

## Outdoor Recreation Projects on Farms For Fun and Profit

LAND AND OUTDOOR RECREATION go together like apple pie and ice cream. When a body of water goes with the land it's even better. Land and water and trees make a near perfect combination.

If you have one or more of these resources, some U.S. Department of Agriculture agencies will likely be able to help you—or tell who can—help you develop recreational facilities for your rural community.

Some recreational developments are intended for improving the quality of living in a community; others are primarily for profit. But generally the two purposes complement each other.

Take the Rome, Wis., community. Two recreational lake developments were begun there in 1967 when the total assessed property valuation was \$1.7 million. This included a valuation of \$117,492 for the property on which the lakes were subsequently developed. Four years later the valuation was \$12.5 million, of which \$9.6 million consisted of the lake developments.

Harold LeJeune, extension resource agent, in a study published in May 1972, concluded that the net gain in tax receipts for all governmental units, after providing the additional services falling under the respective jurisdictions, amounted to nearly \$297,000 through the 4 years 1967-1970.

In summarizing overall benefits of such recreational lake developments, LeJeune adds that "When improvements are made, local contractors and

suppliers are often employed. The visiting owner buys services, food, gasoline, and other supplies from local merchants. Thus outside money flows into the community, assisting and stimulating the local economy."

He also notes that developers of the Lake Sherwood-Camelot complex designed the project in ways best calculated to preserve and protect the area's natural resources.

Some rural communities learn the value of recreation the hard way. Here is how one chamber of commerce president in a town of 4,000 expressed his feelings on that subject:

"... Both of these companies flew their top executives into our community several times concerning locating a new plant here that would have employed 900 men from a five-county area. *We missed this plant and one of the main reasons was lack of recreation for their people.*

"Mr. L. McKay . . . told me, personally, three different times that lack of recreational facilities were weighing heavily against us. I feel very strongly had we such a facility in our county then as we are trying to get now we could have landed this plant and better employment could have been obtained for our people in this area."

It's worth noting that the above letter was written to a consulting engineer. As with any other kind of business, there are failures as well as successes in recreational enterprises. Getting expert advice at the start is a good rule for any community or individual.

Suit the type and size of the recreational facility to a realistic estimate of the number of users. Some communities are too small to support even a small swimming pool. Others may be able to justify a swimming pool but not a golf course. A community might support a 9-hole golf course, but not an 18-hole.

Let's take an example. A 9-hole course can be built in most rural communities for around \$250,000, including a modest clubhouse, swimming pool and tennis courts, cost of land, and semi-automatic sprinkling system.

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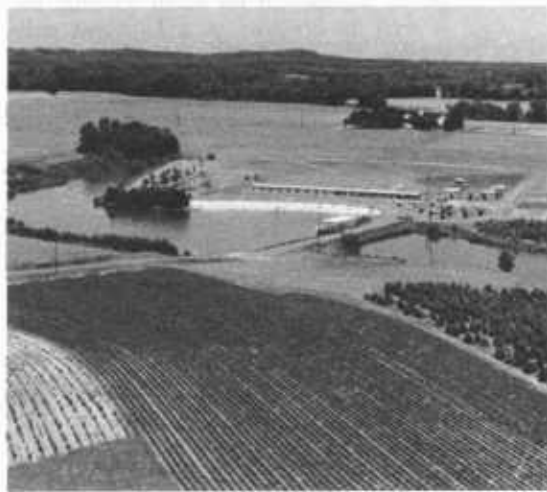


*Top, a farm recreation development. Above, water skiing on Lake Thunderhead, community recreational lake development in Missouri assisted by USDA agencies. Right, enjoying farm recreation land and water. Below right, farmer uses his best land for truck crops and converts rest to small lake with sand beach and cabanas.*



If the money can be borrowed on terms of 40 years at 5 percent, the annual amortization payment will be around \$15,000. Signing up 250 members who will agree to pay \$150 a year annual dues will bring in enough, together with the nonmember greens fees, to cover repayment plus annual operating expenses—providing the operations are well managed.

There are some additional costs, however, that you had better not overlook or they will rise up to haunt you later—equipment for maintaining the course, furnishings for the clubhouse, and operating expenses from the start of construction until the course is ready to play (which is generally longer than you think). So you ought to cover those by requiring each member to make an initial contribution of, let's say, not less than \$100.



A word of caution. In your planning, strive for utility and modesty; forget about prestige.

Costs need to be based on the lowest common income denominator among the prospective members. When such people as the banker, the lawyer, the doctor, and the dentist dominate the planning committee, they tend to think in terms of their own ability to pay initiation fees and annual dues. Setting these costs too high for the majority of members may doom the project to failure at the start.

