Marketing and Expanding your Community’s Agricultural Tourism Assets

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PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

Poor agricultural commodity prices coupled with the rising cost of farming are slowly squeezing the small family farm out of business. Further, forces such as globalization, industrialization, and development encroachment are threatening small farms. In many regions across the globe, farmers are recognizing the need and desire to diversify their farm products and supplement their agricultural incomes. (VCE Agri-tourism, 2001). Due to the economic downturn more travelers are opting for long weekend vacations as opposed to extended vacations. Many urban citizens seek vacation destinations within a three to five hour drive from their residence. Rural farmers can capitalize on these travel patterns to provide great weekend getaways in a rural setting. Tourist also enjoy purchasing value added farm commodities and taking advantage of educational opportunities. Many farms have also catered to the needs of educators by providing hands on learning opportunities that correlate with the established learning objectives of their educational institutions.

The objectives of this agricultural tourism / nature tourism project are to assist communities in:

- Understanding tourism and agricultural tourism
- Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the community to determine viability of agricultural tourism
- Determining the customer base
- Personalizing services to add value
- Creating a business plan
- Marketing agricultural tourism and building partnerships

PROCEDURES

Successful agricultural business enterprises do not occur by chance. Communities must first survey their current assets and weaknesses. Most communities have agricultural tourism businesses already occurring to some degree. Proper planning, customer targeting, and marketing will enable these rural enterprises to expand on current assets and create new tourism businesses and markets. Community partnerships are essential to the success of agricultural tourism. These partnerships must cross governmental boundaries in order to be successful. Working together across boundaries benefits everyone involved. Farmers must work together with government agencies, chambers of commerce, and the community in order to insure the success of agricultural tourism.

CONCLUSION

Although the current economic climate is not positive, rural communities can take advantage of the economic downturn as an opportunity to create an agricultural tourism market which will supplement farm income and sustain itself through all economic conditions. Communities must come together to realistically look at their communities and surrounding communities, planning for the future to provide for economic stability while sustaining the rural setting and lifestyle.

The general model used to assess the needs in Patrick County, Virginia can be utilized in any location worldwide. All community partners must work together to capitalize on their strengths, and enhance and market agricultural tourism opportunities.
REFERENCES
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