

# Tropical North Queensland Tourism Development Programme

While travellers are well acquainted with TNQ's traditional reef and rainforest attractions, there are a growing number of travellers wanting to explore and experience the unbeaten track, meet the region's characters, and taste the unique food this region produces.



**Regional Stakeholders and programme facilitators checking out the 2009 Feast of the Senses Festival, Innisfail. L-R Judy Noller, DPI&F, Rose Wright & Robyn Rae of Southern Cross University and Ross Contarino of Advance Cairns .**

effectively leverage the opportunities tourism presents. The programme will support farmers to further develop their ideas into a business concept. This could be value-adding to produce and selling direct to local markets or diversifying into agri or nature based tourism experiences. A business facilitator will mentor them through the programme to ensure they can be confident of adopting the correct processes to develop a viable business. SCU Manager of Research Extension and Development, Rose Wright said the project was a catalyst for change in Tropical North Queensland. "There has been a lot of work done in developing food and tourism links in this region, but this programme will bring it all together to ensure the region's farmers make the most of the opportunity" she explained. "For these agri-tourism businesses to be viable, the owners or managers must be committed to high standards of service and business



**Garrie Douglas of Tropical Tablelands Tourism and Linda Jaques of Jaques Coffee at a Field Day held at Gallo's Dairiland.**

Southern Cross University has received funding through the Australian Government Department of Resources Energy and Tourism, and along with the support of the regional councils in Far North Queensland, relevant state agencies and Advance Cairns are delivering a series of food tourism forums and nature-based tourism field days to provide farmers with an overview of the opportunities tourism offers and help them decide if they have the potential to diversify or value-add.

A selected number of these farmers will then be supported through a business development programme to ensure they are set up in a way that complements both their farming operations, and can effectively leverage the opportunities tourism presents. The programme will support farmers to further develop their ideas into a business concept. This could be value-adding to produce and selling direct to local markets or diversifying into agri or nature based tourism experiences. A business facilitator will mentor them through the programme to ensure they can be confident of adopting the correct processes to develop a viable business. SCU Manager of Research Extension and Development, Rose Wright said the project was a catalyst for change in Tropical North Queensland. "There has been a lot of work done in developing food and tourism links in this region, but this programme will bring it all together to ensure the region's farmers make the most of the opportunity" she explained. "For these agri-tourism businesses to be viable, the owners or managers must be committed to high standards of service and business management and be ready to invest the time, resources and energy required if they desire success."

The vast majority of TNQ's high quality and diverse agricultural products are currently shipped to central markets in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne as commodities. While these will always be the main market for the region's produce there is significant potential to increase yield for farmers by selling direct or value adding to some of the region's production in a way that links them with local consumers, visitors and commercial users and promotes their produce in a totally new market. This project will also allow for the development of a Regional Food Strategy identifying the opportunities around food value adding, assisting in the development of authentic regional farmers markets effective local distribution system and a strategy to bridge the gaps in the local food supply chain.

## Where are we at?

- Strategic planning and scoping sessions have been held with a broad group of regional stakeholders from government agencies, tourism operators, food producers and landholders. The strategic framework agreed and implementation plan proceeding.
- Field days to recruit participants for the Business Development Programme have been held in the Tablelands and Cooktown in March 2009. Participant recruitment for this programme will be finalised by the end of April 2009.
- Delivery of the Business Development Programme targeted at rural land holders and producers, consisting of 5 business planning workshops and an on-farm assessment of the property will be run between May & July 2009.
- There will be ongoing monitoring, evaluation and support of the participants and the growth of food tourism in the region for the purposes of research for a further two years.

## Want to find out more...? Contact

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Since its establishment in 1989 the Southern Cross University's School of Tourism and Hospitality Management (STHM) has been developing standards of excellence in tourism education, research and regional engagement and extension. With more than 1200 undergraduate students, the School is one of Australia's largest providers of university level tourism and hospitality education. The School currently offers seven undergraduate degrees and four Masters by coursework degrees (and associated Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas) distributed across the Coffs Harbour, Lismore and Tweed campuses, and in partnership with The Hotel School Sydney (THSS).

As well as teaching and education the School of Tourism and Hospitality engages with the regional and wider communities and professional associations through its Extension and Development Unit. The Development Unit has established a more strategic approach to the interface between external stakeholders and STHM educators/researchers and developing strong relationships and communication between STHM & stakeholders. The Extension and Development Unit aims to ensure that research knowledge is translated & transferred to appropriate stakeholders via innovative delivery programs and to identify opportunities for input into government policies and programmes.

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