



**GO TEXAN.**

Big State. Big Backyard.  
Come Play.

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE • COMMISSIONER TODD STAPLES

April  
2009

# SPECIAL FOCUS:

## Growing Tourism on the Farm and Ranch

*From Todd Staples, Commissioner  
Texas Department of Agriculture*

Living off the bounty of the land is a hard living, but an honest way of life. This is not just a legacy of the past, but a tradition reborn each day in rural Texas. As folks seek simpler joys, Texas farmers and ranchers are opening their gates to the public and growing new sources of revenue through agricultural tourism.

Agritourism offers visitors a wealth of experiences. It grows supplemental income for farm and ranch owners, and creates tourism magnets for communities.

Need some ideas for growing a bumper crop of visitors? In this issue, see how other GO TEXAN members are planting the seeds of success. Then give us a call if we can help. Together, let's grow Texas!



*Todd Staples*

## AGRITOURISM EXPERIENCES

- Agriculture crafts, gifts
- Barn dances
- Bird watching, wildlife viewing, star-gazing
- Camping, picnicking
- Off-road bicycling, motorcycling
- Lodging, cabins, bed & breakfasts
- Exotic animal farms, petting zoos
- Farm skills workshops, tours, stays
- Fee-based fishing, hunting
- Festivals, fairs
- Garden/nursery tours
- Guided crop tours, hay rides, mazes
- Historical agricultural exhibits
- Hunting dog training, competition
- Nature photography, painting
- Roadside stands, markets
- Trap/skeet shooting
- U-pick operations, on-farm sales
- Winery tours

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

- \$23.1 billion** Gross domestic product, Texas travel industry, 2007
- \$15.8 billion** Fish/wildlife-related recreation economic effect, 2006
- \$3.8 billion** State/local tax revenues generated by travel spending, 2007
- \$1.35 billion** Texas wine industry economic impact, 2007

Sources: "The Economic Impact of Travel on Texas," Texas Tourism, Office of the Governor, Texas Economic Development & Tourism, Aug. 2008; "2006 Economic Benefits of Hunting, Fishing and Wildlife Watching in Texas," Texas Parks and Wildlife, Nov. 2007.



## CASE STUDY: Growing a Business Organically

For Lisa Jenkins, owner of **Sunshine Farm** in Montgomery, 50 miles northwest of Houston, the egg came before the chicken. That is how her family business began.

"Our opening was really by accident," explains the mother of five and budding agri-entrepreneur. "We live on a country road that is also a busy commuter route. We put a sign out one spring day three years ago because we had too many eggs. When people stopped in, they wanted to talk about our chickens, our goats, our property with its gardens and the house itself. It seemed all these people had been watching us build and grow; the sign was an open invitation."

Sunshine Farm makes soaps, lotions and other all-natural skincare products using only plant-based ingredients and organic botanicals. Located on 12 acres, with a variety of trees, plenty of space for animals and a creek in the back, the family farm grows a large assortment of herbs, flowering plants and seasonal vegetables.

"We noticed the hunger for knowledge and the enjoyment people got from this interaction with the land," Jenkins explains. "Our goal is to give people a place to learn and experience day-to-day life on a farm. It really is a big deal for those who don't live it every day. They even enjoy the smells. I only wish I could find some who enjoy weeding!"

**"Our goal is to give people a place to learn and experience day-to-day life on a farm. It really is a big deal for those who don't live it every day."**

Along with her farm's excellent location and the road sign, Jenkins promotes her skin-care products and farm by going to craft shows and festivals. "We are promoting tours with our new marketing brochure," she notes. "We see shoppers almost daily and get lots of calls and visits to our Web site."

What's her biggest concern? "Growing too fast and being overwhelmed, as this is a family business," Jenkins answers. "The gardens are pretty much my job along with soap making. My husband, Jim, and I have built all the structures in the gardens as well as the shop. A public restroom opened in March. Two of our children are still at home. They help take care of the animals and earn money from egg and goat sales."

