

NORTHEAST OREGON & OREGON'S RUGGED COUNTRY

Agriculture & Culinary Tourism 2016 Project Report

The purpose of this project is to increase the number and quality of experiences and services for visitors and residents to enjoy the amazing local foods and craft beverages, events, recreation and educational outreach associated with the working landscape of EASTERN OREGON.



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Project Summary

This document will serve as a summary of the project activities and a gathering of observations and suggestions by the consultant.

Partners and Funding Sources

This project is a partnership between the following: Northeast Oregon Economic Development District; Eastern Oregon Visitors Association, which is the official regional destination marketing organization (DMO) for the eleven counties of Eastern Oregon; Travel Oregon, the official Oregon destination marketing organization.

The Project was funded by a Rural Business Enterprise Development Grant from the US Department of Agriculture, a grant from the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association, and financial contributions from Travel Oregon. The RBEG was administered by the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District.

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Project Scope of Work:

What: Northeast Oregon Economic Development District, in coordination with EOVA and Travel Oregon, was awarded a USDA-Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) to further develop the Agritourism Product of two of Eastern Oregon's sub-regions. (Northeast - Baker, Union, & Wallowa counties; and Oregon's Rugged Country- Umatilla and Morrow counties. All project activities are to be completed by November 30, 2016. Here are the specific deliverables of the project:

- **Task #1** Create and convene Northeast Oregon Agritourism and Rugged Country Agritourism Working Groups by January 2016. These groups will establish goals and further the work of the ag/culinary tourism development and marketing plan. NEOEDD staff and the consultant will complete this work.
- **Task #2** Conduct and complete inventory of existing and developing ag tourism and culinary products by May 2016. The consultant will complete this task and add to the inventory throughout the life of the project.
- **Task #3** Host educational workshops to assist businesses in connecting and/ or enhancing existing products and/ or in developing new products to offer to the ag/ culinary tourism visitor. The consultant, NEOEDD staff, Travel Oregon staff, and Travel Oregon consultant will complete this task by the end of May.
- **Task #4** Develop a marketing plan that can help businesses leverage future marketing funds and business investment, including itinerary development, wayfinding, signage, print and digital promotion by November 30, 2016. The consultant will complete this task with the assistance of the steering committee and stakeholders.

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Strengths:

- A new Eastern Oregon Agritourism Marketing Plan, and a contract with a very highly regarded firm, Lookout, Inc., to implement it
- The region is very diverse, with a wide spectrum of geography that includes highly productive farms, vast cattle ranches, a great mixture of orchards, vineyards and wineries, gardens and rural event venues
- A strong Western heritage image that is well known and well promoted, especially in Pendleton
- Long, lonely stretches of paved highways and gravel country roads draw cyclists and motorcyclists
- Intriguing and well-known cultural heritage and natural history
- A very wide range of successful farming and ranching enterprises; many that have been in business for over a century
- The spirit of independence and strong work ethic that imbues people with a *willingness to do what it takes* to live in the place they love
- Several established wineries in Milton-Freewater, Echo and Keating
- Five successful and acclaimed craft brewing companies, as well as two new and one established distilleries, a hard cidery and a new malting facility
- Rugged Country has many known culinary and ag-related suppliers and attractions, such as Pendleton Round-Up, SAGE Center, Walchli Farms Watermelons, Bellinger's Farm Stand, Barhyte, and Hamley's
- Northeast Oregon (particularly in Wallowa County), is home to some leaders in the culinary/locally grown food movements. NEOEDD, Winding Waters Rafting, Carmen Ranch and 6 Ranch come quickly to mind, but there are others

Weaknesses:

- Lack of research that directly matches the products and services available in the region to what people in target geo markets want and are willing to travel for
- The independence that is a strength is also a challenge as it makes it hard to come to a consensus and to work together for common goals
- Distances make it very difficult to get stakeholders together as a unit, resulting in the need for more meetings at the county level
- A frequent turnover in tourism leadership and in who is able to actively participate means there is a need to continually educate and recap what has been done or is underway - this can be frustrating for those who have stayed involved from the start
- The climate works for you at times and against you at other times
- Readiness for visitors; improved hospitality and spruce-up is, as always, needed in many towns and businesses
- Most importantly, people are very busy and stretched too thinly. That is a big issue when it comes to getting volunteers engaged and working on projects
- Lostine Tavern, a business that had received lots of media attention, went out of business early in 2016, shortly after we held a meeting there that was very well attended

Threats: Some headway has been made at the state level on the first two

- Land use laws, or just the fear of navigating and complying with them
- Liability and the high expense of insurance
- Because of time and resource constraints and natural independence, if something doesn't fit their wishes, people are quick to back away. This makes building a project and sustaining the effort extra hard.
- Apathy or disbelief from some suppliers – "the project isn't going to benefit me so I won't get involved." Or, "I can just go it alone!"

Opportunities:

- In general, there is much room for expansion of agritourism experiences and services throughout Eastern Oregon. See more at the sub-region level further into the report.
- Agritourism is popular across the country and there is strong interest from state and regional DMOs. This has led to significant investment to help the region extend its efforts to further develop and promote its product.
- Timing is at the optimum since the interest in locally produced foods, nature and cultural roots are strong. The general public seems to have heard the term "Agritourism" enough to have a good feel for what it represents in visitor experiences. Our challenge is to deliver!

A "missing link" between tourism and agriculture?

In the 2015 JDRT report, I mentioned a need for an agency/broker/tour operator business in that sub-region. Both sub-regions under the 2016 project have entities actively filling that role, with room for more as demand increases.

In Rugged Country, Roads2 Tours relocated to Pendleton in 2016 and immediately began marketing tours of Walla Walla and The Rocks wine country. In Northeast Oregon, Geiser Grand Hotel began offering "Ranch Experiences", while Richie Outfitters launched "Wine & Food on the River," rafting trips on the Minam River that feature wine makers and a known Walla Walla chef. Winding Waters Rafting Company continued their very successful culinary themed trips on the Snake River.

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Development

We began this project by pulling together a Working Group for each sub-region, personally inviting destination marketing professionals, established tourism businesses, community leaders and agriculture practitioners. We cast a wide net. In Oregon's Rugged Country (ORC), the response was wonderful and included a great mix. Dedicated participants stayed active and engaged throughout the year.

In Northeast Oregon (NEO) it was immediately clear pulling together people from all three counties for meetings would be a challenge. Subsequent meetings were usually fairly well attended by people pretty close to the location. For this reason, we moved them around through the three counties. DMOs are short-staffed and stretched thinly, and in two cases, experienced staffing changes or loss. This meant less staff assistance for the consultant for business outreach. In both sub-regions, we were able to establish goals and set the course for the year.

We incorporated some supplier tours in the meetings, which was popular with the hosts as well as with the participants who were able to do the tour. The best tour results came when meetings were held at a supplier location that was easy to get to, ending the meeting with a tour of the facility, such as that at Oregon Wheat Growers Distillery in Pendleton.

