



Tapping tourism potential



By LON TONNESON

RUSSELL Stubbles is a South Dakota State University professor of parks management and a private agritourism consultant. He has conducted seminars in the United States and Europe on developing profitable agritourism ventures. He replied to the following questions via e-mail.

You say that a farm family could make an extra \$5,000 to \$10,000 on agritourism with very little investment. How is that possible?

It depends on the site and situation. For example, if one has an extra bedroom in the farmhouse, a large green pasture where there is little nighttime man-made light, and you invest in using the Internet and buying some very strong telescopes, you can have a nighttime attraction for those who want to really see the stars and planets and enjoy peace and tranquility.

Key Points

- Parks management professor sees tremendous potential in agritourism.
- Russell Stubbles advocates marketing the "culture" of agriculture.
- Find a niche, start small and stay focused on your niche, he advises.

It is important to remember that you decide how much to charge for the room, for a family, etc. You decide whether you want to be bothered all of July or all summer. You decide the rates. You decide if you want to serve food, etc. You decide how much to charge per night per family.

Do you offer food, a chance to be at peace, and to see the stars and drink coffee and hot chocolate and eat homemade pie? You might charge \$100, or \$125 for a family. Are you considering doing this all of July? Then, it is 31 times \$125. And, of course, if you can attract an astronomy club from Omaha or Milwaukee or Chicago, then you have to throw away the book and recalculate how you want to do it. I always recommend using the Internet to find your customers and to market to them directly.

You have said that agritourism is more than pumpkin patches, mazes and Christmas-tree farms. What ventures are you suggesting and why?

Use the unique cultural and physical resources at your disposal. Some people have wonderful large gardens and can sell "gardening" to the city folk. Others have old wagons and wagon ruts on the farm. Some have berries to be picked. Some just sell peace and quiet (which is an interesting market and has been for decades in the Texas Hill Country, for ex-

ample). You must know your community, your assets, and then get outside the box and see how you want to market it. The beauty of agritourism is that it allows the homeowner, rancher and/or farmer to determine how he or she wants to do it. It is truly for the entrepreneur.

What advice do you have for someone interested in getting into this business?

Ask yourself if you like people. Can you stand people who are idiots walking around your property? Find your niche. Do an assessment of your unique assets. Talk to someone in the business. Talk to your attorney and insurance agent. Think about when you want this "company" to show up.

Set up a Web site. Start slowly. If things go well, join the Chamber of



Rural tourism conference set

A FULL-DAY conference focusing on issues of importance to nature and rural tourism operators in the Upper Midwest will be held in Fargo, N.D., Jan. 16. The fifth annual Natural and Rural Tourism Conference will be held at the Fargodome in conjunction with the Marketplace for Entrepreneurs event. Topics will include how to identify your customers and market your enterprise to them. For more information, visit the North Dakota Nature and Rural Tourism Association's Web site, www.ndnature.org, or call Maria Effertz-Hanson, NDNRTA president, at



(701) 839-6641. Also check out:
 ■ Southeast South Dakota Tourism Association: www.southeastsouthdakota.com
 ■ Naard Creek Ranch: www.naardcreek.com
 ■ Black Butte Adventures: www.blackbuttheadventures.com