

State officials visit four agricultural tourism locations in Middlesex and Norfolk Counties

Massachusetts is home to 390 agricultural tourism destinations

BOSTON - July 23, 2010 - To highlight the diversity, scenic draw and economic impact of Massachusetts' agricultural destinations, Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR) Commissioner Scott Soares and Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) Executive Director Betsy Wall, today participated in an agri-tourism farm tour in Middlesex and Norfolk Counties. Stops on the tour included a Pick-Your-Own operation, a farm stand, a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation and an apple orchard.

"Agri-tourism enables farmers to expand their businesses while giving visitors a unique hands-on experience to see, feel and taste agriculture right at the source," said Commissioner Soares. "Enjoying local products and meeting local producers on these tours is a fantastic way to have some fun, learn something new and support the robust Massachusetts agricultural industry."

To find out more about agricultural tours around the state visit DAR's [MassGrown & Fresher website](#). The site lists farmers' markets, wine and cheese trails, pick-your-own farms, and agricultural fairs and features an interactive Google map that marks agricultural sites statewide.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2008 census statistics, agri-tourism has demonstrated significant growth. In 2002, the value of agri-tourism was reported as \$663,000. This number increased to \$5.6 million in 2007, representing a more than eight-fold increase. Agri-tourism encompasses a variety of activities including farm tours, farm vacations, farm bed and breakfasts, hiking, nature study, cross country skiing, picnics, hayrides, workshops, hunting and fishing, and more. Agri-tourism provides farmers with the opportunity for direct sales of services and products. Massachusetts ranks No. 2 nationally in the value of average direct sales per farm at \$25,356 per farm.

"Massachusetts' agricultural destinations offer an authentic and tangible experience for visitors and residents alike," said MOTT Executive Director Betsy Wall. "We are proud to be combining our resources by partnering with the Department of Agricultural Resources to help encourage agri-tourism and to increase visitation to the many farms around the Commonwealth."

"We're so pleased to see that the agri-tourism sector is thriving in the Commonwealth; and that the USDA can support that growth and success," said USDA Rural Development State Director Jay Healy. "It's these types of forward-thinking initiatives by DAR and MOTT that create such measurable economic benefits for local agricultural producers."

DAR has a printed version of the 2010 Massachusetts Agri-tourism Map, which lists tourism locations across the state by the following categories: Christmas trees, dairy farms, equine or livestock locations, bed and breakfasts, farm stands, greenhouses and nurseries, maple sugar houses, wineries and aquaculture. This second edition was funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Rural Business Enterprise Grant. The map, which offers brief descriptions about each agricultural tourism destination throughout the state, is a valuable pocket resource to residents and visitors interested in planning a trip to a farm. For a paper version of this map please send an email tomdar.brochure@state.ma.us or [download an electronic PDF version of the map](#) .

DAR's mission is to ensure the long-term viability of local agriculture in Massachusetts. Through its four divisions - Agricultural Development, Animal Health, Crop and Pest Services, and Technical Assistance - DAR strives to support, regulate and enhance the Commonwealth's agricultural community, working to promote economically and environmentally sound food safety and animal health measures, and fulfill agriculture's role in energy conservation and production. For more information, visit DAR's website at www.mass.gov/agr, and/or follow us

at <http://twitter.com/MDARCommish>. For your gateway to locally grown products, specialty foods, and fun ag-tivities go to www.mass.gov/massgrown.