

SCOPED
IN COOPERATION WITH
SCHUYLER COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND
CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION OF SCHUYLER COUNTY

*Schuyler County Agri-Tourism
Development Project*



Final Report

Submitted by

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Project Consultant

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Schuyler County Agritourism Development Project

FINAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION



The Schuyler County Agritourism Development Project was a coordinated project involving SCOPED (Schuyler County Partnership for Economic Development), the Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County. The project was undertaken with grants funds from the Appalachian Regional Commission and matching resources provided by the participating organizations.

Project Goal and Objectives

Overall goal of the project: Sustaining the agricultural industry in Schuyler County through product diversification and opportunities for new revenue streams, expanding and enhancing the tourism industry in Schuyler County, and preserving agricultural land.

Project objectives:

- Assess the feasibility of establishing an Agritourism trail in Schuyler County
- Identify those business that are best suited to participate in terms of product mix and potential to be positioned as anchors in an Agritourism trail
- Develop business plans that will provide a blueprint for these businesses to quickly activate if an Agritourism trail is formed
- Develop a positioning strategy for the possible development and implementation of an Agritourism trail

Project Team

The project team consisted of an Advisory Committee and two consultants.

Advisory Committee:

SCOPED

Kelsey Jones
Brian Williams

Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce

Cynthia Kimble
Michelle Benjamin

Cornell Cooperative Extension

Jim Ochterski
Robin Travis
Brett Chedzoy

Consultants:

Susan Payne, Community & Economic Development Consultant: Ms. Payne served as the lead consultant and was responsible for providing an overview of the project at the participating workshop, conducting two one-one-one counseling sessions and an in-depth site evaluation with each participating farm, preparing the farm assessment reports, developing a set of recommendations and action plan to position the individual businesses to participate, identifying successful Agritourism ventures for the program participants to visit, conducting market research, assessing the feasibility of both an Agritourism trail

concept and individual business capacity, making recommendations for a product mix and positioning strategy to organize and successfully launch an Agritourism program in Schuyler County, and recommending a brand concept and elements of a communication program. Ms. Payne also provided editorial comments on the draft Agritourism manual prepared by Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Monika Roth, Cornell Cooperative Extension: Ms. Roth served as a consultant and was responsible for contributing to the market research, jointly assessing the potential of each participating farms especially in terms of its physical assets, contributing to the list of farm sites to visit, and taking the lead in developing the agritourism manual on behalf of Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Scope of Work

The scope of the project included the following components.

- Education Workshop
- Identify farms best suited to participate and become anchors
- Assess the potential profitability of the farms ~ as individual entities and on the aggregate level as member of a future trail
- Prepare a report on each business regarding the feasibility of creating or growing an Agritourism venture; the best set of products that each business brings to a county-wide Agritourism program; and, a set of recommendations and action steps needed to position each business to be a viable agritourism destination
- Assist program participants develop strategic action plans
- Conduct the necessary market research to ascertain the level of demand and expectations of the consumer groups for various products that would be attractive and drive adequate traffic to support an Agritourism trail
- Assess the feasibility of establishing an Agritourism trail in Schuyler County
- Develop a positioning strategy for the possible development and implementation of an Agritourism trail and mix of businesses and products
 - ⊗ Organizational structure
 - ⊗ Branding recommendations
 - ⊗ Marketing and communications plan
 - ⊗ Linkages with other tourism agencies and destinations
- Produce an Agritourism Farm Development Manual

Participating Farms

At the Education Workshop, participants were invited to complete an application form (see Appendix D. Forms) if they wished to be considered for participation in the program. A total of ten applications were received. The following six farms were selected.

- Arcangeli Farm and Country Critters (beef production)
- Hoffarms Dairy and Sunset View Creamery (dairy and cheese making)
- Church Street Produce (u-pick strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, vegetables)
- Ort Family Farm (heritage livestock and heirloom vegetables)
- Reisinger's Apple Country (orchards and u-pick)
- Wine Country Alpacas (Alpaca farm and fiber products)

Farm Assessment and Business Planning

Each farm participant received one-on-one assessment and counseling services from Susan Payne and Monika Roth. The overall goal was to provide them with the tools to help them decide if they could create or grow an agritourism venture and turn their farm assets into additional annual income for their family. The following steps were followed with each farm participant.

Step 1. Explore Options That Build on the Strengths of the Farm Operation

Step 2. Personal Assessment

- Evaluate the family's interest and motivation
- Identify the types of enterprise best suited to the family's interests and opportunities

Step 3. Farm Assessment

- Determine how suitable it is as a tourism destination
- Examples: geographic location, farm setting, conditions of the buildings, basic amenities such as bathrooms, impact on neighbors
- Identify potential risks to the visitors; conduct risk analysis

Step 4. Set Personal Goals

Step 5. Understand the Customers

- Know who they are and what they would expect
- Evaluate how attractive the Agritourism idea and location would be to potential customers

Step 6. Opportunities to leverage resources and develop products

- Education programs
- Value-added products (jams, jellies, canned goods, yarns, quilts, etc.)
- Interactive activities (petting zoos, pick-your-own)
- Natural resources (waterfalls, creeks, gorges, hiking trails, etc.)
- Entertainment (hayrides, hiking, natural walks, cooking demonstrations, processing demonstrations, etc.)
- Historic recreations (old farm machinery, stone walls, barns, farm houses)
- Special events (harvest festivals, etc.)

Step 7. Gather Important Business Information (legal structure, zoning, permits, insurance)

Step 8. Identify opportunities to leverage other businesses and tourism destinations

Step 9. Develop a start-up plan and an operating plan

Step 10. Develop a marketing plan (product, pricing, positioning, promotion and advertising)

Step 11. Build a financial model

Step 12. Develop a business plan – *road map*

This process involved four on-site visits over a four-month period, of which one was dedicated to an initial feasibility assessment, a second to an in-depth evaluation of the physical place, a third to strategic planning and a fourth to review of the strategic action plan recommendations. The overall objective was to assist each participant to honestly answer these basic questions and develop an action plan to address issues that surfaced in the process.

1. Do you or could you sell what you grow right at the farm?
2. Could you create an authentic farm experience?
3. Could you cater to tourists and meet their expectations for a farm experience?
4. Could you include one or more products or experiences that you could sell?
5. Do you think there is a possibility you could sell your product or activity and make money?

A final assessment report and set of recommendations that formed their individual strategic action plans was prepared and reviewed with each farm participant. A summary of the capacity of each farm is provided on pages 22-26 of this report. The detailed reports are contained in Appendix B. Participating Farm Reports and Strategic Action Plans. Also, the participants were provided with a list of recommended Agritourism ventures recommended for them to visit. These recommended site visit lists are contained in each Farm Report.

PROJECT APPROACH



Questions

A set of key questions was developed.

- What are the national and regional agritourism trends?
- What are the tourism trends in Schuyler County?
- In consideration of a county-wide agritourism program and potential trail, what is the capacity of the county's current agritourism attractions and what should be the ideal product mix?
- How should a county-wide agritourism program be positioned?
- What are the basic services all Schuyler County Agritourism attractions must have and what are cost-effective ways to establish these services?
- What alternatives or options are available for farms to host visitors?
- Who is the consumer? What are their needs and expectations? What Agritourism opportunities are most sought by regional residents, the growing numbers of seasonal residents and overnight visitors?
- What are realistic income expectations and how can farms develop enterprise budgets for Agritourism opportunities?
- What can be done to address the challenge of farm security and visitor expectations, particularly on livestock farms interested in Agritourism?
- What is the potential for developing a Schuyler County Agritourism trail?
- How can Schuyler County position itself to maximize its agritourism potential? What branding and communication tools might be needed?

Definition of Agritourism

One of the first steps in the project was to agree on the definition of Agritourism. According to the dictionary *Agritourism* is the practice of touring agricultural areas to see farms and often to participate in farm activities.¹ Agritourism involves visits to working farms, ranches, wineries and agricultural industries. The scope of activities at agri-destinations has expanded and now typically includes entertainment, education, relaxation, outdoor adventures, shopping and dining.

For the purposes of this project, the Advisory Committee agreed on the following definition.

“If the activity (petting zoo, hayride, corn maze, etc) contributes to the production and marketing of crops or livestock products or modern farm education, then it is appropriate for this project, since these activities are meant to attract customers and engage learning. The crop or livestock product or educational activity must be available at the same time as the tourism or entertainment activity.”

¹ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate R Dictionary, 11th Edition

MARKET RESEARCH



The Industry and Its Trends

A recent study by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University reports that over the last 30 years, farm income has remained flat while expenses have tripled.

With farm income becoming weaker, more and more farmers are looking into alternatives to traditional farming. Agritourism is one of those alternatives that is a realistic option for some farmers. In fact, 4-5% of all 2.1 million farms in the United States engages in Agritourism, and the number is growing.²

Agritourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry in the country. Tourism is the second largest industry in New York State, and there is evidence of an emerging Agritourism segment on both the state and regional level. However, the quality of the various agritourism programs is not meeting customer expectations.

This project is based on the assumption that there are three elements to a successful Agritourism program that need to occur simultaneously:

Individual Enterprises: Each Agritourism entity must have the capacity to meet the basics of having *something for visitors to see, something for them to do, and something for them to buy in a convenient, attractive and consumer-friendly environment.*

“Growers have to adopt a new outlook and switch their thinking away from production toward giving today's consumers what they want. That might include farm tours, value-added products, or even adding a petting zoo. People come out to the farm these days not so much to buy large quantities of produce, but for the immersion experience for themselves and their children. They are looking for a farm-fresh feeling—not just food.”³

The “Wow” Factor: Another key to a successful Agritourism venture is creating a fun and memorable experience - one that will result in a visitor saying:

- “Wow” I’ve got to tell my friends and family about this
- “Wow” we have to come back here next year
- “Wow” these products are great, how can I buy more when I get home

Regional Advertising and Promotion: A regional entity needs to develop and implement an advertising and promotion program, stimulate the creation of regional activities such as festivals and farm markets, and provide support services to help the individual enterprises develop activities that will meet the consumer’s needs and expectations.

²Marketing Trend Blog: Agritourism, Posted by Jsefine Koehn, March 11, 2007

³ Professor Duncan Hilchey of the Cornell Sustainable Agriculture Program

Consumer Needs and Expectations

Jane Eckert, a leading authority on Agritourism, believes that “People want a new experience -- an escape from the stress of traffic jams, office cubicles and carpooling! Parents want their children to know how food is grown and that milk actually comes from a cow -- not a carton! Families enjoy a drive to the country and spending the day together, especially in these times.”⁴

This is supported by research conducted by the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) that indicates:

- Travelers are looking for new experiences as part of their trips
- Families want to strengthen their relationships by being together
- Tourists are increasingly traveling by cars
- Tourists are taking shorter trips & planning at the last minute

We also know that after food and lodging, the tourist dollars are spent on clothing, crafts, and local food products. And, that tourists are making shorter trips and many are planning them just before or shortly after they arrive -- nearly half plan their trip about 1-month ahead.

According to the area conference, visitor bureaus, tourism marketing associations and TPA's, nearly 50% of the tourists get their information from visitor guides and 30% from websites. And we know that about 50% get their information from friends and families who live in the area or visited here before.

