

Action

PUBLIC ISSUE INFORMATION FOR ALABAMA CITIZENS

FROM THE EDITOR

Developing Agri-Tourism Attractions

Tourism is big business for Alabama. When the topic of tourism is mentioned, many times the image that comes to mind is mass-produced travel that attracts many travelers. These images can discourage farmers and other small entrepreneurs from considering agri-tourism as a method of enhancing agriculture revenues. However, the best way to view agri-tourism is to see it much like ecotourism in that it is often low-impact, small-scale and education-focused.

The Community Resource Development unit of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System publishes "Action" once each quarter. The goal of the CRD unit is to help people solve community problems, take advantage of opportunities and build on their assets. To accomplish this, the CRD unit provides educational and technical assistance in economic development, leadership development, strategic planning, environmental education, community health and public policy education. "Action" is a tool we use to link community groups to Extension's resources. This issue represents internal links within Extension and external links between Extension and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

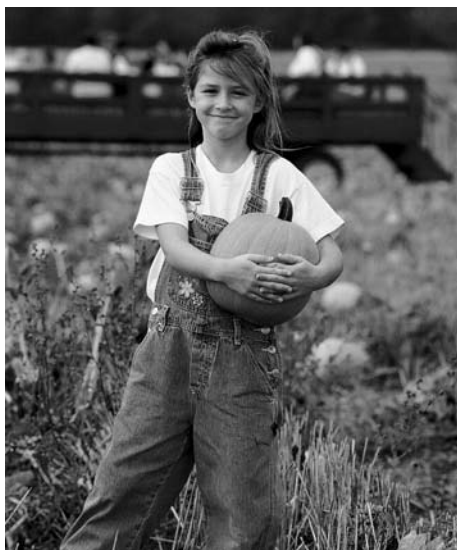
Extension's involvement and links to others involved in **developing agri-tourism attractions** is the focus of this summer 2006 issue of "Action." J. Thomas Chesnutt, Extension tourism specialist, is the coordinator for this issue. Other contributors are Danny L. Cain (Walker County Extension coordinator) Ricky W. Colquitt (Shelby County Extension coordinator) and Martha Glass (North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services).

The next issue, "Action, Fall 2006," will highlight **faith-based initiatives**. Faith-based and community-based organizations can be key partners in assisting communities and individuals in need. For more information on these topics or suggestions for additional topics, contact the editor at (334) 844-3517, fax (334) 844-9022, or e-mail chesnjt@auburn.edu.

J. Thomas Chesnutt
Editor

Extension Tourism Specialist

Developing Agri-Tourism Attractions



Agriculture and tourism are the two largest industries in Alabama. Leaders in both industries are beginning to combine efforts through the promotion of agri-tourism. To assist in this effort, Extension has developed guidelines needed to develop an agri-tourism attraction. Titled "Developing an Agri-Tourism Attraction in Alabama," these guidelines were designed to be a practical tool to assist farmers and entrepreneurs in deciding if agri-tourism could enhance their incomes and to provide the initial basic information needed for an individual to develop an agri-tourism attraction.

Poor agricultural commodity prices coupled with rising input costs are slowly but substantially eroding small farm incomes across Alabama. The outside forces of globalization, industrialization and development encroachment further threaten small farms. According to the National Agricultural Statistical Service, over the past 10 years, the number of Alabama farms has decreased from

49,000 to 44,000 and the amount of land in farms has decreased from 10.1 million acres to 8.7 million acres. This represents decreases of 10.2 percent and 13.9 percent, respectively. Most of that reduction in the number of farms has occurred over the past 5 years.

To cope with this situation, many farmers are recognizing the need and desire to diversify their products and supplement their incomes based upon traditional agriculture. Agri-tourism provides the opportunity to increase the potential for higher margin, on-farm sales of value-added products and services.

