



Alabama's Agri - Tourism Trail

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Managing a forest or farm to make it provide income for your family is one of the primary goals of most landowners. In the business we're in, this mainly involves growing a crop of trees, which we all know is a long term investment. For those landowners who have other forestry-related crops or attractions on their land, there is now a program in Alabama that may interest you.

Alabama's Agri-Tourism Trail can provide forest landowners an opportunity to raise capital while dealing with tourists in a farm setting. The program is a partnership between the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, the Alabama Farmers Federation, and the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel.

The Agri-Tourism program is designed to improve the income and economic health of small farms and rural communities. Categories and activities that may be of interest to forest landowners include: Direct Sales (agriculture-related crafts, farmers' market, u-pick operations); Outdoor Recreation (camping, fishing, bird watching, game/wildlife preserves, horseback riding, nature walks, trail rides, photography, shooting sports; even sea-

sonal activities such as hunting); Educational Experience (farm tours, school tours, etc.); Entertainment (special events, festivals, fairs, etc.); Accommodations (farm/ranch vacation, farm stay, guest ranch, farm skills, farm work conference facility); Miscellaneous (guide/outfitter operation).

According to Extension Tourism Specialist J. Thomas Chesnutt at Auburn, the Agri-Tourism Trail was patterned after other similar programs existing across the United States. In the future, the partners of the program hope to provide workshops that address things such as pricing, liability, and other concerns a rural entrepreneur might have. Chesnutt stressed that this program is not for anyone who does not want to deal with tourists.

When a farm is included on the trail, the operation will be listed not only on the Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail webpage (www.alabamaagritourism.com), but also the national agri-tourism site (www.farmstop.com) as well.

Many of our state's tourists and visitors enjoy purchasing locally-grown or -made products while they are visiting other states. The Agri-Tourism Trail website will give people a chance to find the

products or rural experiences they want, plus all of the details including days and hours of operation, website addresses, directions, and products and services grown or offered.

How to be Listed on the Trail

Any farm, rural business, or other operation interested in generating income while inviting visitors to your property can submit information for the Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail. There is no fee to be listed on the Trail. All you have to do is complete the application form (available on the agri-tourism web page). Photographs are welcome and desired. You can send any photo by e-mail or regular mail.

To remain on the Trail, you must submit written confirmation via e-mail or regular mail, that you are still open to tourists and that the information currently on file regarding your attraction, service, or activity is correct.

The Extension System requests that you submit applications on-line if possible to speed up the process and reduce errors. If this is not possible, you may mail applications and photos to Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail, c/o Extension Tourism Specialist, 218 Extension Hall, Auburn University, AL 36849. ☎