

Case Study for

Tri-County Agritourism Corridor

through Putnam, Flagler and St. Johns Counties

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1 Executive Summary

Family farms in Florida's historic winter potato and cabbage patch have steadily diminished in number. Failure to diversify crops, reluctance among farmers to cooperate, and the late adoption of cost-saving technology have left St. Johns, Putnam and Flagler County less able to compete in national and global markets. Steady loss in profitability has sapped once thriving communities of the Tri-County Agricultural Area.

A 2015 Golden Sun Strategic Marketing Plan initiated by UF/IFAS Extension agents with participating farmers called for a food innovation center in Palatka. The FIC would introduce coolers for crop storage, new value-added processing technology, and research and educational facilities.

The Golden Sun Strategic Marketing Plan of 2015 would organize a long-neglected Florida market led by Millennials who, according to the report, read labels and want to know where their food comes from. They source fresh food for wellness and associate family farms with heritage preservation in a Florida landscape where residential development is more prized than cultural heritage. Visits to family farms could translate into premium pricing in markets that choose to play up sources that food shoppers become enjoyably familiar with. Changing demographics and agritourism can strengthen the 20-year-old Fresh From Florida brand.

The multi-use St. Johns River-to-Sea Loop was conceptualized in 2008. Its 260-mile route would pass through portions of the TCAA as well as through Volusia and Brevard counties. It would connect with SunRail in DeBary and with Amtrak in DeLand and Palatka. Principals viewed the trail as a transportation as well as recreational corridor and asked how it would benefit communities along the way. Bicyclists travel respectable distances in a day and, among travelers of all kinds, they're outdoors and curious about where they find themselves, seeking out mom-and-pop restaurants and pubs, distinctive shops. Some already ride the entire Loop by themselves or with guided tours even while the trail is a scant 40 percent complete. They want one-of-a-kind places to overnight. Their preferences conflate with Millennial values.

The trail through St. Johns and Putnam counties slices through ag lands bookended between thriving St. Augustine and reviving Palatka and, between them, Hastings on hard times. While motorists stop only for the one light in town, cyclists can imagine the once prosperous and now almost-empty ag center for its investment potential, the ruins of its WPA building Hastings' Acropolis.

In 2015 FDOT adopted the Loop as the second of its long-distance trails earmarked for funding to completion. The nonprofit SJR2C Loop Alliance soon formed. It chose to make a Tri-County Agritourism Corridor its first community building project. The trail would thread through a wider corridor. Motorists could range farther afield and enjoy farm visits in far greater numbers than cyclists ever would.

Model for the corridor was the hamlet of Armstrong, a 125-year-old one-time migrant community that in 2012 adopted the trail and started extending hospitality to cyclists. Regional bike clubs began calling. Bike Florida began tour stops. In 2017, an annual mass ride generated enough income so that the nonprofit SEA Community Help Resource Center was able to a house next to the trail for retrofit as a refreshment stop, mini-store, community center and village museum.

The corridor promised to alleviate congestion in St Augustine by drawing day trippers and overnight visitors out of the overcrowded city. They would need more than an annual existing corn maze, a landmark produce stand and a quirky country store to satisfy a day away. Populate the corridor more fully, said the St. Johns County Visitors and Convention Bureau, and it would promote DIY and guided tours. The Alliance and Flagler College prepared and emailed an inventory questionnaire of welcoming sites. Jacksonville Magazine promoted a pilot tour that called on the 94-acre longleaf pine restoration Sauriwa Conservation Area, Blue Sky Farms, the County Line Produce stand, and in downtown Hastings stopped to view the ruins where the trail advanced toward a November 2018 opening across North Main Street.

That tour ended at a Brunswick stew, Blues and Blueberry Lunch at the 22-acre Rype & Readi Farm in Elkton. The lunch was the third at the farm that was drawing customers in the mid-200s. These events became monthly celebrations of seasonally fresh corridor produce. Armstrong itself, an heirloom tomato farm and an herb farm would

become additional tour stops. The search was on for an operator that would run monthly tours starting in fall 2018. Work began on story maps for the corridor, and a search was underway for a site to host monthly barn jams.

Corridor collaborators grew in numbers to include in addition to tour stop hosts St. Johns River State College, the Florida Agritourism Association, Hastings Rotary and downtown businesses, Putnam Blueways & Trails, and St. Johns and Putnam County administrations. The Alliance began planning for a new and collaborative nonprofit that would assume responsibility for ongoing corridor development.

Following November 2017 voter approval for dissolving town government, a grant from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity spurred community impetus. The grant called for a Hastings Investors Guide and an Investors Workshop tied to opening of the trail as well as a trail opening celebration. The Alliance scheduled its fall 2018 annual summit in Palatka tied to the opening.

Flagler College prepared a corridor marketing plan that mirrored the Golden Sun strategy and detailed how to combine awareness of the corridor generated by the tours and attendant media attention with corresponding awareness of family farms area in-market cross-promotion. Plans began for a simultaneous corridor/in-town launch possibly tied to the trail opening and the summit.

The corridor would become a focus of good regional living.

2 Background and History

2.1 Agriculture Background

For generations, the family farms of the Tri-County Agricultural Area -- St. Johns, Putnam and Flagler -- rooted stable communities. Rural populations shared in the prosperous years and hunkered down after seasons of severe weather. This was America's reliable winter potato and cabbage patch.

Yet whereas only two generations ago hundreds of family farms thrived, today maybe 50 remain. The annual Potato & Cabbage Festival that brought thousands to the tri-county ag center of Hastings has dwindled to a 5K run. The Potato Growers Exchange failed, its handsome Beaux Arts headquarters abandoned. There is no more independent St. Johns County Fair. Hastings in 2017 voted to give up its town charter.

The problem of the Tri-County Agricultural Area (TCAA) stems from pressures that area farmers can't control and a failure to control what they can. Pressures alike come from market forces that play out disastrously for Florida and from the rising lure of farmlands converted to houses. The University of Florida/Institute for Agricultural Science (known variously as IFAS or the Extension service), with four offices in the tri-county area as well as a regional coordinator, long recognized the problem and called for change. In 2004, Extension brought together farmers, educators, county commissioners and their heads of planning and water management district staff in a tri-county agriculture sustainability working group. Their deliberations called for urgent action. In 2006, the Legislature appropriated a half-million dollars to the Hastings Research Farm for scientific study of production savings and alternative cropping. Some farms after generations began shifting from potatoes to cattle ranching and experimenting with broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cauliflower.

Still, TCAA farmers remained more competitive with each other than collaborative in ways that could otherwise challenge the market command by powerful distributors and buyers. Contracts forced farmers into unsustainable risk. Some committed to sales at \$11 for a bag of potatoes when they needed \$13 to break even. They gambled that processors would wind up needing more late-season supply than contracted for under terms that might be re-negotiated on the open market. But seasonal advantages were disappearing. TCAA's far southern location that once provided for a profitable two-to-three-week advantage before Georgia harvests could reach market has been lost to new storage technology that allows producers in regions closer to high population centers to undercut Florida prices.

Over the decade, rusting tractors and empty barns scarred roadsides. Asian growers had long-term leases on farms they worked with their own crews. A 2018 report in the St. Augustine Record quoted local farm leaders that "there's less than half the acreage in the tri-county area dedicated to

potatoes that there was in 1995. They said about 35,000 acres have been whittled down to 17,000 acres — and that some estimates go even lower than that.” One widely circulated draft document declared the situation had become as volatile as “a one legged duck in a whirlpool.”

Other ducks, however, were lining up.

A new Golden Sun Strategic Marketing Plan produced in 2015 offered hope with its call for new approaches to marketing and value added processing. The plan was developed based on phone interviews with several TCAA farmers and Extension agents, then followed up with a six-hour face-to-face group discussion and SWOT analysis with 10 representative TCAA farmers. One recommendation called for a food innovation center at the Palatka Farmers Market that would include cooler facilities, research and educational facilities. By 2018, the IFAS-led project was ready for major grant funding. The FIC in time could include a tri-county processing plant.

The strategy called for collaborative marketing that regional farmers could control. It followed by 25 years the introduction by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs’ Fresh From Florida branding for external markets. Now Golden Sun focused attention in part on a long neglected domestic market, a market barely penetrated by TCAA production. Even as Florida’s population had grown to near 22 million with a hundred million visitors a year, TCAA delivered less than 20 percent of its production to this hungry in-state market.

Here was a Florida population ripe for Florida-fresh agriculture. Soul food and steak and potato diets remained staples for many even as these were giving way to an immigrant inspired cuisine matched by the tastes of a sophisticated global tourist trade. Also tipping the scale in favor of farm preservation was popular pushback to over-development, and new water- and bovine-waste-saving practices that were quieting complaints of environmentalists who once demonized growers as the enemy of conservation but who instead became the white hats for preserving heritage Florida. Florida consumers could be roused to demand locally farmed food that could position agriculture as a force for Florida identity.

As Golden Sun put it, “Consumers have strong interest in buying locally-grown fruits and vegetables. Buying local is no longer considered a trend but a way of life. A key driver of this trend is the consumer’s interest in

understanding the values and knowing the identity of the growers.” Golden Sun called for TCAA growers to develop a branding and marketing strategy to capture the unique selling proposition of these family farms. They envisioned a campaign targeted toward consumers in northeast Florida and retailers statewide. Golden Sun called for regional branding that each TCAA grower would adopt along with its family farm name to strengthen awareness.

Millennials led a culture shift that couldn’t be ignored. According to Golden Sun researchers, these were people with food curiosity, many interested in fresh, wholesome ingredients and with less processed foods. They bought from non-traditional channels, and often “with their hearts looking to support a cause” They sought produce direct from family farms, cared about the environment, and avoided GMO products.

Golden Sun called for a values interface between growers and consumers that includes farming’s traditional role in sustaining stable communities, freshness, quality, and food safety programs. It called for expanding traditional agritourism with retail farm stands in high traffic locations, selling at farmers markets, offering U-pick sites and “agri-tainment”, while entering into subscription food delivery. Ineluctably, it drove a connection between farming and the broad concept of what geographers mean by “place” that undergirds civilizational value.

Golden Sun called for community gardens and for creating retail/food service hub models to deliver fresh TCAA produce from farms to restaurants, always with “clear and consistent branding focusing on freshness and eating local.” The call was for “an aggressive marketing campaign directed at retailers and consumers [and] displayed in restaurants.” Farmers could be seen not as victims but instead as valorous in setting a standard for what it means to be Floridian.

2.2 The St Johns River-to-Sea Loop

When in 2016 the Alliance formed as a nonprofit, it went looking for opportunities. Leaders already knew from years of advocacy that trails were good for health and fitness, for recreation, for short-distance travel and long-distance touring, and that trails brought economic, social and cultural benefits to communities they passed through. Principals of the

Alliance had imagined this trail in 2008 after the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy brokered two state acquisitions of abandoned rail corridors that, when combined with sections of trail already piecemealed in place, conjured a Loop.

Advocates were familiar with that geographical concept of place that overlapped natural and cultural endowments in contriving what makes places distinctive. Ecological systems ethically (if not in policy) ranked in priority ahead of transportation systems that, for example, prioritized the disruption of landscapes by high-speed road corridors stratified by land clearing, by chain commerce, and by living patterns that isolate and devalue heterogeneity – the opposite of values that Golden Sun saw ascendant with Millennials.

Now the Alliance went looking along its 260-mile route for a pilot project where the trail wasn't yet fully in place but where its completion could generate locally resourceful economic development and build community. Leaders found this through the TCAA, and after discussions with many who represented area communities and institutions, began to formulate a Tri-County Agritourism Corridor (TCAC, or simply the "corridor").