While working to enhance experiences and increase the number of agritourism suppliers, we felt strongly there was a need to better promote the existing services and experiences. This is partly because there was no coordination in place across the region to show the critical mass available to visitors. We also felt new businesses would be inspired by becoming aware of what others are doing. For this reason, we chose early to create farm loops in every county.

Once the foundation is laid for a farm loop, more assets can be added they are developed. New suppliers can join in when they are ready for visitors.

They must first:

- Cover the legal bases so all can be promoted without legal repercussions
- Reduce and manage risk
- Get visitor readiness and hospitality training to ensure they can meet visitor expectations and needs, are welcoming to visitors and all are knowledgeable about and promoting each other.

One factor that I believe is really hampered supplier development in 2016 is the extremely low prices for livestock and commodities. Farmers and ranchers are too busy just trying to hang on to their places to be thinking about entertaining visitors. When operating loan payments are in the hundreds of thousands, the prospect of a few thousand in revenue doesn't seem worth the extra hassle, investment and ongoing expenses. For the sake of all, we hope conditions will improve in 2017.

Learned in 2015 - still relevant:

I have observed three scenarios under which individual farms and ranches move into developing agritourism:

Indigenous – Established farms and ranches choose to incorporate an agritourism aspect into their existing operation. For them to want to take on a tourism aspect:

1. The project must fit their core operation from which they derive their majority of income. A working wheat ranch can't sacrifice harvest in order to entertain guests.
2. It must make financial sense.
 - Will the amount of money and time invested bring in enough revenue to at least cover those costs?
 - How long will it take to recoup investment and how long can the proprietor wait to do so?
 - Can it make a profit, and are they okay if it doesn't?
3. Is it even doable?
 - Do they have or can they acquire the infrastructure and staffing to serve visitors?
 - Can all of the legal issues be covered? Land use laws, health department, building permits
 - Can they reduce the risk of liability and insurance it fully?
4. They must start with clear goals of what they want to achieve and all of the principal partners must be in agreement.

(continued next page)

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Development Workshops

What worked well and didn't?

In ORC, attendance was good, but there were very few private business owners or agriculture professionals. Most attending were from local government, DMOs, or agencies. It was great having them there, but the curriculum was not designed so much with them in mind and we really wanted to be helping the AT business owners themselves. *However, the workshops fostered much interest and support from the attendees and that had lasting impact on the project.* We held the first day of the workshop in Boardman and the second in Hermiston, which meant a few people only came to one day or the other. I recommend just one location in the future. An outcome from this workshop is the completion of planning guidelines that take into account agritourism in both counties.

In NEO, the workshop was held in La Grande, both sessions, and attendance was good, with the right mix of proprietors and support agencies. Direct outcome from the La Grande workshop was lasting relationships with several proprietors, which has led to me be able to garner media attention for them and aided in the completion of the Cove-Union Farm Loop.

What could be done differently next time (for the whole process)?

The 2016 workshops were well put together and presented. Alexa Carey did a great job. Conversation and contributions from the people in attendance was very useful for all. One of the biggest challenges is still getting the people to the table who would most benefit from participating and also who have the most to offer in partnerships.

What needs to be covered in the follow-up marketing workshops?

We need to give them more hands-on instruction, helping them create or improve their websites and get the most from social media. Help them develop their branding to tie into and build off of the new EOVA branding, actually craft their message and story, select advertising venues, share information with each other, cross-market and foster partnerships.

I continually hear that meeting together, sharing information and ideas, was the most beneficial aspect of the workshops. I feel a classroom-type situation, with people working individually and together on creating their own marketing strategy, will benefit them the most. **Carried forward from the JDRT Report:** They need a workbook to work their way through in the workshops. It should include a place to add the handouts after each speaker; worksheets to go with each session; contact information on presenters, facilitators and organizers;



Watermill Winery, Milton-Freewater

profiles of successful AT businesses, such as those serving on the panels, and specific next steps time line for moving their operation forward. (This was done well for the 2016 workshops and I think there could be more worksheets to carry the work forward afterward. I intend to work on this.)

Learned: (continued from page 5)

- Are they after big financial gain?
- Is their aim educating the public and outreach?
- Or, does someone just want a hobby or something fun to do?
- If all of the above, can the project meet such lofty expectations?

Imported – Another type of agri-culinary tourism proprietor is one imported into the region or industry. These are people who have lived elsewhere and probably had some kind of tourism related or retail business. They move here most likely because they like it or have roots here. Many have sufficient financial means for start-up costs. What they need most is local connections and community support, knowledge and ties to EOVA and TO. Some may be able to stand alone, usually when catering to a higher income clientele, but most need the ability to join in a critical mass.

Combined – Sometimes the project most likely to succeed will have a combination of indigenous and imported partners. This marriage can produce an agritourism business that includes people experienced in working with the public, knowledgeable about visitor expectations and needs, and tapped into the world of marketing, *plus* people who know and understand agriculture and value the lifestyle that goes with it. Any time we can help create or foster this type of partnership, I believe the opportunity for success will grow. Good examples available by request.

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Grande Ronde Goat Dairy

Marketing

A huge step taken by the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association in 2016 was creating a committee, known as the “Aggies,” and contracting with Holly MacFee of Lookout, Inc., to go through the process of creating an Eastern Oregon Agritourism Marketing Plan for the entire region. Through a series of meetings, the Aggies were walked through the steps of defining “agritourism” as it is used in the plan, and categories of product; visioning; reviewing trends and insight; examining our typical and optimal visitor profiles and the best avenues for reaching them; setting objectives; defining strategies and actions. As a participant in the Aggies, I was very impressed with the level of discussion and brainstorming by that group and how the ideas were carried forward into the completed plan. (Readers, please request a link to the complete plan.)

We are just beginning to see the new concepts take shape in ads and brochures — an exciting time. The outcome of the plan and contract work is also coming to fruition in the placement of advertisements, signage and media outreach. While remaining with the branding that was created for the EOVA a number of years ago, that branding has been refreshed and applied to agritourism themed marketing activities. This report includes notes on how it is being applied or slightly adapted for use in the two sub-regions under the 2016 project.

Farm Loops While the idea of creating farm loops (inspired by the Mount Hood Fruit Loop) came up during the JDRT project in 2015, actual creation of some started in the spring, when two agritourism suppliers in Cove approached me about putting together a Cove-Union Farm Loop. Catherine Parks (Nella Mae’s Farm Stand) and Cindy Edwards (Folly Farm) gathered contact information and initiated conversation with suppliers they thought might like to be included. We worked together to complete the required information and determine the route of travel. I created a flat brochure that included a Google map for navigation and descriptions of all of the stops and points of interest. The Union County Chamber of Commerce pitched in the money to buy signs for each participant. I distributed the maps and signs in mid-July. When contacting the participants late in the fall to see if they wanted to continue on the new map (under design, now) all but one was affirmative. Many reported seeing visitors with map in hand, and while few reported a big jump in sales, all but one felt participation was beneficial.

