

Title: Naturally EscaRosa: Developing a tourism trail focused on agriculture and natural resources in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties.

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Collaborators:

- John Atkins, Lamar Christenberry, Dan Mullins, and Beth Bolles: UF IFAS Escambia County and Santa Rosa Extension
- Chris Wilcox: TEAM Santa Rosa Economic Development Council, Inc
- Lori Coppels: Pensacola Visitors and Tourism Bureau
- Sabrina Owens: Escambia River Electric Cooperative
- Jack Livingston and Jerry Davis: Escambia and Santa Rosa Farm Bureau Federation
- Katrina Penton, Santa Rosa County GIS
- Tracy Zwillinger, IFAS ICS designer

Abstract: The counties of Escambia and Santa Rosa are ideally located on one of the most traveled routes: Interstate 10. In addition, both counties have a significant population base of military personnel who routinely receive visitors from throughout the nation and world. Thirdly, these counties are a major destination for people from throughout the United States year round. Moreover, both counties are rich in agricultural and natural resources with many potential locations for residents and tourists to visit, learn, and enjoy. It is an ideal location to promote a trail dedicated to improving the awareness of individuals to agricultural and natural resources. The intention is for this project to be a collaborative effort between both Escambia and Santa Rosa counties in an attempt to give beach-goers and urban dwellers a better understanding of the environment that surrounds and provides for their lifestyle. Agritourism and Ecotourism is fast becoming a lucrative profit center for the rural landowner because it can

improve profits and sustainability of regional farmers by adding value to their product, diversifying their crop mix and protecting their land for future generations.. The Naturally EscaRosa Trail can be a showcase for the importance of agriculture and the environment to tourists and urban/suburban residents alike.

Project Goals:

- To develop a brochure style pamphlet that would include a map of both counties, points of interest, background information on the agriculture and natural resources (i.e. crops, rivers, forests, wildlife and domesticated animals) and short descriptions about the attractions and distribute 3,000 to local tourism bureaus and hotels.
- To target visitors and residents of Escambia and Santa Rosa counties and encourage agricultural and natural resources awareness of Northwest Florida.
- To create a website that mirrors the pamphlet but goes more into detail about the attractions and the background information thereby continuing to increase the level of agricultural and natural resource awareness
- To increase the amount of tourists that visit the more rural parts of both counties, thus improving the local economy.

Project Activities: Discuss Naturally EscaRosa idea with other potential community supporters to identify a list of likely destinations to include on the map, present the project idea to potential stops and receive permission to include them on the list, work with IFAS-ICS staff to design the brochure, contact photographer to decide on photo opportunities, design the map and brochure with many revisions. Once the map was sent to Escambia County, it was unveiled at the annual Escambia County Farm Bureau Meeting. The website is nearly completed; we are awaiting site space on the IFAS server.

Recipients/Benefactors: In the future, the benefactors of the Naturally EscaRosa Agritourism trail will be numerous: local landowners that participate on the trail will see more visitors to their locale. Tourists and locals alike will benefit because they will see more of the agriculture and natural resources of these two counties and learn more of what surrounds them. More people may decide to add some “agritainment” to their agricultural operation, thereby diversifying their farm and increasing profits. While serving to educate the public, the Naturally EscaRosa trail would help local economies by bringing in a new clientele.

Outcomes and Deliverables: 7,000 Naturally EscaRosa brochures for the two counties to share in disbursing, one website: Naturallyescarosa.ifas.ufl.edu that will have basically the same locations as the brochure but will be able to accommodate more pictures and information about each site, and a positive working relationship with the local tourism development boards and Extension. This first step has enabled us to see that much more is possible and that Extension can be there to help in a different way than Extension has previously done—promoting our producers via tourism.

Description of Impact: We only received the brochures in house within the past week and have not been able to document any economic impact as of yet. We plan on continuing this project and will hopefully have the economic implications in 2008. The sites that were listed were very pleased with the finished product and are optimistic concerning the increase in visitors. This brochure has brought attention to the fact that many of our alternative enterprises are unsure of marketing and need more information on how to proceed.