



Don Curlee: Latest Thing is Agnature Tourism

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By Don Curlee

Just as agritourism was becoming a familiar term, some dyed-in-the-wool naturalists found a way to expand its meaning. They call it "agnature tourism."

The expanded term connotes the natural features and appealing activities that often accompany a farm, such as fishing, hiking, swimming, nature walks, bird-watching, perhaps even stargazing. Farmers whose properties offer any of these things often take them for granted, but they seem glad to help parlay them into a closer relationship with their non-farm friends who drop by for a visit.

For several years, tours or just informal visits to farms have been promoted under the banner of agritourism. As tourists visit farms, they become better acquainted with standard farming practices such as irrigation, weed control, harvest intervals, fertilization, use of farm equipment and machinery, tree care, animal comfort, safety procedures and more. The familiarity leads to a better understanding of how food is produced, and to a warmer relationship between farmers and non-farmers.

Now, a select group of farm operators is being encouraged to take agritourism to the next level, the stretch version. If their property includes attractive features such as lakes, streams, riding trails or other natural assets, they qualify as an agrinaturist. Bring on more tourists,

Most of the agrinaturist sites are likely to be in mountainous or at least foothill country, and the majority of their owners probably will be producing cattle and/or other animals. If their land is at a high elevation, they might dazzle their visitors with the details of lumber production or operation of a sawmill. That can produce a real buzz. In winter, they probably can offer snow and the not-so-natural vehicles to travel on it, real attractions to the city dweller.

To help the privileged farm owners who have an abundance of natural attractions prepare for visits, a Central California group is developing a program of instruction and assistance and encouragement. While it recognizes and emphasizes the beauty and appeal of natural assets, it is cataloging the practical aspects of guest visits — transportation while on the property, safety measures for hikers, anglers, swimmers and waders, potty availability, food, lodging requirements and insurance.

All of this and more will be packaged in a free full-day workshop in Visalia on Nov. 10. Sponsored and arranged by the Yosemite/ Sequoia Resource Conservation & Development Council, it will run from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the chambers of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors at 2800 W. Burrel Ave. For more information and registration, interested parties can call 877-8663

Funded by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, the meeting is open to Fresno and Tulare County residents. Further activities sponsored by the organization include a tour of Tulare County ag tour sites Nov. 15 and a similar tour of ag tour sites in Fresno County on Nov. 17.

While the workshop will include speakers and panelists discussing the nuts and bolts of risk management and legal constraints, it will also emphasize the values of coalition building and networking and the development of the resources for success.

These days, farmers are being asked to reach out, bridge the communication gaps that have developed between them and their city cousins and make friends. Those with choice pieces of property brimming with natural assets are a special group, now being recognized and recruited for their unique magnetism.

They will be front and center at the Nov. 10 meeting. They have the potential to become agriculture's "special forces" in the communication battle for friends and understanding.

Nobody is talking about medals or campaign ribbons yet, but proud service is sure to be recognized — naturally.

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