Market research also tells us that knowing and understanding the needs and expectations of the customer seeking an Agritourism experience is another key ingredient to cost-effective marketing and promotion efforts. The most important factors from the consumer's perspective include:

- A relaxing experience
- An authentic experience such as the presence of farm animals and barns
- A “new experience” that is fun and interactive
- Overall quality of the experience
- Quality products to purchase
- Opportunity to capture family experience such as being on an operating farm
- Parents wanting educational experiences for their children.
- Learning about who is producing their food and how it is produced
- Nurturing activities (especially those from big cities), such as gardening, harvesting fruit, etc.
- Visual experiences -- natural setting, waterfalls, etc. -- are very appealing for all ages
- Friendly staff

⁴ Eckert AgriMarketing Website, Agritourism Page, Q&A

A national survey conducted in 2002 on recreation and the environment asked ten questions regarding agriculture recreation. These are the results. ⁵

Reason for Trip	Percentage
Enjoy rural scenery	75
Pet a farm animal	67
Source of information is a family member/friend	62
Less non-farm development	58
Visit family or friends	55
Like to see more grazing animals, orchards, vines, woodlands	47 - 50
Learning where food comes from	48
Watch/participate in farm activities	42
More pasture, farmsteads, and croplands	28 - 35
Pick fruit or produce	28

In terms of specific Agritourism, recent market research indicates that people are interested in the following types of activities:

- Sampling local food and produce
- Workshops
- Educational tours
- Hands-on activities such as u-pick
- Short-term interactive projects (30-minutes)
- Other forms of entertainment such as hayrides and gator-ride tours
- Horseback riding
- Processing demonstrations
- Crop art such as corn maizes
- Natural features such as panoramic views, waterfalls, streams, etc.
- Parties, festivals, special events and contests
- Shopping - agriculture products, value-added products, local crafts, gifts and souvenirs
- Ready-to-eat food and drink

⁵ Agritourism and Alternative Enterprises, Farming for Profit and Sustainability Resource Manual, Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, 2002

Customer Profiles

The various NY State and Finger Lakes tourism organizations conduct extensive market research that is valuable in gaining insight to the tourist profile, and their needs and expectations.^{6 7}

This information tells us that the most likely customer groups of any Agritourism enterprise in Schuyler County include:

1. Core market = small groups (2-4) of “residential families and their friends” from the local area
2. Regional residents (1 to 2-hour drive)
3. Traveling visitors, especially families with children and older adults, who are already visiting the area for other reasons such as visiting the wineries, or recreating in the State parks (hiking, camping, etc.) and are looking for a unique family experience and opportunities to shop
4. Organized tours or school groups currently represent a much smaller percentage, but offer potential for growth once an Agritourism venture is established.

Local and Seasonal Residents

There are approximately 40,000 people living in the Schuyler County area, including seasonal residents. The geographic area includes all of Schuyler County and extends into Yates and Seneca Counties. The definition of local and season residents are those who would use Watkins Glen and Montour Falls as their primary destination for food and services.

The seasonal residents include those who spend the summer and fall at seasonal homes throughout the County and cottages along the lakes such as Seneca, Wanetta and Lamoka. Seasonal residents are an important target market group because they are seeking opportunities for fun and interesting things to do for themselves as well as their guests. In addition, many seasonal residents like to purchase locally made products such as fruits, vegetables, cheeses, etc. The popularity of seasonal residences is evident in the strong real estate market for lake front homes and cottages.

Regional Residents

Those regional residents within a 1-hour drive of Schuyler County live in communities such as Elmira, Corning, Ithaca, Cortland, Bath, Penn Yan, Geneva, and Canandaigua. There are an estimated 150,000 people in this area.

Those who live within a 1-2-hour drive of Schuyler County live in the larger urban communities such as Rochester, Syracuse and Binghamton. These metropolitan areas combined represent more than a million residents.

⁶ Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance, 2006 *Comprehensive Tourism Research Update for the Finger Lakes Region of New York*, 2007.

⁷ Steuben County Conference and Visitors Bureau. 2006 Visitor Survey Findings and Responses

Tourists Visiting the Finger Lakes Area

Recent consumer-based market research conducted by the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance and Steuben County Conference and Visitors Bureau provides information about the traveler to the area.

Families and individuals visiting the Finger Lakes are a strong customer group. Evidence of the growing strength of this group is the lodging occupancy rate, which has increased from 57.9% in 2002 to 60.1% in 2006.

More than 70% are female. The majority of the tourists are ages 23 – 60, with a family income of \$80,000. The typical visitor has a college degree and is either retired or has a professional career. They are visiting for a weekend to 4 days, travel by car, and enjoy shopping and driving/sightseeing.

The average tourist receives information from the internet and travel guides. In fact, 65% use websites as a primary source of information. An estimated 80% stay in area hotels/motels/B&B and also receive information about interesting places to visit from this source as they plan day trips after arrival in the area.

They are most impressed by the area's scenic beauty, friendly people, peaceful environment, small town feel, lakes/waterfalls, parks and historic sites. Among the factors that they dislike most are weather, poor signage, limited restaurants and poverty.

Tourists Visiting Schuyler County

The Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce also provides information that indicates that the County's tourism industry is strong. It is estimated that 2 million visitors come to Schuyler County annually. Another indicator of its strength is the annual attendance at the County's major tourism attractions.

Watkins Glen State Park	700,000
Watkins Glen International	450,000
Wineries	650,000
Watkins Glen Waterfront	100,000

Another important indicator is the increase in room and sales tax revenue.

	<u>Sales Tax</u>	<u>Room Tax</u>
2006	\$ 6,223,439.00	\$154,285.00 *
2005	\$ 5,829,705.00	\$ 80,456.00
2004	\$ 5,876,533.00	\$ 71,153.00

*note that the county doubled the room tax % collected beginning Jan 06

Effective Marketing Tools

Market research tells us that it is important to target communications, promotional programs to those who make the travel and buying decisions.

1. Among all of these customer groups, it is typically the women who have the greater interest in taking children to Agritourism business, are most likely to shop for products available at Agritourism businesses, and who make travel arrangements.
2. Repeat customers are the core of most Agritourism businesses, so it is important to establish a strong relationship and on-going communication with the local, regional and seasonal customers.

There are numerous trails and Agritourism programs in counties throughout New York State and the United States; however there are few well developed trails. Following are several examples of county and regionally based agritourism programs in New York State and elsewhere in North America.

There are several advertising and promotional tools. The most effective marketing tools for county-wide agritourism are websites and easy to follow maps.

Websites

Websites are becoming the most popular source of information among visitors to the Finger Lakes. The most recent evidence of the increasing use of websites is data released in early 2007 by the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance. The FLTA survey data shows that the use of websites among visitors to the area increased from 107,983 in 2004 to 290,089 in 2006. This is compared to a declining use of traditional tools such as phone contact, e-mail, etc. from 33,611 in 2004 to 24,905 in 2006.

Maps

Examples of web-based maps include the Massachusetts Agriculture Tourism Map, the Vermont - Ski & Maple Map/Guide, and the Connecticut Farm Map

Additional cost-effective tools include:

- Word-of-mouth referrals from several sources such as friends and family, local businesses, tourism agencies
- Newspapers articles/features, event listings, etc.
- Electronic newsletters (requires collecting customer e-mail addresses)

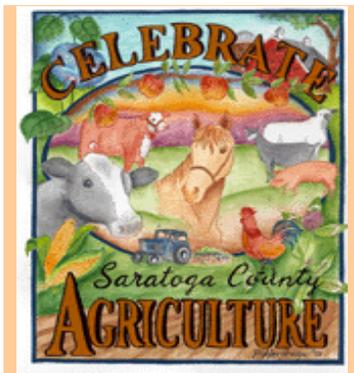
Effective, but more expensive tools include business signs, roadside and other directional signage, printed newsletters and invitations sent via direct mail, printed brochures, and tourism magazines.

Following are several examples of how the web has been used to promote agritourism.

SaratogaFarms.com

SaratogaFarms.com is a website that provides listings of farms, a map locator, agricultural events, farmers markets, agricultural organizations and an on-line driving tour of farms located in the Bacon Hill area in Saratoga County. The farm tour guide also is available in the form of a printed brochure. The website viewer can view and print out the Saratoga County Map. The numbers and symbols on the map correspond to the farm information & descriptions. And, within the Saratoga Farms program are sub-sets or program sponsored by towns and villages such as the annual "Town of Ballston Drive-It-Yourself Farm Tours."

The driving tour segment of the website is called "Bacon Hill Beckons." It is a driving tour of farms and provides on-line profiles of each participating farm. The project is a joint collaboration between Saratoga County Cornell Cooperative Extension and American Farmland Trust, with the assistance of the Saratoga County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, Saratoga Springs Open Space Project, the Black Crow Network, the town of Northumberland historian, local scenic byway steering committees, tourist groups, farmers and farm organizations. Additional funding was received from the Saratoga County Farm Bureau, the Saratoga County Agriculture Promotion Committee and the Saratoga County Dairy Promotion Committee.



Welcome to

Saratogafarms.com

all about Agriculture in Saratoga
County, New York

Saratoga County "Sundae" on the Farm

Saratoga County also presents an annual program called 'Sundae' on the Farm. It takes place each June, and this will be its 11th year. The public is invited to enjoy a free tour of a Saratoga County farms, learn about agriculture, enjoy food, exhibits, children's activities, and a farmers' market. This activity is promoted on the SaratogaFarms.com website.

Saratoga Fiber Tour

Each October Saratoga County presents the two-day Fiber Tour, featuring six farms that have llamas, alpacas and sheep. Each participating farm features a unique activity. The event is promoted on both the SaratogaFarms.com website and the Saratoga Fiber Tour website. The event is sponsored by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Saratoga County and Saratoga County. In addition, each of the participating farms is a member of the Pride of New York Program.

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Adirondack Harvest

Adirondack Harvest is a 501-c-3 community organization formed out of concern for the loss and abandonment of farmland in the Adirondacks. It was originally formed in 2001 because members realized that to keep local food available and to preserve the scenic vistas that farmland provides, farming needs to be profitable. Founding members also had a strong commitment to sustainable farms and wanted to insure that farm-fresh food is available.

Adirondack Harvest has grown to encompass Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, and Warren counties in northeastern New York. These counties contain major sections of the Adirondack Park and the Champlain Valley. The focus has been on expanding markets for local farm products so that consumers have more choice of fresh farm products and on assisting farmers to increase sustainable production.

The organization performs three major functions:

- Represents and promotes the members to area stores and restaurants.
- Provides education for its members on topics such as Inviting Tourists to Your Farm and Value Added Products; and Make the Most of Your Farmer's Market
- Supports a high-quality website that attests to the benefits of preserving agriculture and describes the farming activities in the region. The website serves as a resource for members.
- Produces and mails a "Farm Fresh Foods Map" of the farmers markets, food stands, and Agritourism destinations in the region.
- Provides information to consumers via e-mail on in-season fruits and vegetables and events
- Undertakes projects such as the Adirondack Harvest Cookbook

ADIRONDACK HARVEST

Farm Fresh Foods & Local Products



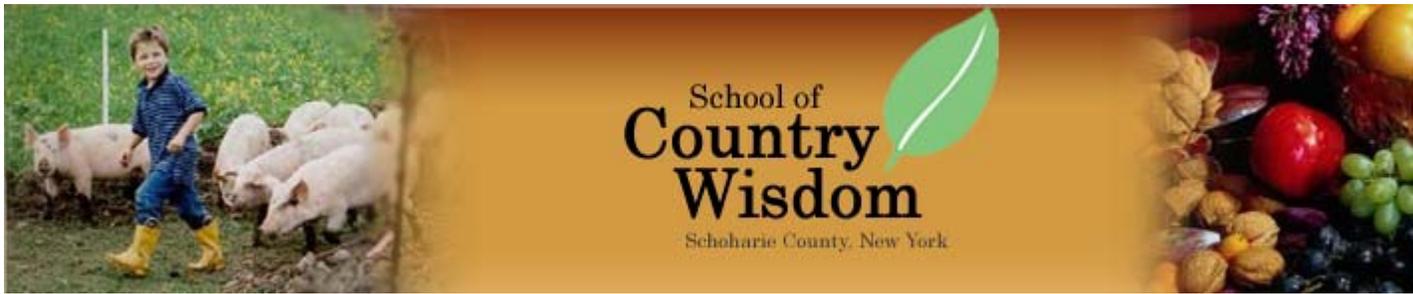
Delaware County

The Delaware County offers the “Farms and Farmstands to Visit” web page that provides a map and listing of farms to visit. A visitor to the website can search by town/village or product/service topic.

