trying to achieve the same. Likewise, the input and stories of others who have developed similar systems can be helpful to our future efforts and can help everyone avoid pitfalls.

DEVELOPING AN ECOTOURISM PROGRAM FOR NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Introduction
Tourism is currently the number one industry in the world based on employment and gross income (www.world-tourism.org). People more than ever are seeking enriching adventures in their leisure and travel (Patterson, 1997). They are looking for experiences in nature, opportunities to discover new cultures, and personal challenges and discoveries. One of the off-shoots of this quest is a fast growing segment of tourism, namely, ecotourism. Ecotourism is focused on nature, culture, and adventure. North Carolina is abundant with all three. It can be a viable and satisfying way of balancing environmental preservation with cultural and economic well-being.

Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.

Purpose and Objectives
North Carolina has traditionally had a strong tourism economy. Direct tourism spending last year in North Carolina consisted of $11.9 billion (Source: NC Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development/ TIA Travel Scope). Eleven percent of 1999 visitors in North Carolina reported that outdoor recreation was the primary purpose of their trip. This amounts to 4,895,000 visitors (Source: NC Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development/ TIA Travel Scope).

North Carolina is currently third in the country in losing rural land to development (American Farm Land Trust, 1999). We are quickly over using our natural beauty and resources. A new paradigm must begin that discourages “loving what we have to death.” Given all this, North Carolina Cooperative Extension has been involved in developing alternative sustainable approaches to tourism. In 1999 North Carolina Cooperative Extension set out to develop an educational program in ecotourism. The objectives were:

1) To gather grassroots data in support of the educational effort.
2) To design and conduct a survey of N.C. Extension agents on their knowledge, skills and attitudes as it relates to educational programming in ecotourism.
3) To travel to several states and learn what other land grants are doing in this area.
4) To develop and conduct awareness meetings
5) To develop curriculum to conduct competency training in agritourism
6) To develop an evaluation systems that measures impacts of programs.

Major Points
North Carolina Cooperative Extension is currently in its third year of the program and five of the six objectives have been accomplished. Grassroots support occurred. A survey was developed and conducted that measured knowledge, skills and attitudes of Extension agents. This helped us to design the curriculum. A comprehensive notebook with power point support was developed for each county in the state. This notebook included educational modules on the competencies needed to succeed in the agritourism business, fact sheets, specific county tourism data, evaluation forms and power point slides for each module. Four awareness meetings were conducted. From these meetings further programming is being done.

Conclusions and Educational Importance
Currently North Carolina has ten new businesses that have been developed from these meetings and over fifty existing businesses adding value and income to their farm through ecotourism. Many other
businesses also vertically integrated into the industry. For example, many of the businesses in a cluster are supporting the ecotourism business with their products and services (Cherokee Indian story tellers coming on board a raft trip).