Agri-tourism is a commercial enterprise at any agricultural site, including horticulture and agribusiness operations, conducted for the enjoyment of visitors that generates supplemental tourism income for the owner. The types of activities available in agri-tourism are broad and can be tailored to fit each individual situation. Because most Alabama farms are operated by small landowners, there is great opportunity for customization and uniqueness in agri-tourism attractions. Furthermore, many agri-tourism activities can successfully be provided with a small farm crew. The agri-tourism experience could involve the following activities:

- Farm tours
- Holiday visits and tours
- Farm visits and stays
- Hay rides
- Roadside stands and markets
- Barn dances
- U-pick operations
- Photography or painting
- On-farm sales
- Camping and picnicking
- Festivals and fairs
- Mazes (such as corn or hay)
- Agriculture-related crafts or gifts

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- Habitat improvement projects
- Guided crop tours
- Bird watching
- Garden or nursery tours
- Wildlife viewing
- Winery tours
- Hunting dog training and competition
- Historical agricultural exhibits
- Trap and skeet shooting
- Exotic animal farms
- Fee fishing
- Farm skills or farm work
- Fee hunting
- Petting zoos

As with other forms of tourism, agri-tourism will not simply happen by itself. That is, you cannot just hang out a sign and wait to rake in the money from tourists. To be successful, you must plan and market your product. Also, a critical mass of agri-tourism activities and attractions in your area is needed so packages can be created and marketed. Agri-tourism is more effective if groups of activities and attractions are marketed rather than just one or two.

The information provided in the “Developing an Agri-Tourism Attraction in Alabama” guidelines is as follows:

- What is Agri-Tourism?
 - o Background of Agri-Tourism
 - o Agri-Tourism Defined
 - o Why Consider Developing an Agri-Tourism Attraction?
 - o Keys to Success

- Is Agri-Tourism for Me?
 - o Personal Assessment
 - o Advantages and Disadvantages
 - o Goals and Objectives
 - o Visit an Existing Agri-Tourism Business
- Assessing Your Property/Attraction
 - o Inventory Your Resources
 - o Location
 - o Make Access Easy
 - o What Would Tourism’s Role Be in My Farm Operation?
- Pricing Considerations
 - o Cost-Based Pricing
 - o Pricing Based on Your Competition
 - o Seasonal Pricing
 - o Value Pricing
 - o Tour Groups
- Developing a Business Plan
 - o Executive Summary
 - o Mission Statement
 - o Your Business Concept
 - o Measurable Goals and Objectives
 - o Industry Research and Market Analysis
 - o Management Needs and History
 - o Marketing Strategy
 - o Financial Strategy
 - o Appendix
- Accessibility, Environmental Considerations and Animal Welfare
 - o Accessibility
 - o Environmental Considerations
 - o Animal Welfare
- Marketing Factors
 - o Market Analysis
 - o Marketing Mix

- o Evaluation
- o Collaboration
- Developing Partnerships
 - o Alabama Agri-Tourism Partnership
 - o Regional Tourism Organizations
 - o Tourism Industry in Alabama
- Risk Assessment and Management
 - o Strategies to Reduce Risk
 - o Farm-Safety Risk Management
 - o Financial Risk Management
 - o insurance
- Resource Materials and Acknowledgements

Tourism continues to be a growth industry, particularly in the Southeast, and one of the fastest growing segments of the industry is rural tourism. Agri-tourism, a component of rural tourism, can provide income to many involved in the agricultural industry. However, it is not an unlimited resource. The numbers of tourists and the money spent are large, but they are not infinite. Success requires careful planning, effective marketing and an investment in time and money.

For more information on these guidelines, contact J. Thomas Chesnutt, Extension tourism specialist, chesnjt@auburn.edu., 218 Extension Hall, Auburn University, AL, 36849, (334) 844-3517.

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Agri-Tourism Farm Tour

Alabama’s unique agricultural diversity is often overlooked by residents, producers and tourists alike. However, it is this diversity that could appeal to many people from all walks of life if they were only aware. Agricultural tourism is a relatively new concept to Alabama and the potential target audience is somewhat difficult to identify, but when the proper contacts are made, touring Alabama’s agriculture becomes an easy sell.

This was the case when the Mecklenburg Farm tour group contacted county Extension coordinators Danny Cain, Rick Colquitt, Yvonne Thomas,

David West, and Gay West and regional Extension agents Henry Dorough and Charles Pinkston in the spring of 2005 about an agricultural production tour featuring Alabama agriculture. Planning the tour involved numerous phone conversations between the tour coordinator and county Extension personnel, which resulted in a 4-day tour of Alabama’s agriculture for 43 North Carolina farmers, July 26 to 29, 2005.

