

Ag Tourism CLUSTER

Ag Tourism news from around the province and beyond
Bringing Alberta to you!

News

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Alberta
AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND
RURAL DEVELOPMENT

ALBERTA CLUSTERS LEAPFROG TOWARDS SUCCESS

We've all heard the expression R&D – in today's world it stands for rob and duplicate. At the recent **Harvest**

the Talent – Grow the Cluster

conference that's exactly what participants did. (Actually, the speakers from ag tourism clusters around North

America came and shared willingly, so you might say we *borrowed* their ideas as opposed to robbing them!)

In any case, they inspired audiences in both Bon Accord and Okotoks to try new things and adapt new practices in their own cluster initiatives. One person even said, "This was the best learning session yet this season".



KEEP READING THIS NEWSLETTER FOR OTHER GREAT TIPS FROM THE CONFERENCE OR GO TO WWW.AGTOURISM.CA TO DOWNLOAD SOME OF THE PRESENTATIONS.

Among the many ideas shared a couple of themes stood out:

Engage the creative talent

Successful events like the Agro Art Festival in California and the Strolling of the Heifers would not exist if it were not for groups embracing the somewhat wacky ideas of the creative talent in their midst. We all know those creative folks who have a knack for dreaming up the kinds of events and activities that will spark attention and attract the public – here's to unleashing their talent and embracing their ideas!



Leverage what you have

Every cluster starts with a pot of resources – a little bit of money, a few keen people and a whole lot of passion. We might consider these resources to be just the beginning. That's how the **Visit the Country** group in Edmonton approached the funding for their guide – start with a little to make a lot. From the TDR (Tourism Destination Region) to the area municipalities helping out – a small pot of resources became significant enough to produce 10,000 copies of a full color guide and 50,000 of a companion postcard.



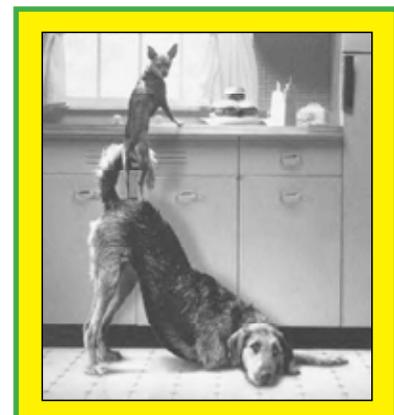
THANKS TO MELISA ZAPISOCKY, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA PRACTICUM STUDENT,
FOR HER SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THIS NEWSLETTER

- May 13 & 14 - Visit the Country kicks off with their first annual Spring Driving Tour in the Edmonton countryside on Mother's Day weekend. This new self-guided tour includes 32 greenhouses and garden inspired destinations - featuring a flower festival, herbal tea party, expert speakers, special events, new products, demonstrations, Mother's Day discounts, and a shopping experience. Watch www.visitthecountry.ca for more information. **EDMONTON CLUSTER**
- May 17 - A new FAM (familiarization) Tour called the Bales to Sales Tour will introduce operators or anyone interested in developing an ag tourism business to other established businesses in the region. Locations along the tour, including the Saskatoon Farm, Sheppard Family Park, and Bar U National Historic Ranch, will provide brief samplings of their products and services. This "rolling marketing workshop" will also have a host of guest speakers onboard discussing topics from successful business development, partnership and funding options. **FOOTHILLS CLUSTER** (formerly South Calgary).
- June 15 - A media FAM tour is planned to kick off the Ag-Adventure Passport in the Lakeland area. Check the last issue of the Ag Tourism Cluster Newsletter for more information or go to www.albertaslakeland.com/agpassport. **NORTHEAST CLUSTER**
- June 17 - The Porcupine Hills Cowboy Challenge will give the public a taste of the fun side of ranching. There will be many interactive activities at this brand new event such as a pitchfork fondue, hayrides and other surprises. **SOUTHWEST CLUSTER**
- July 8 & 9 - Summer Trails and Tales Tour in Strathcona County will occur again this year with a few new operators. **EDMONTON CLUSTER**
- July 16 & 17 - The 2nd annual Country Drive event will offer visitors of all ages the opportunity to come out and experience the country. **RED DEER CLUSTER**
- July 16 - Plans are now underway for a new and improved Taste of the Stroll – Country Cuisine promotional event for the Country Soul Stroll. **EDMONTON CLUSTER**
- July 22 & 23 - The Country Soul Stroll in Sturgeon County is entering its 4th year. They may look at a marketing partnership with the Summer Tales and Trails tour in Strathcona County this year. Check www.countrysoulstroll.ca for updates. **EDMONTON CLUSTER**
- August 19 - The first annual Fun Family Farm Tour will take place around Lethbridge in the sunny south countryside. This self guided driving tour will provide travelers with an opportunity to visit operations like the Lethbridge Corn Maze, Broxburn Vegetables and Café, and Hilltop Greenhouses, as well as a Hutterite colony and even the chance to meet local 4-H members. **SOUTH CENTRAL CLUSTER**
- November 17 to 19 - Plans for the Country Christmas weekend packaging initiative are already in the works. Watch www.countrychristmas.ca for details. **EDMONTON CLUSTER**
- Local operators and stakeholders are pushing ahead with a marketing guide/map outlining the great ag tourism product in the north Calgary area. Plans are to unveil this guide at various events this summer. **NORTH CALGARY CLUSTER**
- The Harvest Festival of Foods, gala agri-food event in Strathcona County, is on 'sabbatical' for a year to revitalize and re-strategize. **EDMONTON CLUSTER**

An assortment of other projects are also in the planning stages. Watch future issues of this newsletter for details.

