

Group Memory – June 28 meeting for AgTourism association

Minutes of meeting on June 28, 2007

Purpose of Meeting:

To create a compelling case for Tourism and other agencies to join us at the table. Invite key players in the tourism, AG and hospitality industries join in the creation of the Hawaii AgriTourism Association, to contribute, provide financial backing to the association and to assist in laying down the foundation of the association. The group will also participate in identifying important “Next Steps”, answer an appeal for assistance in accomplishing these Next Steps and identify how to start taking action and who will be responsible for completing projects.

Location: (2:00-4:30)

Department of Agriculture Plant Quarantine Office
1849 Auiki St. Honolulu, Hawaii

Facilitators: Diane Sands and Donna Ching

Attendees: Robbie Kane, Muriel Anderson, C.L. Chesire, Todd, Low, Dean Okimoto, Tracy Reddekopp, Kylie Matsuda, Melvin Matsuda, Lorie Farrel, Kim Coffee-Isaak, David Oyadamari, Gloria Biven, Victor Reyes, Keala Francis, Jill Coryell, Alan Takemoto, Randyl Rugar, Ken Love, Kent Fleming, Andy Hashimoto, Mark Takemoto, Benson Medina, Wenhao Sun, Aaron Nakamura, Randy Teruya, Tova Callender, Carlos Sandoval, Steven Chiang, Deepa Alban, Tom Staton, Alberta deJetley, Brenda Kaneshiro, Lani Weigert, Annette Lee, Lee Collins, Esther Ohta, David Thompson, Robb Anderson. Donna Ching, Diane Sands

Agenda

- 2:00pm Brief overview by Donna Ching of the Hawaii AgriTourism Association and the meeting objective
- 2:15pm Video presentation – “AgTourism in Hawaii”
- 3:00 PowerPoint Presentation with statistics and info about agricultural tourism in Hawaii (based on 2003 report)
- 3:30 Panel discussion and group questions.
 - Why is a partnership between tourism, agriculture and the larger community desirable?
 - What are the benefits for joining the Hawaii AgriTourism Association?

- I. Donna Ching gave a brief explanation of the purpose of the meeting, the status of the Hawaii AgriTourism Association and why the meeting was brought to Oahu from Kona.
- II. The video, “AgTourism in Hawaii” was shown followed by a PowerPoint slide show presented by Diane Sands
- III. The group had the opportunity to ask questions to some of the farmers represented in the video: Lani Weigert of Ali’i Kulu Lavender; Kylie & Melvin Matsuda of Kahuku Farms; Tracy Reddekopp of Hawaii Vanilla Company; and Deepa Alban of Kona Joe Coffee.

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What could the Association provide? What are the Benefits (panel discussion):

- Zoning protection (Deepa Alban)
- A collected, united voice.
- Answers about legality...what is legal, what is not...
- Help to keep Hawaii green
- Education to farmers about laws/zoning/etc.
- Power & synergy of coming together (Lani Weigert)
- The association needs to be exclusive, not inclusive to promote agtourism...not every farming operation will be agtourism (i.e. ATV rides)
- Ag base has to be at the foundation of the association
- Shift paradigm to compete against those beyond Hawaii, not each other
- Visitor is looking for an “experience” in Hawaii
- Bring people back to the land
- AgTourism can help with the apathy of the local people toward tourism
- Association will help to establish standards so that tourists will have a consistently high quality product/service

Group Discussion:

Islands represented: Maui (4); Molokai (1); Lanai (1); Hawaii (6); Oahu (24)

Dean Okimoto (HFDF):

- The more he hears, the more he likes the idea of an association
- Really likes the education aspect, especially how it would benefit the local community.
- This association could work hand-in-hand with HFBF
- Would like to see control mechanisms in place to define “AgriTourism” so it doesn’t include things like water parks and ATV rides
- Concerned about food safety
- Need to have standards

Other group discussion:

- About 1/2 the group represented tourism
- Locals also want Ag experience...it’s not just for visiting tourists
- Will promote produce/ag from Hawaii instead of importing it
- There are a lot of farmers worldwide who want to visit farms in Hawaii and see first-hand how we are working on sustainability on each island. Local farmers host farmer-to-farmer visits.
- There are other associations/networks worldwide who want AgriTourism in Hawaii (i.e. slow food movement)
- HTA reports a high repeat visitor percentage to Hawaii – about 60% repeat visitors. These repeat visitors are looking for new & unique experience...not just sitting on a beach.
- HTA legitimizes what the association is doing and recognizes that this association can help policy makers determine what is legitimate in “AgriTourism” and what is really a value-added business
- County planners would like to have 1 voice representing AgriTourism instead of having to deal individually with many farmers.

