



Alabama Farms as Tourist Destinations

Impact Statement

The Problem/Issue:

Tourism is 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. Agri-tourism is not new—it has a long-standing tradition in the West, and Europe has long had the concept of the farm stay, where travelers stay on a working farm for a holiday or vacation. People become involved in agri-tourism for many reasons including supplemental income, sole business, hobby and the opportunity to provide an educational tool to explain agriculture to non-farm individuals.

While agri-tourism has had a significant impact in the upper Midwest for a number of years, it is just beginning to develop a foothold in Alabama. Significant interest in agri-tourism is growing among residents and travelers to Alabama. After the tragedies of Sept. 11, 2001, people are still traveling but are traveling more often by automobile and are taking shorter trips closer to home. Agri-tourism attractions also serve the desires of tourists to learn more from their travels and to rediscover their rural and agricultural roots.

What's Been Done:

Success requires careful planning, effective marketing and an investment in time and money. The Alabama Agri-Tourism Partnership was formed to offer assistance in these areas. The members of the partnership are the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel, Alabama Farmers Federation, and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Extension coordinated the formation of the partnership for the purpose of developing and marketing the statewide Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail.

The partnership defined agri-tourism as "a commercial enterprise at any agricultural operation, including horticultural and agribusiness, conducted for the enjoyment of visitors that generates supplemental tourism income for the owner."

The trail has been implemented, and its purpose is to provide farmers and entrepreneurs a source of supplemental income and an educational tool to explain agriculture to non-farm individuals. The Trail will also provide additional attractions and marketing opportunities to tourists and tourism organizations. The partnership, through Extension's leadership and expertise, recently completed and launched a Web site to

implement the Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail. The Web address is www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com.

The marketing efforts of all four organizations are restricted by a similar set of operational constraints. Because of very limited marketing resources, each partner is expected to rely upon existing in-house personnel, utilize agency/organizational Web sites, use in-house publications, and emphasize direct contact with clients and stakeholders. Because each agency/organization will have the autonomy to market the Web site as they desire, there was some concern regarding the consistency of developing a common marketing brand for the trail. To assure design compatibility, Extension designed the website and developed a series of three graphic ads of varying sizes in both color and grayscale that resembles the Web site. Both the Web site and ads were developed with input and approval from all partners.

Each partner has specific marketing responsibilities. Extension developed and implemented a five-part strategy to fulfill its marketing responsibilities. The Extension strategies revolve around the following areas: Extension Web site; Extension publications; press releases and press packets for use by local media; university publications and direct mail.

Why We Care:

Tourism and agriculture each have annual economic impacts of greater than \$6 billion for the state of Alabama. The trail has provided a means for small farmers, rural entrepreneurs and small agri-businesses to market their agri-tourism product regionally, statewide, and nationally. Before the development of the trail, there was no state-wide means to market all aspects of agri-tourism attractions. Extension believes that enhancing these farmers and others marketing efforts will generate additional income for their farms and businesses.