

Economic Development Insight

Agritourism

Recently, I watched a re-run of “Jon & Kate + 8” on television, the one where the family visits a farm. As a large family, they buy most of their food in bulk and are concerned about quality and nutritional value, so they purchase organic meats and produce. In this instance, they are buying half a cow.

The trip takes about an hour and, after a (not-too) quick stop at the restroom facilities, they place their meat order with the farmer and then board a horse-drawn, sheltered trailer that has wood seating on either side. Being from a more city suburban setting, the children are awed by the open space of hundreds of acres of farmland.

One of the older children, a twin, gets to ride up front with the farmer and, of course, the other twin is heartbroken, thinking she missed out. The parents and farmer assure her that she can ride up front on the return trip. The children are all quite young and, after the trip in the van to get there and now having to sit again, the smaller ones are getting rather restless and irritable.

At their first stop, the farmer wisely engages them in farm chores by bringing them a large bucket of organic chicken feed. Once he throws a couple of handfuls onto the ground, the chickens start pouring out of the barns. The children are at the same time startled yet thrilled. They quickly join in the action, some even chasing after certain chickens to make sure that their ‘favorite’ gets plenty to eat. By this time, hundreds of free range chickens have surrounded the children, who take great delight in feeding them.

A shady tree and a picnic-style lunch later, they again load up into the trailer and head out, past fields of crops, to inspect the cows. The sight of a calf delights the whole family and dad and mom, Jon and Kate, are impressed with the healthy appearance of the herd and the way it’s maintained. The children are amused by the constant mooing of the cows and how soft their ‘skin’ feels.

On the trip back to the staging area, the farmer remembers that it’s the second twin’s turn to ride up front. As he gives her the reins and allows her the privilege of steering the horse, he leans over and quietly says, “See. Sometimes, patience brings great reward” and she grins, knowing that it’s true.

When they return to their van, farm hands help Jon load the cases of frozen meat previously selected, while Kate and the children head to the farm store. Here they find a wide range of organic foods, snacks and healthy-yet-yummy treats, so mom let’s each of them pick their own treat and gets one for dad, of course. The episode ends with the van exiting the farm to head home, as parents and children reflect on the highlights of the day.

As I watched this, I kept thinking, “I wish some of the farmers in Greene County would develop something like this.” Even if the meat and crops don’t qualify as organic, people are becoming more conscious of the importance of eating quality foods, and the concepts of ‘knowing the

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where your food comes from' and 'buying within 150 miles of where you live' are gaining in popularity. This is a wonderful step-up from the Farmers' Market approach.

It could also be tied to a 'healthy food'-type restaurant. Or, a piece of land could easily be set aside, divided into 10' x 10' plots with a compost heap in the center of each, and leased out for city dwellers to plant and tend their own family garden. Schools or civic clubs might want a larger communal site. The composting material, seeds and everything else they might need could be readily provided (sold, hired or rented out) on-site, even services, such as ground tilling.

Anyone interested?

Joan Bethell is the executive director at Greene County Economic Development Corporation and can be reached at (812) 847-4500 or jbethell@gcedc.us