Delaware County “Farms & Farmstands to Visit”

Schoharie County

Each summer, the Schoharie School of Country Wisdom is holds its annual “Barn doors are wide open” program, featuring farm tours throughout the day. A listing of farm locations are found on the chamber’s website. Simultaneously, the Iroquois Indian Museum holds Corn Celebration. A Multi-cultural music festival features the Haudenosaunee Dancers, local musicians, storytelling, nature walk, locally grown food products, community exhibits, and petting zoo.



Ontario County

Ontario County launched its Ag-tourism web site in 2006 at the address www.fingerlakesagriculture.com. The Ontario County Agricultural Enhancement Board developed this project in partnership with the Finger Lakes Visitor Connection - Ontario County, Ontario County Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the Ontario County Planning Dept. as a fun way to educate the public about agriculture and encourage them to visit Ontario County and enjoy its bounty. The site includes an interactive map of attractions, farmer’s market information and a “What’s in Season” calendar for fruits and vegetables.



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Cortland County

Cortland County supports an Agritourism program that includes a trail and branding program. The website has a detailed trail map, listing and description of Agritourism destinations, and website links.

*from Alpacas to Zucchini,
Cortland County is Waiting for You!*

The definition of Agritourism in Cortland County is very broad and includes roadside stands, farmers' markets, and farms that offer interaction with growers. The connection to the "product" is very loose. For example, farms may open to the public for wildlife watching and hunting. Agritourism in Cortland county includes its ag tours program, farm bed-and-breakfasts, and nature centers that "give tourists a taste of fresh air, open space, and a view of country life."

Dutchess County

Dutchess County promotes Agritourism by interweaving it with other interesting destinations in a series of recommended tours. Following are some examples of the tours listed on the Dutchess County Chamber of Commerce website.

Aristocrat Tours/Hudson Valley Tours Planners

Description: Itinerary planning, step-on-guides. Reservations for accommodations, attractions, meals & transportation for groups of 15 or more visiting the Hudson Valley.

Location: New Hamburg.

Contact: 845/297-1557

URL: HVTP.org

Bike Tours

Description: Six self-guided bike tours with directions and maps in one publication.

Location: Dutchess County Tourism Promotion Agency, Poughkeepsie.

Contact: 845/463-4000 or 800/445-3131

URL: DutchessTourism.com

Cross Country International Vacations

Description: Horseback riding vacations, both equestrian training and trail riding packages. Walking and hiking vacations also available.

Location: Millbrook

Contact: 845/635-2200, 800/828-8768

URL: equestrienvacations.com | walkingvacations.com

Exclusive Wine Vacations

Description: Weekend escape packages offering local transportation, lodging, and escorted tours of wineries.

Location: Poughkeepsie

Contact: 845/485-7221

URL: ExclusiveWineVacations.com

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Historic and Scenic Driving Tours

Description: 7 self-guided drive tours with directions, road signage and maps in one publication.

Location: Dutchess County Tourism Promotion Agency, Poughkeepsie.

Contact: 845/463-4000 or 800/445-3131

URL: DutchessTourism.com

New England Helicopter, Inc.

Description: Customized scenic tours by air.

Location: Picks up at Dutchess County Airport, New Hackensack Rd., Wappingers Falls.

Contact: 845/496-7928 or 800/836-3541

URL: NewEnglandHelicopter.net

Pennsylvania Apple and Cheese Festival (Canton, PA)

The Apple & Cheese Festival is a two-day event held in Canton, Pennsylvania. It is now in its 19th year. It is a combination of a central event held in Canton, as well as, several local destinations that include on-site demonstrations such as the Fine Arts and Photography Show, woodcarving, glassblowing, blacksmithing in the newly finished blacksmith shop, and quilting. The central event in Canton includes continuous musical entertainment, food courts throughout the community that feature apple products such as apple pie, apple dumplings, and samples of cheese, apples and wine.



Salem Area Focal Points Tour (Washington County, NY)

Salem, NY in Washington County is sponsoring its fifth annual Focal Points Tour, a free, self-guided tour focusing on the Salem area's unique agricultural sites, local artisans, markets and galleries. The Focal Points Tour is a weekend event in the month of August that provides an opportunity for visitors to explore a variety of arts and agricultural ventures in Salem and see how, together, they help this rural community thrive.

Close to twenty participants take part in the drive yourself tour. Participants range from fabric and fiber artists to sculptors and fine artists, and highlight the diverse talents of the town, village, farms and markets, while offering visitors the opportunity to view the countryside. Participants in the 2007 tour include several fine art galleries, the Salem Art Works, a sculpture park and studio for visiting artists in various mediums, Trip's Antiques, Shusbarn Art Barn, Gallery 668, Steininger's Chocolate Shop & Café, Fiber Kingdom, Paul Kobyluch's woodworking workshop (furniture and cabinet making), and

local farms such as Woody Hill Farm (dairy), Battkenkill Valley Creamery, Slate Hill Farm Daylilies, Gardenworks, Sheldon Farms (fresh vegetable and gourmet foods), and farmstands with local products such as maple syrup, homemade baked goods, local cheeses, breads and pies, and much more.

Hood River County Fruit Farm Loop (Oregon)

The Hood River County Fruit Farm Loop is a 35-mile scenic drive through orchards, forests, farmlands, and local towns and villages. It is the nation's largest pear growing region. Destinations on the farm loop include wineries, alpaca farms, farms (produce), flower and herb farms, farm stands with baked goods, and orchards. In addition, there are festivals and events such as the Graventein Apple Days, Hood River Cherry Days, Hood River Pear and Wine Festival, Heirloom Apple Days, and the Hood River Pear Celebration. The website includes details about the various festivals, events by the month, and harvest seasons.



Fur and Feathers Farm Tour (Strathcona County, Alberta, Canada)

The Fur and Feathers Farm Tour is a county-wide event. For \$20, participants receive a passport (one per vehicle) that outlines the activities at each stop and includes a detailed map to help in planning a route. Passports are sold at several locations, including Ticketmaster. The passport entitles people to visit as few or as many sites as they wish. The tour focuses on providing plenty of opportunities for shopping. Among the food products for sale are federally inspected bison, wild turkey and pheasant. There are also creations using the wool of alpaca, llama and sheep. Complementing the tour is a farmers' market where visitors can browse through goods from dozens of vendors while listening to country music.

PROJECT OUTCOMES



Project Outcomes

There are five project outcomes described in this section of the report. They include:

- Assessment of Each Participating Farm
- SWOT Analysis: Schuyler County's Suitability to Support a Trail
- Conclusions about the Future of Agritourism in Schuyler County
- Recommendations regarding Product Mix, Positioning, Branding and Communications, Roles and Responsibilities of Leadership Group, Opportunities for Leveraging Other Organizations, Budget

Assessment of Each Participating Farm

The detailed consultant's evaluation and recommendations report for each participating farm is located in Appendix B. Participating Farm Reports and Strategic Action Plans. Below is a brief summary of the assessment of each participating farm in terms of its capacity to be a successful agritourism venture and potential anchor of a county-wide agritourism program or trail.

Arcangeli Farm Country Critters

The Arcangeli Farm Country Critters is owned and operated by John and Marge Arcangeli, and is located just east of the Village of Burdett. It features miniature horses, llamas, emu reindeer, miniature pigmy goats, registered Tennessee walker horses, sheep, peacocks, pigs, chickens and more. The farm is available for tours, parties, picnics, wagon rides and a corn maze. For the past few years they have offered a popular corn maize, Moonlight Maize, in the fall and a Festival of Lights during the December/January holiday season. They do not charge a formal entry fee for either event, but do accept donations. A fee structure is in place for the birthday parties.

The Arcangeli's offer an excellent presentation. They recently added parking and a restroom facility. The buildings and stall are in great condition, and a restroom facility was added recently. There is ample parking, as well as nice wide lanes and good farm roads. It is nicely landscape, and the grounds are well kept. The play yard is nicely fenced for safety.

The owners work full-time, but are nearing retirement age and enjoy the visitors. They are enthusiastic, but do not have an action plan to make the venture profitable. The venture has been more of a community service and avocation, rather than a business operation. However their daughter, Daneen Phillips who lives nearby, would be the strong person to move the agritourism business forward. In the meantime, it is recommended that they seek out ways to subsidize the family with outside labor such as volunteers from 4-H. Also for large events, they could contact local churches, service groups, scouts, school groups raising money for trips, etc. that could assist with managing people (if you gave their club a donation). They also might consider having service groups or private caterers do BBQ's and share in the percentage of the proceeds

The following are examples of specific recommendations made to enhance the venture and position it to be a profitable business.

- Build on the success of current activities; especially the Moonlight Maize, children's play area, and farm tours before adding any new major events or physical improvements. For example:
 - Target school groups and offer organized farm tours and educational activities. Charge a fee per head - \$2 is usually affordable (mostly the PTA's are the ones that pay the fee)
 - Develop a self-guided tour and map...with a route through the farm and numbers to designate each pertinent stall
 - Develop a fee schedule and charge for the Moonlight Maize, Festival of Lights and Farm tours.
- Install directional signage at key intersections
- Start small with the retail store
- Once a solid customer base is established for the existing activities, consider adding one major event or activity each year such as hayrides, pony rides, expanded play area, campsites in the woods, fee fishing, adopt-an-animal, special events such as a Burdett Family Farming Weekend that would involve partnering with Church Street Produce and Nancy Richards, Bronson Hill Cheesery to develop a 3-farm passport; an event such as a fall harvest weekend with area crafts people to set up booths (charge commission)

Church Street Produce

Church Street Produce is a u-pick farm featuring strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and vegetables located in the Village of Burdett. It is owned and operated by Jerry and Val Carocci, who purchased the business three years ago. Since then they have made good progress in positioning the farm as an agritourism business, particularly by replacing the majority of the fruit plants and developing several value-added products such as jams and canned vegetables. They have good business sense and are methodical in deploying their plan.

The quality of the fruit and vegetables is excellent, and the retail building is clean and neat. The issues related to agritourism development rest primarily with the physical aspects. Specifically, the farmstand needs to be enhanced in several ways including exterior and interior painting, lighting, visual merchandising, and signage. The parking area needs to be expanded, and they could benefit from good directional signage from major intersections. There also is an opportunity to enhance the u-pick experience with good signage, shaded rest areas in the fields and a portable lav facility. And as the Carocci's develop the fields by the old barn, they may also want to develop an easy path to access those fields.

In terms of advertising and promotion, there is an opportunity to significantly improve their customer markets, particularly regional and seasonal residents. They have recently developed a business logo and are doing local advertising. Recommended tools include the development of a website, an e-mail newsletter, postings on local and regional websites, continued efforts to leverage relationships with B&B's and other tourist destinations, and active participation in the Chamber of Commerce.

At this time the Carocci's do not wish to engage in any festivals or other events because of their commitment to two young children.

Ort Family Farm

The Ort Family Farm is a livestock and produce farm owned by Roger and Maria Ort. It is located in Bradford. Both Roger and Maria have extensive training and experience in the field of horticulture, and owned and operated a successful nursery business for several years. The Ort's have four children that are actively involved in the daily operation of the farm.

The Ort's purchased this non-operating farm about three years ago and have been working hard to slowly rehabilitate the various structures and rejuvenate the crop fields. Simultaneously, they have expanded the livestock operation with beef cattle, pigs, goats, chickens and ducks. Today they sell butchered meat (1/4 to whole pig or cow, and ducks) and a limited selection of herbs and vegetables .

The physical assets of the farm need major improvements before it would be ready as an agritourism destination. The project is in the planning stages and will require a significant investment of time, energy and money. The Ort family has limited financial resources, but lots of manpower with the help of the children. The project will involve several components such as further development of the pastures, demolition and disposal of some existing structures, rehabilitation and painting of the main barn and development of a goat barn, creation of parking areas and walking paths for visitors, conversion of space for a retail operation, and construction of poultry sheds, hoop house, and covers for the herbs and flowers.

