

Development of Recreational Agriculture

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Recreational agriculture, is a secondary agricultural business which is derived from agriculture itself. The simple concept is to combine agriculture, lifestyle, and ecology as a whole. The key elements are: 1) agriculture itself, such as: operational activities, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery production; 2) surrounding environment which includes pastoral landscape, ecology, environmental resources; and 3) rural culture and rural lifestyle. The operational management of recreational agriculture has been focused on identifying the cultural specialties of a specific location, or a crop, or agro-processing; developing specific customer focused services and driving market campaigns to attract citizens to experience and enjoy such a unique agricultural based recreational activities.

Recreational agriculture generates many positive impacts which are significant. It promotes business opportunities in following areas:

1. Tourism
 - Alliance with travel-related business units
 - Organization of theme-based trips (walking tour, floriculture appreciation tour, health tour etc.) and location specific trips (coastal travel in Hualien and Taitung of Taiwan)
2. International Integration
 - Fairs and conferences organized domestically, and participated internationally
3. Special Promotions
 - Guided the refinement of rural souvenirs and gifts that illustrate the special features of local rural culture that also have market value
 - Organized specialty cooking groups
4. Associated Local Development
 - Local projects to improve surrounding (sanitary facilities, walking paths, hotels etc.)
 - Information system (computer based, paper based)
 - Service groups to address customer needs

Few obvious improvements of recreational agriculture are:

- Increase in income for the farming community

- Development of farming community
- Increase in employment
- Added products in the future

The hard value of recreational agriculture can be easily measured based on the number of people who went to a specific location, trips organized, tickets sold, souvenirs purchased, the rolls of toilet paper used at a remote location, gasoline consumed for tour buses, the increased income of farmers and the total dollar amount generated. But, the soft values which are difficult to measure, and yet it is as critical, because it has a deeper meaning to our survival as a nation, and as global citizens on this planet are in the form of the following questions:

- What is agriculture about, why is it important?
- What resources are required to support agriculture?
- Why eco-system needs to be maintained?
- Why we need to conserve energy, what should we do to conserve energy?
- Why we should not waste our food?
- Why certain agricultural policies are required?

The development of recreational agriculture in Taiwan is still at the early stage and there are still more work to do. Taiwan is on the right track to leveraging recreational agriculture to generate income, and to use it as an effective tool for learning in order to build a positive future.

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