

For Immediate Release – September 21, 2018

Local and provincial governments rally behind farmers and rural businesses to drive Agri-tourism growth

Is there anything better than berries straight from the branch, fresh vegetables in a homemade recipe, pony rides for the kids, or buying your meat from a neighbour? Agri-tourism is an emerging economic opportunity in Alberta, and local producers in the Community Futures Wild Rose region east of Calgary are leading the way.

To meet the growing consumers demand to learn where their food comes from and wish to source locally produced food and connect with producers. Community Futures Wild Rose is working to grow the agri-tourism sector throughout the Wild Rose Region. The project aims to grow the existing agricultural, tourism, and culinary agri-tourism assets throughout the region beyond Alberta Open Farm Days. Many producers and operators in the region participate in the weekend long event, demonstrating the region's potential to grow in this sector.

The project received a Tourism Growth Innovation Fund (TGIF) grant from the Government of Alberta. TGIF is a project-based grant program designed to support economic growth and improve quality of life in Alberta communities to diversify tourism experiences and destinations, focusing on innovation and shoulder season opportunities across the province.

“Our government is proud to help communities across the province continue to build and enhance tourism experiences that travellers want, like culinary and agri-tourism. The Wild Rose region has many gems, and providing more opportunities for visitors to stay in the region and create memorable experiences will help grow our tourism industry and the local economy.” said Ricardo Miranda, Minister of Culture and Tourism.

This project is also a partnership with financial contributions from Community Futures Wild Rose, Wheatland County, Kneehill County and Rocky View County. Also essential to securing project resources were multiple letters of support from Whispering Cedars Ranch, Strathmore Chamber of Commerce, Wheatland County, Canadian Badlands and Poplar Bluff Organics.

“Agriculture is the mainstay of Wheatland County and we look forward to supporting and growing tourism opportunities within the agriculture sector,” said Alan Parkin, Chief Administrative Officer, Wheatland County.

To be completed in July 2019, the initiative involves research and asset collection, stakeholder engagement, and development of an opportunity profile, strategic action plan and regional strategy to accomplish the objective to grow the agri-tourism sector and foster year-round opportunities.

“Rural and small urban communities across the Wild Rose region and beyond have an exciting opportunity to develop and expand businesses in the emerging agri-tourism sector. From local farmers markets to farm gates and outdoor activities, communities can come together to combine amazing experiences that together draw crowds from both the city, and international tourism markets,” said Wendy Gerbrandt, Community Futures Wild Rose.

Community Futures Wild Rose will lead the initiative and contract Clearthink™ Group in association with Factor 5 Group to achieve the project's objectives. The consultants are qualified, enthusiastic and prepared to deliver results. Their expertise in areas of agriculture, tourism, and community economic development will be valuable assets throughout each phase of the project.

“This initiative will make a difference for producers, processors, associations/societies and others interested in agri-tourism opportunities. This project will undertake in-depth research specific to tourism in the agriculture sector, providing farm operators and communities with relevant information and knowledge to better assess the potential of Tourism for their operations,” said Keleigh Cormier, Clearthink™ Group.

“It is an exciting opportunity to rally farmers, businesses and community leaders in developing a shared strategy to grow the agri-tourism sector in the region. Local participation is key to creating a thriving industry that drives prosperity in rural communities” said Eric Burton, Factor 5 Group.

For more information, contact Wendy Gerbrandt at Community Futures Wild Rose wendy@cfwildrose.ca or (403) 934-8888.

Additional Information

Community Futures Wild Rose

Community Futures Wild Rose is a federally funded community-owned, not-for-profit organization dedicated to stimulating job creation, business enhancement and economic growth through individual, business and community development. Our services include: business development loans, business counselling and training and community economic development with focus on entrepreneurs with disabilities, women and youth. Community Futures Wild Rose is proudly supported by Western Economic Diversification Canada.

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Clearthink™ Group

A proud Alberta-based professional management consultancy with a proven track record of trusted expertise and professional advice. Co-founded by Keleigh & Pierre Cormier, the firm has over 25 years' experience advising entrepreneurs, all levels of government and non-profits in finding solutions for opportunity development and business strategy. We designed the Open Farm Days Coaching program and have worked with over 30 farms / ranches interested in agri-tourism for the past 3 years.

<http://clearthinkinc.com/>



Factor 5 Group

Factor 5 Group is an award winning social enterprise designed to co-create sustainable communities through economic development expertise and services. Co-founders Eric and Amanda Burton are Community Economic Developers with experience working with provinces, municipalities, post secondaries, community organizations and indigenous communities to achieve excellence through strategy, innovative project design, research, marketing and deep community engagement.

Alberta Open Farm Days

Open Farms Days is a collaborative, province-wide, two-day event that gives Albertans an opportunity to experience the farm and understand where their food comes from. It is a backstage pass to meet the farmer, experience Ag-tourism in Alberta and taste local foods direct from the producer.

In Alberta, Open Farm Days is held on the third weekend of August. The goal of the program is to showcase Alberta's agriculture and tourism industry in a fun, engaging and meaningful manner to participants of all ages.

Alberta Open Farm Days is available to farms, ranches, agricultural organizations and community groups interested in becoming a farm host or culinary host. Farmers and ranchers are encouraged to participate who would like to share their story with consumers by opening their gates for farm tours and experiences to help visitors learn more about agriculture in Alberta.

Culinary event hosts can provide experiences ranging from pancake breakfasts, a chili cook-off, and an outdoor barbeque, to a formal five-course long-table farm-to-fork feast showcasing Alberta's local agriculture products.

If you would like to organize a local food culinary event for August 20 or open your gates on August 21st and become an Open Farm Days host please visit <http://albertafarmdays.com/> call Brenda Hanson at 780-638-4302 or openfarmdays@gov.ab.ca. You can also contact Community Futures Wild Rose at 403-934-8888 for more information.

This project is made possible thanks to contributions by the Government of Alberta, Community Futures Wild Rose, Kneehill County, Wheatland County and Rocky View County.