The agritourism plan also needs to include several elements such as valued added products, risk management, interactive and entertainment activities, advertising and communications, and promotion and events schedule.

In the meantime, it is recommended that the Ort's start slow with a farmstand and limited tours of some livestock such as the goats. Because they are not located on a major road, it will be necessary for them to have good directional signage to be successful.

Reisinger's Apple Country

Reisinger's Apple Country is a U-pick and retail sales business owned by Rick and Karen Reisinger. It is located just north of Watkins Glen. They sell apples, peaches, plums, pears, berries, pumpkins, gourds and ornamental corn. All fruit and homemade products are grown and/or produced on-site. Specialized pruning and consulting on fruit trees is also provided.

In the future, Rick and Karen plan expand the baked goods with an apple theme, add a hands-on museum - "Apple School House" - to include history of apples/fruit production in Schuyler County, and offer nature education programs.

The buildings and property are in excellent condition. Grounds are well maintained, and the entire orchard is very walkable and provides a lovely place to visit. Some recommendations were offered to make both auto and foot traffic flow more efficient and enhance the customer's overall experience.

Of all the participating farms, Reisinger's Apple Country is best positioned to be an anchor in a county-wide agritourism program. There is an opportunity to enhance the operation for agritourism purposes, primarily in the advertising and promotions area. It is recommended that the Reisinger's:

- Develop a detailed advertising and promotion program to grow the regional and seasonal customer groups; in particular, add a website
- Evaluate each farmers market and determine whether they provide an adequate return on investment vs. commitment to on-site agritourism development
- Manage school tour groups by setting a specific schedule and informing schools
- Develop family fun days with activities such as apple tasting sessions, pie baking contests with celebrity judges, apple dunking, etc.
- Consider hosting birthday parties
- Identify 2-3 annual events around seasons. For example, Spring Blossom Festival and Summer Raspberry Festival. Evaluate whether a fall harvest festival is necessary to drive traffic during that season. Consider inviting plant vendors to sell at the festival (charge a commission - 10%)
- Promote the “antique” variety apple orchard
- Explore opportunities to collaborate with Wine Country Alpacas
- Consider hosting family reunions, weddings, etc. If plan to move in that direction, then use catering companies as an easy and inexpensive way to develop this option.

Sunset View Creamery

Sunset View Creamery is a small creamery located in Odessa. The dairy farm business, Hoffarms, is run by a 4th and 5th generate farm family.

The Creamery is clean and bright, and contains a handicap accessible bathroom. Large glass windows provide viewing into the cheese-making rooms, which provides the opportunity to explain the process. Products available for sale on-site include cheeses, cheese related items such as crackers, gift baskets, and local food and craft products. Year-around sales take place via e-mail, the website, at area wineries and farm markets. Tours are available by appointment only; however, customers do not pay a fee for a tour of the farm.

Sunset View Creamery has a strong potential to become an agritourism destination, but needs improvements in several area such as advertising and promotional activities, website updates, interactive activities, directional signage, grounds and building maintenance, landscaping, outdoor activity area, organized tour program, and enhanced consumer communication program such as an e-newsletter. The retail area is small and needs improvement in terms of making it easy and convenient for the consumer.

There is potential to expand the customer groups to include tour groups, families, seasonal residents, and regional residents. In addition, there are numerous vehicles of communication that could be utilized to bring the businesses to the attention of customer groups. Such opportunities include B&B's that would serve cheese and promote to visitors, brochures at wineries, and tours and interactive activities with civic groups such as girl scouts, etc.

More specifically, it is recommended that education programs and interactive activities be developed that feature the cows, calves and goats. There is opportunity for expanded retail with local products such as jams, jellies, canned goods, yarns, quilts, etc. A missing element is entertainment, which might include hayrides, hiking, natural walks, processing demonstrations, and special events etc. Also, there is an opportunity to showcase “historic recreation” by featuring the old farm machinery, stone walls, barns, farm house, etc.

Wine Country Alpacas

Wine Country Alpacas is owned and operated by Doug and Kathy Richtmyer. It is located just north of Watkins Glen and is adjacent to Reisinger's Apple Country. Both Doug and Kathy have full-time jobs, and are actively involved with school and sport activities of their three young children. These factors limit the time and financial resources available to develop an agritourism venture at this time.

Last year the Richtmyer's hosted an open house with modest success because of limited parking and visibility. At this time the Richtmyer's advertising and promotional activities are limited to a retail space at the Windmill where they sell Alpaca goods (not made from their farm animals). This is a break-even operation, but the Richtmyer's believe it provides them with visibility for a future agritourism venture.

The pens, barn and grazing area for the Alpacas are located behind the Richtmyer house and cannot be seen from the road. The Richtmyer's own a nearby parcel of land ideally suited for relocation of the farm activities and development of agritourism activities. It has good visibility and capacity to accommodate parking and promotional events. It is likely that the Richtmyer's will not have the ability to fully develop this land and an agritourism venture for at least 3-5 years. However, in the meantime there is the opportunity for them to partner with other agritourism destinations such as Reisinger's Apple Country for special events and retail sales.

It is recommended that the Richtmyer's focus on developing a detailed business and financing plan for incremental development over a 2-3 year period that would involve the physical development of their vacant land and creation of a viable agritourism venture including risk management, permitting, retail sales, educational activities, events, signage, and advertising and communications program. Several detailed suggestions were provided by the consultant to assist in developing such a plan.

SWOT Analysis: Schuyler County's Suitability to Support a Trail

The assessment of Schuyler County's suitability to develop and grow a strong Agritourism industry was based on several factors including:

- **Strength of the current Agritourism Infrastructure**
 - ⊗ Organized structure with clearly defined roles
 - ⊗ Education and technical assistance
 - ⊗ Product mix in terms of number and quality of existing and potential Agritourism destinations
 - ⊗ Physical attributes such as signage
 - ⊗ County-wide branding and communications program
 - ⊗ Linkages with compatible programs and organizations.

- **Strength of Tourism in Schuyler County**

- **Strength of Potential Customer Base**

- **Strength of the Agricultural Base**

- **Compatibility Between Agriculture and Tourism**

A SWOT Analysis was conducted regarding the potential of a successful Agritourism Program in Schuyler County using these criteria. The results of the SWOT Analysis follow.

Strengths

Tourism in Schuyler County

Tourism in Schuyler County continues to grow. This is best evidenced by the increase in room and sales tax receipts.

	<u>Sales Tax</u>	<u>Room Tax</u>
2006	\$ 6,223,439.00	\$154,285.00 *
2005	\$ 5,829,705.00	\$ 80,456.00
2004	\$ 5,876,533.00	\$ 71,153.00

*note that the county doubled the room tax % collected beginning Jan 06

- Schuyler County has a dedicated tourism program, including staff and promotional materials
- Schuyler County has several assets that contribute to its success as a tourism destination that would be compatible with an Agritourism program; these include natural beauty, scenic drives, lakes, gorges, forests, and entertainment
- Tourism activities throughout the county are family-oriented, which is compatible with Schuyler County's offerings
- Tourism trends are supportive of Agritourism in Schuyler County: more frequent and shorter trips, increasing interest in heritage and participating in "natural" experiences
- The tourism season is adequate: May - November

Compatibility with Agriculture in Schuyler County

- Agriculture is a dominant industry in Schuyler County
- The small diversified farms in Schuyler County are ideally suited to Agritourism

Consumer Base

- Potential customer groups for an Agritourism Program in Schuyler County include tourists, regional residents, seasonal residents and local residents
- There is a large existing tourist base consisting of both regional and long-distance travelers
- The vast majority of visitors to the area are looking for a vacation getaway. The major attractions are the wineries and well established tourism destinations such as the Watkins Glen State Park and the Corning Museum of Glass that serve as draws to the region
- There is a large population of seasonal residents that is relatively untapped
- The area is considered by travelers to be safe and friendly
- There is a high level of satisfaction among visitors regarding the overall quality of attractions

Education and Technical Assistance

- There are several entities that can assist farmers with making decisions and developing action plans for transition. The primary ones that could best be of assistance to farms considering Agritourism ventures include the Small Business Development Center at Corning Community College, Cornell Cooperative Extension, NY Farm Link, Rural New York Initiative, and NY Farm Net ~ a non-profit program housed and administered by Cornell University and coordinated with Cooperative Extension
- The New York State Food Venture Center, located at the Agriculture Experiment Station in Geneva, is an excellent resource. The Food Venture Center assists small producers in starting new food manufacturing businesses.

Strengths (continued)

Product Mix

- Throughout the County, there is a good variety of agricultural activities and products in terms of crops, livestock, and value-added products such as cheese, canned goods, etc.
- The Burdett/Hector and Watkins Glen/Montour Falls areas currently have adequate concentration for a limited program launch.
- There are several businesses that have the potential to serve as anchors in the near future if they follow a strategic positioning plan designed to enhance quality, variety of activities, and organized tours. These would include Sunset View Creamery, Reisinger's Apple Country, Arcangeli Farm Country Critters, Bel Canto Alpacas and Church Street Produce.
- For example, Reisinger's has a focus on u-pick and "agri-education" with the addition of the Apple School House. Country Critters is a good example of "agri-entertainment" with the variety of unusual animals, but it is not related directly to the farm's beef production operation
- There are an adequate number of farms throughout the County that are ideally suited to participate if they have the interest and are provided with adequate technical support. For example, there are several businesses such as u-pick, produce and farmstands, trees, nurseries, sheep, goats, free range chickens, herbs and flowers, maple syrup, vineyards and grape juice.
- Vineyard wineries and farmstands are typically included in Agritourism programs across the country, and they are in abundance in Schuyler County. If the scope of Agritourism destinations were to be expanded today to include "vineyard wineries," then the number of potential program participants could be expanded and potentially involve Hazlitt 1852 Vineyards, Rock Stream Vineyards, Lakewood Winery, Castle Grisch Estate Winery, Atwater Estate Winery, Chateau Lafayette Reneau and Bloomer Creek Vineyard.

Branding and Communications

- The County's Fall Harvest Festival is a good tool to promote agritourism and heighten its visibility to the local residents as well as visitors
- The Chamber of Commerce has a limited agritourism page on its website - "Agriculture and Animals"
- The Chamber's website is in the process of being revamped and the Chamber is receptive to including web pages dedicated to promoting Agritourism and integrating into the County's comprehensive tourism promotion program
- The Chamber has strong links with the tourism destinations and trails throughout the county and the region, and could work to leverage their respective and collective communications programs to promote agritourism destinations in Schuyler County
- For example, there are several tourism-related businesses and destinations throughout the county that are well-positioned to promote agritourism such as lodging facilities, restaurants, wineries, state parks, recreational activities and destinations such as Captain Bill's
- There are several other programs and trails in the immediate region that are complementary and could be used to complement and support the development of agritourism. These include, for example, Seneca Lake Wine Trail, Culinary Bounty and the Fiber Trail.
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County has a good communication network with area farmers, which could be leveraged to promote agritourism within the local agriculture industry and assist with networking

Opportunities

Tourism

- Rural tourism has been increasing rapidly over the last two decades. This is attributed to people taking more and shorter trips, doing more traveling by car, looking for new experiences, adding diversity to their experiences, traveling as a family, and looking to “get back to their roots.”
- There is interest in “homemade” products by the consumer groups. There are opportunities for small processors to produce regional and specialty products (e.g. jams, sauces, etc.), which adds monetary value to their commodities.
- There is an opportunity to educate the public about the important contributions of agriculture to the county's economy and quality of life
- There is increasing demand among tourists for experiential, hands-on, non-conventional tourism activities
- Because of Schuyler County's proximity to Ithaca, Rochester, Binghamton, Syracuse, and other metropolitan areas, there is an opportunity to capitalize on families seeking interesting day-trips.
- The local residents, restaurants, lodging facilities and other tourism destinations throughout the County are excellent sources for referral to friends, family and tourists, but they need to be targeted, cultivated and educated.
- The seasonal resident is a tremendous untapped resource for the tourism industry.