We carried the concept forward to other areas of NEO and to ORC. The next two to be completed were those in Umatilla and Morrow Counties. Loops in Wallowa County and Baker County are still in development.

Promotional Events We took the opportunity to highlight agritourism when Travel Oregon came to Pendleton for the 2016 Governor’s Conference on Tourism and during our EOVA regional participation in packaged travel and media tours. For the former, EOVA hosted *Taste of Oregon Old West* during the opening reception on Sunday evening. We set up and decorated a room directly adjacent to the exhibit hall and invited suppliers to present samples to Governor’s Conference attendees. Three wineries and a hard cidery, two chocolatiers, a guest ranch, a B & B Inn, a hunting lodge and preserve, and an alpaca farm were among the twenty-plus businesses represented. The room was packed throughout the two-hour event and we felt it was very successful in raising awareness within Oregon’s tourism industry of the amazing agritourism and culinary experiences available in Eastern Oregon.

For the packaged travel and media tours, we similarly inserted locally produced food and beverages and agritourism attractions into the itineraries and media kits whenever possible. This has resulted in an exciting boost in coverage for many EO businesses. I feel these tactics are solid and should be continued, as should including culinary and ag-related community events in the products we actively promote as a region.

Marketing Ideas

Following are the seeds of ideas I came up with while working on agritourism development in 2016. The EOVA director, Alice Trindle, and I have begun planning ways to implement them in 2017.

TOURISM 101 AND CROSS-MARKETING

It seems to me the best help we can offer is to first get them tied into just how tourism marketing and development works in Oregon; 7 regions, local DMOs, TO, media relations, FAM tours, trade shows, etc. I am looking into pulling the Tourism 101 sessions through the region again, but with some adjustment specifically for agritourism. It could be through this that we are better able to introduce and tie in the EOVA agritourism marketing plan and foster more partnerships and cross-marketing.

Marketing (continued)

While we are still working to bring everyone to the table, by promoting the established experiences, we can strengthen the demand, which will lead to opportunities for growth. I see the farm loops as an effort at a ground-floor sub-regional marketing plan, helping shine the light on existing experiences, while inspiring the creation of more. The loops, along with events and other cross-marketing opportunities, bring a number of the suppliers together and become a centerpiece for promoting established agritourism entities, leading the way for newcomers.

Winding Waters River Adventures, Wine & Food On the Minam River, and the Eagle Cap Excursion Train are good examples of how recreation and sightseeing attractions can partner with producers to raise the awareness of the high quality food and beverages available in Eastern Oregon. My contract as the marketing person for the excursion train has allowed me to incorporate regional food and beverage suppliers into some of our excursions. The resulting Wine & Cheese Train, which was a partnership with Umapine Creamery (3 times) and Copperbelt Winery, and the Brews & Brats Train, a partnership with Terminal Gravity and Joseph Trading Post, were sellout trips and we are planning similar rides in 2017. Winding Waters Rafting has been doing similar trips for several years and Richie Outfitters is marketing their Wine & Food on the River trips in 2017.

TELLING THEIR STORIES THROUGH SHORT VIDEOS

Another strategy I would like to suggest is the production of 90-second videos of those who are ready for visitors. A really great example of a short video is this one from Farm Bureau: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VP4P9e5yqZE&feature=youtu.be>

Suppliers "stories" are of interest and a good way to connect with people who know nothing about how their food is grown and produced. That desire to connect is often a main reason people on our side of the state want to add even a small tourism component to their agriculture operation. The goal of added revenue resonates with a few places that have just the right mix of people skills and attractive property that is easy to convert for visitors. For most, especially mid-to-large farms and ranches, the additional investment of money, time and staffing to make their program friendly to visitors isn't going to be offset by a few nights of lodging or sales from a farm stand. But, the desire to tell about what it takes to be a farm or ranch family has its own appeal.

Videos like the one for the Leutholds convey so much in just a short dose and make the viewer want to meet them to learn more. Theirs is not an agritourism business, but it is the brevity, mood and feeling it conveys that I especially like.

A series of a few such pieces could really make a difference for Eastern Oregon. The video was shot and produced by Anne Marie Moss, communications director of Oregon Farm Bureau. I would keep them under two minutes, max. People lose interest in longer videos, making them less effective. Give great visuals, get a good feel for the proprietors' personality and passion, and say what the visitors can expect to experience.

AGRITOURISM Mini-Grant Partnership

What will it take for you to move your agritourism business to the next level, and start welcoming visitors to your farm, ranch, orchard or processing facility? The Eastern Oregon Visitors Association wants to help and is willing to invest in your ideas. We know there are some things, large and small, that get in the way of bringing an idea to fruition. To help you deal with some of the smaller challenges, the EOVA wants to partner with you, offering advice from the experts we have under contract and a grant of \$1,500 to help you achieve a very specific set of goals. You can even meet with the agritourism consultant before submitting your proposal for help refining your goals and advice on what will qualify. The consultant will help you assess your readiness for visitors and determine what is needed most to move your project forward, whether it be repairs to corral fences, new steps for the porch, a bed for the guest room, marketing through social media, print advertising, signs, even a little bit of hired help from a carpenter. Then, fill out the application and submit your proposal. The EOVA agritourism committee will select six winning projects to be completed in 2017. EOVA and Travel Oregon experts will be available for further advice as you work to complete your project and put out the "Open" sign.

PLEIN AIRE ART TOUR - NE Sub-Region idea for Wallowa County

Plein Aire Art Tour along the farm loop: Select seven or eight of the most scenic farm loop participants, each of which would draw the name of an artist to paint at their location. Possibly one for the a.m. and one for the p.m. People can drive the route and see the artists at work. All of the art would be displayed and many for sale that evening at one location, where there would be a farm to fork dinner. This could be a fund raiser for the arts festival and draw a lot of attention to the farm loop and agritourism.

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Inventory

Building the inventory for each sub-region began with referrals from the DMOs and people responding to our publicity about the program and about the workshops. I also did a lot of Internet searching and relied on word-of-mouth as the year progressed. I know there are many more suppliers out there that are not included, which is why building the inventory is a never-ending task and one that needs to be planned for longevity as new businesses are started, businesses close, existing businesses that have been flying under the radar come into light. *It is important for the sub-regions to address who and how this process will continue.* Don't put this tool on the shelf and let it grow rusty and obsolete.

A very important part of the inventory situation is pushing the content about suppliers that are serving or ready for business to inclusion on the EOVA and Travel Oregon websites and incorporating their stories into our story kit. We have been able to bring quite a bit of media attention to several of the suppliers over the year and have also had the opportunity to work some into media tours. Needless to say, they are very appreciative when such successes happen.

SIDE BAR Several high-end hunting preserves in ORC are quite luxurious and self-sufficiently marketed to wealthy, largely professional male clientele that enjoy hunting. Outreach to such places for participation in the agritourism project drew no response, similar to the situation in the JDRT. However, I believe some of them are working with the local DMOs, so the latter are able to connect people who are seeking those experiences with the proprietors. These places bring in revenue, but the economic impact beyond the preserve is often limited to a few select, restaurants and retailers.