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- We aren't doing this for the mass market...it's not for every farmer. It's a higher-end market that promotes a consistently good product.
- Hawaii AgVentures already certifies farms...can provide assistance to association in this matter so the association can focus on zoning, legal issues & quality control.
- What about ADA standards? Is this something that the Association could help with?
- The Dept. of Ag marketing has a program that matches marketing funds ...but it will only work with an association, not individual farms. This association legitimizes farmers so the Dept. of Ag only has to work with the association.
- Lee Collins of Polynesian Adventures commented that the governor is excited about AgriTourism in Hawaii
- Kim Coffee-Isaack (AgLeadership Foundation) suggests we look at why the previous attempts of forming association failed...what were the barriers
- Gloria Biven (Hawaii Coffee Co.) – we need to stick together to help each other; we need the association to help the community because people aren't being educated about agriTourism in Hawaii. We want to romanticize the experience of Hawaii and extend the experience. It's important to include and bring along your neighbors to help the community.
- To assist with start-up of association, we need to answer: *How many people want this? How much time is involved? How many people need to be involved? Who is willing to be a member?*

RE: County Bill 148 (Hawaii) and other legislation regarding AgriTourism:

- Alan Takemoto (HFBB) – county has to have rules & regulations in place before the State can accept a bill about AgTourism. This association is good for communication between farmers & county. As we go down the path, it's good to have negative comments so we can look at both sides (positive and negative)
- Deepa Alban (Kona Joe Coffee) – Bill is essential to protect people and farmers...right now it is a free-for-all.
- Dean Okimoto (HFBB) – If you have a vision with input from Tourism and Farmers then you can make a strong alliance and association.

RE: Concerns from Waimanalo Farmers about agricultural tourism (Tom Staton):

- Concern about buses on the road and impact on safety for pedestrians
- More paperwork for farmers
- Concern about neighbors and potential conflicts...want to maintain harmony
- Percentage of income...Waimanalo is doing fine just doing farming. Why do we need something else? How will this be reinforced?
- Potential for having people doing non-ag work on ag land.
- Can these issues be resolved in Waimanalo?
- We need more clarification on how the community can be sustained.

Responses from group:

- *This association can help with these issues, but we need to give the association a chance. Waimanalo has the most extreme cases*

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- *Farmers/producers should join the Hawaii AgriTourism Association to help affect change.*
- *This group should set some ground rules and certify farmers, but won't have the ability or human power to enforce the county/state rules.*
- *Enforcing state/county laws is difficult even for the state/county council. There isn't enough staff even in DLNR to enforce county rules*
- *This association will have to go back to each individual county to work on rules/legislation because the state gives the county the right to create these rules.*
- *Goal should be to stop abuses before they start...we don't want more problems from this.*
- *Hawaii island has tried for 6 years to get zoning regulations for agricultural tourism. The Planning Director wants to talk to 1 association, not a lot of farmers. The County of Hawaii Planning Director has stated that he wants this association.*
- *The value of community is important. The economics are important. A lot of people would love to work on the land and would love to have a farm experience. This is an exciting proactive way to have Hawaii be a destination.*

NEXT STEPS:

We need to move forward on finalizing:

1. *Opening up business banking account*
2. *Set pledge levels/membership dues*
3. *Write association's Goals*
4. *Write association's By-laws*
5. *Finalize Non-Profit status paperwork*
6. *Create website for association*
7. *Plan for Strategic Meeting by the end of summer*

Core group of volunteers will meet on July 12th to work on/finalize steps for start-up of association. (Donna Ching, Diane Sands, Lani Weigert, Kent Fleming, Jim Reddekopp, Lorie Farrell, Gloria Biven, Jill Coryell, Mark Takemoto, Carlos Sandoval, Deepa Alban, Alberta deJetley, Brenda Kaneshiro, Carlos Sandoval, Robb Anderson)