Selecting the site for the course is very important. It doesn't have to be the richest agricultural land, and it doesn't have to be rolling. Probably the greatest errors committed in selecting sites are in getting land that is too stony or land that is too steep.

You can get good help in planning a golf course by writing the National Golf Foundation, 707 Merchandise Mart, Chicago, Ill. 60654. The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) district supervisor can assist in all technical matters pertaining to soils and plant materials.

Some individual farmers have converted their farms to profitable golf courses. If a farmer's land is suitable he already has a head start. When he has a good solid barn that can be remodeled into a clubhouse, and his own power equipment for earth moving, he is well on his way to a low cost golf course. He had better get some expert advice, however, on golf course planning and on estimating the amount of patronage.

A fish-out or fee fishing pond can be an income source for a farmer who has plenty of water. "Catfish Farming—A New Farm Crop" is the title of USDA Farmers Bulletin No. 2244. It covers such essential topics as number and size of ponds, water supply ("Well water often has dissolved carbon dioxide or nitrogen but no oxygen—a combination deadly to fish"), brood ponds, feeds and feeding, diseases and parasites, harvesting, and catfish economics.

If you have cool enough water (50° to 70°F.) you may want to check into USDA-SCS Leaflet 552, "Trout Farming." The income per acre from trout is much higher than for catfish. It could run up to \$10,000 an acre; but don't let that fool you—acres are not the most important input.

Farmers who have built fish ponds and stocked them with bass and bream for their own use have sometimes turned them into fee fishing enterprises—there's a limit to how much fish one farm family can eat.

Charges for fee fishing can be per pole, per hour, or per pound. If you charge by the pole you can even set up a box with a slot in it at the entrance and depend on the honor system for collecting the fees—fishermen are pretty honest *about money*.

The Farmers Home Administration's Farm Family of the year award in 1972 for the Emporia, Kan., area went to bird farmers Jesse and Flossie Johnson of Bushong. When I visited their farm in 1964 they had just secured a \$3,800 recreation loan from Farmers Home, primarily for pheasant raising pens.

The Johnsons started their shooting preserve in 1961. Only 56 hunters patronized them that year. In the fall of 1972 they had 931 customers.

They raise their own pheasants (but buy quail and chukars) and turn them loose in front of the hunters on their 800-acre farm 14 miles west of the Kansas Turnpike.

Your local SCS office is a good place to start looking for expert advice on technical aspects of shooting preserves.

In certain areas of Nebraska, South Dakota, Kansas, and Iowa, pheasants multiply naturally in sufficient numbers to make a mecca for hunters in the fall. Many farmers in those areas earn extra income boarding and lodging hunters.

For those who would escape the asphalt jungles, no better haven can be found than a vacation farm. If you are a farmer, all you really need to start a vacation farm is an extra bedroom, a friendly disposition, and a wife who is a good cook.



*Top, drawing bead on a chukar at a shooting preserve, Missouri. Above, girls with mallard ducks shot on a game farm in Wisconsin.*

The family should be willing to explain with enthusiasm the many facets of farm life that city folks find exciting, even though they may be commonplace to the farmer, like the farrowing of pigs or the sprouting of seed.

Providing thoughtful little services for the guests will add to their enjoyment and make them want to come back. Treat them like relatives who have arrived for a visit.

Some farmers who lack a spare bedroom have renovated a bunkhouse or built satellite cabins. Indoor plumbing is a requisite, of course.

Farm and Ranch Vacation Guide is put together for Farm & Ranch Vaca-

tions, Inc., by Patricia Dickerman—whose desk is in New York City but whose heart is in the farm fields and in the homes she and her aides carefully inspect before she lists them in her directory.

Size of farm doesn't seem to be a limiting factor. Among the 42 vacation farms listed in New York State in a recent issue of the Guide, one was 2 acres and another 2,000 acres. You can find such intriguing names in the listing as "Stupid Charlie Guest Ranch" in Colorado, and "Big Foot Guest Ranch" in South Dakota.

The county Extension agent and the Extension home agent can give valuable advice on how to operate a vacation farm, and the Farmers Home county supervisor can be helpful with financial problems.

Farmers can do all kinds of things in the recreation field simply because they have *space*. If that's all you've got, just add a little imagination like the Crews family did.

Keith Crews of Interior, S. Dak., is a cattle rancher. The nearest water to his 5,000-acre ranch is several hundred feet underground. You can see 50 miles in any direction, but there are no trees. His ranch is along the main road approaching the entrance to the Badlands National Monument.