Learned: 1) As discussed in my JDRT 2015 report, there are many issues with the way things have been listed on the Travel Oregon ORB that need to be adjusted to give AT businesses a higher likelihood of being seen by people who are interested. 2) The process for entering and editing data is improved by the EOVA contracting Elizabeth Farrar to enter the data and manage media outreach. She and I will continue to work together to ensure complete listings.

Learned: 1) I feel a separate site should be considered, specifically for agritourism experiences in Eastern Oregon. But, we can only wait until we see the new integrated site and how it works to know what needs to be done.

About the EOVA website...

During the meetings of the EOVA agritourism marketing committee, a great deal of thought and thorough conversation was dedicated to the broader issue of the visiteasternoregon.com website, which was badly in need of upgrades.

In the end, it was that group's recommendation to the EOVA Board of Directors that EOVA move their site to become a part of traveloregon.com, which is in the midst of its own complete reworking. The EOVA eventually came to the same conclusions and the migration will take place early in 2017. People searching for the EOVA URL will now land on an Eastern Oregon page within the Travel Oregon site, with its own, compatible branding.

Data entered into the Travel Oregon "ORB" will be shared as before on the EOVA pages and may even be enhanced by the EOVA social media contractor.

There were many reasons for and against this change, but it came down to the amount of exposure for Eastern Oregon, which will be greatly increased with this move.

Therefore, it is even more critical that listings be complete, links to websites and Facebook pages correct and every impression viewers get of Eastern Oregon and her individual businesses and attractions are alluring.

Please see my 2015 JDRT Agritourism Report for more on this issue. I am anxious to see how the new TO site looks and functions.

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Inventory (*continued*)

Following are notes I made concerning meetings with suppliers for a requested consultation, either at the site of their business or another location.

- 1) The first obstacle when approaching a producer/supplier about the project is their immediate perception that I am selling something. When making cold-calls, there is always suspicion that I want something or I am selling something (even possibly just an opposing philosophy).
- 2) Often the proprietor seems to think there is a source of funds involved with the project. There are no funds directly associated with this project, but we may be able to direct people to some possible financial resources.
- 3) Most commonly, proprietors have very optimistic and broad plans for what they want to do. The best help I can give is encouragement to focus in on what they can offer visitors in the near future, identify a target market and seek to accomplish one thing at a time. They can always have a five and ten-year plan that includes some bigger dreams, but in order to just get started, most really need to dial in on one or two doable things at a time. My advice to them:
 - a. Clarify what a visitor can expect to experience/see/do/learn at your operation. What exactly are you offering and why would they want to visit?
 - b. Define the age range, interests and geographical location of the people you think will want to take part in what you are offering.
 - c. What do you need to do to start welcoming these visitors? Create a check list and start working your way down.
 - d. How will you reach your target market (identified in b)? Determine if you will rely on social media, a website and WOM, or incorporate advertising and earned media. Work up a plan, with a time line and a budget.
 - e. It will probably take some time for people to notice you. Get all of your information, including descriptions of the experience, your "About us" story, directions, prices, promotional language, good quality photos, all gathered and well thought through before you post or promote anything. Anticipate questions and have the answers ready – then hang out your shingle.
- 4) Visitor readiness is a big issue. Owners really need to look around with the eyes of someone who has no experience with agriculture.
 - a. Does the place appear junky, with too much old equipment, broken down fences and other clutter in obvious view and where visitors will be allowed? Are there obstacles that might lead to accidents and result in injuries?
 - b. Are farm animals and pets kept away from where they might harm visitors? One small dog bite could lead to a lawsuit that literally costs the owners to lose the farm.
 - c. Is it obvious or well signed as far as where visitors are and are not allowed?
 - d. It is a mistake to open for visitors before you are ready to make a great and lasting impression. Making up for a bad first impression could stop you in your tracks before you barely get started. Remember, bad news travels faster/further than good.
- 5) If you aren't sure how heavily or even *if* you want to get into the agritourism business, start really small. Volunteer to be a stop on an annual crop tour. Sell some products at a farmers' market to get in the habit of answering questions and dealing with the public. Put a self-help farm stand at the end of your lane, and make a point to be there occasionally to greet people who stop. Invite friends and relatives to bring their friends and relatives for a visit. With these activities, you will learn pretty quickly how well you enjoy interacting with visitors. If you don't like it, don't do it. There is no shame in making that discovering and it can save you a lot of money and headache doing so early in the game. If you love it, you will know it is worth the investment in time and energy to go the next steps.

It's our heritage! Although the terminology and methods of marketing are very different in the 21st Century, there is nothing new about mixing farming and ranching with providing shelter and food to travelers. Like most places in the west, people traveling through Eastern Oregon in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries frequently stopped at the ranch beside the road, seeking a place to feed and rest their horses, get a home-cooked meal and maybe even buy a bed for the night. Ranch and farm wives usually grew large gardens and preserved the bounty. They were used to cooking for the crew so setting another place at the table wasn't a big deal. A stranger riding down the lane could mean a few extra cents to spend in town. "*Home-grown*" hospitality was common and is imbedded in our roots.

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Rugged Country Overview

In Oregon's Rugged Country, if you look at what is available for visitors to experience beyond just a very short season, most suppliers are attractions or retail establishments, including lots of makers of items related to agriculture. There are currently no farm or ranch stays or even just rural B & B inns in the sub-region. (While writing this report, I learned of a farm bed & Breakfast about to open in Milton-Freewater. I am working on getting more information about it.) However, there are lots of agri-heritage events and attractions. The working group for this sub-region decided to focus on completing two farm loops that will draw visitors out into the countryside and to incorporate ag and heritage artisan producers within the cities into the tours. Pendleton has a special reputation for fine quality boots, saddles, woolen items and western crafts, which fit very well into their long-standing western heritage image. Brochure/maps of the two loops are being developed and we have placed an ad promoting them in the East Oregonian's 2017 Visitor Guide. An important step will be how we present these farm loops on the new EOVA and Travel Oregon websites and the links to them from other key sites.

The SAGE Center in Boardman is well worth highlighting and makes a great jumping off attraction to get people interested in exploring the sub-region. Exhibits include a look at large corporate farming and food processing in the area, highlighting how production innovations are made at a very grand scale that can be adapted for use on a much smaller scale. The Center shows the importance of agriculture to the economy and as a major employer for good family-wage jobs.

The new Skinny Bull Museum in Irrigan offers visitors the chance to see a large private collection of restored and well-worn tractors. Wayne and Wanda Schnell, owners of the collection, are delightful to visit with, as Wayne recalls the history of every piece of equipment and the amazing care that has gone into restoration and presentation of the collection. The museum includes a large number of pieces in the outside display area, as well as those housed inside the former supermarket building. Wayne says every tractor is in perfect running condition.

