

Touch the Past; Touch the Plenty--Agritourism in Montezuma County

Mesa Verde County Visitor Information Bureau of Cortez, CO, received \$50,000 to promote agritourism and farmers markets in Montezuma County. The funds allowed the implementing of a promotional campaign, which included printing a brochure, creation of a video and developing a website to encourage agritourism and farmers market participation.

Final Report

FINAL REPORT FMPP GRANT G-0695

TOUCH THE PAST, TOUCH THE PLENTY - AGRITOURISM IN MONTEZUMA COUNTY

Summary

The issue addressed by this grant was the development of an agritourism program for our area. As a rural community with a long tradition of agriculture (from the Ancestral Pueblo people to the present) the need to keep agriculture sustainable is of utmost importance. As the county continues to grow in size, more agricultural lands are being taken over and more of our agricultural heritage is being taken away. We are losing open space, wildlife habitat, and the economic viability to keep our farmers and ranchers in business. Our agritourism program was developed to provide visitors to our area an opportunity to return to their roots...to where food is produced...and connect with local individuals and experiences to enrich their lives. At the same time the program would provide a means to enrich the economic viability for our farmers and ranchers and continue our long agricultural tradition.

How Issue Was Addressed

The development of this program followed a variety of steps:

- ❖ Educating producers on the idea of agritourism and how it could help them.
- ❖ Providing workshops for interested producers introducing them to the concept of agritourism and how to “market” themselves.
- ❖ Getting the word out through participation in Ag Expo and underwriting of agricultural programs on public radio
- ❖ Designing a logo for the program that incorporated the past and the present
- ❖ Developing an agritourism photo library for use in website and brochure
- ❖ Working with the Cortez Farmer’s market to develop a poster and local food directory for consumers
- ❖ Providing advertising for the local farmer’s market and other agritourism programs regionally and state wide
- ❖ Interacting with the public at special events like the County Fair and Verde Fest to spread the word about agritourism and the importance of agriculture in our community
- ❖ Continual interaction with producers to develop a final participation list for inclusion in the brochure and website.
- ❖ Adding an agricultural adventures section to our Mesa Verde Country® Travel Planner (150,000 copies distributed each year)
- ❖ Developing an agricultural adventures section for the Mesa Verde Country® website
- ❖ Developing a DVD of agricultural activities in the area and incorporating it into the website
- ❖ Producing the final Agricultural Adventures brochure
- ❖ Offering a press trip for journalists to experience agritourism and write about it in national publications

Project Partner Contributions:

An important partnership was with the Colorado State University Extension Office. They had already developed an extensive curriculum program in Agritourism and they offered multiple workshops in the area for producers focusing on the concept of Agritourism, legal issues and how to work around them, website development and overall marketing. The local extension office was extremely helpful in identifying local producers who would benefit from and be interested in developing an agritourism program. They also provided assistance at events like Ag Expo and the County Fair making contact with people and spreading the word about the program. They assisted in the final review of the brochure and in laying out the map and checking it for accuracy.

Of course, the greatest partnership is with our producers, all 49 of them, who enthusiastically engaged in the program. They assisted with photography at their businesses, helped write text for the brochure and website, and were cheer leaders throughout the entire development of the project. They were also gracious hosts to media who came to write about the project and the producers participating. And they continue to be gracious hosts to all the visitors who come to our area and engage with them in agricultural adventures.

We also have a great partnership with the Cortez Farmer's Market who reaps the benefit of this promotion and the "buy local" program. The grant assistance underwriting the development of their poster and their advertising for two years allowed them to branch out and hire a market manager, which in turn allowed them to expand and grow the Farmer's Market.

Results, Conclusions, Lessons Learned

There has been a great deal of excitement over the program, not only from the producers who have benefited, but from locals in the community who were not aware of all the agricultural opportunities in the area. New businesses have developed promoting local products through "buy local" promotions. The farmer's market has expanded and has secured a market manager.

One of the greatest lessons learned is that when you present a new concept it must be nurtured and supported in order to grow. But, once it takes off and people understand what it is and how it can help them, it grows and develops and takes on a new direction of its own.

Current and Future Benefits of the Project

- ❖ Producers have found new ways to benefit economically from agriculture
- ❖ Cortez Farmer's Market has grown and expanded
- ❖ Visitors to the area have new opportunities to learn where their food and fiber come from and the importance of agriculture
- ❖ The community has benefited from agritourism opportunities made available to them for their participation.
- ❖ The importance of agritourism in the overall tourism industry is just beginning to be explored and expanded. Future benefits in both tourism and agriculture will be seen with these developments.

- ❖ The Mesa Verde Country® Wine and Art Festival has been expanded to the Mesa Verde Country® Food, Wine and Art Festival and local producers are now included.
- ❖ Local businesses benefited from the development of these products as we used local photographers, graphic designers, web developers, videographers, and printers.

Additional Information

The agricultural adventures section of our website may be viewed at:

www.mesaverdecountry.com/tourism/agriadv.html. In addition, articles written about our agritourism program, as a result of our press trip, may be viewed at:

www.mesaverdecountry.com/tourism/travelog.html.

Products produced and included with this report include:

- ❖ Agricultural Adventures section in 2010 Travel Planner
- ❖ Agricultural Adventures Brochure
- ❖ Agricultural Adventures DVD
- ❖ Cortez Farmer's Market Poster
- ❖ Agritourism Program Banner

Future Recommendations

This project will not stand still. We will continue to add new producers to our website, work with the Farmer's Market to assist in any way possible, encourage more press to visit our area to write more articles on agritourism, promote the program in each year's Travel Planner, and promote special events like our Food, Wine and Art Festival. We hope to work with the Farmer's Market on additional FMPP grants to assist in the ongoing expansion of the market. We also hope to work with Colorado State Extension Office for future research on the effectiveness of the program.

Beneficiaries of Project

- ❖ Local area producers who are part of the Agritourism program
- ❖ Vendors at area Farmer's Markets
- ❖ Area visitors who participate in Agritourism activities
- ❖ Local residents who participate in Agritourism activities
- ❖ Tourism businesses who keep visitors here longer and increase their revenues
- ❖ City governments who collect more taxes from visitors who stay longer
- ❖ The local tourism office, Mesa Verde Country®, who with grant funding was able to launch this major project
- ❖ Local businesses that benefited from the development of this program, including local photographers, graphic designers, web developers, videographers, and printers.

Contact Person

Lynn Dyer

Mesa Verde Country®

Box HH

Cortez, CO 81321

970-565-8227

lynnd@mesaverdecountry.com