

# Action

PUBLIC ISSUE INFORMATION FOR ALABAMA CITIZENS

## FROM THE EDITOR

### Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail

Tourism and agriculture each have annual economic impacts of more than \$6 billion for the state of Alabama. The Alabama Agri-Tourism Partnership was formed to promote agri-tourism, the blending of common segments of these two large industries. The partnership has recently developed the **Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail** to promote agri-tourism across the state.

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System Community Resource Development unit 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 resources. This issue represents linkages between two components of Extension—agriculture and community development—and Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel, and Alabama Farmers Federation.

Extension's involvement and linkages to others involved in the **Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail** is the focus of this winter 2004 issue of *Action*. J. Thomas Chesnutt, Extension tourism specialist, is the coordinator for this issue. Other contributors are Paul Mask and Evelyn Crayton (Extension), Doug Rigney (Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries), Grey Brennan and Brian Jones (Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel), and Jeff Helms (Alabama Farmers Federation).

The next issue of *Action*, spring 2004, will highlight the newly developed **Alabama Communities of Excellence Program**, which is a public-private partnership involving Extension, Alabama Power Company, Economic Development Institute, Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, and others. For more information on these topics or suggestions for additional topics, contact the editor at (334) 844-3517, or fax (334) 844-9022, or e-mail [jchesnut@aces.edu](mailto:jchesnut@aces.edu).

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Extension Tourism Specialist

## Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail

Agri-tourism has had a significant history, both in Europe and in selected segments of the United States, such as the West and upper Midwest. Interest in this unique form of tourism is on the rise around the country. From the farmers' and entrepreneurs' points of view, agri-tourism offers a source of supplemental income and an educational tool to explain agriculture to nonfarm individuals. To tourists and tourism organizations, agri-tourism provides additional attractions and marketing opportunities.

Unfortunately, there was no statewide effort in Alabama to market all the components of agri-tourism. The Alabama Agri-Tourism Partnership was formed in June 2003 to develop and market the statewide Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail. The members of the partnership include the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel, the Alabama Farmers Federation, and Extension.

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. Activities and attractions include farm tours, roadside markets, u-pick operations, winery tours, fee fishing, on-farm sales, festivals and fairs, hay rides, petting zoos, hay and corn mazes, fee hunting, and many others.

The partnership recently completed and launched a Web site to develop and promote the Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail. The Web address is [www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com](http://www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com), and advertising of the Web site has begun. One of the ads promoting the Web site is shown on page 2.

The trail will be promoted via two different methods for two distinct purposes. The initial marketing efforts will span several months and will be directed to entrepreneurs, tourism organizations, farmers, and agri-businesses, encouraging them to list their attractions as components of the Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail. There will be no charge to be listed on the trail, and photographs can be included with the listings. If an attraction has a Web site, links will be made between the trail Web site and the attraction Web site.

Once a comprehensive agri-tourism inventory has been established, the trail Web site will be marketed to travelers. This will serve both tourists and communities. The trail will provide travelers with additional opportunities to experience the heritage and culture of the area. Communities will have additional attractions to include in their marketing mix, and the critical mass of tourist attractions in their area will increase. The tourist will be able to search the Web site by type of activity and section of the state.

The attractions listed at [www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com](http://www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com) will be periodically contacted to ensure that they are still open to travelers, that their hours of operation are still the same, and that all other posted information is correct. This will help ensure that the trail will successfully meet the needs of tourists and communities.

A long-term goal of the partnership is the development of a series of workshops, seminars, and publications to assist farmers and entrepreneurs in the development of future agri-tourism attractions. This will assist in the continued development of the Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail.

*(Continued on page 3)*



# AgriTourism

I n A l a b a m a

## Explore Our Roots



**A**gri-tourism is a commercial enterprise at any agricultural location, including horticultural and agribusiness operations, conducted for the enjoyment of visitors that generates supplemental tourism income for the owner.



Agri-tourism can take many forms. Roadside stands and farmers' markets offer farm-fresh produce and interaction with growers. Farms may open to the public for wildlife watching and hunting. Ag tours, on-farm bed-and-breakfasts, and dude ranches give tourists the fresh air, open space, and relaxation of country life.



U-pick operations, pumpkin patches, Christmas tree farms, hay mazes, farm animal petting zoos, wine tasting, ag heritage museums, festivals, and fairs all attract visitors.



[www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com](http://www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com)

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## Role of the Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries in the Agri-Tourism Trail

One of the primary missions of the Department of Agriculture and Industries is to actively work to initiate and support economic development activities and promote domestic and international consumption of Alabama products. One way we continue to pursue this goal is our partnership with other agencies in promoting the Agri-Tourism Trail. Alabama has many treasures that are not far off the beaten path, and the project of promoting these places to the public is very important to this department. If the agricultural community fails to promote these sites and the unique products that can be found in our rural communities, they may not be around for the next generation to learn from and enjoy.

### Action

Alabama  
Communities  
in Transition

#### Editor

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Extension Tourism Specialist



*Action* is published once each quarter by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

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.