The story of The Rocks AVA and the wineries and orchards in the Milton-Freewater area are perfect fits for agritourism and culinary visitors. Without a doubt, the designation of the Rocks AVA is an important story to help them spread. There are also several very nice event venues on farms or acreages in the country. And, the area's fine reputation for melons and other fruit and vegetables can be further utilized to draw visitors.

There is a very enthusiastic group of people in Milton-Freewater who want to capitalize on their agriculture assets and location in relation the well-know wine making region of Walla Walla. Unfortunately there have been some challenges in that group of interests working together and staying focused on one goal at a time.

One big project they are working on is signage to help visitors find their way to attractions and businesses in and around the conjoined towns. They have acquired a grant and are looking to the EOVA for design elements that fit our branding. They are very fortunate to have Chris Chester, a retired tourism professional from Travel Oregon, living in the community and helping keep efforts coordinated. With a new Chamber of Commerce Director (the second within a year), Chris will continue to be very important to their work and eventual achievements. Another strong leader is Clive Kaiser, the OSU Extension agent, who has lived in the community for over ten years and brings a very useful background in International agritourism.

Working Group Participants:

The Rugged Country Working Group has been very involved and active from the beginning, with a solid core of participants, plus others who attended when available.

Kalie Davis, SAGE Center
Karie Walchli,
Umatilla County Tourism
Berlyn Bales, Echo Ridge Winery
Pat Beard, Travel Pendleton
Carla McLane, Stephanie Loving,
Morrow Co. Planning
Mike Watkins, City of M-F
Pat & Lori Kennedy, Don Carlos
Chris Chester, Milton-Freewater
Bob Christensen, Roads2 Tours
Clive Kaiser, M-F OSU Extension
Boardman Chamber Exec
Milton-Freewater Chamber Exec
Laura Ryun, River Lodge & Grill
Sheryll Bates, Heppner Chamber



Zerba Cellars Tasting Room

Agriculture & Culinary - Oregon's Rugged Country Tourism Project Report

Where do we go from here?

Aspects of the program that need long-term planning:

Work with Milton-Freewater on their sign project.

Clive Kaiser has acquired a grant for a large sign project in and around Milton-Freewater. The EOVA has volunteered to work with him, through our Agritourism Marketing Contractor, to design signage that fits the EOVA agritourism branding. This is something that will need to happen early in 2017 in order to meet his grant timing.

Manage the inventory.

This is a task that needs ongoing attention in order to make sure new businesses are added and the list remains fresh. I can't emphasize enough the importance of keeping in contact with suppliers (even bugging them!) so they know they are part of a bigger picture, with impact on the whole region.

Create new product.

I feel the fairgrounds in every county provide good potential for exploitation, and this is especially true in Umatilla County, when their new facilities are complete in 2017. In addition, the Pendleton Round-up Grounds and Happy Canyon provide excellent facilities for a wide range of events. Can we encourage outfitters or other middle-men to provide horseback riding or on-demand events and activities that give visitors looking for the opportunity to ride or at least get up close and personal with horses? I think we assume visitors are looking for the chance to trail ride or ride on ranch, but in the absence of those opportunities, just being able to say they can ride every Saturday at the rodeo arena, from 1 to 4 p.m., June through August, would be a huge boon to our agritourism product and tourism in general. After all, lots of people have never even sat on a horse so the arenas might feel more comforting and doable to those who are a little leery of the big animals. An outfitter could provide boots and hats and give the greenhorn a fun experience in an arena, and liability insurance would probably already be covered.

Incorporate agriculture elements into your general tourism marketing.

I urge the destination marketing and other tourism professionals to find ways to highlight agritourism attractions, services and experiences in their publications and advertising and social media outreach. To fully capitalize on the work we are doing and the public's interest in the genre, you need to continue to push those interesting stories and feature the topic whenever possible. It is clear, given the strength of every new, as well as vintage, agri-heritage event, that Pendleton's Western branding continues to be one of the strongest community brands in the state and its influence carries throughout the sub-region. This horse isn't ready to be put in the barn yet and appears to have many more years of hard riding!

Other (This is a big one!)

Milton-Freewater has an outstanding and immediate opportunity to pull together its many factions, decide how it wants to present itself to visitors and get serious about capturing the many people who travel through. I hope all of those amazing volunteers, whose work can be seen throughout the city, will undergo some collective visioning to find the common ground, focus the energy and present a unified image. It is true that some communities get bogged down in the visioning process, spend lots of money and then get nowhere as a result. I believe the success of the exercise is wrapped up in who you hire to conduct it. You should walk away from the sessions excited, unified and ready to tackle the actions together, not feeling like time and money have been wasted. Don't fall for nicely presented rhetoric alone - it's not about the process, but rather the results! Check references and find someone with solid successes and great referrals.

Farm Loops

In 2016, we chose to focus on creating the two farm loops in order to get visitors out and about in the counties and in Pendleton. The loops offer a great opportunity for you to focus your marketing, but they carry some responsibility for the working group.

You will need to manage them to get the most you can out of the two farm loops. Promote them through any tourism and lifestyle publications, websites and social media you can. Use the story pitch to get attention from publishers and editors, offer guided media tours on the loops and make sure participants are well informed about all the highlights of the loops, are ready and serving visitors well, and inform you if they make any changes to their participation. Once the brochure is printed, we won't be able to make changes to what is in writing, so participants should be made aware they may continue to receive visitors, even if they have changed what they offer. However, we will be able to update online versions and through social media, if needed.

Agriculture & Culinary - Oregon's Rugged Country Tourism Project Report

ORC Marketing Plan

The group reviewed key pages of the EOVA Agritourism Marketing Plan, and customized them for the sub-region.

Audiences (pages 29-34): The seasonality of tourism in the area was pointed out: shoulder season visitors tend to be young seniors

- Summer visitors are more often families;
- Millennials are seen year-round and targeted by Pendleton, in particular.
- International visits occur from April to Oct.
- Geographic origin is PDX/Metro, Tri-Cities, Walla Walla, Boise and Canada.
- FIT are the biggest focus for ORC.
- This region has a strong connection to agriculture-related heritage. Cross-promote with the other segments of EOVA focus; cycling, arts/culture, and packaged travel, as well as nature-based recreation.
- Emphasize experiences in ORC, with specific ideas.
- Pendleton also has great opportunities for people to buy handmade items as souvenirs of their visit.
- Associate activities with donations to non-profit projects that fit people's interests and the region. (See Travel Oregon Forever Fund for ideas)
- Tie cultural heritage attractions into our AgriT marketing: pod casts, apps with narrated auto tours, special websites (see Pendleton Bronze Trail site), and "Near Story" by Giovanni Salimena, www.nearstoryapp.com, "Listeners hear content that is relevant to their location and catered to their personal interests."

Pages 34 & 35 Comments: The diversity of the landscape leads to a wide variety of experiences within the region.

