

The tourism industry in Louisiana boasts many trails: culinary, hiking, paddling, golf, sugar, holiday lights, nature, birding, recreational, history, black history and creole just to name a few. What all these trails have in common is that they direct tourists to destinations. The economic impacts on communities where these trails are located oftentimes are not documented, but people who travel tend to spend money on food, lodging and other items.

So, would trail development be right for you and your community? Why not consider offering an Agritourism Trail linking all things agricultural. We have lots to see in Louisiana, but we need to organize destinations and events and publicize them. Trails can be year-round or for a specific time period. They can focus on one theme or themes with a logical relationship to each other.

Many states including our own have designated trails that are highly publicized by tourism offices. But, there are many more exciting places that will remain unnoticed unless venue owners decide to create the trail themselves. To accomplish this, one must learn about trail development.

Agritourism operators should capitalize on this opportunity to create a trail. In previous articles, I've mentioned the Arts and Eats trail in Michigan. This trail is open only two days out of the year and yet attracts many tourists. It's self-guided, has excellent road signage and takes tourists through several counties to visit working farms. The trail allows the traveler to see where food and fiber are grown and then suggests eateries where you can experience the local grown foods. Visit www.artsandeats.org for more information.

This type of trail development is possible in Louisiana. With our diversification of agriculture across the state, one could create trails that offer something for everyone in their travel group. For example, go horseback riding through forest lands and return to a chuck wagon setting that provides an evening meal or maybe a stay in a cabin. Wake up the next morning and head to a neighboring farm to select your own eggs for breakfast. Then it's off to help feed the animals on the farm. End the day with a walk in the woods and list the wildlife you've seen along the way.

Whatever you decide to promote, packaging venues is a great way to get tourists to stay in your area longer. Working with neighboring agritourism operators will increase sales.

Perhaps, it's time for you to consider a trail. As the agritourism coordinator with the LSU AgCenter I'm available to assist you with agricultural related trails.