It's

AMAZING WHAT CAN BE DONE
WHEN A GROUP OF DEDICATED,
PASSIONATE PEOPLE GET
TOGETHER . . .





CONFERENCE NUGGETS

Missed the afternoon bear pit sessions at the Harvest the Talent Conferences? Fortunately, we're bringing you some of the highlights:

Engaging the media - Angela Tahti, director of the Arts Council in Placer County, California offers some great advice:

- Use local celebrities and well known community members to attract extra buzz.
- Get to media 'through their stomachs'.
- Attachments can be tricky to open - copy your press release/story lead into the body of the e-mail.
- Give advance notice and details to entice summer media cruiser vans/RVs to your event.
- Leave a lasting impression by sending thank you cards or phone calls to media who promote and attend your event.

Attracting Sponsors – Helen and Charlie Robb from Strolling of the Heifers in Vermont, share some tips on how to line up and attract sponsors to your event:

- Sponsors are often repeat offenders - visit the same people year after year.
- Ask for more money than you anticipate - this gives everyone room to negotiate.
- Create professional looking sponsorship packages.
- Thank all your sponsors for their time, even those who weren't able to sponsor but took the time to listen.
- Consider in-kind or non-monetary sponsorship.
- Select team members to vie for sponsorship who are:
 - Willing to accept rejection
 - Have good public relations skills
 - Are passionate about the project and well informed

Websites that Work:

In addition to individual ag tourism operators, a number of ag tourism cluster projects are starting to create their own websites. Brad Kostyniuk, a new media designer, producer, educator and consultant offers some advice to anyone wanting to improve their website presence.

Web 101:

- Think of your website as an electronic brochure.
- Just like when you read the important articles in a newspaper, make sure your key content is located 'above the fold line' (or the elevator bar).
- Include sponsorship logos and testimonials on your homepage - they add credibility.
- Anticipate what questions your customers may have and design your website layout accordingly (i.e. a driving route event should have a map link on the homepage).
- **AIDA**: grab Attention, stimulate Interest, build up Desire, urge the user to Action.
- Look at building relationships with your local college and website design students to gain website expertise.

Brad Kostyniuk - Rock Paper Internet Inc.

www.rockpaperinternet.com

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RESOURCES - AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

- Contact Denise Martell, Director of Communications and Media Relations with Travel Alberta, for tips and a template for writing a press release. She can also help proof your draft and provide you with time lines and media contact lists. Denise Martell, Ph. 780.732.1633, denise.martell@travelalberta.com
- School Tour resources:
 - Brent Andressen recommends visiting www.projectwild.org, or Joseph Cornell's book: Sharing Nature with Children I & II (available at most book stores), to help learn how to think like a teacher.
 - Look for more school tour resources at www.agtourism.ca under Important Links.
- Remember to post your events on the Tourism Information System (TIS) so the folks at Travel Alberta will be aware and can help with promotion. Go to www.industry.travelalberta.com/postIt/listings/ or call 403.297.2836



BRING ON THE BIG YELLOW BUSES

Entertaining the idea of bringing school groups out to your farm operation or cluster event? Before you consider the big yellow buses...there are a few things you should think about.

“Schools can be messy, wild, noisy things,” cautions Brent Andressen, who has taught and developed curriculum for twenty-five years. He recommends the first thing to do is evaluate yourself and your farm (or event) to ensure you are prepared for this new type of engagement.

It’s not going to be Disneyland right off the start. “You might talk to 20 teachers before one comes out”, states Brent. The key will be forming relationships with teachers and showing them what you have to offer in terms of education, safety and fun.

Brent’s Outline for Success:

- Have pre-contact with the teacher/school (invite them to your farm).

- Create a pre-trip package to get the class ‘farm ready’ (DVD with site pictures, a site map with boundaries, farm expectations and learning themes).
- Create opportunities for learning that engage all five senses.
- Create a post-trip take-home piece (teachers can debrief and link the farm learning with the class learning).

Brent can help you with planning engaging activities and working with teachers. Also, look for more information on school tours in the Resources section on page 3.

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Stakeholder Spotlight

MUNICIPALITY

Municipalities like Strathcona County and Sturgeon County offer a plethora of services, expertise and assistance to those members of the community who are looking for initial and ongoing support in their ag tourism operation.

Sherri Levesque, Economic Development Coordinator from Sturgeon County, likens her municipal role to that of a ‘springboard’; helping give operators that extra boost they may need to diversify into ag tourism. “Ag tourism community events should be driven by operators as much as possible.” Thus one of Sherri’s key roles is bringing market ready operators to the table and serving as a network and resource ‘conduit’.

Erica Thomas, Coordinator of Business Development and Marketing from Strathcona County, sees her municipal role as a facilitator. She helps operators connect, develop and maintain packages that will bring the public to their farms and events. “It’s all about the marketing,” states Erica, “and figuring out how to market the operators’ services.”

By providing operators with the current skills they need, Erica optimistically sees her future role becoming less vital as operators and their events will become increasingly sustainable and self-directed.

The role of municipalities is diverse and can range from providing a meeting space to being an advocate who helps local operators learn about scholarships, funding and awards. Municipalities can offer a wealth of knowledge - don’t hesitate to contact yours.

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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