- There are great examples of both traditional and sustainable agriculture, from very small to very large (Three Mile Canyon).
- Eastern Oregon, especially ORC has a strong and lasting Old West identity that can't be replicated in other parts of Oregon. "Oregon starts in Eastern Oregon."
- Make sure everyone – from visitor interfacing employees to DMOs to businesses – is trained in hospitality, attractions and the branding of the sub-region.
- Use cute animals and children to attract attention.

2017 Planning – what is most important for this group in 2017?

The sub-region has product ready. Start promoting existing agritourism suppliers immediately – others will follow when they see the success of the pioneers. Pat – What we need most to meet the desires of our visitors is horseback riding suppliers. Janet – Are there ways we can encourage and assist with less obvious ways of delivering this? County fairgrounds, rodeo grounds, riding arenas, etc. – they don't necessarily need to be trail rides.

Oregon's Rugged Country Topical Successes:

- Morrow County Planning Department incorporated language about agritourism into their planning code
- Roads2 Tours completed move to Pendleton and began offering tours of wineries and farms
- Two Farm Loops are nearing completion, having gathered information on participants, mapped routes and created titles and narratives; maps are soon to be designed by EOVA
- Milton-Freewater acquired a grant for a large way-finding project - EOVA to assist with design through agritourism marketing contract holder
- Working group toured SAGE Center, Petit Noir Chocolates, Blue Mountain Cider and Watermill Winery, Umapine Creamery, Echo Ridge Tasting Room, Sno Road Winery and Tasting Room, Oregon Wheat Growers Distillery, Skinny Bull Ag Museum, K & K Blueberries, Bellinger's
- Held successful Agritourism Workshop
- Meetings held in Boardman, Heppner, Echo, Pendleton, Hermiston, Milton-Freewater, and Irrigan
- ORC enjoys a very healthy and growing array of successful agriculture and Western Heritage-related events that draw visitors
- There are some wonderful Western or farm event venues

A Sampling of Oregon's Rugged Country Agritourism Operators

OREGON WHEAT GROWERS OPEN DISTILLERY

There's yet another great reason to visit Pendleton for a taste of Oregon's Old West! Oregon Wheat Growers Distillery has opened their tasting room at the distillery in the heart of Pendleton's historic downtown. After 44 years of farming, as the fourth generation on a Pendleton-area wheat farm, Cliff and Judy Bracher began envisioning opening a distillery about 6 years ago when they acquired a pear orchard in Hood River. With their sons now running the farm, they partnered with longtime regional agriculture advocates Rodney and Kelly Bullington and bought a former car dealership a year ago. The two couples immediately began transforming it into a distillery. Dedicated to using all locally sourced products, they created a batch of vodka just in time for the 2016 Pendleton Roundup and sold over 200 bottles during that world-famous event. They are thrilled to offer tastes of their vodka and gin in the tasting room, decorated with vintage photos and furnished with reclaimed urban wood tables and counters, and offer tours of the facility. Learn the story of how these two couples brought their unique skills and love for the region's heritage into the partnership and taste the craftsmanship in every bottle.

Contact: Kelly Bullington, Kelly@oregongrain.com, www.oregongrain.com

CREAM OF THE CROP

Food tastes better when consumed close to the source. At Umapine Creamery (www.umapinecreamery.com), ten miles west of Milton-Freewater, you can taste cheese made in an immaculate kitchen just steps from the dairy that provides the cream. You can visit Jersey-cross calves, just days old, watch while "Bossie" is milked, and get to know Brent and Yvonne Carroll, the proprietors. The Umapine Creamery was started to introduce artisan cheeses to northeastern Oregon. Milk is used from pastured Holstein, Jersey and Shorthorn cows to compliment the fabulous array of wines, beers and fruits available in the region. Visitors take home some delicious cheese and cherished memories.

Contact: Brent & Yvonne Carroll, 541.861.2009 or umapinecreamery@gmail.com

WINE ON THE ROCKS.

The Walla Walla Valley wine industry has matured and earned a wonderful reputation. There are 174 wineries in the area and 29 tasting rooms in downtown Walla Walla, Washington. Milton-Freewater sits on the state line between Oregon and Washington and is very much a part of the Walla Walla Valley wine making phenomenon. Recently, Milton-Freewater was formally recognized with its own unique American Viticultural Area designation. The Rocks District AVA is recognized as a distinct wine grape growing region based on its cobblestone-filled soils. Located at the western base of the Blue Mountains in Eastern Oregon, the area surrounding the small town of Milton-Freewater is home to lush vineyards that supply the grapes that have made Walla Walla Valley wines famous for decades. In fact, the Walla Walla AVA recognizes that 83% of all grapes in their award-winning wines are actually grown on the Oregon side in, and around, the area known as the Rocks District.

Contact: Karie Walchli, 541.561.6207 or kariewalchli@gmail.com

WALCHLI FARMS

This multi-generation family operation produces some of the amazing watermelon for which the Hermiston area is famous. Skip Walchli started growing melons in high school, and founded Walchli Farms near Hermiston in 1957 with a small bank loan and seven acres of land. The farm now totals more than 2,500 acres and grows an assortment of produce, including watermelons, cantaloupe, potatoes, corn, wheat, hay, and asparagus. Walchli Farms is the largest Watermelon grower in the Pacific Northwest. The farm has its own watermelon packing and distribution shed, and trucking outfit. It highly supports and implements sustainable farming practices and is a part of the global gap (food safety) program. Walchli Farms only sells produce directly to the public and peddlers out of their blue shed on Loop road in Hermiston and to grocers through their brokers.

Contact: Karie Walchli, 541.561.6207 or kariewalchli@gmail.com

Agriculture & Culinary - Northeast Oregon Tourism Project Report

Northeast Oregon Overview

In Northeast Oregon, there are several rural B & B inns, with some farm animals but no working farms or ranches where you can stay – yet. Airbnb and VRBO are both present and available in a variety of styles in Wallowa and Baker Counties, as well, but few of the proprietors participated in the agritourism project. Late in the fall, I found out about a new B & B that offers facilities for people with their own horses. The Willow Creek Horse B & B turned out to be a great find and, after meeting with her, I am happily helping Lyndall find new ways to promote her business. There is a similar B & B in Wallowa County.

While the season is short, there are a number of self-serve farm stands (a real novelty to people from urban areas), and a few ranches, farms and goat dairies, and some stands, such as Platz Family Farm, that are attended at all times they are open. Some great attractions such as Sunrise Iron, welcome visitors only by appointment or during an annual event.

Across Eastern Oregon, there are many events (in fact, most events) that rely heavily on the agriculture heritage as a theme, such as Hells Canyon Mule Days, Bulls On Main Street, several ranch rodeos and the Haines 4th of July parade. While these events draw mostly area residents, they, along with county fairs, are a fantastic way for visitors to really get a sense of how our culture is family-oriented and farming and ranching are part of our daily lives.

