

## Is tourism the road to economic vibrancy?

Tourism can be a powerful catalyst for short-term economic development in small rural communities, often serving as a lifeline for areas facing economic challenges. By leveraging their natural, cultural, and historical assets, rural communities can create a sustainable source of income and employment, leading to broader economic benefits. Here are some ways small communities can leverage tourism.

Tourism can quickly create jobs across various sectors, from hospitality and food services to transportation and retail. These jobs often require minimal training, allowing residents to enter the workforce rapidly. For example, in rural Scotland, tourism supports 217,000 jobs, accounting for 8% of the country's total employment. This immediate boost in employment opportunities can reduce unemployment rates and increase household incomes in rural areas.

Many rural communities rely heavily on traditional industries such as agriculture or mining, which can be volatile and subject to economic downturns. Tourism offers a way to diversify the local economy, providing a more stable economic base.

For instance, the small town of Forks, Washington, successfully transitioned from a declining timber industry to a thriving tourism destination after being featured in the popular "Twilight" book series, seeing a 600% increase in tourism-related revenue between 2008 and 2010.

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*Photo courtesy of LaLaBicheRegion.com*

## Connecting Tourism and Agriculture Through Agritourism

As the fair season concludes and fall approaches, agritourism businesses are preparing for a busy season. This is an ideal time for destinations to leverage agritourism to boost both tourism and local agriculture. Here's how different regions are successfully integrating agritourism to drive tourism and support their agricultural sectors.

### Lac La Biche's Innovative Approach

In Lac La Biche, Alberta, a recent initiative highlights the potential of agritourism to invigorate local economies. The region is hosting a workshop series aimed at developing agritourism products. These workshops are designed to educate farmers and tourism operators on how to create engaging experiences that showcase local agricultural products. The series will cover everything from crafting farm-to-table experiences to creating interactive farm tours, providing a comprehensive toolkit for businesses looking to capitalize on the growing

interest in agritourism.

### Southwestern Ontario's Investment in Agritourism

Southwestern Ontario is another example of a region embracing agritourism. Recently, local communities received funding to enhance their tourism experiences. This investment aims to develop agritourism attractions, such as farm tours, harvest festivals, and culinary events featuring local produce. By supporting these initiatives, the region is not only promoting tourism but also encouraging the consumption of locally grown products, thereby creating a sustainable cycle of growth for both tourism and agriculture.

### Klamath County's Support for Farmers

In Klamath County, Oregon, a new grant program is helping farmers tackle challenges while enhancing agritourism opportunities

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## Tourism as a Pathway to Economic Vibrancy

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Tourism encourages the preservation and celebration of local cultural heritage, which can become a valuable economic asset. Rural communities can capitalize on their unique traditions, crafts, and historical sites to attract visitors. The village of Giethoorn in the Netherlands, known as the "Venice of the North," has successfully leveraged its picturesque canals and traditional thatched-roof houses to attract over 800,000 visitors annually, significantly boosting its local economy.

The growth of tourism often leads to improvements in local infrastructure, benefiting both visitors and residents. This can include better roads, enhanced public transportation, improved telecommunications, and upgraded water and sanitation systems. For example, many rural communities see significant infrastructure improvements to support the influx of tourists, including the expansion of new roads, services, and hotels.

Tourism spending has a multiplier effect on the economy, benefiting a wide range of businesses beyond those directly involved in the tourism sector. This ripple effect stimulates growth across various sectors, from agriculture to construction. A thriving tourism industry can attract external investment to rural areas, further driving economic development. Investors may see opportunities in developing hotels, restaurants, or recreational facilities. For instance, the rural town of Marfa, Texas, has seen significant investment in boutique hotels, art galleries, and restaurants following its emergence as a trendy cultural destination, with tourism now contributing over \$25 million annually to the local economy

While seasonality can be a challenge, it

can also provide valuable supplemental income for rural residents. Many agricultural communities can benefit from tourism during off-seasons, providing year-round economic stability.

The wine regions of Napa and Sonoma Counties in California have successfully combined agriculture and tourism, with wine tourism contributing \$9.4 billion annually to the local economy.

Tourism often provides opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurship with relatively low barriers to entry. Residents can start small businesses such as bed and breakfasts, tour guide services, or artisanal craft shops with minimal initial investment. This encourages local entrepreneurship and keeps tourism revenues within the community.

The tourism industry provides opportunities for skills development and capacity building within rural communities. As locals engage in tourism-related activities, they gain valuable skills in customer service, business management, and marketing, which can be applied to other sectors of the economy.

Tourism can serve as a powerful tool for short-term economic development in rural areas. By creating jobs, diversifying local economies, preserving cultural heritage, and stimulating infrastructure development, tourism can provide immediate economic benefits while laying the groundwork for long-term growth. These examples demonstrate the transformative potential of tourism in rural communities across the globe. With proper planning and management, tourism can indeed be the most important short-term assistance for robust economic development in small rural communities.

*-John Newby, Washington County  
Enterprise-Leader*

## Building Stronger Communities with Agritourism

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With \$100,000 allocated to address insect infestations, the grant also supports projects that integrate agritourism, such as farm experiences and educational tours. By addressing agricultural issues and simultaneously promoting agritourism, Klamath County is ensuring that its agricultural sector remains robust and attractive to tourists.

### Wyoming's UWS Worth Initiative

Wyoming's UWS Worth Initiative is a noteworthy example of bridging the gap between agriculture and tourism. The initiative focuses on creating agritourism experiences that highlight Wyoming's agricultural heritage. By promoting farm stays, local food festivals, and educational workshops, the program aims to connect visitors with Wyoming's farming traditions. This integration not only enriches the visitor experience but also provides farmers with new revenue streams and opportunities for engagement.

As fall approaches, agritourism offers a valuable opportunity to strengthen the connection between tourism and agriculture. By investing in agritourism, regions can attract visitors and support local farmers, creating a positive impact on both sectors.

*- lakelandtoday.ca,  
klamathsports.net, wyrl.net  
stratfordtoday.ca*