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Colorado Agritourism Showcased During Tourism Conference

The Governor's Tourism Conference held in Grand Junction last month kicked off with a "mini-conference" focusing on culinary and agritourism that was attended by about 80 industry partners.

The mini-conference was the result of a collaboration between Colorado Proud, the Colorado Wine Industry Development Board and Colorado State University. The event began with a reception on October 9 at The Chateau at Two Rivers Winery featuring culinary destinations, pairing an agricultural producer, chef and winery. For example, beef and lamb from Colorado Homestead Ranches in Paonia, was matched with Chef Florian Wehrli of Windsor, and with wines from Whitewater Hill in Palisade.

The mini-conference formally opened on October 10 with an address by Commissioner of Agriculture John Stulp who highlighted the importance of promoting diverse opportunities to Colorado producers, such as agritourism, to grow the state's vibrant agricultural sector. Dr. Dawn Thilmany and Martha Sullins of CSU then presented findings from a national agritourism study that indicate that approximately 13.2 million visitors to Colorado (half of the total number of visitors identified by the Colorado Tourism Office) participated in some form of agritourism in 2006. In and out-of-state agritourists generated about \$2.2 billion for Colorado's economy, or 14% of the total economic activity generated by the total tourism industry, as estimated by the Colorado Tourism Office for 2006.

Brent Warner, from the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, then presented some of the programs he has undertaken in Canada, including implementation of certification standards.

A panel discussion by agritourism operators focused on issues and obstacles they have encountered. The panel included Bob Witham of Two Rivers Winery in Grand Junction, Duke Phillips of Chico Basin Ranch, Sylvia Tawse who runs the Fresh Ideas Group in Boulder and is a partner in Pastures of Plenty, an organic farm in Boulder County, and Reeves Brown of Club 20 in Grand Junction.

Afternoon speakers included Jim Trezise, director of the New York Wine and Grape Foundation, recounting his state's successful efforts to bring together ag producers, restaurateurs, wineries, government agencies, and the Farm Bureau to create a unified marketing campaign to promote culinary and agritourism.

The final speaker was Jerry Shriver, well-known food, wine and travel writer for USA Today, who coached the audience on how to attract media attention to their

agritourism enterprises. He recounted some of the more successful culinary tourism experiences he has had and what creates a good experience for him.

The Culinary and Agritourism Mini-Conference was part of the larger Governor's Tourism Conference at the Two Rivers Convention Center in downtown Grand Junction that drew about 400 attendees and covered many other topics under the broader heading of tourism. Although Gov. Ritter was unable to attend, he acknowledged the importance of agritourism to our state's economy in a video presentation to the entire conference.

Copies of the speakers' presentations and photos from the Culinary and Agritourism Mini-Conference can be found at www.coloradoagriculture.com. Follow-up presentations and discussions are planned for the Ag Outlook Forum in February 2008 in Denver.