Alliance principals before incorporation were already familiar with that portion of the corridor along SR 207 between Vermont Heights (just southwest of the I-75 exchange) and the Putnam County line. Familiarity began in 2010 upon the chance discovery of Armstrong by a later-to-be-co-founder of the Alliance. Armstrong was an African-American hamlet along SR 207 adjacent to the St. Johns County Fairground. This 207 section of the Loop, officially designated the Palatka-to-St. Augustine State Trail, sliced east-west across the mid-section of Armstrong Road before the road ended in bush. For residents the trail was more than a boon for fitness. It was a way to capture cyclists for the community that could become a hub of hospitality. Back in 2008, advocates had first drawn attention to the Loop by organizing a weeklong tour that began and ended in Palatka, unknowingly riding past Armstrong. (The tour was indispensably underwritten by the Florida Wildflower Foundation and the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation.)

In 2011, Loop advocates persuaded the state touring nonprofit, Bike Florida, to schedule meal stops in Armstrong on its more-than-annual tours of the Loop. Another nonprofit was already in place that works to improve

living conditions in the remaining migrant camps of Spuds, Elkton and Armstrong (the SEA Community). Bike Florida proved a natural fit for the SEA Community Help Resource Center with its Armstrong office in a single-wide adjacent to a food pantry and clothing closet. Opening of the trail led to an annual event that marked the community's official settlement in 1912, though farmers had worked these fields since the 1880s when Henry Flagler began bringing visitors down on his trains to his St. Augustine hotels. Who would feed them? The annual event took the name of the Rails-to-Trails Celebration with music, vendors and display tables for nonprofits. Bicyclists began to show up. Velo Fest Community Initiative based in St. Augustine and the North Florida Bicycle Club based in Jacksonville began to organize monthly rides that started and ended in Armstrong. DOT set in motion plans for a spur off the trail south to the county park at Armstrong Field. By 2016, cyclists were coming from as far as Gainesville to camp out for the annual jump-up that was extended to two days.

No surprise that as the corridor formulation took hold that the focus was on this particular section of trail with its connections that in time would link the 30 trail miles between downtown Palatka and downtown St. Augustine.

The Loop gave rise to the corridor. The Loop occupies narrow width, the corridor flexibly encompasses a much broader land area. Yet trail bicyclists frequently leave trails to explore back-road vicinities. Nor are farms the only businesses that make up the corridor, although so far other businesses already in place exist compatibly with farming or tend to be supported by farm incomes. Clearly the Loop and the corridor are different entities. The trail is for cyclists and walkers, the corridor forever likely to be explored more by car. Yet it's wholly reasonable to expect that fall 2018 completion of the Loop for the 22 miles between Vermont Heights and Palatka will motivate farm-based and farm-themed investments in businesses and activities that draw bicyclists to stop along the trail and to ride off its narrow alignment to answer questions that cyclists always ask: "When I'm here, where am I?" "What's worth hanging out awhile for?" "Is this someplace for me to come back? To invest in?"

Trails and the cyclists who popularize them are like artists with their utility for re-creating value in failed economic districts. Artists move in for the cheap rents and draw followings that spur informal art compatible enterprise, "third places," in the term of urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg,

where the love of argument about creative expression compels places to visit -- coffee shops, brew pubs and shops that repurpose old buildings. Think the revival of Lincoln Road in Miami Beach and of 5 Points in Jacksonville.

Most cyclists love trails that follow abandoned rail corridors and pass through public lands away from cars. These engender renewal of failed depot towns and, in cyclists' desire to hang out when off their bikes, where enterprise takes hold that's not driven by car culture. Instead of shopping malls, think browsing among mom-and-pop stores and walkability. Think the comebacks of Dunedin on the Pinellas Trail, Winter Garden on the West Orange Trail and newly Titusville, where three long distance trails merge in north Brevard County and the new city welcome center includes a bike shop.

In November 2017, voters in the town of Hastings chose to give up their town charter effective March 1, 2018. This has released a new dynamic for southwest St. Johns County where for generations the town has served as the center of regional farming. The Loop and the corridor now exist inextricably with how the county will administer the region.

2.3 Synergy between Agritourism and the Loop

The Alliance idea was to develop agritourism as a way to preserve family farms. However, the Alliance had almost no standing among these rural communities. Some farmers had opposed conversion of the rail corridor to a cycling trail. They preferred that the rail bed instead become a side road for slow-moving farm equipment at a time when SR 207 was becoming a four-lane speedway. Some also complained about cyclists who, even before building of the trail began, would ride the narrow backroads during harvest season and get in the way of long-distance crop haulers.

Advocates found a cautious champion in farmer Jeb Smith, who had been elected to the St. Johns County Commission and in 2016 served as its chair. It was Comm. Smith who identified those farmers and Extension agents that would likely have an interest. In February, he convened a group together with county administrators to hear the pitch. They showed interest. Among them were Bucky Sykes and Cheryle Cooper whose Sykes and Cooper Farm in Elkton had hosted an annual corn maze since 2010; Kelly

Bland, whose family operated a half-century-old landmark produce stand just west of Hastings, and Daniel Roberts of Spuds Farm, with its own stand that featured “Mavis’s Famous Pies” and a locally made crafts shed.

Comm. Smith declared his belief that agritourism could be the salvation of some farms. Yet none among the farmers showed interest in funding a program, nor did county administration. Advocates would continue to work pro bono. Improvements would happen slowly.

3 Vision, commitment and perseverance

Vision drove ongoing commitment. Articles were written for cycling and trail publications, including American Trails, Florida Bicycle Association Messenger, the Connections newsletter of the DEP Office of Greenways and Trails, and for the St. Augustine Record. Meetings were attended of the legislatively authorized Florida Greenways and Trails Council, of the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation. All three counties of the corridor issued proclamations in support of the Alliance and corridor; as did the City of Palatka and Town of Hasting (later, in 2018, of the City of St. Augustine). Letters of support came from the Putnam-St. Johns County Farm Bureau, from the St. Johns County Agricultural Center and from numerous crop grower nonprofits. In 2016, advocates brought together the nonprofit East Coast Greenway Alliance and the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission in a long-term partnership. Armstrong was southern terminus of the four-state national heritage corridor that reached north to Wilmington, North Carolina. This proved an important influence for how the ag tourism corridor would evolve.

The Greenway/Corridor partnership was motivated by the steady encroachment of development upon traditional Gullah Geechee coastal communities. The idea was that the Greenway Alliance would use its marketing clout to attract cyclists into at-risk communities that could look to Armstrong as a model. In return, the Cultural Heritage Corridor would use its offices to help gain funding for completion of the Greenway through the corridor.

The partnership represented a jump of faith. Willingness of the community to make a priority of extending hospitality to trail bicyclists opened a

window through which blacks and whites can see each other in mutually supportive ways. These opportunities should be encouraged everywhere.

The established relationship with the SEA Community led to important synergy tied to the March 2017 mass Bike Florida tour. Bike Florida called the ride its Gullah-Geechee Tour. For 2017, the tour was re-configured from a week-long journey to a hub and spokes format, scheduled for its entire week of overnights at the St. Johns County Fairground. Organized by the Alliance, the SEA Community processed a successful \$6,000 grant through the TDC that paid for the appearance at the fairground of the McIntosh County Shouters. Retired executive director of the Library of Congress American Folklife Program Peggy Bulger introduced the presentation. (In December, the Gullah-Geechee Shouters, a different group, performed at the SEA Community's 6th Annual Rails-to-Trails Celebration.)

For a week, 629 cyclists traveled everywhere through the corridor. Their expenditures in Armstrong alone generated some \$8,500, which allowed the SEA Community to acquire a vacant house where the trail crosses Armstrong Road. By 2018, the community was working with a consulting land planner volunteer and the county to convert the house into a hospitality center potentially with hostel beds. The land planner located a knock-down frame building that could be relocated to Armstrong adjacent to the historical house and could accommodate larger ambitions for a community center, mini-convenience store, historical museum, for a restaurant and lodgings. Money had to be raised. A group supportive of the corridor was forming. It could help.

The trail/community building synergy in 2018 led the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission to schedule its quarterly June meeting in Armstrong -- a milestone moment promised.

All to the good, yet also getting kind of far from a five-county loop trail that was only a few commuter rail stops from Orlando. Yet the lesson learned was that advocacy – especially long-term unfunded advocacy, however prescient it might be – has to proceed as opportunistically as it does by keeping fixed on the goal, in this case, of getting the five-county Loop finished.

A breakthrough occurred in February 2016. The Florida Greenways and Trails Council chose the Loop as the first long-distance project for funding under Florida's new SUN Trails legislation. Florida DOT next committed to fund the Loop to completion. It's unknown what persuaded Council to favor the Loop by one vote over many competitor trails that would otherwise link conurbations between Miami and north of West Palm Beach, another between Naples and Tampa, and another viable loop planned through the state capital in Tallahassee. Stick-to-it-iveness? Creativity? The wish to reward a largely rural underdog that a long-distance trail could steer toward asset-based development in a state that hardly prioritized its future along these lines? The book remains to be written.

After eight years with little to show, everything changed. Within six months the Alliance was incorporated as a Florida nonprofit corporation and was awarded tax-exempt status. Work began with the DEP Office of Greenways and Trails for a first stakeholder review of the Loop in St. Johns County. Doubt ended about how the trail would ever navigate the narrow congested streets of St. Augustine or about whether the entire 260-mile route with its Amtrak, SunRail, and international airport connections would capture the global market looking for Florida adventure vacations, cycling a week at a time and more. A way would be found. The city and county alike wanted the trail through downtown. FDOT was a powerful Alliance partner going forward.

New connections were made with the St. Johns Visitors and Convention Bureau and with the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. Further encouragement was building toward February 2017. The Alliance worked through Comm. Smith and the Chamber of Commerce to help shape the message when Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam spoke to some 150 who attended a Chamber-sponsored breakfast at the ballroom-like transformation of a Blue Sky Farms equipment shed, where Putnam gave a rousing endorsement of the agritourism corridor.

4 Advocacy

Advocacy has been consistent. Partners and supporters have evolved. Early on, advocacy was more than anything about finding partners to help fund the broad-based project. The early quest was met with the advice that agritourism would have to be funded by farmers who were willing to invite

visitors onto their land and thereby benefit, and by tourism through marketing grants. But farmers were either already running their own produce stands or maze. They had a good thing going. They were unwilling to fund a collaboration, especially a collaboration introduced from outside of agriculture itself. Another farmer had attempted a CSA (community supported agriculture), almost succeeded, but then wrote off agritourism as a viable new revenue stream. Ag Commissioner Putnam's big picture didn't convince locals in years of back-to-back hurricanes and freeze that a rising tide would lift all boats.

A new category of tourism development grant funded by the St. Johns County Tourist Development Council seemed ideal but in 2017 a \$30,000 grant was rejected because, according to an insider, grants in the category were still evaluated by marketing criteria, and went instead to established institutions that could far more accurately estimate how many visitors could be attracted to new exhibitions ("new products") at their sites. Neither the Putnam-St. Johns County Farm Bureau nor the Extension agencies offered funding with their letters of endorsement.

It was all a long shot and could easily be invalidated for its seat-of-the-pants approach. No strategic plan. No assured funding source. Not even the attention of one full-time volunteer. Yet that was the advocacy M.O.: glimpse something out there and row your boat toward it. Hadn't the Loop itself come about this way? Eight years with little to show and, Voila! All it took was eight years to get an FDOT commitment to fund the trail to completion!

That commitment had become an ace in the hole. Bungle this, bungle that. The trail was getting built. It was running through the Tri-County Agricultural Area. The ag tourism corridor might be more visionary than the trail, but the trail, like some millipede, would attach itself everywhere. Imaginably, the corridor was a sure thing. Partners would be critical to direct the initiative with a more sure hand, to lend credibility, to provide and help source funding, both in-kind and in dollars.

