

Rural areas have become popular tourist destinations. People want to get away from their rushed life styles and relax in a slower paced environment. They also want to learn how to do agriculture related activities like milk the cow, plow the field and harvest the garden.

Recently, Go West Tours, a bus touring company originating from California traveling to New Orleans, contacted the Houma Area Visitors and Convention Bureau to arrange for agritourism tours for a group of French travelers. Working with the LSU AgCenter, the convention center suggested tours at Eddie Romero's Fruit Orchard in New Iberia, Crystal Rice Plantation in Crowley and Gonsoulin Land & Cattle in New Iberia.

In January of 2014, a French public broadcasting station crew traveled to Louisiana to film two episodes highlighting agritourism venues. For the first experience they joined an organized group who paddled the Mississippi River from St. Joseph to Waterproof. The visitors paddled by barges and saw farmland under cultivation and grain elevators located along the river. They also had a picnic lunch on top of a sand bar.. To see excerpts from their travels go to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Al-d_6hozNY

After leaving the river the French film crew traveled to Frogmore Plantation & Gin in Ferriday. Frogmore is a perfect example of life on a cotton plantation then and now. "It is the only site in the South where visitors can begin life in the 1790's learning about the slave culture and early planting techniques and then experience the changes on southern cotton plantations through today's computerized methods of farming and ginning," according to Lynette Tanner who owns and operates the venue with her husband.

Frogmore Plantation has opened its doors to travelers from the United Kingdom, France and Belgium who want to make the connection to their homeland spinning mills where United States cotton was sent to be made into fabrics for over 150 years.

In nearby, Moreauville, WesMar Farms, a small goat dairy, is a popular destination with international travelers seeking the "experience" of on farm living. Marguerite and Wes Constantine who own the dairy frequently host international visitors for weeks at a time. Part of the experience includes working alongside the Constantine's in the day to day operation of the dairy. Tourists help feed and milk the goats using milking machines. On a recent stay, guests were awakened in the middle of the night to participate in birthing a goat. "Over the last three years, WesMar Farms has hosted tourists from Germany, Australia, Israel, Canada, France, Belgium and England," said Marguerite Constantine.

Opportunities abound for the growth of agritourism in our state. The LSU AgCenter works closely with the Louisiana Department of Ag and Forestry to assist agritourism operators to comply with laws that will limit their liability and make agritourism an affordable asset to their farming operations. Details of this law can be found at www.lsuagcenter.com/agritourism

For a more information, contact LSU AgCenter's agritourism coordinator, Dora Ann Hatch.