Aside from coming together for many years to enhance and promote the Hells Canyon Scenic Byway, Northeast Oregon's three counties rarely work together and often appear competitive. The geology that is the region's strongest asset makes it more challenging to get people together, both literally and figuratively. When attendance at joint meetings slacked, I began arranging meetings in each county and working more directly on a county-by-county basis, which is how I will continue in 2017 as we complete and promote the farm loops. Private consultations are also a part of the plan as we continue this work into 2018.

What is needed to take the completed farm loop from little known activities that visitors can enjoy if they happen to hear about it to an attraction that will attract visitors to Eastern Oregon and extend their stays in the region beyond what they would have otherwise planned? Following is a ranked list of five strategies:

1. **ADVERTISING/MARKETING** Funds are needed to buy advertising, print posters and event fliers; signs marking the route and replace agristop signs each year.
2. **STAFF** Staffing is needed for each farm loop, to coordinate promotional activities, foster ongoing communication with and between loop suppliers and organize events. For instance, supplier participants in the Cove-Union Farm Loop are excited about the idea of one or two days during the season for which all participating agristops are open and have some kind of special products or activities that can be promoted. This will take a person to lead the organization of the event days and be in charge of publicizing and ensuring all participants follow through with their commitments.
3. **COMMITTED SUPPLIERS** The loops need to be organized to include only agristops that are dedicated and committed to hosting visitors.
4. **TRAINING FOR PROPRIETORS** Visitor readiness and hospitality training for all agriculture businesses that are welcoming visitors, whether on a very limited basis or regularly throughout the season. Training should include taking the tour itself to experience it as a visitor will.
5. **COMMUNITY SUPPORT** Local tourism professionals and DMO organizations need to adopt the farm loops as something worthy of promoting and supporting, and invest in their success.

Working Group Participants:

Sara Miller, NEOEDD
Alice Trindle, EOVA
Timothy Bishop, BC Tourism
Vicki Searles, WC Chamber
Barbara Sidway,
Geiser Grand Hotel
Maurizio Valerio, formerly RDI
now Ford Family Foundation,
Palmer & Dana Dobbs,
Apple Springs Farm
Catherine Parks, Nella's
Shelly Curtis, BC Chamber
Emily Palmer,
Union County Chamber
Emily Klavins,
Barking Mad Farm B & B

Numerous other people attended meetings in the various locations.



Sunflower Field & Mt. Emily

Agriculture & Culinary - Northeast Oregon Tourism Project Report

Where do we go from here?

Aspects of the program that need long-term planning:

Promote and improve the Cove-Union Farm Loop.

Farm loops take some management to ensure participating stops are following what is being promoted, as far as days and hours of operation and what visitors can expect to find there. Also, signs need to be put out and distribution of the new brochures. Every stop needs to have a good supply and they need to be made available at the usual tourism supplier distribution points, such as motels and attractions. I don't know how much of this activity will be undertaken by the chamber of commerce or by the individual participants and original organizers.

There is a great deal of interest in creating a website just for the farm loop - and for others in Eastern Oregon. I would love to see this happen, but we will have to figure out how that is part of the EOVA site remake.

As for the farm loops/trails in Baker County and Wallowa Counties, there is still a lot of work to do and these will have to take a good part of my attention for NEO this year.

Manage the inventory.

This is a task that needs ongoing attention in order to make sure new businesses are added and the list remains fresh. I can't emphasize enough the importance of keeping in contact with suppliers (even bugging them!) so they know they are part of a bigger picture, with impact on the whole region. It might be a good idea to hold some kind of annual event for the suppliers, when they can get together, share ideas and experiences and find ways to partner and promote. Whether it takes the form of a workshop, meeting or socializing event, I have not thought through at all - it's just an idea.

Support existing and new agritourism enterprises.

I had several site visits or meetings with individual suppliers in 2016 and feel this is an important activity. In some cases, it lead to immediate opportunities to promote what they are doing or assist them with planning. In other cases, I'm not sure if they found it beneficial. The benefit may have been determined upon how far in to the endeavour they were at the time. I am hoping they were able to garner some ideas and connections, if nothing else. The offer for free consultation with proprietors should remain and important element of the 2017 project.

Create new product.

Identified gaps in what we can offer in Northeast Oregon include Farm/Ranch Stays, Farm to Table Events and services like tour guides for small groups and individuals and gap transportation providers. There is a need for better signage and interpretation of agritourism highlights throughout the sub-region. There are limited opportunities for horseback riding, but it is available at Cornucopia Lodge near Halfway and at Wallowa Lake.

Incorporate agriculture elements into your general tourism marketing.

As in ORC, I believe there are many ways DMOs, events, attractions and businesses can highlight culinary and agritourism in their marketing activities. When designing advertisements, story pitches, brochures on social media posts, they are encouraged to seasonally incorporate agritourism subjects on rotation with their other chief promotional subjects. Feature photos of activities taking place at farms, ranches, farmers' markets, gardens and orchards on a regular basis. Agritourism will become a major regional draw when it is treated as such by the Eastern Oregon tourism industry.

Farm Loops

As in ORC, we chose to focus on creating farm loops in order to get visitors out and about in the three counties.

The loops offer a great opportunity for suppliers to focus their marketing and begin thinking of themselves as part of a bigger picture.

The loops do carry some responsibility for the working group. They need to be managed to get the most benefit for the individuals and the region.

DMOs should promote them through any tourism and lifestyle publications, websites and social media outlets. Use the story pitch to get attention from publishers and editors, offer guided media tours on the loops and make sure participants are well informed about all the highlights of the loops, are ready and serving visitors well, and inform you if they make any changes to their participation.

Participants should be made aware once in print it will be a while before we can make changes, so they need to be committed to serving visitors. Updates will be made online when possible.



Nella Mae's Farm, Cove

NEO Marketing Plan Customization

The groups reviewed key pages of the EOVA Agritourism Marketing Plan, and customized them for the sub-region.

Audiences (pages 29-34): While in general agreement with the visitor profiles discussed in the marketing plan, participants in working group meetings also raised the following points:

- Union County participants noted the importance of local residents as customers and as promoters of agritourism suppliers and farm loops, noting that visiting friends and relatives (known as VFR) is still the top incentive when choosing a travel destination
- Wallowa County named fly-in visitors as a group worth targeting
- Baker County identified technical and educational tours as worth pursuing; people are interested in learning how to grow their own and in processing; tours of “permaculture,” closed loop farming

Pages 34 & 35 Comments: Great diversity in the landscape leads to a wide variety of experiences within the region. The region is already known for its outstanding outdoor recreation. Agritourism suppliers should look for cross-marketing partnerships that will entice recreation seekers to their goods and services.

- Make sure everyone – from visitor interfacing employees to DMOs to businesses – is trained in hospitality, attractions and the branding of the sub-region.
- Use cute animals and children to attract attention.