Product Development and Promotion

- A farmer who diversifies into value-added agriculture or Agritourism has several market opportunities such as food (processing, packaging, specialty markets); roots (heritage and culture), agri-education (education programs, retreats, conference), agri-entertainment (hayrides, maizes); and nature-based adventure (horseback riding, hiking, fishing)
- There are opportunities to build on the farm experience and generate additional reviews for the individual farmers such as specialty/unique dining experiences, nature-based recreation activities, education programs, arts and crafts, farm stays, pick/cut/gather your own, floriculture, processing demonstrations, etc.
- There is the opportunity to develop fairs, festivals and special events on the individual farm or county-wide level. Several examples exist throughout the country.
- There are additional farms in Schuyler County that have the potential to become anchors if they develop an action plan and secure the necessary financial resources. Examples include the Ort Family Farm, Wine Country Alpacas, Finger Lakes Farmstead Cheese and Bel Canto Alpacas.
- There is an opportunity to develop geographic clusters of fun and interesting activities, and/or themes throughout the county that weave together the agritourism destinations with other interesting sites and activities such as waterfalls, wineries, restaurants etc.
- There is an opportunity to leverage the communication programs of other tourism destinations throughout the region if they see the value in promoting agritourism

Weaknesses

Organizational Structure

- There is not an organized structure or strategic action plan for the development and promotion of Agritourism in Schuyler County
- The Chamber of Commerce has taken the lead with an agritourism page on its website – “Agriculture and Animals” – however, it has limited content and strays from the accepted definition of Agritourism as adopted by the Advisory Committee.
- Cornell Cooperative Extension offers education and technical assistance to the agriculture industry but it is not targeted at agritourism development

Product Mix

- Schuyler County does not have the “mature” Agritourism capacity to fulfill the consumer expectations for a high quality “Agritourism Experience.” It lacks depth in interactive activities, entertainment and products to purchase. However, a stronger county-wide Agritourism program could be considered at this time if vineyard wineries and other types of businesses such as nurseries and large farmstands were included in the mix.
- If wineries are not included, and the strict definition of agritourism were to be applied, then there currently are only five agritourism destinations in the County that are positioned to meet consumer expectations and have definite interest in participating. These would include Sunset View Creamery, Finger Lakes Farmstead Cheese, Reisinger’s Apple Country, Arcangeli Farm Country Critters and Church Street Produce.
- There are some geographic areas of the county that have more concentration of agritourism ventures in place at this time, leaving some large gaps especially on the west side of the county.
- With the exception of Reisinger’s Apple Country, the existing destinations have a limited “Wow Factor”

The “Wow” Factor: A fun and memorable experience –

- “Wow” I’ve got to tell my friends and family about this
- “Wow” we have to come back here next year
- “Wow” these products are great, how can I buy more when I get home

Education and Technical Assistance

- There are a wide range of excellent resources available through the Chamber of Commerce and Cornell Cooperative Extension, but the farms with the greatest potential for agritourism need to be targeted and guided through a process to leverage and maximize these resources.
- New farm ventures are not being captured at the early development stages and oriented to the opportunities for agritourism
- Although there are a good variety of training programs and educational materials, they are not packaged to focus on agritourism development at the individual farm level. Hopefully the new manual will be a strong tool in the effort to target education and technical assistance efforts at both the Chamber of Commerce and Cornell Cooperative Extension levels.

Weaknesses (continued)

Interest and Capacity of Farms

- There are many farms throughout Schuyler County, but a large number do not have the “physical presence” to make them attractive as potential agritourism destinations at this time
- Farmers lack the financial capital to invest in upgrading facilities. Of particular concern is the cost of providing rest room facilities, painting barns, and creating parking areas.
- Not all farmers are prepared to undertake the management and operation of an Agritourism business and would likely require support services to help guide them through the initial stages. For example, there is limited knowledge about marketing, the regulatory requirements, sales tax, insurance, establishing fees, and booking to keep the Agritourism venture separate from the farm operation books
- There is concern among several farmers about having customers on their premises
- There is a need for customer service and hospitality training for many local Agritourism farm operators
- Having a limited season agritourism and a return on investment (money and time) is a concern among many farmers, especially those who need to invest time in planting and harvesting crops, etc.

Branding and Communications

- There is no county-wide brand or theme that encompasses agritourism or promotes it as a stand-alone program
- There is no communications program to promote Agritourism on a county-wide level, except the limited information provided on the Chamber of Commerce website
- There are limited county-wide activities to promote agriculture to the consumer; however, the Fall Harvest Festival would be a strong anchor in a comprehensive program to promote Agritourism and heighten its visibility to the local residents, as well as, the visiting traveler
- The Chamber’s website provides a “What’s in Season” page, but it is not prominent and could easily be interpreted as “what’s in season” only for Reisinger’s Apple Country
- Schuyler County does not have an existing advertising or promotion programs targeted at the seasonal residents, particularly those living on area lakes. This group is a critical consumer group for Agritourism in the county.
- There is not a plan to build on existing linkages with the wine trails, Fiber Trail, Culinary Bounty, Finger Lakes Wine County and Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance to promote a future agritourism program
- There is lack of adequate signage and wayfindings on the state and county roads. Any new signage should ideally incorporate the new county-wide brand’s visual design

Threats

- There is no regional definition for “Agritourism” so the product mix and offerings vary from county to county; this is confusing to the consumer
- The start-up costs associated with Agritourism continue to increase. Examples include facilities and equipment for a sales area, signage, repair/upgrades to buildings, hiring employees, advertising, liability insurance, etc.
- There are risks having visitor’s on a farm who are not familiar with hazardous conditions. It might be necessary to incur costs to reduce the risk such as setting up gates and creating viewing area, providing instructions via signage or having a staff member on hand to monitor behavior, etc.
- The tourist is not forgiving if you “over promise” – this is a risk for any Agritourism program that does not have capacity in terms of number, variety and/or quality of destinations
- Ontario County recently launched its Ag-tourism web site in 2006 at the address www.fingerlakesagriculture.com, which suggests to the consumer that it is the official website for agritourism in the Finger Lakes
- There are many quality agritourism destinations throughout NYS; however, there are limited destinations in Schuyler County that meet consumer expectations in terms of overall quality of the experience, quality of products, variety of interactive activities, education and/or entertainment, and scenic appearance of the farm
- The tourism industry is susceptible to fluctuations in the economy and other factors such as fuel costs
- Agritourism programs are being developed by several surrounding counties, and those in Schuyler County are not unique in comparison
- There is the potential for the consumer to become confused with the increasing number of trails and programs in the region

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF AGRITOURISM IN SCHUYLER COUNTY



Overall Assessment

The greatest advantage of having a strong agritourism program as an element of the County's tourism industry is the opportunity to diversify the County's agricultural operations, supplement incomes in low-revenue seasons, promote agricultural products, and leverage existing tourism destinations and the hundreds of thousands who visit the area every year.

However, for the most part Agritourism in Schuyler County is in the development stage at this time. While it certainly has some quality Agritourism sites that are up and ready for visitors, much more work needs to take place to ensure that Schuyler County is providing experiences that are worth visiting and will drive referrals and repeat visitations. The foundation and long-term success of an Agritourism program in the Schuyler County will be based in the quality of the attractions and effective communications with the targeted customer groups. It will be better to start with following the philosophy that "fewer is better."

To put it in a simple context, the readiness of Schuyler County to support a successful agritourism trail should be based on these three basic criteria:

Individual Enterprises: Each Agritourism entity must have the capacity to meet the basics of having *something for visitors to see, something for them to do, and something for them to buy in a convenient, attractive and consumer-friendly environment.*

The "Wow" Factor: Each agritourism entity must have a "wow" factor that will result in a fun and memorable experience -

- "Wow" I've got to tell my friends and family about this
- "Wow" we have to come back here next year
- "Wow" these products are great, how can I buy more when I get home

Agritourism Infrastructure: A successful agritourism program needs a solid program infrastructure to include:

1. Organized structure and financial resources
2. Product mix in terms of number, diversity, quality and geographic distribution
3. Physical attributes such as signage
4. County-wide branding and communications program, including regional activities such as festivals and farm markets
5. Linkages with compatible programs and organizations
6. Education and technical support

Individual Enterprises

From the individual farmer's perspective, the development of an Agritourism program in Schuyler County has the potential to:

- Increase revenue from on-farm activities
- Protect the farm from fluctuating markets
- Expand on-farm employment
- Provide off-season income
- Improve business stability
- Diversify farm operations
- Preserve land for future generations

The fact that the majority of farm enterprises in Schuyler County are small and family-owned is an asset. However, key factors in being successful do not only involve the physical features of the farm, but the farmer's interest in having the tourist a part of their daily lives, their financial capacity to make the initial investments to present a quality agritourism product, and their capacity to manage and operate a tourism business.

“While the popularity of specific enterprises—such as pumpkin patches or U-Pick orchards—may ebb and flow, the public's desire for a ‘farm experience’ remains. Small diversified farms are ideally suited to agri-entertainment. Unlike the mega-hog facility or a corn/soybean operation producing bulk commodities, the small farm can recreate an earlier, simpler, human-scale vision of farming. The chief qualification for the rural landowner who expects to make a living from the land through Agritourism is the desire and the ability to cater to tourists and meet their expectations of a farm visit.”⁸

Many of the farmers in Schuyler County are nearing retirement and see agritourism as a mechanism for additional revenue and a fun way to enjoy their farm life with others. At the same time, both the retiring farmer and those with young families do not have the financial resources necessary to position their farm as an agritourism destination. Issues range from painting structures and moving old equipment to creating parking areas and retail areas. In addition, many of the farmers lack the business skills to operate an agritourism business. Both financial assistance through grants and low interest loans, together with technical assistance, and necessary ingredients to the repositioning of farms as successful and profitable tourism ventures.

⁸ *Entertainment Farming and Agritourism, Business Management Guide*, NCAT, September 2004, page 1

The “Wow” Factor

Tourism and agriculture are among the largest business sectors in Schuyler County. Current trends in the tourist industry show increasing demand for experiential, hands-on, non-conventional tourism activities. This national and regional trend has extended into the agricultural sector because the appeal for agricultural and farm-based tourism attractions is also increasing.

Schuyler County as a tourism destination definitely has the “wow” factor with its lakes, scenic beauty, outdoor recreational activities, wineries, waterfalls and gorges, and Watkins Glen International. However, the agritourism component of the overall tourism mix is weak.

Agritourism is a natural tie to the Schuyler County economy and a means to protect its agricultural heritage. Agritourism is well-suited to Schuyler County because the farms are authentic, small-scale, low-impact and in most cases, education-focused. This is nicely complemented by the County’s scenic beauty, natural resources, and “small-town” charm that are appealing to visitors.

Agritourism enterprises in Schuyler County have the potential to offer a wide range of benefits to tourists, such as convenient, secure, educational, and amusing family experiences for international and domestic travelers, as well as, regional and seasonal residents. And there is the potential to include a variety of facilities and activities that are increasingly available in Schuyler County, such as agricultural festivals, farm visits, farm tours, demonstration farms, farm stays, wineries, nursery trails and agricultural museums.

The relative importance of local tourism and agricultural industries may result in Agritourism becoming an important segment of Schuyler County's tourism product mix in the future. In addition to conventional tourism, there could be a significant boost in the County's tourist industry by marketing agricultural, historical and ecological or nature-based tourism attractions. Combining the large tourism industry with the uniqueness and diversity of local agriculture may offer a whole new set of opportunities for farmers to diversify their operations and their revenue sources.

