



Planting the Seeds for a Regional Agritourism Program



Fields of Gold Region

Counties of:

- Augusta
- Bath
- Highland
- Rockbridge
- Rockingham
- Shenandoah
- Page
- Botetourt

Cities of:

- Harrisonburg
- Lexington
- Staunton
- Buena Vista
- Waynesboro



What is Agritourism?

- Merges two complex industries—agriculture and tourism
- Defined as, “any activity carried out on a farm or ranch that allows members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment or education purposes to view or enjoy rural activities”



Agritourism Activities

- Wineries/Breweries/Cideries
- Farmers Markets and Produce Stands
- Farm Tours and Farm Stays
- Pick-Your-Own Farms
- Trout Farms and Fisheries
- Hay Rides/Corn Mazes
- Christmas Tree Farms/Nurseries
- Farm-to-Table Restaurants
- Ag Festivals/County Fairs
- Event Facilities/Ag Venues



Agriculture in the Region

- Farming has been central to the region's way of life.
- Home to 4 of the top 5 agricultural producers in Virginia.
- **Farm Land:** 1,066,359 acres
- **Farms:** 7,074 working farms
- **Market Value of Products Sold:** \$1,029,099,000 (35% of State total)



Tourism in the Region

- In 2012, travelers spent over \$1.1 billion in the region.
- More than 6.7 million people traveled to the area in 2010.
- Region includes:
 - Blue Ridge Parkway/Skyline Drive/Appalachian Trail
 - Shenandoah National Park
 - George Washington and Jefferson National Forests
 - Headwaters of the James and Shenandoah Rivers
 - Civil War Battlefields
 - Luray Caverns, Grand Caverns
 - Natural Bridge





Organizational Structure



Partnership Development



- Engaged a broad base of private and public sector stakeholders
- Sponsored agritourism workshops
- Participated in ag-related events
- Hosted 4 Farming in Valley Festivals



Economic Impact Analysis



Purpose: Evaluate the economic impact of the agritourism industry in the Fields of Gold region

- Collected regional demographic and visitor profiles
- Defined the size and economic impact of agritourism
- Determined the market potential of regional agritourism



Inventory & Mapping

- Surveyed over 170 agritourism operators
- Categorized and mapped these sites
- Produced interactive, web-based map of agritourism sites



Farm Trail Destinations

- Ag Venues
- Christmas Trees, Nursery
- Experience the Farm
- Farm Stand
- Farm to Table Restaurant
- Farmers Market
- Local Grocery/Store
- On-Farm Lodging
- Pick-Your-Own
- Trout Farm/Aquaculture
- Winery, Brewery



Marketing

- Website www.fieldsofgold.org
- Interactive, web-based map
- Promotional materials
- Print advertising
- Facebook
- Press releases



Annual Farming in the Valley Festival

- There was a need and desire to highlight agritourism in this area.
- Partnership with The Chamber of Commerce
- 1 Day Event – Farm location is ideal
- Very affordable entry





Vendors and Attractions

- Augusta FFA Chapters – Petting zoo, corn box with equipment, cow milking etc.
- Dog Demos – Sheep herding
- Harmony Harvest Farm – Wild flower demo
- Linda Marchman – Magical Monarchs Butterfly Presentation, Tagging & Release
- Lowes Build and Grow Workshop - Hands on wood-working
- Pioneer Seed - Teach kids how to plant a garden
- VA Cattlemen's Association– Beef samples & cooking demos
- Augusta Co-op
- White Oak Lavender Farm
- Singing Earth Produce
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation
- Echo Valley Fiber @ Diamond Triple C Ranch
- Farrier - Marcus Wise
- Meadowcroft Farms
- Pebble Hall Wildflowers & Herbs
- Project Grows
- Relay Foods
- Shenandoah Valley Beekeepers Association
- SPCA of Augusta County



Planning Lessons and Creative Visions for the future

- We know a farm atmosphere works the best.
- We have found 4-5 hours on a Sunday is a good time for families.
- We have found that the more kids can get hands on involvement, the more successful the event.
- We have found a low per person or per car rate works the best.
- Local ag related businesses (Banks, Equipment providers, Home Improvement, Insurance, Electric companies, Nurseries/Landscape etc.) are great supporters/sponsors.
- Get with vendors and sponsors early!
- Encourage activities!
- Live animals are a draw.
- Just retail doesn't work.
- Events on a flow work.
- Local food vendors are ideal.



Pictures from the festival



Tips and Tricks for the event

1. Be prepared!

Double check equipment . Schedule staff support. Survival kit.

2. Logistics – Logistics – Logistics

Name Tags. Registration . Food/Drink. Schedule of events. Speakers.

(If you think it will take 2 hours to set up – plan for 4 hours instead.)

3. Confirmations

Permits. Deliveries. Final Walk Through. Invited press.

4. Check Weather – Have a back up plan.

Outside event. (Rain or shine? Or Inside option?) Snow date?

5. Don't let them see you sweat!

Learn to let go. Control what you can control. SERVICE your guest. Make memories! Thank staff, volunteers and sponsors.

6. Make memories. Have fun!

Talk to your guest. Take pictures. Welcome feedback. Invite your family.

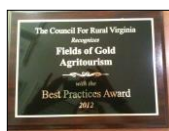
*Check List Handout



Award Winning Partners



170 Agritourism Operators
13 Localities
Shenandoah Valley Partnership
Chambers of Commerce
JMU
SV-SBDC
VA Cooperative Extension
Farm Credit
Farm Bureau
VDACS
VA DHCD
VTC
VAPDC
Center for Rural Virginia
and many others



Key Lessons

- Did our homework
- Built a coalition of partners
- Divided the tasks
- Public relations and communications
- Identified funding and resources





Challenges

- Diversity of Agritourism
- Size of the Region
 - 8 counties, 5 cities, 3 PDCs
- Multiple Stakeholders Involved
- Resources Needed
- Communication
- Trying to Keep Everyone Happy!



The Next Season

- Continue partnership development
- Recruit more agritourism operators and farmers
- Enhance website
- Increase and expand advertising
- Develop a Tour de Farm (bike-to-farm) program
- Hire an agritourism coordinator
- Implement our 5-year Strategic Plan
- Develop a Business Development Plan
- Seek funding to sustain the program



Any
Questions?

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Fields of Gold

The Shenandoah Valley - where agriculture got its roots

Picture - Lexington & Rockville Area Tourism