5 Partnerships

Introduction

Partners and collaborators were essential for the corridor to take hold. Their buy-in alone would measure corridor success. Every approach would be its own test.

5.1 St. Johns County.

The corridor concept was first introduced here. As recounted above, Comm. Jeb Smith was willing but only few fellow farmers showed interest. He at least represented the idea, and this led to a meeting for which County Administrator Mike Wanchick assembled deputies, department heads, and additional depth. Wanchick declared the door open, yet it was clear that the Alliance would have to demonstrate the viability of its corridor concept for meaningful buy-in. This came first from the county Visitors and Convention Bureau. The VCB early on expressed willingness to market the corridor once requisite measures of performance were satisfied. As VCB President & CEO President Richard Goldman put it, “We have to know there’s a *there* there.” For the Alliance, this translated into populating the corridor with activity whether or not precisely located on production farms.

The VCB was a powerful institution. Together with residential construction, tourism powered the county economy. While house-building scooped up and discarded heritage shovelful by bulldozing shovelful, tourism celebrated heritage. Here was the oldest continuous European settlement in America. St. Augustine shone. Some six million visitors of all ages came, especially schoolchildren upon whom parents and grandparents would lavish expenditures in an already expensive destination. Children would later bring their own children. This was going on for generations. And in a place founded in 1565, annual celebrations would crowd an annual calendar as no place else.

St. Augustine today is significantly its re-creation by Henry Flagler. A co-founder with John D. Rockefeller of Standard Oil, Flagler discovered the Ancient City in 1882/1883 on a visit with his second wife. His first had died after winter in therapeutically warm Jacksonville failed to restore her health. Flagler, who disdained European culture, had heard about St. Augustine. He found the old place squalid with only deplorable places to stay yet charming in its possibilities. Retired from Standard, he envisioned a city re-born with American splendor to outshine a stale Europe. His Ponce de Leon Hotel opened in the winter of 1888 and right away rivaled anything

abroad. He bought a narrow-gauge railroad, built a rail bridge across the St. Johns in Jacksonville that made his hotel accessible. He led the restoration of America's oldest buildings, built a magnificent Methodist Church dedicated to the memory of a lost daughter and attracted investors who joined in city renewal. In 2002, Highway A1A through Flagler and St. Johns Counties was designated a Florida Scenic Highway and in 2003, a National Scenic Byway.

If anything, tourism has been too successful in St. Augustine. Residents complain about having lost the quiet charm of a walkable city because of the influx of visitors who, on average each day, double their numbers on the narrow sidewalks and streets. That's not counting day-trippers, who tend to be under-counted and might triple the congestion.

Tourism, of course, lowers the tax burden on residents for re-nourishing beaches all along the coast and generates a large number of jobs especially for those that lack advanced skills. Restaurants, galleries and high-end shops are more plentiful per capita than probably anywhere else in the state. On the other hand, house prices have gone through the roof. When even 2/2 fixer-uppers in gentrifying Lincolnville go for \$400,000, few but the rich can afford downtown. Residents forced out now become day-trippers when they want to enjoy what they used to as residents. Realtors tell prospects to avoid streets that front on the ubiquitous tour trains with their amplified spiel. When a developer attorney recently told a Chamber meeting that he would "remind people that if we didn't have tourism and the visitors that we have that support all of these neat restaurants and all of these neat venues, we'd be another downtown Palatka." The absurdity of the remark was hardly lost on residents and the city commission, which only days earlier determined that St. Augustine would roll out permanent restrictions on events in public spaces, including a series of fees, a prohibition on new multi-day events on an in-town city field, and limit events on city rights-of-way and in the *Plaza de la Constitucion* gazebo.

North in the county, Ponte Vedra Beach that launched as a resort in 1928 became all about golf and luxury. Beaches lined almost all the county's 40-mile coast.

By 2018, little Vilano Beach on the north side of the St. Augustine harbor channel and separated from the city by the Tolomato River was rebounding on the strength of its own history. Vilano at one time was the

avored beach for Flagler hotel guests who came by ferry and horse-drawn trolley, but after development began in the 1920s including a wooden bridge from the mainland, a violent storm destroyed much of the town. Unusually capable civic leaders today lead its rebound. It's a designated Florida Waterfront Community, a Florida Main Street, part of the Florida A1A Historic Coastal Byway, and actively promotes completion of the East Coast Greenway that touches the village center. For the Alliance, this renewal of Vilano by celebration of heritage and trail combines with St. Augustine's grand history to suggest the legacy importance of agriculture in the county and of its Hastings hub. Although Vilano lies north outside the Loop corridor, village leaders collaborates well with the Alliance in the cross-fertilization of ideas.

When one combines the issues of visitor over-crowding driven by a growing consumer market for heritage experiences, the ag tourism corridor suggests a way to divert at least some numbers from the city to rural St. Johns, while providing an altogether novel encounter with heritage in America's Original Farm-to-Table Corridor: Since 1565. For the applicability of coastal renewal to the renewal of Hastings, see below under Section 6.1.

5.2 Putnam County

Putnam County has supplied little opportunity for visitors to experience the corridor along its reach into county ag lands east across the river except for occasional public events like the annual springtime Putnam-St. Johns County Fair held in East Palatka. Yet, downtown Palatka would be a place of pivotal interest as a SR 207/SR 100 bookend with St. Augustine and with the corridor extended up-river (i.e., south along the north-flowing St. Johns) along US Hwy. 17 to Crescent City.

At the turn of the 20th century, Palatka was a prosperous steamship and rail hub, hardly set back by devastating fire in 1884 and the great freeze of that followed 10 years later. Its industrial strength lay in its plentiful cypress and longleaf pine forest. Its lucrative port provided riverboat access to Sanford, the gateway to south Florida, and up the outflow of the Ocklawaha River to already world famous Silver Spring. Palatka became a top Florida winter resort. It became a shrine for naturalists who came to explore the landmarks that celebrated the late 18th-century explorations of father-and-son botanists John and William Bartram.

But Flagler was already diverting inland tourism toward the coast. And one day, the sprawling mill operation of the Wilson Cypress Company shut completely down. Everything worth timbering was reduced to stumps. Thousands gave up and left on the railroads that soon themselves quit. Depression set in. Palatka never recovered.

Trail people drive downtown renewal today. The Putnam Blueways and Trails nonprofit and the nonprofit Bartram Trail have already established a state-recognized paddling trail that extends south along the St. Johns to springs and the great Indian mound at Mount Royal that Bartram wrote about, as well as multi-use trails that extend northwest and west. To the northeast and south, the system includes the St. Johns River-to-Sea Loop that the nonprofits embrace. Leaders also sit on the Loop Alliance board of directors and advisory board, and they will host the fall 2018 Alliance Summit for which plans tie to opening of the trail through Hastings.

Relations formed with the BOCC's Chip Laibl and with Larry Harvey, with Palatka City Mayor Terrill Hill and Vice-Mayor Mary Lawson Brown. In one of the poorest of Florida counties, trail leaders persuaded FDOT to include a separated path across the Memorial Bridge between East Palatka and Palatka. The trails group was allied in vision (and membership) with leaders in conservation and historic preservation that had persuaded the city to preserve the landmark historic block of brick buildings along First Street just back of the river. A builder who put up the new riverside Hampton Inn rehabbed the historic row and has since rented top floor suites to students at the Florida College of the Arts and seeks ground floor commercial tenants including a fine restaurant.

The vanguard of renewal has led revival of the South Historic District with three bed-and-breakfasts, the much patronized brew pub Uncork Unwind, two coffee shops and a few restaurants popular with locals, including Angel's, a must-stop as the oldest diner in Florida. Civic institutions have come back, notably the 1929 Larimer Memorial Library, now home of the Arts Council of Greater Palatka, and in 2015 joined by the St. Johns River Center, a mitigation project of Georgia-Pacific Company that displays the natural and cultural history of the river with meeting facilities and a roof deck for social occasions. Downtown advocates host an annual Palatka Bicycle Weekend and a Bartram Frolic. These augment an annual festival calendar that features a Blue Crab Festival, the month-long Azalea Festival

at Ravine Gardens State Park, and a Mug Race – said to be the world's longest river race -- that starts at the Palatka Yacht Club and ends downstream in Jacksonville, open to sailboats of all sizes. The 66th annual takes place in 2019. These are all events with genuine local connections.

Attractions include a WaterWorks Historical Center, a railroad museum in the Amtrak Station, the historic Bronson-Mulholland House in the North Historic District, and an extraordinary collection of exterior wall murals. Although the city's museums offer access for only a few hours a week (volunteers are lacking, and an on-again off-again Main Street program is now off again), Palatka's murals celebrate and otherwise recall the city and its region's long recorded history, from Timucuan times through the Billy Bartram explorations, the river and rail eras, the globally significant exports of Putnam's cypress and pine forests, the great fire, and the visits of famous figures including Babe Ruth and Billy Graham.

Bartram has become a resurrection figure for the city. A river launch carries visitors to sites where Bartram sailed his canoe in 1773 and again in 1777. Mud Spring, the great Mount Royal Indian mound, and a large unbridged island where Bartram camped overnight and imagined himself walking across the backs of alligators that massed so thickly: these all remain. In 2015, Palatka hosted the bi-annual national Bartram Trail Conference, a hugely motivating event that has re-charged the local volunteer base. The Bartram connection becomes a highly valuable visitor opportunity. The Loop is already under construction toward Crescent City.

Palatka compels in an authentic way, same as the corridor in its entirety.

5.3 Flagler County

Flagler County has been the corridor outlier for several reasons: (1) The county has been hard hit by hurricanes in two successive years that have curbed the attention of county administrators to engage in projects of lower priority. A wish to engage has been voiced, but postponed until 2019 or 2020. (2) The Alliance has not convinced county administrators that, while the Loop through the county comes nowhere near county ag lands, that the county is home to many farms, to ranches and to the Florida Agriculture Museum (FAM). The situation is no different from St. Johns County where trail-remote growers like Maggie's Herb Farm and Saturiwa Conservation

Area are nonetheless eager to be included in the corridor. (3) Many early attempts to draw in FAM that once seemed likely to succeed have so far proved unsuccessful. The Alliance has drawn the interest of the Andalusia Cattle Company in Bunnell that does host visitors at ranch hay rides, cookouts, and overnights at a restored “Cracker house.” Yet the sheer range of opportunity associated with corridor development, coupled with a two-person volunteer base, has so far kept the Alliance from developing an alternative county approach through the county Extension office. It’s now a priority.

5.4 The SEA Community Help Resource Center

In 2018, the Alliance proposed a quarterly board meeting of the corridor commission either in Armstrong or in a visit there as part of a St. Augustine meeting. Such a visit to a hamlet of 300 by leadership of a National Heritage Area would resonate. The event could base wide media awareness about the ag tourism corridor for a national audience, including agencies and foundations that foster inter-racial comity. In April, Corridor Commission Executive Director Heather Hodges met with SEA Community Executive Director Malinda Peeples and the Loop Alliance economic projects coordinator to set a board meeting date in Armstrong.

