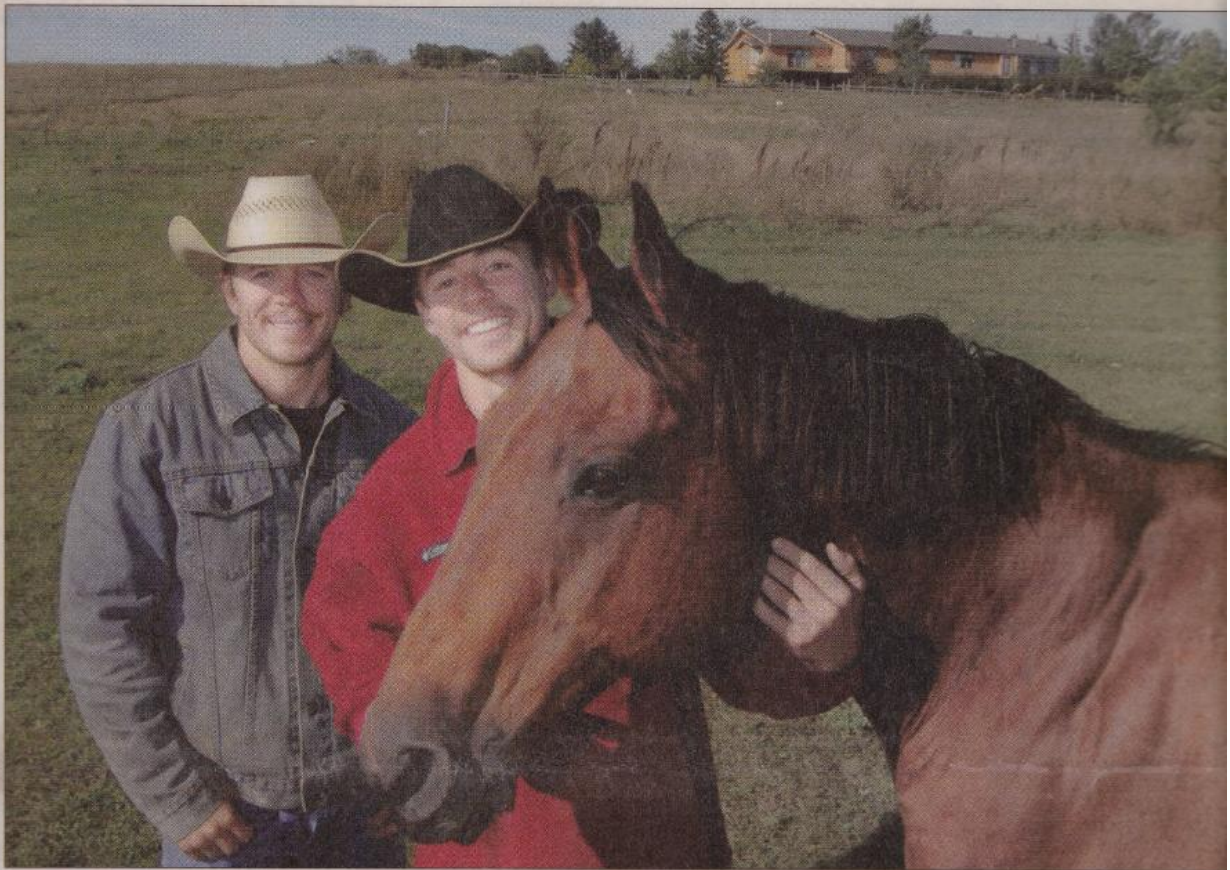


# Cultivating agritourism

*State aims  
to foster  
growth in  
emerging  
tourism  
sector*



Brothers Jay, left, and Jeremy Doan began operating a guest ranch on the family ranch south of McKenzie and have used the North Dakota Tourism Department's help to promote their Rolling Plains Adventures business.

MIKE McCLEARY/T

By CHRISTOPHER BJORKE  
Bismarck Tribune

Reaping the bounty of the land is the livelihood of many North Dakotans, and some are learning to harvest another product of their farms and ranches — its appeal to visitors.