So many of the sites promoted by the Agri-Tourism Trail provide urban residents from our state and across the nation a peek at the rural Alabama lifestyle. Food and fiber do not automatically appear on store shelves. It takes many hours of hard labor and months—years in some farming operations—of planning to provide the safe, abundant, and affordable food we are all privileged to enjoy every day. Our department supports the agri-tourism project wholeheartedly because we feel that the public learning more about rural life, especially life on the farm, is a win-win situation.

Doug Rigney  
Deputy Commissioner  
Alabama Department of Agriculture  
and Industries

## Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel and the Agri-Tourism Trail

The Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel was created by an act of the state Legislature as the Bureau of Publicity and Information in October 1951. The name was amended in May 1984. The Legislature granted the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel “exclusive power and authority to plan and conduct all state programs of information and publicity designed to attract tourists to the state of Alabama.”

To carry out this mandate, the Bureau of Tourism operates welcome centers on major highways at the state line; conducts advertising campaigns; encourages media exposure of tourism sites; staffs a 1-800 call center; maintains Web sites for U.S. and international tourists; conducts tours of Alabama for travel writers, travel agents and tour operators; attends consumer and tourism trade shows; mails tourism information to the public; and produces literature featuring tourist attractions.

As a state agency, the Bureau of Tourism promotes tourist attractions across the state. Agri-tourism is especially important because it is the marriage between two of Alabama’s top industries—agriculture and tourism.

To encourage agri-tourism, the Alabama Bureau of Tourism is assisting in the development of a comprehensive inventory of agri-tourism sites and will list the Agri-Tourism Trail Web site in the Alabama Travel Guide. The bureau’s 1-800 call center will be informed of agri-tourism

enterprises, and information on agri-tourism sites friendly to group tours will be marketed to that industry.

Grey Brennan  
U.S. and International  
Marketing Manager  
Alabama Bureau of Tourism  
and Travel

Brian Jones  
Public Relations Specialist  
Alabama Bureau of Tourism  
and Travel

## Alabama Farmers Federation’s Role in the Agri-Tourism Trail

The Alabama Farmers Federation has joined forces with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, and Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel to launch the Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail Web site, which will give travelers a one-stop home on the Web for agriculture tourism information. J. Paul Till, director of the Federation’s Department of Public Relations and Communications, said the Web site will help Alabama farmers cash in on the agri-tourism boom.

Farm tours, u-pick operations, and agricultural festivals are a big business. With farmers facing low commodity prices and escalating input costs, they are looking for new ways to add value to their products, Till said. Agri-tourism has the potential to increase profits for many Alabama farmers.

The Farmers Federation consulted with the other Alabama agri-tourism partners in developing the Web site. It also will help collect data from farmers who operate agri-tourism destinations. With more than 450,000 members and offices in every county, Till said the Farmers Federation has a network in place for identifying agri-tourism destinations and for collecting information about those farms. In addition, the Farmers Federation will use its membership magazines, *Neighbors* and *Friends & Family*, to promote [www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com](http://www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com).

Agriculture and tourism are Alabama’s two largest industries. But until now, we have not fully taken advantage of our agri-tourism assets, Till said. This new Web site has the potential to increase farmers’

*(Continued on page 4)*

profits and stimulate economic development in rural Alabama. We are proud to be among the partners who are making [www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com](http://www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com) a reality.

**Jeff Helms**  
*Editor, Neighbors and  
Friends & Family*  
Alabama Farmers Federation

## Alabama Cooperative Extension System and the Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail

Congress passed a law in 1862 granting land to each state for agricultural and mechanical institutions of higher learning. Congress granted land to institutions educating black citizens in 1890. In 1914, the land-grant mission gave rise to the national Cooperative Extension Service with a mission to take the university to the people.

Alabama is the first state to combine the Extension programs at its 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System was formally created in 1995 and includes

Alabama A&M University and Auburn University, with Tuskegee University cooperating.

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System is the primary outreach organization for the land-grant mission of Alabama A&M University and Auburn University. Its mission is to deliver research-based educational programs that enable people to improve their quality of life and economic well-being. Extension's vision is to be a world-class educational organization providing real-life solutions to improve the lives of all Alabamians.

Extension was the primary organization that brought the Alabama Agri-Tourism Partnership together. Its role in developing the Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail includes the following:

- Development of the Web site that allows tourists to identify agri-tourism attractions that are currently available to travelers. This was done with close coordination with the other partners.
- Creation of high quality advertisements (print and Web) to promote the Web site.

- Development of a comprehensive statewide inventory of existing agri-tourism attractions.
- Maintenance of the Web site with periodic contact of all listed attractions to ascertain the validity of all entries.
- Assistance in marketing the Agri-Tourism Trail. This will be done through Extension publications and news articles.

A long-term goal is the development of a series of workshops, seminars, and publications to assist farmers and entrepreneurs in the growth of future agri-tourism attractions.

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Visit the Community Resource Development home page at [www.aces.edu/department/crd/](http://www.aces.edu/department/crd/)



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