5.5 Rype & Readi

Proprietor of the 22-acre Rype & Readi farm and entertainment venue in Elkton Jean-Sebastien Gros is a high-powered entrepreneur. Like all such, he takes risks, for a decade salmon farming in Chile, running air and sea events in Fort Lauderdale, only recently extending his vision to St. Johns County where he acquired the food service lease at the county golf course, and then a 22-acre Elkton site at the edge of ag lands, where he knew people would come. As it turned out, not enough. He leased the pasture lands and country store to a natural dairy, kept the permanent tent as a downhome entertainment venue, and switched his retail operation to a popular section of Lincolnvile where his neighbors already included the Ice House Distillery and San Sebastian Winery. His Rype & Readi Town Market in a couple restored barns retails fresh produce, much of it from down the road, from elsewhere in Florida and the nearby South. He hosts cooking demonstrations and chef dinners. He keeps a few sheep and goats – a petting zoo for school kids on scheduled outings and for the delight of

adults who crowd around table islands where nothing fresh is plastic wrapped and shelves brim with small batch jams and honey, handwoven baskets and handcrafted kitchen utensils. Sebastien, as everyone knows him, markets delight.

He was first in the region to warm to the idea of an ag tourism corridor. He was not only at the edge. He already worked three seasons a year with Vermont Bicycle Touring that led cycling visitors farther into the ag lands before ending their rides with a chow-down at the Rype & Readi Farm. He was welcoming, inspiring and collaborative. His business became the first to introduce new content into the corridor with the series of brunches at the Elkton farm. The first in the series, a pilot project in November 2017, drew 120 participants. In March 2018, 275 came for a Family Strawberry Festival Brunch, and in April, as the program turned monthly, 220 showed up for the Brunswick Stew & Blueberry Family Festival Lunch. Bluegrass and reggae bands performed. In November kids helped catapult overripe pumpkins into the cow pasture, in March and April, overripe cabbages. Visitors – who sat on hay bales beside cloth-covered tables -- in March bought boxed seasonal strawberries ripe all the way up to their leaves; in April, blueberries bagged by the pound. May would feature blackberries, June melons, and always mimosas available. The programs resume in fall.

Where Sebastien shone was in the depth of his willingness to engage. Because the events all highlighted the role of the nonprofit Alliance, the trail superintendent allowed a sign along the trail that pointed to the festival site just across SR 207. Ocean Extreme Sports flew kites and Velo Fest Community Initiative drew cyclists in. A face-painter enchanted kids and their parents. Sebastian ran the hay rides. He also had extensive Facebook Friends. The VCB, the Chamber, and a master networker, Fun 4 First Coast Kids, all helped pull the crowds.

It was Sebastien, the entrepreneur, who introduced the Alliance to the entrepreneurship program at Flagler College.

5.6 Flagler College

Work on the ag tourism corridor has dovetailed with a signature program at Flagler College advised by Donna DeLorenzo, Ph.D., executive director of the Office of College Relations, and by retired nationally prominent TV

script writer Barry Sand. Both are Sam M. Walton Fellows. The program is Flagler College Enactus, which stands for “entrepreneurship action for others creates a better world for all of us”. Enactus teams take on community projects that they represent in regional, national and international competitions. The program currently includes more than 1,700 university programs in 36 countries. The Flagler College team formed in 1998 and has won the nationals three times, in 2004, 2009 and 2013. In 2004, the team ranked top runner-up in the Barcelona world competition. In 2017, the team adopted the ag tourism corridor as one of four programs. By April 2018, the team had won its regional competition and was preparing to compete in the May nationals in Kansas City.

The team and the Alliance collaborate in many ways: in the questionnaire mailed to more than 100 farms and area entities that already accommodate the public or plan to. Flagler Enactus launched the first organized tour of the Corridor as part of a regional touring program launched in spring 2018 by Jacksonville Magazine. The questionnaire helped identify visits to the privately held Sauriwa Conservation Area, Blue Sky Farms, County Line Produce and the Blueberry lunch at Rype & Readi. The nine paid participants unanimously praised the tour that was jointly led and photographed by Enactus team members and the Alliance.

The team has helped staff brunches at Rype & Readi from the start. It adopted Armstrong as a key element in its expanding focus on the Corridor. Interviews of SEA Community leaders and a video and photo session have taken place. The team will have a presence at the now confirmed June 2 convening of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission in Armstrong. It’s been a co-participant in preparation of the DEO-sponsored Investors Guide to Hastings.

In all, the Enactus advisers and team leaders, notably 2018 senior graduates Kaitlyn Marie Burke and Natalia Fernandez, have supplied stimulating and almost daily interactions through texts, phone, emails and campus and field meetings – a greatly productive collaboration.

Also, see below under 7.0, Marketing, Positioning, for collaboration between the Flagler College Communication Department and the Alliance.

5.7 The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce, like the VCB, saw the need for diversifying tourism away from over-crowded St. Augustine. The Chamber already had a standing Agriculture and Economic Development Council. Its director, as well as the Chamber's president and CEO, quickly saw the value of the agritourism corridor. As noted above under Section 3.0, the corridor concept became integral to the February 2017 presentation of FDACS Commissioner Adam Putnam. The Chamber has continued to collaborate with the Alliance, even though the Alliance, because of limited finances, has not yet joined as a nonprofit member. The Chamber provided its agriculture list for distribution of the inventory questionnaire and helped drum up turnout for a milestone presentation by the Office of Greenways and Trails to St. Johns County elected officials and administrative staff in August 2017. After a hiatus in collaboration that followed resignation of the Chamber's former council director, collaboration resumed in 2018 with the appointment of a new director.

5.8 The Florida Agritourism Association

FATA has become a consistent source of support and inspiration. One only need read through its Florida Agritourism Toolkit to appreciate the association's competency. Executive Director Lena Juarez has attended meetings of the Alliance convened by BOCC member Jeb Smith and one-on-one with Alliance leaders. These meetings have led to plans for a Tri-County Agricultural Area agritourism workshop, similar to programs that FATA has helped lead with Extension in various parts of the state elsewhere. Different from those "Ag tourism 101" workshops that focus on individual farms, the TCAA workshops would also include an "Ag tourism 201" session that would instruct about ag tourism corridors. The workshop is in discussion for fall 2018.

5.9 A growing roster of collaborators

These include the Jacksonville engineering consulting firm England-Thims & Miller (represented on the Alliance board); Joe Finnegan, proprietor of the St. Francis Inn, the oldest established St. Augustine lodging (continuous since 1791, and listed in the National Register of Historic Places); leading land conservationist Pat Hamilton, who runs Southern Realty in Crescent

Beach, and Vice President Marc Hudson and conservation advocate Andrea Conover of the North Florida Land Trust.

Others collaborators drawn to the corridor include St. Johns River State College, Blue Sky Farms, property owners and civic leaders in Hastings, the Saturiwa Conservation Area; among the state bicycling community, Bike Florida, Velo Fest Community Initiative and the North Florida Bicycle Club The networker Fun 4 First Coast Kids and Fun 4 Augie Kids has become a media collaborator. Contact was made with Capital City Bank and with St. Augustine's Flagler Hospital in April 2018.

6 Elements of Success

In late 2017, consensus started to build around milestone opportunities. These opportunities were clearly synergistic.

6.1 Opening of the trail through Hastings

Here was the corridor's potential ace-in-the-hole. Even though the completion date through Hastings wobbled between summer and fall of 2018, its completion was inevitable. Some would "get it". It was an opportunity for a celebration that did more than organize cyclists and walkers to come out for a ribbon cutting with the usual hoopla. It was a chance to seize upon the new trail for the implications of its permanence. How might popular dynamics change? Cyclists would start coming from Palatka and St. Augustine. They would increasingly come from everywhere as the Loop kept extending toward completion. Cyclists riding in each direction would want places to eat, to have a beer. They would want to explore landmarks: the old school-become-Town Hall, the Beanie Backus murals hidden away in a shuttered dentist's office, the WPA ruins – the town's Acropolis -- the newly restored Potato Exchange, the preserved character of residential neighborhoods. Long-distance cyclists would want places to camp and indoor lodgings, especially during the region's buggy summers. So would motorists.

What activities and events would convert the trail dynamic into investor interest? How could downtown become characterized by what was ahead in part by extolling its legend? Historical re-enactments of the town's

heyday with murals that draw visitors to storefronts? An annual historical pageant? A stage play of fictionalized history? The ruins stabilized and turned into affordable artist studios? An annual photo competition organized by the Museum of Photography at Daytona Beach State College, Bethune-Cookman University and Flagler College?

What investments could visitors borne by the trail opening support? What investments might the county facilitate? Given Hastings history as a train town and the rail conversion to trail, might an entrepreneur invest in a bike-train propelled by multiple pedalers? Could some area place become a neighborhood of high quality container housing, maybe sponsored by the American Institute of Architects and American Society of Interior Designers? Tiny houses had captured the attention of some 60,000 visitors in two successive years at the county fairground. Tiny houses were part of big picture thinking that was most likely to attract funding and attention

The Alliance wrote a Competitive Florida Grant that DEO awarded to the Town of Hastings in October 2017. It called for an investors guide and an investors forum, both tied to opening of the trail, as well as celebration of the trail opening itself. However, time-costly delays followed. First, because of DEO staff turnover. Then in November, when Hastings voters chose to give up their town charter, and again in January, when DEO questioned whether the grant was in fact eligible for effectuation by the Alliance. March 1 marked the transfer from town self-governance to county administration. It also marked DEO approval of the grant to go forward. The board of county commissioners would formally adopt the grant May 1 after a scope of services was agreed to in March. Only intense focus would meet the June 1 deadline.

Meanwhile, a January meeting between leaders of the Alliance and St. Johns County administration had smoothed the way for information gathering pertinent to the grant. A leading Hastings commercial property owner organized a group ready to advise on the investor projects. Its first meeting with the Alliance took place late March. A second group of civic leaders and business people formed and would hold its first meeting in April. Members of both groups would be encouraged to work with a Putnam County host committee for the fall 2018 SJR2C Loop Alliance Summit that would exploit the trail opening.

6.2 The 2nd Annual St. Johns River-to-Sea Loop Alliance Summit

Early in 2018, the Alliance arranged with Putnam County to host its second annual Loop Summit. (The first took place October 2017 in Volusia County.) At last Alliance attention would reach this fast-forwarding Putnam hub of regional trails. After intense corridor development in than St. Johns, direct connection by the trail would ramp up cross-county collaboration. A Putnam host committee right away formed. An early overture for collaboration was made to St. Johns River State College with its Florida School of the Arts. A first meeting would take place in May.

6.3 Corridor Nonprofit

The Alliance godfathered the corridor, but the corridor has always been viewed as only the first of many projects the Alliance would initiate along its 260-mile route and otherwise collaborate on. Two potential projects in Volusia County awaited corridor hand-off by the Alliance to a new corridor-based nonprofit that would initiate a sustainable corridor management plan. In March, the Alliance and Flagler College started compiling lists of potential board members. Crucial would be directors able to raise funds and generate greater benefits from the trail and Corridor alike to communities along the way. Legal papers could be prepared by a Loop-supportive attorney. Prospective directors could be sounded out. The new nonprofit might be ready for launch at the summit, timed as well to opening of the trail through Hastings. Indeed, a heady prospect after almost three years. Nor would the Alliance walk away. It would want to continue engaged either on the board or in a consulting capacity.

6.4 Populating corridor activity

Heart of the matter is populating the corridor with events and activities that welcome public visits. Many farms around Florida welcome visitors. Congaree & Penn in Duval organizes quarterly meals co-sponsored by *edible* North Florida. Robert Is Here on the road to Everglades National Park is maybe the largest produce and specialty food stand in Florida. But while these and other particular farms and activities benefit individual operators, they don't weigh in as consequentially as only a regional collectivity can in the struggle to keep Florida's rural places intact. One by dispersed one, farms can't drive public policy for an entire region. Were

farms in the corridor willing to engage the public at least at their roadsides, it would all be easy. But that isn't yet happening in corridor counties.

