

Bill Bryan, Executive Director of the Cook Center, was asked to speak at the 2005 Young Ag Couples Conference on the topic of Farm and Ranch Recreation. The conference is hosted annually by the Montana Department of Agriculture. The attendees of the conference consist of several members of the Young Stockgrowers who are nominated by The Montana Stockgrowers Association. The goal of this four-day conference is to assist in the development of leaders of Montana's agriculture industry, and to help young couples work together to strengthen a successful future in agriculture. To qualify, couples must be actively engaged in agriculture or agribusiness and be nominated by an agricultural organization.

AGRICULTURAL RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Outline Notes for Seminar Presentation to the
Young Ag Couples Conference
Helena, Montana
January 14, 2005

I presume from the title given to our session today that I'm to identify and then advocate how you might take advantage of agricultural recreation or farm and ranch recreation (FARR) opportunities in the context of your businesses.

FARR is defined as any activity enjoyed by paying guests while on a working farm or ranch. It is most commonly found on small to mid-sized family operations to gain supplemental income.

Another presumption that I am making is that your bottom lines could use a little help from some sort of extra revenue stream that doesn't require: 1) substantial capital outlays; 2) a lot of extra time; 3) doing things that you don't want to do.

But, you would like extra revenue that adds to the bottom line and at the same time enhances your existing agricultural operations.

Is there a free lunch in here somewhere?

Hardly!

So why did the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research out of the University of Montana state in 1997 that 12% (over 2600) of farmers and ranchers in this state want to be involved with FARR by the early 2000's?

- Did they want to change what they are doing for an occupation?
- Did they have the urge to work more with people (tourists) than with grains and livestock?
- Or were they looking for various new ways to bolster the "bottom line"

If it is the latter, why hasn't FARR taken off here in Montana?

It has in other countries: New Zealand's *Let's Farmstay*, Europe's *European Centre for Eco-Agro Tourism*, and South Africa's *AGRI-South Africa Farmstay*.

- Why isn't it one of the main choices of the tourist when wanting to come to Montana?
- If FARR is an advantageous economic enterprise for some of us producers (suppliers), what can make it even more viable from both sides of the demand and supply equation?

FARR is not an economic activity that has few barriers of entry into the marketplace. There are plenty. We'll identify some today and talk about how one might overcome some of these barriers. (This can't be just a "nuts and bolts" session – if you want that, then let's talk about an on-site consultation as you each have special needs requiring custom work on "positioning" in the marketplace.)

Some barriers to implementing FARR:

- No Coordinated National Initiative
 - There are plenty at the state levels, but not at regional (multi-state) levels.
 - There are some in-state regional coops, such as WHOA
 - Marketing costs are high for an individual entryNeed a multi-state, and eventually a national, marketing association.
- Demand – Is It Really There?
 - Need a brand. Some examples: "Got Milk," "Beef, It's What's For Dinner," "Pork – The Other White Meat"

- Need a Classification System
 - Travelers are interested in FARR opportunities in the area, but don't know what they're getting regarding the type of activity, accommodations, services, etc. Need a defined and advertised classification system for each type of FARR program that would build interest and trust. For some suggestions, see [Proposed Classification System for Farm and Ranch Recreation](#) on the Resources/Tools page of the Cook Center website (www.cookcenter.org).
- Regulatory Issues
 - Regarding insurance, kitchens, etc.
 - Need a coordinated effort with workable standards
 - Need volume and consistency
- Wildlife
 - The issue of property owners needing some control over the game on their property.
 - Need to keep end goals clearly in mind
 - Need win-win-win strategy for wildlife, property owner, and hunter
 - Look at role of outfitters
 - Look at role of habitat manipulation for wildlife
 - Possible solutions:
 - Block Management
 - Leased to private outfitter
 - Leased to private individuals
 - Daily trespass fees for individuals
 - Owner-operated outfitting
 - Game farms
- Capital Issues
 - Need low interest loan opportunities
 - Need non-onerous venture capital opportunities

Why is FARR important to the producer and to the consumer?

- There is the economic imperative
- And there is the political imperative - the need to reposition agriculture with regard to consumer perception.

The consumer today is 3, 4, 5 generations urban.

These folks haven't a clue on issues like:

- Range land and benefits of grazing
- Predators, management and livestock
- The need to manage wildlife through hunting
- The impact of NAFTA on domestic agriculture
- Future of family farms and ranches

There is a huge need to build bridges for communication purposes – we need political allies.

The food literacy issue is a great opportunity

“You are what you eat”

The consumer is price-oriented, but how much so?

There is a food literacy movement.

Not just in urban areas, but community supported agriculture has taken hold here in Montana, too. But we have a long way to go.

In 1950, 70% of all food eaten by Montanans *was* grown in state; currently, it is about 4%.

Refer to Jo Robinson's book *Eat Wild* - Why grass fed beef is important to our diet.

Moreover, a growing number of consumers are changing their vacation preferences.

Many are looking for access to rural experiences without having to buy a ranch.

1. Experiencing authentic cross cultural opportunities when traveling on vacation or recreating. This is an essential part of FARR.
2. Appreciating the agrarian heritage of our country. This patriotic theme is important for many who want to feel anchored to the rural ag foundation upon which the country was built.

Also, a great number of travelers have the following underlying values:

- Interacting and observing wildlife, as well as farm and ranch related animals
- Having an outdoor, healthy, and active experience
- Learning while recreating and having fun on vacation

- Finding/rediscovering one's family roots
- Helping the family farmer or rancher both in work-related activities and financially

We need a proactive agenda if we are to have a viable agricultural future in this state.

- Yes, it's our heritage;
- It's best for the land;
- It's best for our health and welfare;
- And it's the cornerstone of a healthy, viable and sustainable agricultural economy.

FARR must be a part of our offensive game plan, our proactive agenda for our future.

Some examples:

- *Keep Montana, Montana* project
- Devil's Kitchen Group, Cascade, Montana
- Ag Appreciation Night, Awards
- Healthy Product and Direct Marketing Initiative
- Ag Congress – The economic imperative versus the environmental
- Provider PALS