



RURAL DEVELOPMENTS

SOUTHERN REGION CONVENING

STORY BY Walter Harris

The Partnership for Rural America (PRA) in partnership with USDA-Rural Development and the SC Rural Development Council is sponsoring a Southern Region Convening in Charlotte, NC on May 11-12 at the Harris Conference Center. Registration is still open for this important event which will feature nationally known experts in the fields of broadband, energy, workforce development and economic development.

The purpose of the meeting is to encourage a thorough discussion of these important issues and to identify regional and interdisciplinary solutions.

The topics were chosen by the planning committee because of the importance of these issues to the future of rural America. The conference will feature a blend of general session speakers, successful practitioners who have succeeded through the use of best practices and a facilitated discussion of how we can work together to overcome obstacles and take advantage of resources.

Participants should feel free to bring their own success stories to share with the group. We will post all PowerPoint presentations online immediately after the conference. While we will not have time for all participants to make formal presentations, we will make an effort to

post those participant presentations which provide valuable information related to the topics of broadband, energy, workforce development and economic development.

Additional information can be obtained from www.cfrv.org/2010SouthernRegion.htm Registration for the meeting online is available at <http://srdc.msstate.edu/srrc/> You can also call 804-371-7141 to obtain more information from the Council for Rural Virginia, the lead partner for the Southern Region.

Hotel arrangements have been made at the Wingate by Wyndham at I-77 and Tyvola Road. They can be reached at 704-523-3366.

AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM FUEL AGRITOURISM GROWTH IN SOUTH CAROLINA

STORY BY CYNTHIA LEGETTE DAVIS

With agriculture and tourism as South Carolina's two largest industries, it's no surprise that agritourism has emerged as one of the state's strongest market sectors in recent years. National trends show urban and town dwellers and visitors increasingly seeking to escape their daily routines and go to the country to unwind and get back to nature while enjoying unique, authentic and memorable experiences. They don't

have to look far in South Carolina, with local farmers providing a wide variety of fun and food all in the name of agritourism.

"Agribusiness and tourism together form a powerful force in the growth and development of this state's economy," says Hugh Weathers, S.C. Commissioner of Agriculture. "Agritourism, which adds value to on-farm revenue and to the economy especially in rural communities, is an important part of the long-term strategic goal for agribusiness in the state."

Agritourism is defined by the S.C. Department of Agriculture as any activity carried out on a farm that allows the general public recreational, entertainment or educational opportunities. Examples include corn mazes, fairs, festivals, tractor shows, visiting farms to buy locally grown produce, pick-your-own fresh fruit outings, bird-watching, petting farms, pumpkin patches, horseback riding, wineries, roadside markets, Christmas tree farms, ... continued on Page 2

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hayrides, bed-and-breakfast inns, shopping in farm gift shops, and hunting, fishing, hiking or trail riding on farm and forest land. Farm settings are also appealing for reunions, outdoor weddings, and vacations.

"We have a generation of people now who are not growing up on farms," says Dr. David Lamie, Associate Professor & Extension Specialist for the Clemson Institute for Economic and Community Development (CIECD). "Agritourism provides them an opportunity to still experience farms without the hard work as they get away and slow down."

In response to this trend, most agritourism businesses result from farmers seeking a way to supplement their farming revenue by reaching out to the non-farming public, providing agricultural activities that are fun. With nearly 25,000 farms in South Carolina, according to the S.C. Department of Agriculture, agritourism remains on the rise.

A study released by the Palmetto Agribusiness Council in 2008 shows the agriculture industry with a \$33.9 billion impact on South Carolina's economy, providing approximately 200,000 jobs. Agritourism in South Carolina has grown from a \$2.7 million market sector in 2002 to an \$8.1 million market sector in 2007, the date of the last USDA Census of Agriculture.

One common goal among many of South Carolina's agriculture and tourism agencies is to strengthen the collective agritourism efforts of farmers. "Agritourism offers a wealth of growth opportunities for our state," says Michelle C. McCullom, president and CEO of the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor (SCNHC).