As noted in Section 2.3 above, already in place when the Corridor was imagined were the popular 50-year-old County Line Produce and the stand at Spuds Farm with its specialty pies and crafts shed. (A third produce stand, FarmBoy, was destroyed in 2017 by Hurricane Irma.) Also in place since 2010 was the October corn maze at Sykes & Cooper and since 2012 the early December Rails-to-Trails celebration in Armstrong. St. Ambrose Catholic Church hosted spring and fall festivals in their namesake community, and St. Paul's Episcopal at Federal Point hosted a springtime native plants sale, among year-round events.

More was needed to create a "corridor's worth" that could attract half-day and full day visits; lodgings from hostel beds to farm stays to -- why not -- posh digs? In tourism terms, a destination could emerge in the celebration of family farms and through the evocable pride of an adjacent urban community that would help preserve this deeply rooted and palpable history – St. Augustine and Palatka, as it were, as "sponsors" of a greenbelt between them, of a century-old planning dream of broad viable greenbelts surrounding urban centers. Yes, it could happen were the farmers themselves to grasp the opportunity and give it life themselves. Instead, they mostly held back in "show-me" hesitation. They would come on board not by argument but only by self-conviction, by drawing a lesson from benign initiatives first taken up at the corridor's perimeters that slowly spread across the region -- by the rise in numbers of bicyclists who spent money along the trail and by van touring of visitors to farms hardly different from their own – "Nothing that I couldn't do better!"

Two projects seemed ripe for the doing: a program of outdoor brunches and another of barn jams. The brunch site was easy. (See above Section 5,5)

The barn jams have evolved with difficulty. The idea originated in Awendaw, South Carolina. The program there, known as Awendaw Green, showcased touring bands, five or more at a time on Wednesday evenings. The site was rented, but the promoter had installed a permanent covered professional stage. People mostly drove the half-hour from suburban Charleston. They brought their beach chairs and coolers; some came with their dogs. Others bought beer, wine and food on site. The gate has

remained steady at \$5. In its 11th year, the event remains laidback and popular, typically drawing 200 on any Wednesday evening. The business plan succeeded because the bands were willing to play for hospitality and because the laidback scene is so close to the southern music hub of Macon. <http://www.awendawgreen.com/>

Many corridor venues were considered, including the Florida Agricultural Museum in Palm Coast, the St. Johns County Fairground, and an ideal small horse ranch with an old red barn directly on the trail in Spuds. However, 10 weeks out from the launch, the owner decided to sell. Attention next turned to Armstrong Field County Park and the fairground again. In March 2018 a third site also seemed possible. This would be at a projected RV resort at the intersection of SR 206 and 207. This connection was made in March. All three sites offer direct trail access.

Other places were found already in place that in St. Johns County included the quirky Molasses Junction Country Store, Maggie's Herb Farm in Riverdale, and the Saturiwa Conservation Area, 94 acres four miles north of Hastings that contained a longleaf pine restoration, wetlands, and a boardwalk that led to a deck on the St. Johns River. Proprietors Mike and Carol Adams already hosted tours by reservation, notably for the St. Johns Riverkeeper.

7 Marketing, positioning

The marketing of what one might wish to happen before it's already in place is always tempting. In the case of the agritourism corridor, the temptation has been resisted. What has happened, however, is the positioning of the corridor in front of influentials who can in fact make the corridor happen. The preceding sections have been all about positioning, about getting the Corridor ready for marketing. The Alliance was inventing a game of chess. It was figuring out the shape of the board and what moves rooks and bishops might make before the match was ready.

The Flagler College Communication Department during the spring 2018 semester had taken on the ag tourism corridor as a client for a local marketing campaign. This focus on local marketing would stack the deck for its national extension. It was of course local embrace by this nationally ever-focal ancient St. Augustine that would prefigure corridor glory:

America's Original Farm-to-Table Corridor; Since 1565. It was a vein of gold hidden like sweet potatoes under the crop rows.

8 Objectives and Expected Outcomes

8.1 The overarching strategy

The 2018 Flagler College-prepared marketing plan for the agritourism corridor adopted and detailed the strategy of the Golden Sun Strategic Marketing Study of 2015. Farmers could gain greater control of their far-flung markets by first branding and distributing their produce in local markets.

This would come about by branding corridor produce for its distinctiveness and desirability. Indian River Citrus and Vidalia Onions are well established. Each invokes incremental high quality. But high quality in these times has become layered and multi-dimensional. Food has become romance, a mixing of fresh with wellness. We read labels about where food comes from, and not just for ingredients. Consumer affection for sources adds marketability to products that source-identify. The study attributes high value to the unique character of the corridor that speaks to conservation, to heritage – to the oldest continuous settlement in the United States of America where today's popular farm-to-market movement originated. The concept is itself original and therefore arresting. Further, it stands to resonate as respect grows for healthy food as against junk, for freshness, for food as affordable lifestyle – for what has come to be known (regrettably) as “foodie culture”. While this label may suggest a fad, eating well has nonetheless become inseparable from affordable health care and from well-being in general. It was all foreseen in the insightful Golden Sun report of 2015.

Loving adoption of the trail by locals is the point of the strategic marketing plan prepared by the team from the Flagler College Communication Department. The plan calls for intense use of social media that plays to the cultural values of the corridor. It draws on gaining the cooperation of local businesses, especially by food retailers. This represents the most far reaching opportunity. It raises the question of how to reach these markets with least risk of rejection because their engagement promises not just a communications outcome but also a reach for characterizing the corridor in

an endearing way. The further outcome that the plan seeks is of course to translate this endearment into VCB communications to a national audience.

It seems plausible that food markets and restaurants can become distribution points for information about the corridor, events that take place there, and tours that operate there. Markets become the matchmaker between the shopping experience and the corridor, a connection that draws on accessible, valued awareness of farming families that supply our food and connects to locals by in-store display of who these locally sourced farmers. The picture invokes the memory that many Americans, native born and immigrant, grew up with, of having visited a grandparental farm – maybe having grown up on a farm -- or at least having read earliest childhood stories about farmers and their farm animals that captured imaginations.

If Publix says shopping is a pleasure, then it's all the more so when markets introduce locals and visitors who shop there to experiences that connect food with a corridor of petting zoos, cabbage catapults, kite-flying and down-home music that accompany brunches of locally sourced food to guests on hay-bale seating inside open-air tents, and of barn jams where you spread a blanket on a green field with food trucks of locally sourced food and piles of freshly picked spuds, collards, kales and carrots for take-home. By connecting where we shop with visits into where we source our food, our shopping becomes more than pleasure. Romance gets infused, a sense of who we are where we are that makes the corridor indispensable to the good St. Augustine life. Ag lands become our theater of awareness. And if indispensable to the good life, why wouldn't economic development officers and real estate professionals sell the corridor as part of asset-based community?

In April, one large family farm was preparing an area market initiative that would introduce market shoppers from Daytona Beach to Fernandina Beach to First Coast Fresh in-store branding of regionally sourced foods. The Alliance was invited to discuss the prospect. The initiative will be both a business and civic strategy. Corridor management will connect the corridor and its produce with fun wrapped in charm. It's about introducing visitors to this accessible side of Florida. So, how does this outcome come about?

8.2 The St. Augustine connection

It starts with residents. St. Johns County already rates high-fives for its food-based lifestyle. St. Augustine has a greater variety of high-end restaurants per capita than any city in the state. Its more affordable dining is equally imaginative, from mom-and-pop bakeries that serve datil suffused spinach wraps to Buddha bowls. There's an association of independent restaurants that specialize in local sourcing. The St. Augustine Amphitheatre Farmers Market may be Florida's most successful. Tasting Tours of St. Augustine is a favorite of residents for introducing friends and family to the city. The St. Augustine Independent Restaurant Assn. hosts two hugely popular events each fall, its Food & Wine Festival and its Restaurant Week. President of Slow Food First Coast that sponsors the regional Tour de Farm is the editor of *edible* Northeast Florida, herself based in St. Augustine. A Taste of St. Augustine in May 2018 would feature dozens of restaurants at its 22nd annual day of food, entertainment and live music at the amphitheatre. Chef demonstrations regularly draw crowds to the Golf Bistro at St. Johns County Golf Course.

Accordingly, an essential part of the national marketing strategy for the corridor starts with its loving adoption by locals. It's a binary affection. On the one hand it's user focused: it's the trail with its allure of safely helping get users in shape in the beautiful outdoors, and by its promise that users, by bike, can reach literally thousands of miles in an extending network of off-road paths. It's also about the corridor that the trail and parallel roads run through with its promise of experiencing one's surroundings as family fun while keeping family farms in business that adds immeasurably to good living.

Additionally related to tourists, as USA Today points out (<http://traveltips.usatoday.com/culinary-tourism-1910.html>), "According to the International Culinary Tourism Association, culinary tourism is growing exponentially every year. With the steady increase in interest of food channels, travel shows featuring local and regional cuisine, food documentaries and online culinary travel shows, more consumers are traveling to various destinations just to enjoy a new food and wine experience." And according to the most recent St. Johns County VCB visitor profile, (<http://www.sapvb.org/research/uploads/103190935.pdf>), 86% of visitors dine in restaurants; 23% tour the Distillery or Winery; and they spend more than \$525 million in restaurants and drinking

establishments.” That’s a half-billion dollars locally spent in the county’s coastal communities despite their small combined populations.

<http://www.sapvb.org/research/uploads/103190935.pdf>

For St. Augustine, the corridor introduces new product for a tourism sector that prizes new. The corridor as well gets visitors out of the teeming city. So that what starts with local focus – which is all about agriculture and its potentially esteemed place in local life – ends up as the foundation of new tourism product for development. It starts with marketing local produce to locals. They create an atmosphere of beloved ownership that extends from local to the allure that visitors look for when they choose destinations. We have already established the importance of St. Augustine as a destination that draws on heritage and food. Locals and tourists deliver a one-two punch that turns the ag tourism corridor into a winner.

8.3 Outcome: Arts, Heritage and Culture

Next would be to position the trail opening through Hastings with the arts and humanities, with the cultural landscape it is. Armstrong was already a home-grow success: an African-American hamlet of 200 advancing on its own trail connection. The formerly incorporated Town of Hastings had only twice the population. Cue up the arts and humanities for culture.

A connection was made in March 2018 with FDOT’s Community Aesthetics Features (CAF) program. The program had its criteria in place for what amounts to public art in transportation corridor right-of-ways. While governments mostly sought permissions to put up gateway monuments, the door was also open to public art that could define an agricultural corridor. With allowances, these might exceed a 20-foot height. Imagine along the corridor sculptures of regal-shaped Napa cabbage, of Datil pepper, of farm workers. Here was a roughly 20-mile corridor through little but ag lands for the most part with a 65-mile-per-hour speed limit. Speed transfixed car drivers. What lay outside their vehicles was Florida flat, boring crop rows almost dizzying in their parallax and best not diverting one’s gaze. It was the non-place that you had to speed through on the way to where you needed to get.

And yet, were marketing of the corridor to succeed, as first indications at Rype & Readi showed plausible, and further as the corridor waxed popular

with social media, the installation of public art could implant the idea that motorists in their non-commuting moments and bicyclists could help preserve it all. It had the power of epiphany to capture hearts and minds – and arts funding. This was Florida, after all, where drumbeat news was about sprawl and mitigation interspersed with bursts of disaster and catastrophe, rarely reaching a national audience about milestone investments in conservation, in restoration, and in preservation.

Many blackbirds have been baked into the corridor pie. Outcomes begin with benefits for the Loop itself. It's from this enlightened self-interest that all outcomes follow.

8.4 Outcome: Growing local demand for the corridor experience

Bike clubs, Bike Florida and Vermont Bicycle Touring already operate tours through the corridor. In March 2018 the 53,000-member Adventure Cycling Association approached the Alliance about re-configuring its transcontinental Southern Tier route that ends in St. Augustine farther along the trail.