Agritourism Infrastructure

Organizational Structure

There is not an organized structure to build and manage a county-wide agritourism program at this time. Although it is important to note that the three collaborating organizations have the talent, resources and capacity to develop a strong program if program goals were set and respective roles and responsibilities clearly defined. This core group should continue to provide leadership to the development of a county-wide agritourism program. A proposed organizational structure, functional diagram, and set of roles and responsibilities are outlined on pages 43-45 of this report.

Product Mix: Number and Quality of Agritourism Destinations

If wineries, farmstands and craft-related businesses are not included, and the strict definition of Agritourism were to be applied, then there are only five destinations in Schuyler County that are positioned to be “Agritourism” ventures at this time, and only one that would meet the expectations of consumers; that is Reisinger’s Apple Country. These participating farms are actually a representation of the various sub-sets of Agritourism such as agri-culture, agri-tours, agri-entertainment. They include Bel Canto Alpaca Farm, Sunset View Creamery, Country Critters, Reisinger’s Apple Country, and Church Street Produce. And each of these has its own weaknesses that prevent them from being a strong anchor at this time.

The farms participating in this program that have the potential to meet consumer expectations within the next 2-3 years, if they follow a specific action plan to build their capacity to offer “something to do, something to see, and something to buy.”

County-wide Brand and Communications Program

A county-wide brand and communications program in support of agritourism does not exist. In terms of advertising and promotion, the Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce has taken the lead with an Agritourism page on its website. The page is listed under “Farms and Agriculture” and is described as including agricultural tourism destinations. The Chamber has taken a broad view of Agritourism and defines it as the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation.

The Chamber’s web page currently includes Skyland Farms, Sunset View Creamery, Finger Lakes Farmstead Cheese, Reisinger’s Apple Country, Farm Sanctuary, and Arcangeli Farm Country Critters. If the stricter definition were to be applied, then listings such as the Farm Sanctuary and Skyland Farm would not be included.

Physical Attributes

A weak link in the agritourism program development chain is the lack of directional signage at the county, town, and local business levels. This problem ranges from missing road/street signs to messages directing the consumer to the various agritourism destinations.

In addition, the majority of farms throughout the county do not have the physical infrastructure in terms of barns and retail facilities that would be attractive to the various customer groups.

Linkages and Compatible Organizations

Schuyler County, particularly through its Chamber of Commerce, is well positioned in terms of linkages with other key organizations needed to build and promote an agritourism program. These include the county and local municipal governments, economic development agency – SCOPED, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Small Business Development Center, area lodging and restaurant establishments, state and national parks, entertainment venues, and the leading

regional tourism promotion agencies such as Finger Lakes Wine Country, Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance, Fiber Trail, Seneca Lake Wine Trail, Culinary Bounty, etc.

Education and Technical Support

Farmers in Schuyler County are fortunate to have access to numerous and high quality education and technical support services available from a wide-range of organizations such as the Small Business Development Center at Corning Community College, Cornell Cooperative Extension, NY Farm Link, Rural New York Initiative, NY Farm Net, the New York State Food Venture Center. However, many farmers are not aware of these resources or do not know how to utilize them to meet their objectives.

In terms of future education and technical support assistance, attention should be given to business planning, understanding the needs and expectations of the various customer groups, how to sell using the internet, developing a break-even analysis and financing strategy, managing an agritourism enterprise, and customer service and hospitality.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Overall Strategy and Strategic Objectives

Overall Strategy

Enhance the existing county-wide tourism program to include a strong Agritourism component, and develop a comprehensive communications program that effectively presents Schuylers County's unique offerings and clearly sets it apart from the competition in terms of overall experience, quality of products, variety of interactive activities, education opportunities, entertainment, and scenic appearance of farms and other compatible destinations throughout Schuylers County.

Strategic Objectives

- Rather than presenting "Agritourism" as a disparate offering, weave together the full array of tourism attractions and activities under one county-wide brand and present the various attractions as stand-alone as appropriate, and a cohesive set of packages based on geographic clusters or themes that will attract the consumer and make the Schuylers County experience unique as compared to surrounding counties.
- Develop a brand and communications program for Schuylers County's tourism program that embraces Agritourism and integrates all subsets of tourism available in Schuylers County, including site-seeing, sports, adventure, recreational activities, exploring nature, wine and food, motor sports, specialty products such as fiber, and agritourism.
- Develop a strong *Agritourism Infrastructure* that will result in a program that meets consumer expectations for local products, entertainment, unique experiences, opportunities to learn, enjoyment of the natural and scenic features of the region, and more.
- Continue to build the "agritourism component" of the County's overall tourism industry by adopting a strategic action plan with measurable goals, timeline and budget that effectively leverages existing programs, organizations and other resources
- Long-term, develop a mature Agritourism "program" designed to identify opportunities for growth, clearly defines role and expectations, and fulfills the consumer expectations for a high quality "agritourism experience"

Approach

Years 1-3

- Phase 1. Enhance the Schuylers County tourism program to include an Agritourism Component and work to develop a more mature County-wide agritourism "program" designed to fulfill the consumer expectations for a high quality "agritourism experience" that produces the "Wow Factor"

Years 4-5

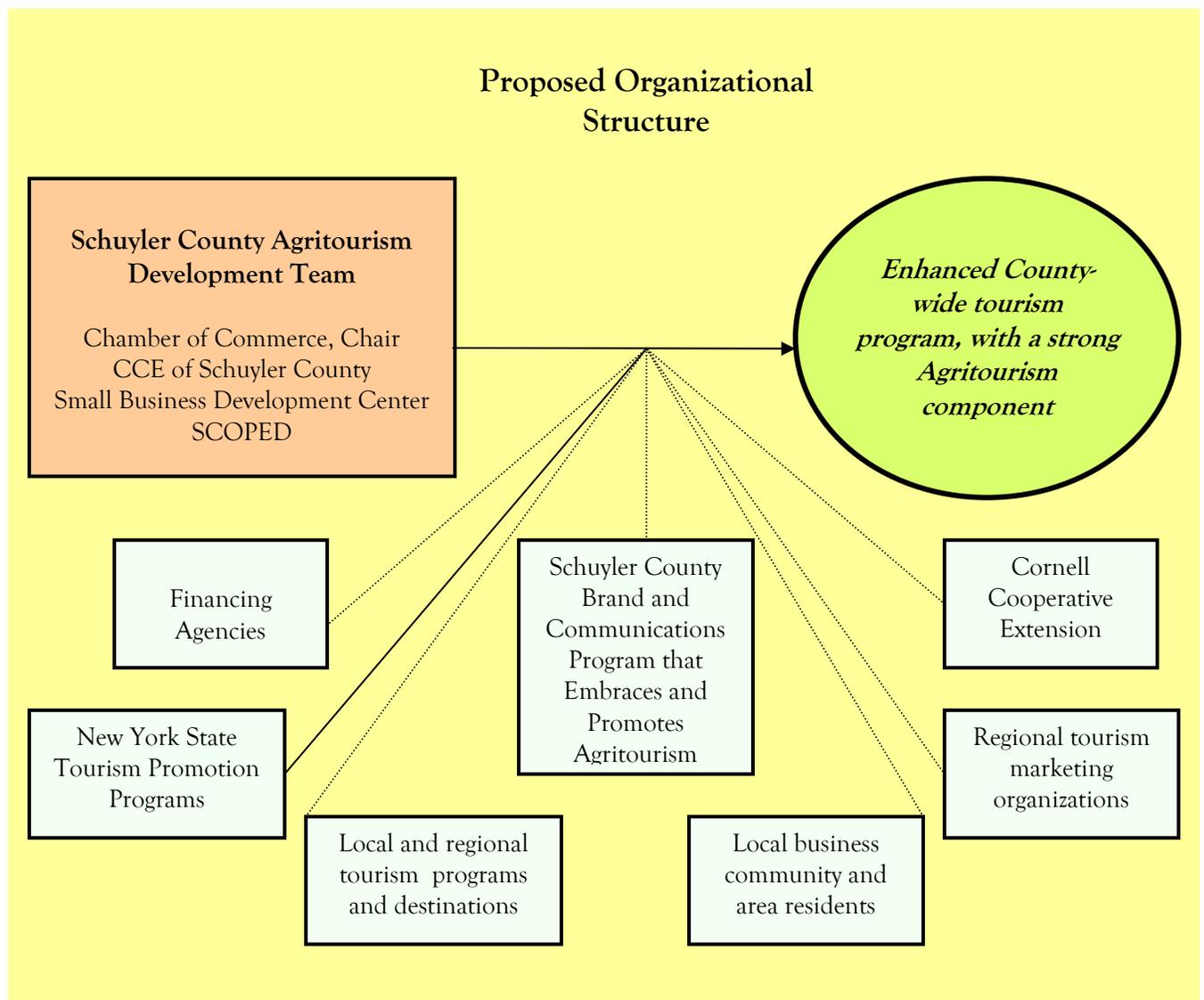
- Phase 2. Organize a formal trail if determined feasible

Organizational Structure

Organizational Structure

The key organizations within the County that should cooperate in the effort to grow an the Agritourism industry in Schuyler County including the Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce, SCOPED, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Small Business Development Center.

In the early stages of forming an Agritourism program in Schuyler County, it will be necessary for an existing organization to step forward and play a facilitating role. It is recommended that the Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce consider playing this role.



Roles and Responsibilities of Leadership Organizations

Following are the recommended roles and responsibilities for each major stakeholder group.

Recommended Role of SCOPED

- Advocate for the development of a county-wide agritourism program to key constituency groups such as the county and municipal leadership, the business community and regional links
- Actively promote the agritourism program and individual destinations as appropriate through various forums and communication vehicles
- Advise the Committee on product mix
- Identify and assist in securing financial sources for program development and assistance to the individual farm (grants, low-interest loans, etc.)
- Identify and assist in securing additional forms of technical assistance for the overall program development and individual farmer through government or not-for-profit sources
- Monitor and report on state and federal legislation and programs that might impact the development of an agritourism program or individual farms
- Participate in forums organized by the Chamber of Commerce to bring together existing and prospective agritourism ventures for purposes of networking and education

Recommended Role of the Small Business Development Center

- Participate in the Agritourism Development Team
- Provide technical assistance through one-on-one counseling to individual farm ventures to develop business plans, marketing plans and financing strategies
- Advise the Team on product mix
- Advise the Team on training and education needs
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce and Cornell Cooperative Extension on the development and delivery of training programs
- Provide relevant market research to the Team and individual farms
- Participate in forums organized by the Chamber of Commerce to bring together existing and prospective agritourism ventures for purposes of networking and education
- Monitor and advise the Team about any government regulations or changes in financing guidelines that might impact agritourism venture development

Recommended Role of the Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce is best poised to assume the primary leadership role in four key areas: program development, branding and communications, business support services and marketing. Below are examples of specific functions the Chamber might play in these areas.

- Serve in the leadership capacity to provide the framework for development of a more formal Agritourism program as outlined in the long-term recommendations; and as such, serve as the chair of the Schuyler County Agritourism Development Team
- Serve as the official voice and advocate of Agritourism to the local municipalities, County and NYS agencies on behalf of Agritourism in Schuyler County
- Facilitate networking and other appropriate meetings of the existing and prospective Agritourism destinations
- Provide support services to assist participating farms with identifying resources and networking opportunities with Chamber members such as insurance agents, attorneys, wineries, B&B's, design of signage and promotional materials, advertising and public relations, logo design, website design, etc.
- Work with Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Small Business Development Center to provide educational programming on topics such as customer service, hospitality training, value-added products, etc.
- Seek out and pursue opportunities to promote Schuyler County Agritourism destinations using existing communication vehicles such as Finger Lakes Wine Country and other tourism publications, Seneca Lake Wine Trail and the Fiber Trail promotional materials, and state-wide communication tools such as the New York Agritourism and Education Program
 - Assist individual farms to connect with the appropriate tourism agencies, trade associations, and NYS programs that could assist in promoting their products
 - Assist with securing listing and links on other tourism related websites such as Finger Lakes Wine Country, Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance, etc.
 - Facilitate connections with other County tourism destinations where advertising/promotion would be cost effective; i.e., lodging facilities, camping and RV parks, wine trails, etc.
 - Include Agritourism destinations in any future "fam tours" and actively promote "clusters" to travel writers and seek features in magazines such as Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance publications
 - Present Agritourism farm profiles in the Chamber newsletter
 - Invite Agritourism farm representatives to be guest speakers at Chamber events
 - Work with Schuyler County and the various towns to install street signs where they are missing, and permit road signs
 - Participate with other Team members in developing and sustaining a strong agritourism product mix
 - Provide training for front-line tourist contacts - B&B's, restaurants, etc.