"We've diversified into so many businesses," said Jeremy Doan. "We never stopped with just one."

Doan's family has ranched on the same land for five generations, starting in 1882. They ventured into tourism about 10 years ago, catering to hunting and other activities, but this year, they started hosting visitors on their ranch, which they promote as the Rolling Plains Adventures Guest Ranch.

"We let them live that cowboy dream," said Doan, who lives in rural Burleigh County.

State tourism officials believe that many of the state's agricultural producers could tap into the same economic resource that the Doan family has, and they are starting a program to help develop tourism on farms and ranches.

"I think the demand is growing, and the interest is out there," state Tourism Director Sara Otte Coleman said. "It's such a natural fit."

After decades of the country — including even North Dakota — becoming more urban and suburban, many people like to use their vacation time to learn about life on the land. Otte Coleman saw an example of this while showing some visitors around sites associated with the Lewis and Clark expedition but finding her guests more interested in surrounding farms.

**"You wouldn't go to Milwaukee without going on a brewery tour."**

*Kathleen Tweeten,  
NDSU Extension  
Service*

"They wanted to know what kind of cow that was, what kind of crop that is," she said. The interest is not unusual. "Half of Americans say they're looking for cultural authenticity," she said.

According to a 2007 study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 52,000 farms in the country earned some money off of recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, horseback riding, fruit picking and other things. That represented only about 2.5 percent of all farms but generated \$955 million for the farms.

Like the national picture, the number of North Dakota farms earning money from tourism is small. The Tourism Division lists fewer than a dozen on its website.

The Tourism Division is working with the North Dakota Agriculture Department and the North Dakota State University



State Tourism Director Sara Otte Coleman talks about statewide and regional economic tourism in 2008.

Extension Service to help interested producers learn how they can earn money from tourism. They begin their efforts with their AgriTourism Conference at the Marketplace of Ideas in Fargo on Sept. 27. Participants will hear from the director of the Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism at Utah State University and can learn from other agritourism entrepreneurs.

In October, tourism officials will take curious farmers and ranchers on a bus tour of agritourism operations in the state and help answer questions about the business.

Part of promoting agritourism is encouraging the idea that farms can be destinations in addition to being fixtures of the state's landscape and economy. For genera-

*Continued on 2B*

# Cultivating agritourism

Continued from 1B

tions, a close connection to a farm or ranch was almost a given for North Dakotans, who if they did not live on farms usually had close relatives who did. But like the rest of the country, North Dakotans are now more urban and increasingly from out of state.

"We're finally a growing state," said Dean Ihla of the Tourism Division. "For years, everybody in North Dakota had some kind of agricultural tie, but that's changing."

Agritourists can be nearby city people looking for fresh food or travelers from as far away as Europe wanting to spend a week on horseback. Working ranches in the state have been popular with tourists from Norway and Germany, where cowboy-themed vacations are popular. Farms, once they advertise themselves,

can draw off of established attractions such as the Badlands or Minot's Norsk Host-fest.

As producers learn more about the market for agritourism, they can introduce attractions on their operations.

"I don't think they realize that a demand exists," said Kathleen Tweeten of the NDSU Extension Service in Bismarck.

With farms and ranches playing such an important role in the state's economy and way of life, Otte Coleman said, they should be attractions the way other activities have elsewhere.

"You wouldn't go to Milwaukee without going on a brewery tour," she said.

The income generated by agritourism is still a small part of the overall agriculture and tourism industries in the state and it is not practi-

cal for every farm. Those who take part in it mostly do not make a living from it, but it does bring in more money to farms and rural communities. According to an NDSU study, the average net revenue of agritourism operations was \$9,730 in 2003.

"Ten thousand dollars can mean a difference in family living expenses," Tweeten said.

For producers, finding new sources of income has long been a part of agriculture, even if it means adjusting to dealing with tourists rather than cattle.

"In these tough economic times, you've got to diversify," said Doan, the rancher. "It seems like there's a lot of resources we're not taking full advantage of."

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