A battery of events starting the end of May would intensify local awareness about the trail and corridor. The Alliance together with St. Johns County interests would hold its investors forum May 31 in Hastings tied to fall opening of the trail. June 1, a bike clinic for Hastings youth in collaboration with The Lord's Temple City of Refuge and Coleman Mortuary would be led by a bike club organizer from Georgia. Atiba Mbiwan, a board member of the East Coast Greenway Alliance, would be in nearby Armstrong for next day's meeting of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission there. The commission would learn about the community's uplift tied to trail-side hospitality.

The Loop Alliance would hold its annual fall summit in Palatka tied to an opening celebration of the trail through Hastings. In early December, the SEA Community would host its 7th Annual Rails-to-Trails Celebration with emphasis on the corridor.

Meanwhile, public activities – agritourism – have been increasing public awareness and participation. Corridor brunches were attracting crowds and in fall 2018 would continue monthly. Tour operators would be interviewed in

May to start monthly programs in fall when tours would resume. Fall would surely see the start of long sought barn jams and movie nights at one or another corridor sites. Sykes & Cooper would present its 9th annual corn maze in October.

9 Lessons Learned, and Next Steps

9.1 A Connection with Florida State Agriculture Management

Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam lauded agritourism when he spoke in February 2017 at Blue Sky Farms. The opportunity to develop a relationship with FDACS was never followed up. Attempts were made through intermediaries to set up meetings as well with the Florida Farm Bureau and with the Northeast Florida Growers Exchange. None of the efforts has brought results -- except acute awareness on the part of the Alliance that while the corridor is no longer iffy, a certain unease pervades, a feeling of remaining constantly under the gun, of vital connections not yet made. Introductory documents were being prepared in April for new outreach in June.

9.2 Achieving paid staff.

Many recognitions have come the Loop's way, chief among them its selection by FDOT for funding to completion, starting with SUN Trails dollars. But with no paid staff, the Alliance board has focused on getting the trail built where gaps or governmental policies have proved most resistant to carrying out the SUN Trail mandate. This is the realm of TPOs and RPCs, of FDOT districts and myriad agencies directly pressured to do the public good despite 5-year plans and internal resistance otherwise in place before SUN Trails legislation and the Alliance showed up.

The corridor instead is a first initiative in which the Alliance serves the public through formal and informal ways that improve people's lives where they live and work along the trail. Its benefits flow from addressing the corridor as a place where tens of thousands of people a year walk and ride bikes on the trail and where hundreds of thousands drive cars along roads that the trails parallels. It's about how people can be influenced by the trail to strengthen asset-based economy and community. It's not that trails are indispensable to achieving these beneficial impacts. It's as pointed out in

section 2.2 of this report that trails generally align with a range of cultural propensities to explore alternatives in living that are less dominated by car culture. This is an initiative that can come only from trail advocacy because most decisions about where and how people live and work are pre-determined by car culture. And while trails do generally attract investments of human scale that match the human pace of walking and bicycling, in the case of the corridor, it's trail advocacy that significantly adds to asset-enhancing outcomes. Trail advocates are not pointy-head theorists. They are on-the-ground collaborators. If there's a civilizational value to keeping communities together through the preservation of family farms, then in the Tri-County Agricultural Area the St. Johns River-to-Sea Loop Alliance is both a catalytic and augmenting resource -- a compatible conceptual framework. . . new arms at the task. . . the Alliance allied.

As the Alliance succeeds at its corridor task, awareness of its role grows its stature. Affiliated interests – colleges, Chambers, tourism administrations, hospitals, a growing number of family farms – become pro-active in support. It's a reputation for credibility and effectiveness available for adaptive export throughout the 260 Loop miles, as well as especially by long-distance trails throughout Florida.

9.3 Funding

In the absence of paid staff and with fewest actively engaged volunteers, much good that has already occurred has gone unreported at the Alliance website and through its social media, where the reporting is nonetheless robust. Funding has to be found. Ways for funding have been identified. They will require attention throughout 2018. In its new round of available grants, St. Johns County TDC funding again includes grants for new product development that could be awarded the Alliance. Another is the RFP for development of an agritourism corridor that the TDC plans to issue on which the Alliance would bid, possibly with one or two in-county partners. The 2018 Alliance summit is being positioned for funding, as is the convening of prospective donors by the Alliance together with one or another partner.

10 Conclusion

The corridor is a sure thing. It will deliver its benefits, New partners will continue to join in. Opportunities will come from unexpected sources. Funding agencies will come forward with and without overt persuasion. Mistakes will continue. They will occur as part of a succeeding order, better planned with new partners, ever opportunistic, always absorbing. Plenty of seats on the train for others to ride.

Appendices

A. Partners

- Ameris Bank

<https://banks.amerisbank.com/fl/st.-augustine/687/>

100 Southpark Boulevard

St. Augustine, FL 32086

Mary Ellen Hancock

Vice President - Business Banker

(904) 810-3958

- Florida DOT, District 2

<http://www.fdot.gov/info/moredot/districts/dist2.shtm>

1109 South Marion Avenue

Lake City, FL 32025-5874

Barney Bennette, P.E.

Transportation Planning Manager

(386) 961-7878

barney.bennette@dot.state.fl.us

** Debrah Miller

Trail Coordinator

(386) 961-7793

Debrah.Miller@dot.state.fl.us

- Bartram Inn

<https://www.bartraminn.com/>

116 Kirkland Street

Palatka, FL 32177

(352) 359-0623

Linda Crider

- Bartram Trail in Putnam County
<http://bartram.putnam-fl.com/>
[Contact Putnam Blueways and Trails, below]

- Bike Florida
<https://bikeflorida.org/>
(352) 224-8601
Gainesville, FL
Joy Hancock
Executive Director

- Blue Sky Farms
<https://bsffl.com/>
(904) 692-5938
P.O. Box 202
Hastings, FL 32145
Danny Johns

- Capital City Bank
<https://www.ccbg.com/Hastings%20Office.htm>
(904) 692-6000
2207 N. Main Street
Hastings, FL 32145
Janette Wagner, President

- Coleman's Mortuary
<http://www.colemansmortuary.com/>
(904) 692-1160
308 N Main Street
Hastings, FL 32145
Christopher Coleman

- County Line Produce
<https://www.facebook.com/countylineproduce/>
(904) 692-4900
848 SR 207
Hastings, FL 32145
Kelly Bland

- DEP Office of Greenways & Trails
<https://floridadep.gov/parks/ogt>
 (850) 245-2052
 3900 Commonwealth Boulevard
 Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000
 Samantha Bland, Bureau Chief

- East Central Florida Regional Planning Council
www.ecfrpc.org/
 (407) 245-0300 ext. 327
 455 N. Garland Avenue
 Orlando, FL 32801
 Tara M. McCue
 Director of Planning and Economic Development

- East Coast Greenway Alliance
<https://www.greenway.org/>
 (386) 503-0294
 Paul J. Haydt, Florida Coordinator
paul@greenway.org

- *edible* Northeast Florida Magazine
<http://ediblenortheastflorida.ediblecommunities.com/>

- England, Thims & Miller (ETM, Inc.)
www.etminc.com/
 (904) 642-8990
 4775 Old Saint Augustine Road
 Jacksonville, FL 32258
 Karl Soderholm, PLA, AICP, ASLA
 Vice President

- Flagler County Convention and Visitors Bureau
http://www.flaglercounty.org/visitors_and_amp_tourism/index.php
 (386) 313-4225
 120 Airport Road
 Palm Coast, FL 32164
 Mathew C. Dunn, Executive Director

- Florida Agritourism Assn.

<https://visitfloridafarms.com/>

(850) 254-5355

Lena Juarez, Executive Director

Tallahassee, FL

- Florida Bicycle & Pedestrian Partnership Council

<http://www.fdot.gov/planning/policy/bikeped/>

(850) 414-4817

FDOT

605 Suwannee Street

Tallahassee, FL 32399

Melanie Weaver Carr

Sr. Policy Analyst - REDI and Rural Consultative Process

Office of Policy Planning

- Florida Bicycle Association

<http://floridabicycle.org/>

(813) 748-1513

PO Box 2452

Oldsmar, FL 34677

Becky Afonso, Executive Director

- Flagler College

<http://www.flagler.edu/>

(904) 819-6255

74 King Street

St. Augustine, Florida 32084

Donna DeLorenzo, Ph.D.

Sam M. Walton Free Enterprise Fellow

Executive Director of College Relations Division

- Florida Department of Transportation
Community Aesthetics Features Program

<http://www.fdot.gov/roadway/ppmmanual/2016/Volume1/Chap09.pdf>

<http://www.fdot.gov/design/training/designexpo/2014/presentations/irizarry/Maria-CommunityAestheticFeatures.pdf>

605 Suwannee Street

Tallahassee, FL 32399

(850) 414-4100

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Roadway Quality Assurance Administrator
Jeremy.Fletcher@dot.state.fl.us

- Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation
<http://fgtf.org/>
Info@FGTF.org
P.O. Box 4142
Tallahassee, FL. 32315
W, Dale Allen, President

- Florida Wildflower Foundation
<https://flawildflowers.org/planting/>
225 S. Swoope Avenue
Maitland, FL 32751
(407) 622-1606
Lisa Roberts, Executive Director

- Hastings Branch Library
<http://www.sjcpls.org/branches/hastings-branch/>
(904) 827-6970
6195 S Main Street
Hastings, FL 32145
Emily Fox, Assistant Librarian

- Hastings Rotary Club
<https://www.facebook.com/HastingsFloridaRotaryClub/>
(386) 546-5164
200 E Lattin Street
Hastings, FL 32145
Nancy Quatrano, President

- John Moran Florida Nature Photography
www.johnmoranphoto.com/
(352) 373-9718
Gainesville, FL

- North Florida Bicycle Club
<http://www.nfbc.us/>
(904) 777-5025
P.O. Box 40995

Jacksonville, FL 32203
Mark Atkins, MD, President

- North Florida Land Trust
<https://www.nflt.org/our-team/>
(904) 479-1967
2038 Gilmore Street
Jacksonville, FL 32204
Marc Hudson
Land Protection Director
** Andrea Conover
Conservation Advocate
(904) 479-1967

- Northeast Florida Regional Council
<http://www.nefrc.org/>
(904) 279 0885
100 Festival Park Avenue
Jacksonville, FL 32202
Margo Moehring
Managing Director of Policy and Planning

- Putnam Blueways & Trails
<http://www.putnambluewaysandtrails.org/>
(386) 546-1668
P.O. Box 181
Palatka, FL 32178

- Putnam County Chamber of Commerce
www.putnamcountychamber.com/
(386) 328-1503
1100 Reid Street
Palatka, FL 32177
Dana Jones, President
** Julie Linton, Vice President, Tourism
** Brian Burkett, Vice President, Economic Development

- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
<https://www.railstotrails.org/our-work/united-states/florida/>
(866) 202-9788

P.O. Box 15227
Tallahassee, FL 32317
Ken Bryan
Director, Florida Field Office
Ken@railstotrails.org

- Rype & Readi Downtown Farm Market
<https://rypeandreadi.com/>
(904) 429-3070
115 La Quinta Place
St. Augustine, FL 32084
Jean-Sebastien Gros

- Saturiwa Conservation Area
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/fl/home/?cid=STELPRDB1269908>
(904) 504-0779
2425 CR 13
Elkton, FL 32033
Mike & Carol Adams, MS CEP

- Scenic & Historic A1A Coastal Byway
Danielle Anderson
<http://www.scenica1a.org/>
(904) 425-8055
2175 Mizell Road
St. Augustine, FL 32080