Recommended Role of Cornell Cooperative Extension

- Develop a list of education programs that might be useful to existing agritourism destinations in the County and farmers considering agritourism
- Link prospective Agritourism businesses with the vast array of Cornell Cooperative Extension resources such as NY FarmNet and New York Farm Link as appropriate to assist with important decisions such as starting an agriculture business, managing agriculture ventures, connecting with similar businesses for support, estate and succession planning, and communications with family members.
- Link Agritourism businesses with promotional programs and activities such as Culinary Bounty
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce to provide forums that allow the farmers to find out what other entrepreneurs are doing
- Consider organizing an annual Spring visit to at least one successful Agritourism business outside of Schuyler County
- Provide information in newsletters and other regular communications about Agritourism trends, seminars, workshops, and publications that would be useful for persons growing or creating an Agritourism business
- Identify new or potential Agritourism businesses and refer them to the Chamber of Commerce for inclusion in advertising and county-wide promotion programs, and link with other tourism destinations
- Capture new farm ventures early on and introduce them to Agritourism options
- Advise the Team on product mix and readiness of a business to participate in the County-wide Agritourism Program
- Refer farms to the Small Business Development Center as appropriate
- Participate with the Chamber and SBDC in Agritourism venture development by conducting on-site evaluations and making recommendations in areas such as physical improvements, value-added products, etc.

Positioning Agritourism in Schuyler County

At this time, Schuyler County does not have the breadth and depth of Agritourism attractions to form an independent trail. Having farms interested in Agritourism and scenic beauty are not enough. County-wide planning and cooperation among the farms and participating organizations is essential. It will be critical for the County's organizations such as the Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce, SCOPED and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County to work together to develop a strong "Agritourism program infrastructure." This will be especially important with the development of several competing trails in the area and the potential confusion it could bring to the consumer.

It is recommended that the following overall strategy be pursued to strengthen the County's appeal as an interesting and attractive tourism destination by expanding the breadth and depth of offerings to include Agritourism.

1. Rather than presenting "Agritourism" as a disparate offering, it is recommended that the full array of tourism attractions and activities be woven together under one county-wide brand and be presented as cohesive packages based on geographic clusters or themes that will attract the tourist and make the Schuyler County experience unique as compared to surrounding counties.
2. Continue to build the "agritourism component" of the County's overall tourism industry by adopting a strategic action plan that includes clearly defined roles and responsibilities of the stakeholder groups, measurable program goals, and action items with a timeline and budget.

Product Mix

A key factor in the future of the Agritourism element of Schuyler County's tourism program will be the agreed upon definition and types of activities it encompasses. The following types of activities are recommended to be included in the Schuyler County agritourism product mix.

Hay rides	Corn-mazes	Farm tours
Farmers markets	Farm vacations	Goat walks & petting
Festivals	Demonstrations	Wildlife viewing
Petting zoos	Fee-fishing	Horseback riding
Pick-Your-Own	Wine tasting	On-farm bed and breakfasts
Farmstands	Retail sale of items made from local products (yarn, wool, wood crafts)	

In terms of participating businesses, there is an opportunity to significantly expand the list of existing agritourism destinations through further identification and active cultivation of prospective participating ventures such as u-pick, tree farms, nurseries, sheep farms, goat farms (cheese and petting), free range chickens, herbs and flowers, maple syrup, vineyards and grape juice products, farmstands, and locally made crafts.

The following is a sample list of potential participating businesses in the next 2-5 years.

A&L Produce Farmstand	Finger Lakes Farmstead Cheese
Arcangeli Farm Country Critters	Hazlitt 1852 Vineyards
Arctic Maple Syrup	Lakewood Winery
Atwater Estate Winery	National Forest (Hector)
Bel Canto Alpaca Farm	Ort Family Farm
Bloomer Creek Vineyard	Reisinger's Apple Country
Boxwood Tree Farm	Rock Stream Vineyards
Castle Grisch Estate Winery	Skyland Farms
Chateau Lafayette Reneau	Stillman's Nursery
Chedzoy Goats	Sugar Hill State Park
Church Street Produce	Sunset View Creamery
Eagle Ridge at the Glen Elk Park	Wickham Twin Oaks
	Wine Country Alpacas

Education and Technical Assistance

In terms of future education and technical support assistance, attention should be given to business planning, understanding the needs and expectations of the various customer groups, how to sell using the internet, developing a break-even analysis and financing strategy, managing an agritourism enterprise, and customer service and hospitality.

Presentation

The participating venues could be presented to the consumer in a variety of ways ranging from geographic clusters to seasonal activities to themed activities.

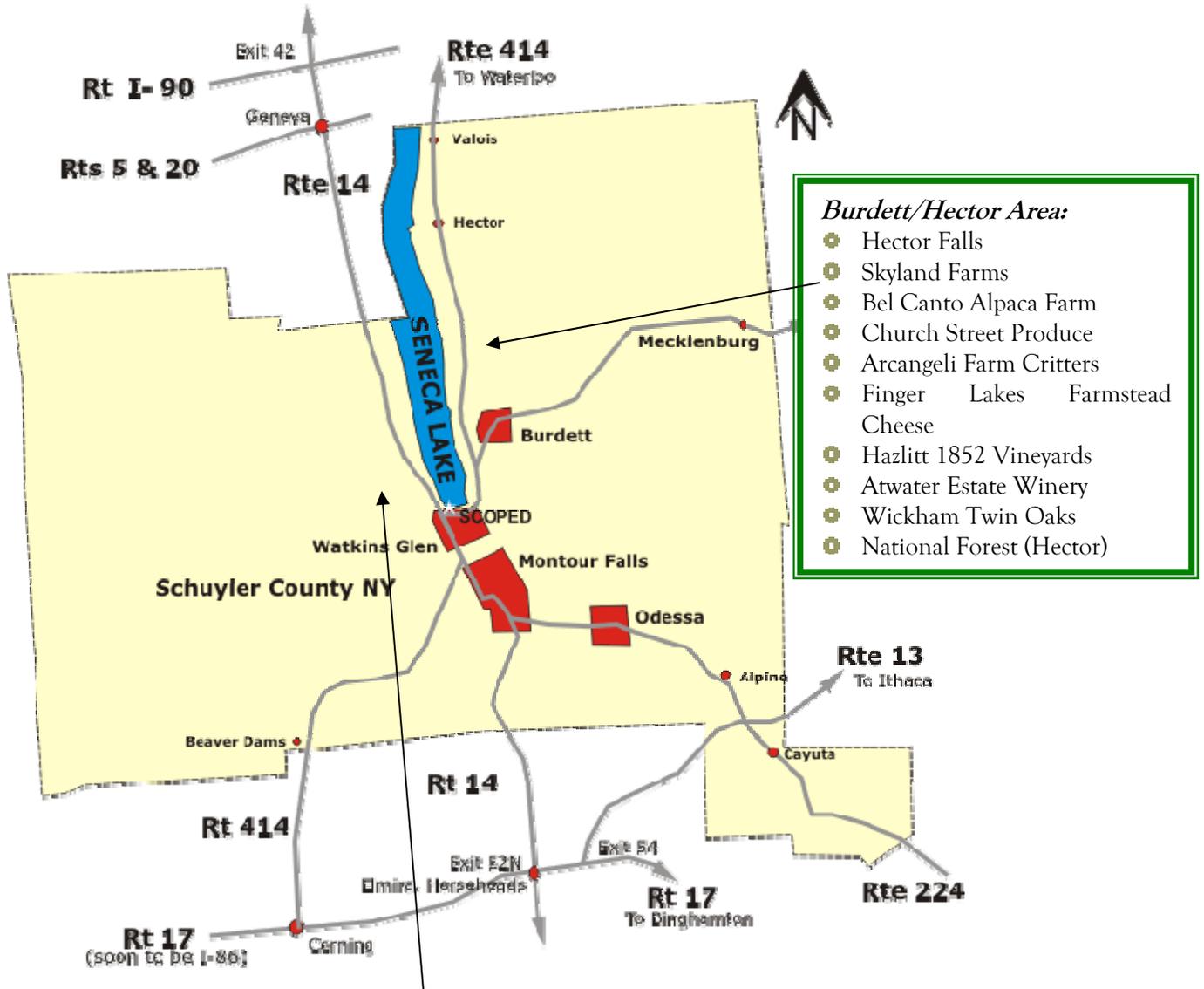
For example, if a group of venues were clustered geographically this is what they might look like.

Watkins Glen Area:

- A&L Produce Farmstand
- Eagle Ridge at the Glen Elk Park
- Reisinger's Apple Country
- Wine Country Alpacas
- Chedzoy Goats
- Castel Grisch Estate Winery
- Lakewood Vineyard Winery
- Watkins Glen State Park (upper entrance)
- Watkins Glen International
- Sugar Hill (summer & winter)

Burdett/Hector Area:

- Hector Falls
- Skyland Farms
- Bel Canto Alpaca Farm
- Church Street Produce
- Arcangeli Farm Critters
- Finger Lakes Farmstead Cheese
- Hazlitt 1852 Vineyards
- Atwater Estate Winery
- National Forest (Hector)
- Wickham Twin Oaks



Branding, Marketing and Communication

An effective brand and market position, based on an understanding of the primary customer groups and the strength of the tourism products, can be an effective tool in developing and delivering a strong tourism product for Schuyler County. Such a statement, which should summarize the desired image of the “tourism product,” can inform future development and investment in the County’s tourism and agritourism infrastructure. It can be used to determine farm and other tourism destination participants, identify opportunities for growth, and clarify roles and responsibilities to build the infrastructure.

Schuyler County has a beautiful and scenic landscape, and several tourism destinations that attract more than 2 million visitors annually, and viable agritourism ventures. The recommended brand strategy is based on the assumption that Schuyler County’s tourism industry be enhanced and expanded with the inclusion of all components to agritourism including agri-entertainment, agri-education, agri-tours and agri-culture.

The overall strategy is to develop a brand and communications program that integrates all subsets of tourism in Schuyler County, including site-seeing, sports, adventure, recreational activities, exploring nature, wine and food, specialty products such as fiber, and agritourism.

The recommended umbrella brand for all tourism destinations throughout Schuyler County is “*Get in Touch with Your Senses.*” This brand allows for inclusion of not only agritourism ventures, but other destinations and activities such as Watkins Glen International, state parks, National Forest, lakes and water falls, fishing and water sports, hiking, wineries and more.

