

The tourism industry gains new attractions for visitors seeking an authentic slice of rural Hawai'i life.

Welcoming Guests to Hawai'i's Table

In 2006, Hawai'i's 7.4 million visitors spent a record \$12 billion. The state's agricultural sales total about \$2 billion. Ag-tourism, the intersection of these two industries, benefits both sectors. Farm tours and on-farm sales, roadside stands, farmers' markets, farmer/chef collaborations, living-history farms, and agricultural events help Hawai'i's farmers

and ranchers create economically sustainable operations that sell high-value products and offer unique experiences directly to customers. The tourism industry gains new attractions for visitors seeking an authentic slice of rural Hawai'i life. Between 2000 and 2003, the value of Hawai'i's ag-tourism increased by 30 percent to almost \$34 million, and the number of farms with ag-tourism income rose by nearly 50 percent. This rapid growth is expected to continue.

CTAHR has nurtured ag-tourism for more than a decade. The college's Mealani "A Taste of the Hawaiian Range" Food and Agriculture Festival—the brainchild of Glen Fukumoto, Milton Yamasaki, and retiree Burt Smith—and extension specialist Kent Fleming's work with Chef Peter Merriman helped create a restaurant market for fresh, locally grown foods. In 1999, Fleming organized the state's first ag-tourism conference, now a biennial event. In a free DVD available through CTAHR's ag-tourism website,

www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/agtourism, the owners of successful ag-tourism ventures describe how they've incorporated visitor sales and services. Extension specialist Donna Ching is lending her leadership-training expertise to the newly formed statewide Hawaii AgriTourism Association.

The growing popularity of ag-tourism was evident at the 12th annual Taste of the Hawaiian Range. This premier agricultural and educational event, which brings food consumers, producers, and preparers together to enjoy and learn more about Hawai'i's forage-fed meats, drew 1,900 participants to the Hilton Waikoloa Village. While dozens of chefs wooed the crowd with mouthwatering samples, producers of coffee, chocolate, honey, taro, sheep, cattle, abalone, fruits, vegetables, and handcrafted saddles promoted their own operations' ag-tourism activities to visitors from 27 states and five countries. By linking agriculture to the state's top industry, ag-tourism helps farmers chart a profitable future.



Photo provided by Glen Fukumoto

Chefs create delicious dishes from Hawai'i's forage-fed meats and the freshest Big Island produce at the 2007 Taste of the Hawaiian Range food show.



Photo: Bill Harby

At the 2007 Taste, visitors experienced paniolo skills firsthand. Here, Bronson Fuertes (foreground) and a student from Kohala High School demonstrate the art of saddle making.