- SEA Community Help Resource Center
www.seachrc.org
Malinda Peeples
Executive Director
SEA Community Help Resource Center, Inc.
6408 Armstrong Rd. Elkton, FL 32033
(904) 692-2307

- Seidler Productions (Seidler Cine)
sopchoppyrobby@gmail.com
(850) 962-2225
191 Pine Lane

Crawfordville, FL 32327

- St. Francis Inn

<http://www.stfrancisinn.com/>

(904) 824-6068

279 St. George Street

St Augustine, FL 32084

Joe Finnegan

- St. Johns County Visitors and Convention Bureau

<http://www.floridashistoriccoast.com/>

(904) 209-4426

29 Old Mission Avenue

St. Augustine, Florida 32084

Richard Goldman, President & CEO

- St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

<https://sjcchamber.com/>

One News Place

St. Augustine, FL 32086

(904) 829-5681

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- St. Johns River Center

<https://www.palatka-fl.gov/256/St-Johns-River-Center>

(386) 326-2704

102 N 1st Street

Palatka, FL 32177

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- St. Johns River State College

www.SJRstate.edu

Melissa C. Miller, JD

(386) 312-4106

Senior Vice President/General Counsel & Executive Director, Palatka
Campus

5001 St. Johns Avenue

Palatka, FL 32177-3007

- Sykes and Cooper Farms

www.sycofarms.com/

Bucky Sykes, Cherylle Cooper
(904) 669-6774
5995 Brough Road
Elkton, FL 32033

- UF/IFAS

<http://putnam.ifas.ufl.edu/>

(904) 966-6224

David Dinkins

Multi-County Community Resource Development/Food Systems Extension
Agent

Putnam County Extension

111 Yelvington Rd.

East Palatka, FL 32131-2118

- UF/Flagler County IFAS

<http://flagler.ifas.ufl.edu/>

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150 Sawgrass Road

Bunnell, FL 32110-4325

- UF/Putnam County IFAS

<http://putnam.ifas.ufl.edu/>

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111 Yelvington Rd.

East Palatka, FL 32131-2118

- UF/St. Johns County IFAS

<http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/stjohns/>

Timothy W. Wilson, MS, PAS

(904) 209-0430 ext. 4772

Extension Director

Production Agriculture Agent

3125 Agriculture Center Drive

St. Augustine, FL 32092-0572

- The Lord's Temple City of Refuge

<https://www.facebook.com/corcovenant/?rf=167782433232696>

Pastor Thomas Cave III

(904) 692-1060

140 Gilmore Street

Hastings, FL 32145

- Velo Fest Community Initiative

<http://velofest.org/>

Heather Neville, Director

(904) 509-6895

St. Augustine, FL

- Vilano Beach Main Street

www.vilanobeachfl.com

(904) 827-7411

P.O. Box 6

St. Augustine, FL 32085-0006

Sallie O'Hara, Program Manager

B. Maps and St Johns River-to-Sea Loop Corridor Resource Directory

Place holder to be pasted in with Acrobat

C. Website, Brochures & marketing collateral

- St Johns River-to-Sea Loop Alliance website:

<http://www.sjr2c.org>

<http://sjr2c.org/tri-county-agritourism-corridor>

<http://sjr2c.org/hastings-investors-workshop>

<http://sjr2c.org/agritourism-corridor-campaign-plan>

<http://sjr2c.org/whos-who-st-johns-river-sea-loop-alliance>

<http://sjr2c.org/sites/default/files/2018->

[04/SJR2C_Loop_Alliance%20for%20CapitalBankF.pdf](http://sjr2c.org/sites/default/files/2018-04/SJR2C_Loop_Alliance%20for%20CapitalBankF.pdf)

- TCAC resource inventory questionnaire:

https://flagler.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5z4uHvC31ywBmcd

- Rype & Readt Strawberry Family Festival Brunch report showing sign on trail at SR 207 and SR 305: <http://www.sjr2c.org/farm-brunch-and-family-strawberry-festival-agritourism-corridor>

- Rype & Readt Brunswick Stew, Blues and Blueberry Festival Lunch:

<https://rypeandreadt.com/events/blueberry-festival-and-farm-lunch/>

- YouTube: The St. Johns River-to-Sea Loop,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TifNXpp0YBQ>

- American Trails, “A Bolder Vision for Florida Trails”, www.sjr2c.org/bolder-vision-floridas-trails-0

- Bike Florida Gullah Geechee Spring Tour, March 2017, Economic Impact Report: <http://sjr2c.org/bike-florida-gullah-geechee-economic-impact-report>

- St. Augustine Record, “Trail Promises Economic Development”,

<http://www.staugustine.com/opinions/2013-05-25/guest-column-trail-promises-economic-development>

- St. Augustine Record, “Armstrong hopes cycling can make a difference in the economy,” <http://www.staugustine.com/news/2013-11-15/armstrong-hopes-cycling-can-make-difference-economy>

<http://www.staugustine.com/news/2013-11-15/armstrong-hopes-cycling-can-make-difference-economy>

- Jacksonville Magazine write-up for Flagler College managed AgVenture Tour: <https://904tix.com/events/agventure-farm-tour>

- St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce talk about the Corridor:

<https://sjcchamber.com/Visit-Relocate/Community->

[Calendar/ctl/EventView/id/3588/rsv/true/mid/5562?returnUrl=%2fVisit-Relocate%2fCommunity-Calendar](https://sjcchamber.com/Visit-Relocate/Community-Calendar/ctl/EventView/id/3588/rsv/true/mid/5562?returnUrl=%2fVisit-Relocate%2fCommunity-Calendar)

- Old City Life magazine reports on TCAC:

<http://www.oldcitylife.com/farming-old-city-expansion/>

- SJR2C logo at website of Florida Agritourism Association:
<https://visitor.visitfloridafarms.com/>
- TCAC Mid-April 2018 Tri-County Agritourism Corridor Newsletter:
<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/in%3Asent+Mary.Hancock%40AmerisBank.com/162360c41ad5b4b6>
- Golden Sun Strategic Marketing Plan:
<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/dinkins%40ufl.edu/162dda45c433eda9?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>
- Flagler College Tri-County Agri-Tourism Campaign Plan Book:
<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/RLaChance124%40flagler.edu/162de0fe4a7b9a01?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>
- OGT flier for August workshop SJC

D. Related material

2012 Census of Agriculture, St. Johns

County: https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Florida/cp12109.pdf

2012 Census of Agriculture, Putnam

County: https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Florida/cp12107.pdf

2012 Census of Agriculture, Flagler

County: https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Florida/cp12035.pdf

St. Johns County

Comprehensive plan policies and land development regulations pertaining to agritourism that would encourage economic development.

The Land Use Plan of the Comprehensive Plan appears here

<http://www.sjcfl.us/LongRangePlanning/media/CPA2025/2Adopted2025.pdf>

Comprehensive Plan Policies:

Policy A.1.6.4- Areas designated A-I and R/S on the Future Land Use Map shall be permitted the development of tracts of land as Family Farms and Lots. Applicants for building permits pursuant to the Family Farm and Lot provision shall not be required to submit PRD applications or be subject to PRD regulations and requirements. The Family Farm and Lot provision is restricted to the following conditions:

(a) Owners of property designated A-I or R/S shall be permitted to construct or place a single-family residence on such property for use as the Owner's primary residence.

(b) Members of the Owner's immediate family shall be permitted to construct or place a single-family residence(s) for use as their primary residence(s) on the same parcel or subpart thereof containing the Owner's primary residence, in accordance with County land development regulations. For the purposes of this provision, immediate family shall mean the Owner's parents, step-parents, adopted parent, spouse, siblings, children, step-children, adopted children, grandchildren, and the parents, step-parents, adopted parent, siblings, children, step-children, adopted children, or grandchildren of the Owner's spouse.

(c) The Family Farm and Lot provision shall be limited to a one time use for each family member.

(d) Applicants shall be subject to all other applicable County land development regulations and other applicable law.

Policy A.1.6.5 - The County shall continue to investigate and coordinate with the County Agricultural Extension Office and area farmers to determine methods to preserve land used for active farms and crop production. Such methods may include a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program, Rural Land Stewardship (RLS) program, tax rebates, farm subsidies agricultural trusts, voluntary agricultural districts and similar programs.

Policy A.1.6.6 - The County shall continue its planning efforts for the Southwest Planning District. The Southwest portion of the County, from CR 208 south to the Flagler County line, east to I-95 and west to the St. Johns River/Putman County line contains large areas of active farm and crop land. The County shall continue to investigate programs to conserve and preserve this agricultural area from intense urban and suburban development.

Policy A.1.6.7 - The County shall strive to maintain a workable viable agricultural economy and promote agribusiness operations in appropriate locations.

Policy A.1.6.8 - The County shall assist as necessary the Agricultural Extension Office in working with the farm communities in providing agritourism and agribusiness activities and to transition from traditional St.

Johns County crops to specialty crops, ornamentals, flowers and similar alternatives as applicable to St. Johns County.

Policy A.1.6. 9 - The County shall allow agribusiness operations within R/S and A-I as designated on the Future land Use Map and further defined by the Land Development Code. Agribusiness is defined as operations associated with active farm activities, equestrian activities, pasture lands, timber production, crop and sod production operations and may include:

- vegetable and food processing plants used for cooking, dehydrating, bottling, refining, distilling, and other methods that change a naturally grown product into another consumer use
- storage, cold storage, warehouse and transportation facilities and buildings that house and transport naturally grown crops and processed products from naturally grown crops
- winery, fruit and vegetable stands, farmers markets, agricultural product fairs and festivals and similar commercial uses
- animal husbandry, feed operations and similar uses
- sale of feed, grains, tack, animal care products, farm tools, hardware and farm supplies; does not include the sale of large farm equipment such as tractors and combines
- bed and breakfast establishments as defined in the Land Development Code
- agri and eco tourism establishments as defined in the Land Development Code
- renewable energy operations, solar farms, wood and debris recycling facilities as related to alternative fuel production operations as defined by the Land Development Code

The County shall amend its Land Development Code to establish agribusiness development standards, which include but are not limited to; the protection of the natural environment, the provision of safe and efficient traffic circulation, adequate parking, storm water management, and similar development standards.

Policy A.1.11.1 - The land use designations, as depicted on the Future Land Use Map, shall permit the following land uses:

(a) **Agricultural-Intensive** and **Rural / Silviculture** shall mean those lands designated on the Future Land Use Map which are primarily intended for agriculture, silviculture, and other uses typical of rural areas. Permitted uses shall include the following as defined and controlled by the County land development regulations:

- Agricultural;
- Cultural / Institutional;
- Mining and Extraction;
- Outdoor/Passive;
- Neighborhood Public Service;
- Solid Waste and Correctional Facilities;
- Public elementary, middle schools and high schools, if located within two (2) miles of an existing Residential or Mixed Use District land use designation on the Future Land Use Map, or any new public school which is replacing an existing school serving the rural areas of the County;
- Residential uses, as permitted and regulated through the County's Land Development Code LDC), including Planned Rural Developments (PRD) as specified in the LDC and as specified in policy A.1.6.2;
- Other uses ancillary to, or supportive of, agricultural or silviculture uses or activities, and single family residential structures which are utilized by the owners of the agricultural or silviculture lands (or family members of such owners) as their primary residence;

2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN Land Use Page 28

- Family Farms and Lots as defined in Policy A.1.6.4;

- Agribusiness and agritourism activities as defined in Policy A.1.6.9 and the Land Development Code.

Policy A.1.22.5- The County shall encourage the research, development, demonstration and application of alternative energy resources, particularly renewable energy resources by allowing agribusiness renewable energy operations, solar farms, wood and debris recycling facilities as related to alternative fuel production operations consistent with Policy A.1.6.9 and by ensuring the Land Development Regulations (LDRs) do not prohibit the use of alternative energy resources, where appropriate.