She has seen first-hand how eager South Carolina farmers are to engage in agritourism. McCullom says that, since 1999, the SCNHC has worked with farmers located in the Upstate and now in the the Low Country areas of the state's Heritage Corridor, helping them organize, market and measure the economic progress of their agritourism efforts.

"As we were establishing Discovery Centers in the Upstate, we talked with a number of farmers who were dabbling in agritourism and wanted to do more with it but were unsure as to how to go about it," says McCullom. "As we visited their farms, we realized that their products could be moved from roadside markets to actual farm visits."

McCullom says that, in response to the farmers' interest in agritourism, she and other staff members attended the North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Conference to gather information that addressed the farmers' needs regarding such issues as best practices, marketing and liabilities. They brought the information back and shared it with the local farmers. She says 1999 was their first year attending the conference and that she and staff members have attended several more years since then.

Farmers in the Upstate used the information to organize and form a nonprofit organization, the S.C. Heritage Corridor Farmers' Association, to cross-promote and support each other's agritourism efforts. Low Country farmers are now also a part of the association.

An example of these cross-promotion efforts is a brochure the association developed promoting all the farms that are members. Also, during the Spring and Fall months, member farms hold festivals each Saturday in the Upstate and Low Country including hands-on farm demonstrations, entertainment, children's activities, arts and crafts, tours, vendors and farm-fresh food. The SCNHC includes details for each of the festivals on their website.

In addition, the S.C. Heritage Corridor Farmers' Association held an agritourism conference this past January in Saluda, SC, attracting more than 175 participants and including exhibits by local farmers.

While the Pee Dee region is not a part of the Heritage Corridor, innovative agritourism efforts are also underway in that part of the state. Through its recently launched "Let's Get Ag-Cited" campaign created by the Florence Convention & Visitors Bureau, farmers, artisans and agriculture professionals offer family-friendly events every weekend of each season.

"It's exciting to see so many agriculturally-related events that are scheduled on a weekly basis in the region," says Florence CVB Director, Holly Young Beaumier. "In the Pee Dee Region of South Carolina, we're proud of our agricultural heritage, and we're spreading the ag-citement to visitors young and old."

Events from the Ag-Cited promotion range from farm festivals and wine tastings to flower and vegetable planting experiences, story-telling and the sale of artisan products.

"We recognize the development of agritourism and artisan tourism

as natural partners as it relates to developing tourism in the rural areas of our state," says George Estes, Director of Operations for Tourism and Recreational Development for the S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism.

He says that his department recently initiated two studies in the Pee Dee and along the I-77 corridor to inventory artisan centers and recommend ways in which they can work more closely together for increased tourism and retail opportunities. Funding for the studies was provided by the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture).

"Agritourism and artisan centers combine fun, food and art for all ages that crosses all lines culturally, ethnically and racially," Estes says. "It's about the visitor having the experience and receiving something to take home with them."

As agritourism continues to grow in South Carolina, efforts remain underway to involve more farmers and other agriculture and tourism entities. According to Lamie, while agritourism is a growth sector in South Carolina, efforts to develop this sector have been fragmented so far.

To help coordinate and facilitate agritourism efforts, the CIECD works with county-based Cooperative Extension agents to provide technical assistance for emerging and existing agritourism operators. As a recent example, the CIECD held a "Train-the-Trainer" one-and-half day workshop for agritourism service providers. The workshop covered such topics as best practices, liability, resource development, cross-promotion and marketing.

Two key issues remain a challenge for farmers seeking to add agritourism to their business approach: signage to direct people to their farms from the main highway and liability. State legislation is currently pending concerning some liability issues that, if passed, would limit the liability of farmers as it relates to agritourism.

"Because agritourism changes the way farmers do business, it also changes their liability, and therefore their need for additional insurance coverage," says Beth Crocker, General Counsel and Director of Legal Affairs for the South Carolina Department of Agriculture.