The group learned about the potential for niche marketing of beef at Bent Tree Farms grass-fed beef operation in DeKalb County. At Seaman Timber Company’s creosote treatment process in

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Shelby County, the group learned about value-added products from Alabama's vast timber production industry. The group also made stops at Petals from the Past nursery and ornamental plants operation in Chilton County and Autauga Farming Company's beef, cotton and forage crops operation in Autauga County.

The tour group learned about precision agriculture applications and got some hands-on experience with self-guided tractors at Auburn University's E.V. Smith Research Center. The tour concluded with educational stops at the Chilton Research and Extension Center and the Lambert-Powell Meats Laboratory and Stanley P. Wilson Beef Unit at Auburn University.

Silas Davis, tour coordinator for the Mecklenburg Farm tour group, said, "We are surprised at the diversity and pleased with the scheduled stops across Alabama." Group members stated that not only did they enjoy first hand the diversity of Alabama agriculture, but also gained much new insight that would allow them to become better producers.

The combination of teaching producers better farming techniques, showing off Alabama agriculture and bringing in tourism dollars is definitely a positive one. The economic impact tourism can have on Alabama is huge, and as the state's largest industry, agriculture will continue to attract tourism dollars, provided we continue to tell our story.

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Southeast Region Agri-Tourism Council Organizes

More than 30 agri-tourism service providers and farmers from nine Southeastern states met in Raleigh, N.C., Feb. 1 to 3, 2006, to continue to discuss formally organizing the Southeast Region Agri-tourism Association. The goal of the association, as discussed in the first meeting in Georgia in June, was to provide ways for new agri-tourism farmers to find resources and training to develop viable businesses to increase their income, and in many cases, stay on the family farm. Studies indicate agri-tourism farms are growing in number and are popular with tourists, school children and the general public and support the rural economy.

The group adopted the following working definition of agri-tourism farms:

"Agri-tourism farms or ranches are value-added agricultural venues that provide pleasure as well as recreation, information, education or other agriculturally oriented experiences or services. Visitors may or may not pay admission or a fee to participate in and/or purchase an agricultural product or activity."

States represented again were Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, South Carolina, Georgia and Mississippi. West Virginia was welcomed to the group. Alabama and Louisiana were unable to attend, although both states have expressed interest in the association.

The group decided to change the name to the Southeast Region Agri-Tourism Council and agreed that, instead of adopting bylaws and electing officers, it would remain a cohesive organization by staying in close touch with each other not only as a group but also as individuals. They plan to actively promote the council and encourage participation of other interested farmers and agri-tourism service providers. The council intends to establish a communication network to facilitate and support the success of agri-tourism farms in the Southeast.

The council will also assist states' efforts to create statewide agri-tourism

Action

Alabama
Communities
in Transition

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We would like you to share success stories in your community for inclusion in future issues of "Action." Send to: J. Thomas Chesnutt, 218 Extension Hall, Auburn University, Alabama 36849.

associations. State associations would consider direct marketing farms that have some element of agri-tourism as defined above for membership. Vineyards and wineries are also a part of the agri-tourism industry. State organizations will encourage the development of networking, mentoring, advocacy and training opportunities.

The council will promote and publicize training opportunities in Southeastern states and elsewhere and will share each other's resources for helping farmers begin and successfully continue agri-tourism farms. Partnerships will be encouraged with relevant regional, state and local tourism and economic development agencies and nonprofits that support and can partner

with the agri-tourism farmer for the economic well-being of all rural tourism enterprises. We will encourage advocacy efforts to help make liability insurance more easily available and affordable. Agri-tourism farmers will be encouraged to develop relationships with policy makers and elected officials at the local, state and national levels to let those in influential positions become more aware of the concerns of agri-tourism farmers.

As encouraged by the Southeast Region Agri-Tourism Council, the North Carolina Agritourism Networking Association formally organized in February with more than 80 paying members. The association elected officers and appointed district representatives to

represent districts that are geographically identical to the seven Extension districts in the state. A statewide agri-tourism workshop and business meeting is tentatively planned for November.

For more information on the council, contact Martha Glass at martha.glass@ncmail.net, or (919) 733-7887.

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Visit the Community Resource Development home page at www.aces.edu/department/crd/



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