On his place was the tumbledown remains of a sod house built by a homesteader in 1909. One day he decided to tidy up the place by bulldozing the old ramshackle remains out of the way and leveling off the site. But then he remembered a conversation he and his mother had one time about the possibility of preserving the "soddy" as a historical curiosity.

So instead of tearing down the sod house he restored it, resurrected some furniture of that period and some old-time farm equipment, paved a parking area, and advertised along the roadside that for \$1 per car passersby could visit the homestead. The response exceeded his best expectations.

He has now been in business 10 years, and it improves every year. He



*Top, "cowhands" line up for day's operations on a vacation ranch. Above, vacationers retrace the Butterfield Trail through Kansas as the early pioneers did it. This is part of the Wagons Ho recreation project organized by Frank and Ruth Hefner. Right, farm pond used for recreation.*





*Top, rock formations in Blanchard Springs Caverns, Ozark National Forest, near Mountain View, Ark. Right, the Cathedral Room along the seven-tenths of a mile Dripstone Trail in the caverns. An elevator takes visitors 216 feet down to the trail. Surface activities include an information center, amphitheater, swimming, camping, picnicking, scenic drives, and a nature trail. With the nearby \$3.4 million Ozark Folk Culture Center, the caverns are expected to improve the economy of rural Stone County, making the area a tourist magnet. Above, Crow Wing Canoe Trail, Minnesota.*

received technical assistance from the local SCS staff.

My wife and I once drove the entire length of one Midwestern State on a primary U.S. highway looking in vain for a place to stop and eat a picnic lunch. Yet I am sure there was a farm woodlot or a small lake on an average of every mile, and each was securely surrounded by a fence and generally had "Keep Out" signs posted.

With very little expense, a farmer could clear out several spots in his woodlot, put in picnic tables, and charge \$1 per car. Operate it on the honor system if it can't be attended all the time. SCS people can help design a layout and provide plans for tables.

People who stop at such a picnic area could also be good prospects for home grown farm products.

Wagons Ho, operated by Frank and Ruth Hefner of Quinter, Kan., offers a chance for western buffs to relive the authentic life of a wagon train pioneer.

It's mind-boggling to find that after 3 days of pushing the wagons west at all possible speed you are picked up and taken back to your starting point by auto in 1 hour.

Some ranchers have arranged to take "dudes" along on their regular cattle drives either to summer pasture in the spring or back to the ranch in the fall. The frequency of such drives is limited, of course, as is the number of extra riders, but one rancher permits up to 15 riders on a week's drive at \$300 per person.

Farmers and ranchers with initiative have established a place for themselves in almost every type of adventurous sport in the wide open spaces. The *Adventure Trip Guide*, 36 East 57th Street, New York, N.Y. 10022, lists 20 different categories of adventure trips of which the following are based partially or primarily upon farms and ranches: backpacking, cattle drives, covered wagon trips, 4-wheel-drive trips, hiking, pack trips (by horse), walking trips with packstock, float trips, ski touring and snow camping, and snowmobiling.

Golf clubs in rural areas sometimes make extra income by permitting snowmobiling on their fairways and by activating the clubhouse services for winter sports fans. Individual farmers often get extra income from opening up areas of their farms to snowmobiles.

Almost any farmland (except rice land) can be developed into a camping area which will not only bring some income but will also fill a much needed service to the public. If your farm is near a well traveled highway it has a potential for an overnight camping area. If it is somewhat isolated from the traffic mainstream but has an attraction such as a lake, stream, historic spot, or national park, it may be potentially a destination type camping area.

SCS representatives can give expert advice on camping layouts and building designs, and you may want to consult your Farmers Home county supervisor regarding financial feasibility.

So if you are a farmer with land and time you are not making the best use of, you may want to look into the recreation field. Farmers Home has loaned over \$120 million in the last 10 years to enterprising farmers and rural communities for recreational enterprises that are financially capable of repaying the investment. However, due to a current holddown on funds, such lending is now limited to around \$2 million per year.

#### For further reading:

*Farm and Ranch Vacation Guide*, Farm and Ranch Vacations, Inc., 36 East 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10022. Price \$2.50.

*Adventure Trip Guide*, Farm and Ranch Vacations, Inc., 36 East 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10022. Price \$2.95.

*Economic Impacts of Artificial Lake Development: Lakes Sherwood and Camelot—A Case History*, by Harold Le Jeune, Extension Resource Agent, Environmental Resource Center, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

U. S. Department of Agriculture, *Be Safe from Insects in Recreation Areas*, Home and Garden Bulletin No. 200, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402. Price 10 cents.