The Baker County group emphasized the connection between cycling and agritourism, noting that cyclists are especially interested in fresh, healthy food and they enjoy places to take breaks and refresh their energy as they cycle long distances. Additional thoughts:

- More people are entering the byway from Cambridge, Idaho. We need to connect with them and provide more opportunities in the Hells Canyon area.
- Cyclists on the TransAmerica Route are grazers and really appreciate farm-direct food as they travel.
- The Main Place will have 11 hostel rooms upstairs next season. Cornucopia Lodge has mountain bikes for guests to borrow and the restaurant now serves drop-in diners, as well.

2017 Planning – what is most important for this group in 2017?

- This sub-region is particularly interested in mobile-friendly versions of the farm loop maps and mobile apps that promote the agristops.
- They also would appreciate an event flier template that each supplier could use to promote their own and farm loop-wide events.
- The Cove-Union Farm Loop people are considering coordinating one or two event days, where every loop participant promises to be open and have some kind of featured activity and/or products.

Northeast Oregon Topical Successes:

- Held successful Agritourism Workshop
- Meetings held in La Grande, Baker City, Enterprise, Elgin and Lostine
- Working group tours of M. Crow & Company, Sunrise Iron, 6 Ranch, Baker Technical Institute and Gold Rush Malting
- On-site consultations or visits: June Davis, Jeremy McCullough, Apple Springs Farm, Catherine Parks, Pigtail Pork, Platz Family Farm
- Off-site consultations: Northwest Skillet and Homestead Springs Farm, Willow Creek Horse B & B, Burnt River Ranch
- Completion of the Cove-Union Farm Loop, including creating the brochure/map and signs, and distributing them to all participants
- Arranged for and delivered 30 crop signs in the Grande Ronde Valley
- Partnered with Eagle Cap Excursion Train to showcase locally produced food and beverages on three rides
- Made arrangements for touring media to include agritourism visits or products
- Began the process of creating farm loops/trails in Wallowa and Baker Counties

A Sampling of Northeast Oregon Agritourism Operators

FROM FORGE AND FARM TO TABLE

Northwest Skillet Company offers an unmatched story about a wonderful intersection of agriculture, art and heritage. On a small farm at the edge of the broad and fertile Grande Ronde Valley, Peter Clark uses his passion and the art of blacksmithing to create hand-forged carbon steel skillets and beautiful forged kitchen accessories. Peter brings over 30 years of experience in fine craft to his blacksmithing work. One of a kind skillet handles are forged through fire, hammer and anvil to be pleasing to the eye and the hand. Each carbon steel skillet pan is made by hand on a metal spinning lathe using techniques invented by the ancient Egyptians. Peter works each piece individually with care and commitment to artistry and function.

As a life-long maker Peter Clark came to smithing by desire and a bit of chance. It was only 10 years later that he realized it is also in his blood. Imagine the deep connection Peter experienced when he realized his ancestry traces back to John Shields, blacksmith for Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery. Peter proudly continues the tradition of blacksmithing; each piece is lovingly designed and built to be a family heirloom.

At Homestead Springs Farm, Peter Clark and Sue Miller believe in farming in cooperation with nature, fresh food, and art in every room of the house including the kitchen! They raise grass-fed lamb, pastured pork and free-range poultry along with bountiful vegetable gardens. They partner with Turkish Boz Shepherd livestock guardian dogs for their excellent disposition, courage and the bond they form with their charges.

Contact: Sue Miller, 541.952.4854 or nwskillet@gmail.com; www.nwskillet.com

GEISER GRAND LAUNCHES RANCH EXPERIENCES

Built in 1889 and restored in the 1990s, the beautiful Geiser Grand Hotel (www.geisergrand.com) is known for its enchanting history, elegance and old-world charm. Visitors to the Baker City landmark also know the extent to which the owner and proprietor, Barbara Sidway, will go to ensure her guests have an enjoyable stay. When it became clear many had an interest in what it is like to live on a ranch in Eastern Oregon, she created the Geiser Grand Ranch Experiences. She and her staff will contact local ranchers who are interested in sharing their stories and giving a taste of ranch living, make all the necessary schedule, financial and activity arrangements and direct guests to and from the hosting ranches. This provides an up-close and personal peek into the economically and culturally important ranching industry.

Contact: Barbara Sidway, 541.523.1889 or barbara@geisergrand.com www.geisergrand.com

RANCHERS TRUST THEIR CUSTOMERS

"Five generations of our family have taken care of the land, river and animals that have sustained them," says Liza Jane Nash. "Our values will become a legacy providing future generations with the story of who we were. For our family, who live and work here, it is the best place we know. We cherish this ranch, and that attitude is reflected in the quality of our product: the health of the land itself." Step into the charming farm stand, choose fresh eggs, herbs or vegetables, or a package of beef from the fridge, and leave your money in the box. Liza Jane knows you will be honest because that is how the stand has functioned for several years. She and her son, James, and daughter, Adele, run 6 Ranch (www.6ranch.com), raising grass-fed beef and offering guided flyfishing on the Wallowa River, which courses through miles of the ranch. They will happily show you the recently completed river restoration project, along the way to the favorite fishing holes.

**Contact: James Nash, 541.398.0446 or 6ranch@gmail.com
Liza Jane's Farm Stand & 6 Ranch**

GRANDE RONDE GOAT DAIRY

Stephanie Rovey and her all-woman staff at Grande Ronde Goat Dairy milk 250 Nubian goats to produce commercial Grade A milk, shipped to Northern California to make artisan organic cheeses. Part of the Rovey's extensive family farm, the goat dairy is expanding after just two years in business. A mother of small children, Stephanie says her employees are welcome to bring their children to the farm while working, creating a fun, family atmosphere. Call ahead to schedule a dairy tour.

Contact: Stephanie Rovey, 541.805.9622 or srovey@netscape.net

Below are comments from a project leader and a participant:

"The Agritourism Working Group for Oregon's Rugged Country was very successful in 2016. During the early stages of this project, the goal was to network with as many people as possible who shared the same vision and goals. As a collective group we reached out to anyone who might be interested and took the time to visit many of our local agritourism businesses. The shared knowledge of what we offer and who we are trying to reach was key in developing a marketing strategy for our region.

In order to successfully share our story, Janet organized many events throughout the year that included "A Taste of Oregon's Old West" to feature local food during the Governor's Conference on Tourism. In addition multiple gift bags featuring local food products were provided to showcase our region to international tour operators. Janet also collaborated with Travel Oregon on a very educational workshop to help new businesses become successful.

As the marketing team begins to launch the Eastern Oregon Agritourism campaign, each business will see a positive impact through the creation of farm loop tours and a schedule of events. In 2017 we will begin to see more tangible materials that we can use to promote our region. The marketing materials will also increase awareness and opportunity for new businesses to join the working group." ***Kalie Davis, ORC Working Group Chair***

"Hi Janet,

Thank you for sending the Observer reporter our way! We were pleased with how the article came out. We had a good visit with Jess Thomson (visiting travel writer) and her family too. Like I've said before it is great to have you in our corner! Thanks for all you do and Happy New Year!" ***Sue Miller, Northwest Skillet Company & Homestead Springs Farm***