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Ards aiming to milk agri-tourism trend

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Photo By CHAD LEDERMAN

Ard Dairy

Pat Ard explains the milk parlor process at his dairy farm in Ruth. For the past couple of months he and his daughter, Julie Ard-James, have been giving tours, in addition to the daily activities on the farm, as part of a new agri-tourism venture.

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By CHAD LEDERMAN, DAILY LEADER Staff Writer | 0 comments

Area residents and those on school trips are all too familiar with corn mazes and pumpkin patches in fields across Lincoln County, but Ard's Dairy provides a fresh venture into the area's agri-tourism development.

Pat and his daughter, Julie Ard-James, began giving tours of the family's dairy farm, which is located in Ruth and contains 200 milk cows, in April. They have since given four tours and are looking to expand their current operations.

"I think we're doing a good thing," said Ard. "I'm looking forward to a lot more tours and a lot more people coming through here."

District 39 Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith, who serves as chairman on the Senate Agriculture Committee, said agri-tourism is the fastest-growing form of tourism in the

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"Most people find it very interesting, and there are so many ways we can capitalize and accent on farmers' daily (lives)," said Hyde-Smith.

While green acres may not be the place for everyone, the activities of farming life can sprout curiosity in anyone - no matter what part of the country or city they may come from.

"Many people, especially children, don't know where their food comes from," said Lincoln County Mississippi State University Extension Service Director Rebecca Bates. "It's a great opportunity to get kids out in the country and let them interact with farmers and learn where their food comes from, whether it is a dairy tour or just a regular farm tour."

With James acting as the primary tour guide, the dairy tour begins where the Ards' dairy farm began many years ago. From the roots of the farm, tourists are shown the feed house, get to bottle feed a calf, feed the fish in the farm's pond, enjoy a wagon ride and are shown the milk parlor.

"Most kids come in holding their nose," Ard said while showing off the milk parlor. "We tell them to a farmer that smells like money."

As spectators continue to visit the dairy, plans are being made to milk the farm for all it's worth and expand the activities offered through the tour.

Ard said they are working on bringing in a petting zoo, pig race, corn maze, playground area, mobile concession stand and are remodeling a house to allow visitors to get an extended stay on the farm.

"We're hoping people will choose Ard's Dairy farm for a school tour or whatever the outing might be," said Ard.

While agritourism has allowed the Ards to get an extra value out of their farm, the tours have given Ard the opportunity to get his whole family back involved with the family business.

"It's something that's in our blood and a part of who we are," said James.

The large property the farm rests on has been in Ard family since 1894 and was originally a cotton farm. It was not until the 1940s when the family began milking cows and in January of 1950 started selling Grade A milk.

"You don't really, necessarily, always think about your everyday things as blessings," said James.

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