

Innovative Ideas - North Carolina State University

Category: Teaching

Project Name: HomegrownHandmade.com Agri-Cultural Tourism Trails

The Idea: Based on the success of HandMade in America's visitor guidebook, *Craft Heritage Trails of North Carolina*, several driving routes have been created in Eastern North Carolina and the Piedmont to encourage tourists to visit farms, studios and other sites off the beaten path. Tourism is a key economic force for rural areas that are rich in natural and cultural resources. Careful planning of tourism yields new wealth in a community as well as a renewed appreciation and stewardship of the region's assets.

Project Execution: Through a partnership of NC Cooperative Extension, NC Arts Council and HandMade in America, sixteen driving trails were developed in seventy-seven counties over a three-year period. Each county's Extension Center, local arts council and local tourism professional worked together to create an inventory of farms, produce stands, festivals, museums, art galleries and studios, heritage sites, restaurants, and retail shops to be included. These potential sites were identified and evaluated according to criteria (http://www.homegrownhandmade.com/AboutHgHm_Criteria.htm). NC Cooperative Extension provided technical assistance and training to land and business owners who wanted to ensure their operation was "visitor-ready." The sites were then plotted into convenient driving routes and a descriptive narrative of each trail was written. The project was underwritten by a generous grant from The Goldenleaf Foundation and the trails are currently being marketed online at <http://www.homegrownhandmade.com/Default.htm>. Plans for a printed guidebook are underway as well, and new sites are being added often. More about the program partners can be read at <http://www.homegrownhandmade.com/AboutHgHm.htm>.

External Impact: Since the website's debut almost two years ago, sites and communities are reporting a positive impact from an increased flow of visitors. The NC Arts Council just completed a study on the economic impact of the project. According to Rebecca Moore, Director of Marketing, "Based on the number of visitors to the HomegrownHandmade Web site who reported that they decided to come to an agricultural location because of the Web site, the project has had a considerable direct economic impact on the State of North Carolina. Visitors to sites who went there due to the presence of the website are estimated to spend \$321,574 per year directly associated with their site visits and an additional \$1,113,142 not directly related to the site visits, but incurred during their trip to the sites."

Internal Impact: This program has served as a catalyst for communities to examine their resources and plan for tourism, towards the end of sustainable economic growth. By celebrating the culture, heritage and natural assets of their area, residents of rural communities are feeling a renewed pride in rural lifestyles and occupational folkways. In addition, it has strengthened partnerships between communities working regionally to develop tourism and public agencies aiming to increase the quality of life in our state.

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