

MSU provides information about natural resource-based enterprises

By Glynda Phillips

Educators at Mississippi State University (MSU) are spreading the word about management opportunities associated with natural resource-based enterprises.

These types of enterprises include a diversity of opportunities such as providing public fee-access to private lands for recreational activities like hunting, fishing and horseback riding or for wildlife viewing, hiking and trail riding.

Other natural resource-based enterprises provide products, goods or services that are produced from or are dependent on natural resources, including commercial production of wild fruits and culinary mushrooms, pine straw collection for mulch or guide services for fishing, hunting or wildlife watching.

Still others provide rustic lodges or cabins for retreats and special events in natural resource settings.

"The commonality of these enterprises is that they are renewable, natural resource-based and have the potential of adding annual economic returns for the landowner if they are sustained and enhanced over a period of time through proper management," said Jim Miller, Extension Outreach/Research Professor, Mississippi State University, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

Good way to diversify farm

For some farmers, ranchers and forest landowners, a natural resource-based enterprise can be a good way to obtain a supplemental income from their land not only in the off season but year-round. However, consideration must be given toward making the enterprise compatible with existing economic activities on the land.

"Many farmers or other private landowners may not be aware of the potential for developing and managing natural resource-based enterprises," Miller said.

"The outdoor recreational opportunities here in our state are exceptional, and

the opportunity for Mississippians to explore and develop natural resource-based enterprises at the current time is significant," he added.

"It's a part of our mission here at MSU to help landowners determine effective means of being able to hang onto their land while sustaining, enhancing and managing their resources for economic benefit. Adding a natural resource-based enterprise may be an appropriate way to do that."

Miller pointed out that, in the past, many farmers and other private landowners have managed operations that focused on only one or two commodities.

"Today's producers know they must diversify in case prices drop or input costs increase or there are problems with the weather, disease and insects," he said.

"A sustainable natural resource-based enterprise is a good way to diversify your operation if you have the resource base to accommodate such enterprises."

According to Daryl Jones, Ph.D., Assistant Research Professor, MSU GeoResources Institute and Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, only a small percent of our state's farmers and other private landowners are responding to a growing public demand for access to land for recreational purposes.

This includes many out-of-state tourists who want to take advantage of Mississippi's abundant natural resources as well as our unique Southern culture.

"Many landowners are legitimately concerned about liability and fear possible lawsuits or abuse of their property," Jones explained. "But studies have shown that landowners actively engaged in these types of enterprises who have reduced potential safety hazards on their properties and obtained appropriate liability coverage have not found these problems to be major impediments."

In fact, according to Miller, these landowners have found that it is often a good way to manage trespassers.

"You invite people to use your land with appropriate consideration and they,

in turn, will help police it for you because they have a provincial interest," he said.

However, both Miller and Jones caution that a natural resource-based enterprise is not something that every farmer or private landowner will want to engage in, especially if he or she doesn't enjoy dealing with the public.

"You must enjoy working with people," Jones said. "Landowners should think about the pros and cons and the associated tradeoffs of managing such enterprises before even considering an investment in any type of alternative enterprise."

For more information

There are several excellent MSU Extension publications available that provide extensive information about business and management considerations related to sustainable natural resource-based enterprises, including recreational land leases and dove food plot management. MSU also has information available via its Web site at www.msucare.com.

"We basically focus our efforts on assisting landowners by providing educational information to help them make wise decisions," Miller said. "We are trying to make them aware of the opportunities, but we are not promoting this as a silver bullet or the panacea for every landowner in Mississippi.

"What we offer in our educational programs is, 'Here is the information you need to consider so that you will know how to make wise decisions about the use and sustainability of these renewable natural resources, which can also contribute to your annual economic return, help you retain your property and help you enhance it as a legacy for those who will follow you.'