The family's work is paying off. Last year's sales were up 62 percent.

"Lessons learned the hard way are pretty much common around here," Jenkins adds. "But we have been very careful with the big decisions. We've allowed the business to grow slowly. We pay as we go and do not take on debt. This allows us the peace of mind that makes farm life so much less stressful while we work hard toward a sustainable existence."

Visit Sunshine Farm at [www.goodcleanlivin.com](http://www.goodcleanlivin.com), or look for the sign on Jackson Road in Montgomery.

### LESSONS LEARNED:

- Listen to your customers
- Grow wisely based on resources and demand
- Limit your debt (and stress) burden
- Invest in marketing
- Enjoy the journey on your way to the goal



# CASE STUDY:

## Growing According to a Plan

Lush pastures and towering pines sound like a scene from heaven, but you can find it here in this world in the northeast Texas community of Daingerfield, two-and-a-half hours east of Dallas.

The **Greer Farm** raises hay, fruit, berries, vegetables, flowers, pine timber and grass-fed Maine-Anjou cattle on 400 acres dotted with luxury log cabins for overnight guests. Visitors are welcome to pick fruit, wander forest trails, bird watch, fish for bass and catfish and enjoy gourmet cuisine with farm-fresh ingredients.

"It has taken 10 years to bring the farm back from the wilderness to what it is today," says Sid Greer, co-owner with wife, Chef Eva. "From our restored 1850s farmhouse to the log cabins, barns and sharecropper buildings on the old homestead, we have tried to maintain the integrity of the land for future generations while offering a truly unique agritourism experience for our customers."

Success was not overnight for the Greer Farm. "I came from a corporate background in energy and understood financial and strategic planning," Greer notes. "But when you are on your own it is a different animal. Everything is your own task, not to be delegated. The time and investment needed to get from where we were to where we are took longer and was more than I anticipated."

But agritourism and family farming have worked. "Whether you have five acres

or 500, you can add to your income, or even have a farm that is your only income, if you develop a well-thought-out business plan and implement it," Greer says.

And that is what the Greer family has done — packaging the total experience, thoughtfully introducing new product lines, gauging acceptance and growing at a steady pace.

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Marketing has been a key ingredient. With traditional print ads in Dallas, the largest metro market within a short drive, and radio and television spots in Sulphur Springs, Shreveport and Tyler, the broad market is covered for daytrippers and overnight guests. Old-fashioned classified ads covering the local area are still most effective in advertising pick-your-own crops. Greer Farm also leverages new media with its Web site, online coop marketing sites and blogs where customers become part of the farm's virtual sales force.

The investment in traditional and new marketing — including the donation of cooking classes for fundraisers — and the farm's growing customer base has garnered attention from media, resulting in feature articles and other free publicity. Marketing has also multiplied the return on the initial investment as evidenced by sales.

"In 2008, the entire pick-your-own crop sold out," Greer says. "We anticipated 20 percent occupancy with our start-up cabin rentals; we had closer to 70 percent and we are already booking many repeat customers. Response to our new cooking classes is more



than expected. And our grass-fed beef business has always been great — we've sold all of the available cattle for the past several years."

Not all reasons for success are found in a plan. "For our family farm there is also another very special lesson," Greer says. "Over our front door is a sign that says, 'All Because Two People Fell In Love.' Our family farm and our business did not grow in isolation. We are successful because we are a partnership that takes each other's strengths and weaknesses to make us a strong team."

To visit Greer Farm, go to [www.greerfarm.com](http://www.greerfarm.com).