An additional policy for agritourism farming is often needed. Crocker encourages farmers engaged in or considering agritourism to build a good relationship with their current insurance ...continued on page 3

USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT ANNOUNCES ENERGY PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, May 4, 2010

– Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that USDA is seeking applications to increase the production and use of renewable energy sources. Funding is available from four USDA Rural Development renewable energy programs authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill).

“This funding will help spur investments in technologies that will reduce reliance on fossil fuels, conserve natural resources and help build a sustained renewable energy industry in rural America,” Vilsack said. “Support provided by USDA through these programs will not only benefit the environment, it will create green jobs and help America become more energy self-sufficient.”

USDA is accepting applications for grants and loan guarantees in the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) until June 30, 2010. More information on how to apply for funding is available in the April 26, 2010 Federal Register. The Rural Energy for America Program provides funds to agricultural producers and rural small businesses to purchase and install renewable energy systems and make energy efficiency improvements.

Eligible projects include installing renewable energy systems such as wind turbines, solar, geothermal, biomass, anaerobic digesters, hydroelectric, and ocean or hydrogen systems. Funding may also be used to purchase energy-efficient equipment, add insulation, and improve heating and cooling systems. In fiscal year

2009, this program helped fund 1,485 REAP projects in 50 states, the commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the Western Pacific Islands.

“The Rural Energy for America Program enables owners of small rural businesses, farms and ranches to reduce energy consumption, part of President Obama’s effort to reduce our reliance on foreign oil and the destabilizing effects of a changing climate,” Vilsack said. “Through this



program, farmers, agricultural producers and small business owners will be able to upgrade or replace outdated, inefficient systems in their operations. That not only saves money, it supports job creation.”

One rural company that used REAP funds to reduce energy costs is Energex American, Inc., a Mifflintown, Penn., based pellet manufacturing firm. In 2009, the company received a \$476,685 grant to help fund the installation of an industrial dryer powered by woody biomass. The company reduced its annual demand for propane by 150,000 gallons and realized energy savings of nearly 98 percent.

In addition to the REAP program, Secretary Vilsack announced that USDA is also planning to accept applications for three other renewable energy programs: Repowering Assistance Program.

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agents to get the best agritourism insurance rates for a single event or year-round, depending on their needs. In addition, she says the North American Farmers’ Direct Marketing Association is working to offer a group rate for agritourism insurance.

The S.C. Farm Bureau is also addressing the needs of local farmers for agritourism insurance. According to David Winkles, President and CEO of the S.C. Farm Bureau, the agency has a number of advisory committees that meet regularly on various issues concerning farmers. “One of the most recent issues that has arisen is the interpretation of farm use from a taxability standpoint and liability insurance,” he says. In response to this concern, he says the S.C. Farm Bureau has rewritten general farm liability insurance to include coverage of agritourism.

With agritourism having taken root in South Carolina, all indications are that it will continue to grow, creating a greater diversity of fun rural excursions for residents and visitors and increased revenue for agriculture, tourism and our state’s economy.

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The Biorefinery Assistance Program, provides guaranteed loans to develop and construct commercial-scale biorefineries or to retrofit existing facilities using eligible technology for the development of advanced biofuels.

The Repowering Assistance Program is designed to encourage the use of renewable biomass as a replacement fuel source

The Bioenergy Program for Advanced Biofuels works to support and ensure expanding production of advanced biofuels by providing payments to eligible advanced biofuels producers.

For more information contact your local USDA-Rural Dev Office.

RURAL DEVELOPMENTS is a publication of the SC Rural Development Council and the SC Community Development Collaborative. It is designed to promote awareness of the issues confronting rural South Carolina. Rural Developments is supported by the Clemson Institute for Economic and Community Development and a grant from USDA-Rural Development.

The South Carolina Rural Development Council is a federally recognized organization made up of federal and state agencies, non-profit organizations and other organizations which have interests or responsibilities in rural areas.

The SC Community Development Collaborative is made up of organizations interested in effective community development practices in South Carolina. It is facilitated by Clemson’s Institute for Economic and Community Development.

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