"The sustainable part is absolutely critical," he added. "If we can help private landowners hold onto their land, enhance and manage their natural resources, incorporate the management of these resources into their overall land management and concurrently improve

continued on page 34



The General Store

THE MISSISSIPPI FARM BUREAU

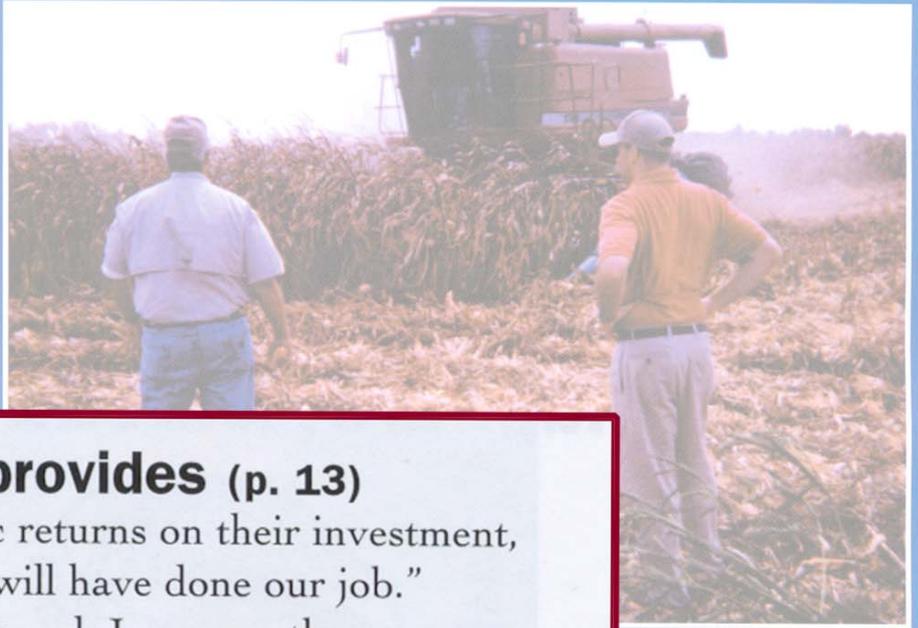
Federation (MFBF) State Women's Committee will set up a "General Store" at the 83rd MFBF Annual Meeting in Jackson on Dec. 4-6.

Proceeds from sales will go toward funding the Berta Lee White Scholarship.

Items to be sold include homemade breads, cakes, jams, jelly, candy, afghans, earrings, hair wreaths, Christmas tree decorations and other items.

The new cookbook, compiled by the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation Women's Program, will also be on sale.

Make plans to visit the "General Store" and help fund the Berta Lee White Scholarship. *



Miller and Jones, owners of Miller and Jones Company, showed Aubert Miller and Jones how they raised rice, catfish and corn on their Mississippi catfish farm.

MSU provides (p. 13)

economic returns on their investment, then we will have done our job."

Miller and Jones say they are convinced that the majority of private landowners want to be good stewards of their lands. If MSU experts can contribute in some way to helping them achieve that stewardship and improve their economic stability, they say their goal will have been achieved.

For more information on natural resource-based enterprises, call Jones at 662-325-6768 or e-mail at djones@gri.msstate.edu.

Call Jim Miller at 662-325-3174 or e-mail at jmiller@ext.msstate.edu. *

MSU provides (p. 13)

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Surface water (p. 15)

complete river basin. People can also formulate a consensus position on water quality concerns through a membership organization such as the Farm Bureau.

Either way, you can have an opportunity to voice and address your concerns. Everyone, particularly landowners, should take an active and positive role in protecting our surface water resources. *

In addition, you'll find an exhibit dedicated to Jefferson Davis as well as exhibits of antebellum clothing, toys and tools.

"Almost everything here has been given to us," Cotton explained. "We are crammed full of priceless items. The collecting has been going on for 56 years, and the public has been great."

On the second floor is a beautiful historic courtroom that features an ornate cast iron judge's dais and railings and an iron stairway.

"I've been approached by Hollywood to film in here," Cotton said. "And, of

Cotton explained. "But you find the best things in an attic."

Some history

The first Vicksburg courthouse, which opened in 1826, burned in the mid-1850s. Construction on the second courthouse (now the museum) was begun in 1858 and finished in October 1860. It served as the official courthouse until 1939, when the Works Progress Administration built the present one across the street.

William Welden designed the second courthouse (and also designed the torpedo