Appeal

- Sensory ... hands-on experience
- Honest, all natural
- The real thing ... nothing artificial
- Experience nature
- Keeping life simple
- Provides mechanism to expand tourism season
- Non-conventional experience
- Safe environment

Motivation to Take Action

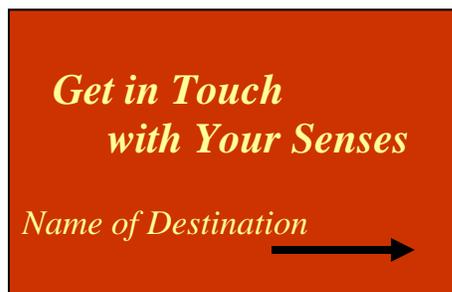
- Intriguing
- Suggests healthy and relaxing
- Appeals to an individual as well as a family
- Suggests opportunities for teaching/learning experiences for children
- Prompts memories of fun and memorable vacation
- Allows viewer of website to “begin the experience immediately”

Possible presentations of the “Get in Touch with Your Senses” brand

- General presentation of how to *Get in Touch with Your Senses* ... Smell the fresh air, listen to the waterfalls, gaze at the picturesque scenery and magnificent sunsets, taste the freshness in the fruit, touch the animals, enjoy the romance of the wine
- Create tours/packages of stops that combine various ways to “*Get in Touch with Your Senses*” - include restaurants, wineries, farmstands, water activities, u-pick, hiking/walking/parks, arms with animals, nurseries, fiber (sheep, alpaca, etc.)
- Experience the Seasons with Your Senses - Use Vivaldi's Four Seasons music
 - Fall ~ apple and raspberry picking, grape harvest and wine tasting, hills full of multi-colored leaves, pumpkins and corn maizes...
 - Spring - fresh fruit and vegetables (asparagus, strawberries, etc.), beautiful flowers and herbs, rushing waterfalls ...



Sample Signage



STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING THE AGRITOURISM INDUSTRY IN SCHUYLER COUNTY

PHASE 1 ACTION PLAN



Phase 1. Enhancing the Schuyler County Tourism Program and Preparing to Deliver a Strong Agritourism Product: Short-term (Years 1-3)

Strategy	Action Item
<p>Strategy #1. Lay the organizational foundation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Form a Team to guide and oversee the development of an Agritourism program that will become a strong component of the Schuyler County Tourism Program. Recommend the Team include the Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce, SCOPED, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County and the Small Business Development Center b. Agree on lead agency for the Team- recommend Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce c. Agree on an overall strategy and action plan to enhance the country-wide tourism industry by strengthening the agritourism component and fully integrating it into the branding and communications program of a county-wide tourism program d. Establish clearly defined goals in several areas such as the scope of an Agritourism program (farms tours, festivals, etc.); number of farm participants, mix of farm participants, support system, branding and communications program and budget. e. Outline criteria for a farm to be included in a program and the expectations in key areas such as product, quality, interactive activities, operating hours, etc. f. Set standards for consistency in terms of quality and overall customer experience - cleanliness, commitment to customer service, authenticity, hours, etc. g. Develop a strong “Agritourism infrastructure” by actively supporting the development of individual farm capacity, producing two county-wide activities each year, and developing and deploying a branding and communications program h. Define the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholder groups and partners (see pages 43-45 of this report)

<p>Strategy #2. Strengthen the Existing Agritourism Destinations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strive for a balanced mix/representation of a variety of Agritourism experiences (livestock, u-pick, corn maizes, alpaca farms, nurseries, maple/honey farms, etc.) b. Make sure each participating farm has the three basic elements: <i>Something for visitors to see, something for them to do, and something for them to buy</i> c. Continue to provide support for well-established farms that can serve as anchor destinations and have adequate attractions for the consumer, whether that be entertainment, interactive activities, shopping, etc. d. Add customer service and hospitality training to the scope of education and technical assistance provided to farms e. Assist in identifying sources of finances to make improvements to the physical setting and expand offerings f. Establish a network of Agritourism destinations throughout the county coordinated or facilitated by a single agency such as the Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce. Role of the network would be to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, discussion about major issues and barriers such as insurance and government regulations, consideration of joint marketing efforts, collaboration on one or more county-wide events, etc.
<p>Strategy #3. Increase the Number and Variety of Agritourism Destinations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develop a complete inventory of potential Agritourism participants and solicit their participation b. Seek out participants that help to achieve the desired tourism mix and offer sub-sets of agritourism: agri-education, agri-entertainment, agri-culture with livestock, u-pick, corn maize, farmstands, nurseries, maple/honey, etc. c. The Chamber, CCE and SCOPED should proactively work together to continue identifying potential Agritourism ventures and connecting them with the array of resources available to help develop a product or venue d. Actively support the transition of existing farms into agritourism ventures e. Leverage all education and technical assistance program available through the SBDC, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Chamber of Commerce and SCOPED

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> f. Encourage prospective Agritourism businesses to use the new manual to conduct a personal, market, project feasibility, and financial evaluations. g. Encourage new entrepreneurs to have business plans that include goals, customer analysis, project feasibility, marketing plan, regulatory compliance and realistic financial projections. h. Identify new agriculture businesses that have the potential for agritourism and get them in the “pipeline” early in their development
<p>Strategy #4. Create a County-wide Brand and Communications Program that Integrates all Major Tourism Subsets, Including Agritourism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develop a brand and communications program that integrates all subsets of the Schuyler County tourism industry, including site-seeing, motor sports, recreational sports, adventure, agritourism (agri-entertainment, agri-culture, agri-venture), food, and locally made specialty products such as wine and fiber. Integrate this new brand and communications program in the tourism industry development efforts being led by the Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce as the official TPA b. Develop a plan to aggressively market to the three primary customer groups: regional residents, seasonal residents, and tourists c. Produce two county-wide events, including First Harvest Festival, designed to promote agriculture and heighten the visibility of agritourism destinations throughout the county with particular emphasis on restaurants, lodging facilities, and seasonal residents. For example, consider a spring event that features early produce such as asparagus and strawberries. Examples: The Strolling of the Heifers in Brattleboro, VT; Agro-Art competition in Placer County, CA; Sundae on the Farm in Saratoga County d. Create sample itineraries or “Clusters” ~ teams of neighboring farms, bed and breakfasts, wineries, restaurants, parks, entertainment and adventure, etc. Pool their resources to create a cluster of attractions. The cluster invites potential guests to visit several attractions within a reasonable driving range. Example: The Cowboy Trail; Vermont Brewers; and, Vermont Farms. e. Work with the State, County and towns to provide directional signage to the participating destinations. f. Consider a “Schuyler County Farm Pride Day” or weekend to promote Agritourism to local residents and seasonal residents

- g. Consider developing a guide to fresh produce. Example: Yates County Guide to Fresh Produce ([http:// www.yatesny.com/produce](http://www.yatesny.com/produce))
- h. Consider promoting seasonal themes such as fall apples (picking, education and value-added products); spring and summer u-pick featuring asparagus and berries); animals with easily demonstrated animal to product activities (sheep shearing, alpacas); crops art such as corn maizes; and, animal festivals. Promote the many agricultural activities that are supplemented with spectacular views and physical features such as ponds, streams, hills, etc.
- i. Collaborate with other tourism organizations and destinations that will result in direct referrals from other chambers of commerce, lodging facilities, state parks, wine and other trails, etc.
- j. Use the Chamber of Commerce resources to introduce and promote Agritourism ventures to its members and area municipalities
- k. Hold Chamber After Hours events at a member farm
- l. Promote feature articles in local and regional newspapers such as the Watkins Glen Review, Ithaca Journal, Elmira Star-Gazette, Corning Leader, Rochester Democrat, Binghamton Press & Sun Review; and other publications such as the Highlights
- m. Investigate billboards promoting clusters by geographic area
- n. If space is available, provide an Agritourism display at Information Center with sample products
- o. Rename section of Chamber brochure rack. Currently labeled “agriculture.” Consider changing name to “Agritourism or Farm Tours.”
- p. Consider teaming-up with other Agritourism type entities for 1-2 county-wide events; i.e., Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty, the Art Trail, the Fiber Trail, or the Seneca Lake Wine Trail. One example might be a “Schuyler County Spring Soiree” featuring all things spring such as flowers, new born livestock, fresh produce such as asparagus and berries, and new wine releases.
- q. Enhance “new resident” welcome packets with samples of local products and brochures of agritourism destinations

- r. Approach major employers to promote Agritourism products, such as employee prizes, awards, etc.
- s. Enhance the Chamber website by providing the following:
- Links on Chamber website to local Agritourism businesses
 - Self-guided tour including map of destinations and brief description of destinations. See several examples such as Ontario County and Saratoga County websites.
 - Themed farm tours or trip plans with a “build your own trip” from a selection of clusters such as farm stands/u-pick, livestock/petting zoos, nature/tourism, on-farm recreation/education, nurseries, prepared foods and value added products (baked and canned goods, cheeses, knitted garments, etc.). Example: Hood River Fruit Loop (Oregon)
 - News and information for the consumer – Seasonal fruits and vegetables for u-pick, new features at farms, places to purchase farm-raised meat, places to cut your own Christmas Tree, etc.
 - Calendar of events being offered at Agritourism farms
 - Photo tour of farms open for u-pick, tours, events, etc.
 - Have one page on the Chamber website that lists all of the different trails so it doesn’t get confusing to the consumer (Seneca Lake Wine Trail, Fiber Trail, Agritourism guide). See example: www.homegrownhandmade.com (trails in North Carolina) and www.napayolanoharvesttrails.org (trails in three counties in Northern California)
- t. Make the self-guided tours easy to maneuver and the participating farms easy to find using clearly marked signage, printed brochures/maps, electronic mapping available on easy to find website that is linked to other area destinations and the local tourism agency, and well informed tour guides whether they are private or representatives of the local tourism agency
- u. Gain confidence and support from the local towns, villages and counties to assist in promoting the Agritourism trail through signage, clean roadsides, well maintained roads, etc.

Preparing to Deliver the Product: Long-term (Years 4-5)

The following action items are recommended to position Schuyler County to launch an Agritourism trail or a clearly defined subset of the county-wide Tourism Program.

1. Market the Agritourism trail/program as a “destination” travel corridor within a defined geographic area
2. Ensure quality and variety that the local and regional customers want so they will be repeat visitors and recommend the program(s) to friends, relatives and neighbors
3. If it is determined that a formal trail would be possible in the future, then consider a farm tour passport program that includes details of each rural attraction on the tour, special activities, places to eat, items for sale, directions, a detailed map, and official badges. Sell for a single priced-ticket similar to a wine trail event.

Next Steps

If these recommendations are accepted then the following next steps are suggested to take place immediately.

1. Agree on the organizational structure, and related roles and responsibilities
2. Actively involve the Small Business Development Center
3. Get buy-in from other key stakeholder groups; i.e., Chamber Tourism Committee
4. Issue a request for proposals to graphically develop and deploy the recommended brand
5. Complete an inventory of desirable and interested agritourism participants
6. Develop a plan to continue to position and strengthen existing agritourism ventures i
7. Develop a detail budget for deployment of the branding and communications program
8. Develop a geographic cluster program
9. Facilitate links
10. Get buy-in from regional tourism marketing programs

Appendix A

Sources of Information

Appendix B.

Participating Farm Reports

Appendix C.

Program Workshop
January 30, 2007

**Program Workshop
January 30, 2007**

**10 AM – 2 PM
Fire Academy
Montour Falls, New York**

- Welcome, introductions and overview of the day's agenda
- Overview of the Schuyler County Agritourism Project and Expected Outcomes (including mini-grants)
- Overview of "Agritourism"
 - What is Agritourism?
 - Overview of benefits and pitfalls of being an Agritourism business (opportunity for added income, impact on personal life, financial, resources, safety & other liability issues, etc.)
 - Examples of successful Agritourism businesses and marketing tools
- Testimonials
- Participating in the Schuyler County Agritourism Development Project
 - What are the important factors of success for an Agritourism business in Schuyler County (leveraging existing tourism destinations, viable and interesting ideas, positioning and showcasing your farm to meet consumer expectations – creating an authentic, interactive experience, income model – short-term and long-term)
 - How can a local farm operation get involved in this project and what will be expected by your participation? (application, on-site visits, business plan development, etc.)
- What are your ideas – worksheet?
- Lunch
- Roundtable Discussions (5-10 at each table)
- Next steps
 - Application to participate in the program
 - Participant selection and site visits by consultants

Appendix D.

Project Forms

Program Application
Personal Assessment
Business Plan Template