site", or "Participation has increased 'x' percent each year"?

Tracking seems like an easy thing to do, but it's often left as one of those last minute details that just doesn't get done. Not only is it extremely valuable to attract new support but it's the kind of information that will help existing cluster partners to know it's worth their continued time and investment.

As you rev up for another year of cluster activities be sure to put tracking on the top of the 'to-do' list.

## Edmonton Cluster - Nice Day for a Spring Drive

Flowers and Mother's Day go hand in hand and the Edmonton Region Ag Tourism Cluster were quick to realize the ag tourism potential within this spring holiday. Organizers agreed Mother's Day would be the perfect weekend to introduce the Edmonton Countryside Spring Drive. Not only did the Spring Drive become an opportunity to create something special for families, but the event itself served as a 'call to action' and a launch for the Visit the Country Guide early in the season so visitors could refer to it throughout the summer months.

Over two days, 30 operators opened their shops, gates and greenhouses to approximately 5 000 guests. The weather was favourable and the public had the opportunity to participate in many value-added activities including: planting demonstrations, afternoon teas, nature walks, Mothers' Day draws, 'how to' gardening clinics and children could 'pot a plant' just for mom.

Operators and municipalities worked together to organize the event. A 'teaser' post card, brochure guide and information on the Visit the Country website were methods used to promote the event.

### A COMMON CHALLENGE:

The Spring Drive covered 5 counties and organizers found the biggest challenge was not the span of the region, but facilitating communication between rural operators who were not all connected to the web.

### KEY LEARNING:

The driving event covered an expansive area and organizers found rather than choosing specific points of interest, the public chose one region and covered operations geographically.

### CONTACT:

Joan Barber, St. Albert Chamber of Commerce  
Phone: (780) 459-1725  
E-mail: [jbarber@st-albert.net](mailto:jbarber@st-albert.net)  
[www.visitthecountry.ca](http://www.visitthecountry.ca)



Marketing can be a bit like a ‘black hole’, where resources go in and well, disappear without a trace. Read on to learn creative and cost effective ways ag tourism clusters from across North America are promoting their event on a limited budget (something we can all relate to!):

- **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. Be friendly, accessible and assume people don’t know who you are and what you represent.
- **Cross Promote.** Provide space for a brochure rack in your own operation and partner with local operators to display each other’s brochures. Visitors need places to sleep and eat at as well; try to keep them in your community for as long as possible ... the longer they’ll stay, the more they’ll spend.
- **Recruit** members from industry, newspapers, university, TV and radio stations, etc., to volunteer their time and expertise to sit on a public relations (PR) committee. A PR committee with influential people can help garner and coax media support.
- If your target audience is families, get permission to **hand out bookmarks** advertising your event at the local schools. Bookmarks should drive people to your website and be given out only a few weeks

before the big event so it stays fresh in people’s minds.

- **Embrace your theme.** Organizers of Strolling of the Heifers (Vermont) attract attention and keep things fresh through their whimsical use of everything *bovine*: “You’ll have an udderly great time”, “Bodacious Bovine Block Party”, and “Funky Heifer Contest”.
- **Be consistent.** Loudoun Farm Tours (Virginia) believe their event resonates in people’s memory by consistently being offered on the same weekend each year – “people come to expect the event and remember the dates year after year”.
- **Combine arts and agriculture** to create ‘over the top’ competitions that fit your mandate, build hype, involve the community and attract media interest. The Rural Ramble (Ontario) has a Bale Art contest dubbed the “largest exhibit in the Region” and Placer Farm & Barn Tour (California) has their well known AGROart competition where participants build 3D vegetable sculptures and compete for cash prizes.
- **Utilize** every possible community resource, agency, and association with free newsletter publications to get your event listed.

## Red Deer Cluster - A Farmgate With Eye-Catching Appeal

Artistic in design, with a warm and contemporary country feel; a bright sunflower proudly brands the first *Sylvan Lake Farmgate Guide* (2006).

“County secrets in a little Country Guide” appropriately describes the year-round brochure with 19 farm businesses involved in the Sylvan Lake area.

Sylvan Lake has a large tourist population in the spring and summer months with many Calgarians and Edmontonians looking to escape the big cities for sunny days at the lake. Organizers of the guide saw the potential behind the booming summer months and ventured to create a guide that would keep the tourist and local population informed of the diverse rural experiences within the area.

Time was of the essence and the project coordinator had a few short months to rally enough interested operators to fill a guide, design a brochure and have it off for printing for the May long weekend. With only 6 interested operators at the first meeting, the project coordinator personally drove up and down the country roads of Sylvan Lake, going door to door to recruit members.

### GREAT PARTNERING

Membership costs were kept low (\$25 a member) by accessing funding from Travel Alberta Central TDR (Tourism Destination Region) and partnering with the local UFA as a sponsor. Five thousand brochures were printed in 2006 and distributed within the area, at Farmers’ Markets and Visitor Information Centers. The group also partnered with the Alberta Farm Fresh Producers Association (who linked the guide to their website), Ag Societies and local rodeos.

### AND GROWING ...

For 2007, the group would like to print 10 000 copies and broaden their geographic region to include more operators. They also plan to create a fundraising event to help off set printing costs and to raise membership fees.