### LESSONS LEARNED:

- Do jobs right the first time; rework is not efficient
- Leverage all media
- Offer affordable, high-quality products that people enjoy and desire
- Package the total experience
- Live your dream; make a plan and never give up

## RECOMMENDED READING

Texas Department of Agriculture –

[www.TexasAgriculture.gov](http://www.TexasAgriculture.gov)

Under "Publications by Title"

- Agriculture Diversification Through Nature Tourism
- Building an Agribusiness or Small Business Plan

Texas A&M University, Recreation, Parks and Tourism Sciences – [www.rpts.tamu.edu](http://www.rpts.tamu.edu)

In "Nature Tourism" section of Extension Programs

- Agritourism Best Management Practices
- Agritourism Marketing
- Nature Tourism: A Guidebook for Evaluating Enterprise Opportunities

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department –

[www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)

Search "Nature Tourism"

- Making Nature Your Business

Agricultural Marketing Resource Center–

[www.agmrc.org](http://www.agmrc.org)

Click on "Agritourism," under the "Commodities & Products" section

- Tool Kits and Agritourism and Nature Tourism Planning Guides

## GO TEXAN MEMBER BENEFITS

*Flex your marketing muscle*

• **PICK TEXAS:** Get your community's farmers markets and pick-your-own farms added to our online directory found at [www.pick-texas.com](http://www.pick-texas.com). Certification is required. Contact Richard De Los Santos, (512) 463-7472 or [richard.delossanto@TexasAgriculture.gov](mailto:richard.delossanto@TexasAgriculture.gov).

• **FIBER MARKETING PROGRAM:**

To add your producers to the GO TEXAN Wool and Mohair Directory and Texas Organic Guide, contact Mary York, (512) 463-8289 or [mary.york@TexasAgriculture.gov](mailto:mary.york@TexasAgriculture.gov).

• **LIVESTOCK MARKETING PROGRAM:** No matter what type of Texas livestock you are selling, staff is available to help with referrals and assistance in coordinating buying trips and more. Contact Amanda Lyles, (512) 463-7560, [amanda.lyles@TexasAgriculture.gov](mailto:amanda.lyles@TexasAgriculture.gov).

• **RURAL COMMUNITY PROGRAM:** Join the rallying call to promote rural Texas. Community members, businesses, organizations and others can join to show their support of rural Texas. Contact Natalie Houghton, (512) 463-6490, [natalie.houghton@TexasAgriculture.gov](mailto:natalie.houghton@TexasAgriculture.gov).

## Hardworking Rural Community Awards 2009

Each year, the Texas Department of Agriculture shines a spotlight on rural communities through the GO TEXAN Hardworking Rural Community Awards. Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples would like to honor communities' efforts and salute their vital economic and cultural contributions to Texas.

Rural Texas is a unique place. TDA wants to showcase the dedication, leadership and ingenuity shown by community volunteers, business owners and city and county officials working together to preserve the past, celebrate the present and anticipate the future.

TDA invites your community to apply for the 2009 Hardworking Rural Community Awards. Deadline for submissions is May 15, 2009. For more information and to download an application, visit [www.gotexan.org](http://www.gotexan.org).

## TOURISM WORKSHOPS

The regional tourism workshop series is coming to a town near you. All six workshops are confirmed. For more information, dates and locations, visit [www.gotexan.org](http://www.gotexan.org).

**June 25 – Granbury**

**July 22 – Salado**

**August 5 – Nacogdoches**

**August 26 – San Angelo**

**October 15 – Seguin**

**November 4 – Rockport**

*We hope to see you there!*



**GO TEXAN Rural Community Team**  
We're ready and set to GO TEXAN!  
Have questions? We're here to help.  
(877) 99GO-TEX, [www.gotexan.org](http://www.gotexan.org)  
[ruraltexas@TexasAgriculture.gov](mailto:ruraltexas@TexasAgriculture.gov)

For general program information including membership, grant opportunities, Hardworking Community Awards and workshops, contact:

### **Natalie Houghton**

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(512) 463-6490

### **RESOURCES**

Check out these resources for tourism ideas:

- **Developing Tourism in Your Community**  
[www.rpts.tamu.edu/tourism/](http://www.rpts.tamu.edu/tourism/)
- **GO TEXAN Rural Community Event Starter Kit**  
[www.gotexan.org](http://www.gotexan.org), click on Rural Community Program, Member Corner, Resources

### **Texas Department of Agriculture GO TEXAN Rural Community Program**

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