### CONTACT:

Margo Staniforth, Project Manager

Phone: 403-746-3681

E-mail: staniforth\_margo@hotmail.com



# WELCOME MELISA!

Melisa Zapisocky will be working with the Ag Tourism Clusters across the province on awareness and coaching about funding sources, sponsorship and communication. Melisa can be reached at 780-427-6403 (toll-free via 310-0000) or melisa.zapisocky@gov.ab.ca

## Resources

### AGRI-PRENEUR SCHOLARSHIP

Funding is available to support continuous learning and innovative educational opportunities for Alberta agripreneurs to attend educational out-of-province, national and international conferences, tours or workshops, self-directed learning opportunities and also the NAFDMA Grow West Convention in Calgary (February 2007). Eligible applicants must be farm direct or ag tourism operators/owners, managers or sponsors of Alberta Approved Farmers' Markets and staff or board members of farm direct or ag tourism industry associations. Application deadlines are December 8th (for Grow West) and February 2nd.

For more information contact:

Marian Williams - Farm Direct Marketing Initiative  
Phone: 780-679-5168 (toll free via 310-0000)  
Email: marian.williams@gov.ab.ca  
Website: www.agtourism.ca

### GROW WEST — HERE WE COME!

The 2007 North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Convention will take place in Calgary, February 12 - 27, 2007.

In 21 years this is only the third time the convention has been held in Canada. We're so lucky to have this unique and valuable opportunity in our own backyard. Join us in Calgary for Grow West!

Website: www.nafdma.com



## Limited Time Only -

### Cluster Coordination Seed Money Now Available

In order to support the sustainable growth and development of Ag Tourism cluster projects, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development's Ag Tourism Team is in the process of accepting proposals for cluster coordination seed funding.

**Certain administration and coordination activities are eligible for funding. They may include:**

- Seeking out and pursuing funding sources and sponsorship opportunities for cluster and specific cluster projects.
- Regular communication link and liaison with ag tourism operators, cluster and provincial stakeholders.
- Maintenance and expansion of cluster inventory or database.
- Specific project coordination support (eg. coordination of a familiarization tour, driving route event, agri-food event, operator showcase, driving guide, etc.)

**Non-eligible expenses:**

- Printing and distribution of marketing/promotion products.
- Travel & office expenses.

Applications must be made from the cluster perspective. They should show evidence of involvement of multiple operators and stakeholders in the planning. Applications must include a plan to leverage resources and target sustainable funding in order to build momentum and longevity of the initiative.

**For more information contact:**

Carmen Andrew  
Phone: 403-340-5542 (toll-free via 310-0000)  
Email: carmen.andrew@gov.ab.ca

*"Happiness is not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort."*

Franklin D. Roosevelt



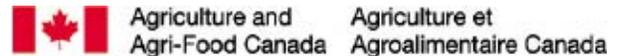
## PATHWAYS TO LEARNING

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has a number of programs that enhance continuous learning for farmers and ranchers

- **Canadian Farm Business Advisory Service (CFBAS)** offers funding for business management services. CFBAS will provide a farm financial assessment followed by a one-on-one consultation on a range of advisory services to help farmers set goals for their businesses and develop plans to meet those goals. This valuable service, worth \$2000, is offered at the price of only \$100.
- **Canadian Agricultural Skill Services (CASS)** Program will provide funding to beginning and established farmers and their spouses to develop a learning plan and take courses to help them gain the skills they need to reach their goals. CASS will assist farm families to acquire on-farm skills, or skills and training to pursue other income options, or both.

- **Planning and Assessment for Value-Added Enterprises (PAVE)** funding is available for groups and individual producers who are considering establishing or expanding a value-added enterprise. Funding will help pay up to 50% of the services of a business planning professional.

For more information:  
1866 452 5558  
[www.agr.gc.ca/renewal](http://www.agr.gc.ca/renewal)



## STAKEHOLDER SPOTLIGHT

### TDR - TOURISM DESTINATION REGION

You've heard the term but do you know what the TDR, or Tourism Destination Region, can mean to you and your ag tourism cluster? Travel Alberta has as part of their organizational structure, six TDRs that are responsible for providing marketing funding for consortia to increase tourism across the province. Recently Cindy Guay, Marketing Director for the Alberta Central Tourism Destination Region, helped us to make sense of her role in ag tourism clusters.

Cindy notes, "This cooperative marketing program is designed to help by increasing the impact of new or enhanced tourism marketing projects." With marketing dollars, the TDR can help the development of an ag tourism guidebook, culinary event or harvest festival become a reality. Cindy reflects past projects within the Alberta Central region have included helping with the design and printing of brochures, development of websites, direct mail, radio and print advertising. Cindy encourages any ag tourism operator, business, event or community to take the lead role and gather partners for a project.

"The process is simpler than you may think" encourages Cindy,

"Staff are available to help, however it is important to plan ahead and call the TDR with your idea before you begin your project. If your project meets the guidelines you could receive up to 50% of the eligible marketing costs of the projects"

Cindy Guay, Marketing Director, Alberta Central TDR  
Phone: 403.254-6023  
Toll-Free: 1.888.414.4139  
[cindy.guay@travelalberta.com](mailto:cindy.guay@travelalberta.com)

For Contact Information for all 6 TDRs (Edmonton and area, Calgary and area, South, North, Central and Canadian Rockies) go to:

[www.industry.travelalberta.com](http://www.industry.travelalberta.com)



For more information on Ag Tourism development in Alberta go to [www.agtourism.ca](http://www.agtourism.ca) or contact an Ag-Info Centre New Venture Specialist at 1.866.882.7677