Land Development Regulations

Section 2.02.04.E.1 –

E. Permitted Accessory Uses in Open Rural Districts

1. All Uses described in (B) above, except where in conflict with permitted Uses of agricultural districts or defined to apply to residential districts only. Seasonal sales and farm production tours/events are specifically permitted, as an Accessory Use, in Open Rural Districts. Such Uses shall provide for a safe surface and an adequate number of parking spaces suitable to accommodate traffic.

Section 2.02.04.E.3

3. Agricultural Structures

Accessory Agricultural Structures shall not be limited to a maximum height, but shall be set back from the zoning Lot line as follows:

a. An agricultural Accessory Structure fifteen (15) feet or less in height shall be located a minimum of three (3) feet away from the side and rear zoning Lot line and shall not be located in a required Front Yard.

b. An agricultural Accessory Structure over fifteen (15) feet up to fifty-one (51) feet in height shall be set back a minimum of one (1) additional foot from the side and rear zoning Lot line (in addition to the requirements of paragraph one (1) immediately above) for every three (3) feet of increased height up to fifty-one (51) feet. Therefore an agricultural Accessory Structure forty-five (45) feet in height shall be located a minimum of thirteen

(13) feet from the zoning Lot line. Said agricultural Accessory Structure shall not be located in a required Front Yard.

c. An agricultural Accessory Structure over fifty-one (51) feet in height shall be set back from the Side and Rear Yard an additional (in addition to the requirements of paragraphs one (1) and two (2) immediately above) one (1) foot for every foot of increased height over fifty-one (51) feet. Therefore an agricultural Accessory Structure eighty (80) feet in height shall be located a minimum of forty-four (44) feet from the zoning Lot line. Said agricultural Accessory Structure shall not be located in a required Front Yard.

Section 2.02.04.E.4

4. Rural Home Industry

a. Rural Home Industry shall include, but not be limited to, such activities as welding services, repair of farm equipment, furniture making, lawn maintenance services, tool sharpening, and lawn maintenance equipment repair.

b. The primary Dwelling Unit on the site of a Rural Home Industry shall be owner-occupied. In the event that the primary Dwelling Unit ceases to be owner-occupied, the Rural Home Industry shall be terminated.

c. External impacts, such as noise, odor or vibrations, shall not exceed those normally associated with the principal Uses allowed in the zoning district within which the property is located.

d. The employees onsite at the home industry shall be restricted to members of the immediate family or other residents of the property.

e. No commodity or good not produced on the premises shall be sold on the premises or displayed or warehoused on the premises for sale elsewhere. This does not preclude taking orders for sales or provisions of services offsite.

f. No traffic shall be generated by the Rural Home Industry that is in excess of that normally expected by the principal Use.

g. The activities and materials associated with the Rural Home Industry shall not occupy a Front Yard and shall, unless conducted within a completely enclosed Building, be setback a minimum of fifty (50) feet from any side or rear property line. If said setback is not provided, screening shall be required as per Section 6.06.04.B.5.

h. Signage shall be allowed as per Article VII of this Code.

Joseph C. Cearley
Special Projects Mgr.
St. Johns County Growth Management Department
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[St. Augustine, FL 32084](#)
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Cell: 513-907-4775

Questions pertaining to economic development in rural southwest St. Johns County

These questions pertain to rural southwest St. Johns County including the former Town of Hastings. Please provide links to sources requested.

- Does the county have short and/or long term economic and community development plans? What studies, reports and recommendations support the realization of these planning goals?

Comprehensive Plan –
<http://www.sjcfll.us/LongRangePlanning/media/CPA2025/2Adopted2025.pdf>

- Does the county have a plan for the development and implementation of economic change through retention, expansion, attraction of commerce and industry and the creation of incentive zone/programs?

Comprehensive Plan – **Section Objective A.1.21 Economic Development**
<http://www.sjcfll.us/LongRangePlanning/media/CPA2025/2Adopted2025.pdf>

- **Is there a current department work plan for the region?**

Part of JAXUSA Regional Economic Development. Completed NEFL Regional Economic Development Strategy

http://innovatenortheastflorida.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Innovate_NEFL_Executive_Summary_4-19-12.pdf

<http://innovatenortheastflorida.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Innovate-Four-Year-Accomplishments-Overview.pdf>

New NEFL Regional Economic Development Strategy underway

<https://www.elevateneffl.com/>

- **What county analyses exist of existing economic situations relative to business attraction and expansion and their application to the region?**

Florida Department of Opportunity (DEO) statistics reflect 18,000 new jobs created and 1,200 new establishments opened in St. Johns County since 2011.

The most recent data available is here.

<http://freida.labormarketinfo.com/vosnet/lmi/area/areasummary.aspx?section=inndata&session=areadetail&geo=1204000109>

SJC Economic Development Activity Update 2017

http://www.sjcfl.us/EconomicDevelopment/media/2017_ED_Activity_Report.pdf

SJC Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) 2016: page 8-12

<https://www.sjccoc.us/Financial/pdf/2016/FINANCIAL%20SECTION.pdf>

- **What grants or incentives for new development and redevelopment does the county make available? Anything pertinent to regional recovery from Hurricanes Matthew and Irma?**

County Business Incentive Ordinance 2014-30

<https://www.sjccoc.us/minrec/OrdinanceBooks/2014/ORD2014-30.pdf>

Efforts underway to obtain CDBG DR funding for impacted areas within the county.

- **What are the tax and millage rates for the region?**

2017 Millages:

<http://sjctax.us/media/MILLAGESHEET.pdf>

- What is the condition of infrastructure, including plans for improvement?

St. Johns County Capital Improvement Plan Updated FY 2017

<http://www.sjcfl.us/OMB/media/Budget2017/FY17CapitalImprovementPlan.pdf>

- Are there any overlay or special taxing districts in place that a developer would want to know about?

No taxing or special incentive districts or Enterprise Zones located in St. Johns County.
Hastings Zoning Overlay – Growth Management has provided.

- What sensitive and controversial issues might the county face in development/redevelopment of the region? Are there law enforcement issues?

- Is there an existing inventory of available building, businesses and land areas for sale in the region that includes both public and private? Any large divestments of public lands or facilities in the works, e.g., as I've heard rumored about the US/IFAS research station in Hastings?

Provided reports generated from Costar real estate database on available land and buildings in Hastings and Elkton area.

- What if any of the following are in place: industrial parks, shell buildings, utilities, transportation, etc., that support business growth and expansion?

Developer-controlled business park areas within St. Johns County.

<http://www.sjcfl.us/EconomicDevelopment/CommercialDevelopment.aspx>

- Are any investor workshops planned or scheduled for the region? If so, please supply information about these.

Not aware of any.

- What's the employable state of the regionally available workforce? What analyses and recommendations are in place for workforce education and training?

Labor force data for St. Johns County and all counties statewide.

<http://www.floridajobs.org/labor-market-information/labor-market-information-data-releases/monthly-data-releases>

- What recent promotional pieces or magazine inserts --, e.g., in Florida Trend or The Wall Street Journal -- that promote economic investment in the region?

Florida Trend:

<http://www.sjcfl.us/EconomicDevelopment/media/2018/FT-1.22.18.pdf>

Global Trade Export Guide:

<http://www.sjcfl.us/EconomicDevelopment/media/2017/St%20Johns%20USA%20Trade%20Reprint.pdf>

Business View Magazine:

<http://www.sjcfl.us/EconomicDevelopment/media/2017/BusinessViewMagazineSJC.pdf>

Southern Business & Development Magazine:

http://www.sjcfl.us/EconomicDevelopment/media/2016/DixieDozen_Winter2016.pdf

Other data provided relevant to request:

Opportunity360 Measurement Report for Hastings

Tract FIPS: 12109021101

https://www.policymap.com/report_widget?pid=198400&type=op&area=predefined&sid=2010

United States Census

Resident Population Estimates for the 100 Fastest Growing U.S. Counties with 10,000 or More

Population in 2016: July 1, 2016 to July 1, 2017 Population Estimates

https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=PEP_2017_PEPANN_GRC.US06&prodType=table

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4/19/18

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Plans and projections relating to tourism

RE: Tourism projections

The Tourist Development Council Strategic Plan, completed by an outside consultant in March 2017, identified the areas for potential tourism development in St. Johns County and was the precursor to studies for sports, arts and culture and agritourism. The TDCe also completed a brand perception study around the same time, [These results are linked here: <https://app.luminpdf.com/viewer/hNLTgkhEJSkRHj5hy> and <https://app.luminpdf.com/viewer/Jk4ELnT35drLtcbjF>]

I have attached a copy of the FY18 TDC Budget Goal Summary which was prepared for the FY18 administrative budget hearings. As for FY19, we are early enough in the budget season that we have not created the performance projections and goals for FY19 with the exception of the revenue projection. On Monday March 19th, the TDC voted to recommend a 5% rate of revenue growth for FY19 which results in an anticipated annual revenue of \$11,012,830. The Budget Goal Summary is here: [\[https://app.luminpdf.com/viewer/zBJDgTYKEJSLrxrcv\]](https://app.luminpdf.com/viewer/zBJDgTYKEJSLrxrcv)

I've attached a copy of the Ordinance 2011-31 which is the St. Johns County Tourist Development Plan. The ordinance outlines some of the basic expected uses and goals of the expenditure of Tourist Development Tax in St. Johns County. [This is here: <https://app.luminpdf.com/viewer/j8PX9drL4j2ocSHTy>]

Link to the County Comp Plan is:

<http://www.sjcfl.us/LongRangePlanning/media/CPA2025/2Adopted2025.pdf>

Tourism citations from the Comp Plan:

A.1.6.8 The County shall assist as necessary the Agricultural Extension Office in working with the farm communities in providing agritourism and agribusiness activities and to transition from traditional St. Johns County crops to specialty crops, ornamentals, flowers and similar alternatives as applicable to St. Johns County. (page 18)

A.1.6. 9 The County shall allow agribusiness operations within R/S and A-I as designated on the Future Land Use Map and further defined by the Land Development Code. Agribusiness is defined as operations associated with active farm activities, equestrian activities, pasture lands, timber production, crop and sod production operations and may include:

- agri and eco tourism establishments as defined in the Land Development Code (page 18)

Legislative authority for leveling the county Tourist Development Tax is found at F.S. 125.0104 and is linked here:

http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0100-0199/0125/Sections/0125.0104.html

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[Putnam County](#)
[Tourism Data](#)

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/Julie%40chamberpc.com/1624a17c9ca59f2a?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>

[Flagler County](#)
[Tourism Data](#)

1 RE: Tourism data request from Flagler County TDC Director Matthew Dunn

2016

- \$524,500,000 Economic Impact
- 5,063 Tourism related jobs
- \$137,800,000 in payroll
- \$1,700,000 in annual promotions budget
- For every \$1 spent on promotions - \$309 to Flagler economy
- \$7,800,000 in local sales tax revenue
- Visitor spending in Flagler County helps pay for Infrastructure, Art & Culture, Public Safety, Environmental Programs and Schools
- Current Occupancy is 60.2%
- Current Average Daily Rate is \$135.52
- RevPAR = \$79.73
- Demand = +5.9%
- TDT Collections = +33%
- 43% increase in website traffic
- 76% of website visits were new visitors
- 49% mobile
- 37% desktop
- 14% tablet
- Facebook 118% increase
- Instagram 17% increase in Follower Growth
- Twitter 9% increase
- YouTube 32% Follower Growth
- Top Webpage Viewed: Webcams & Weather (Hurricane related)
- Top Campaign: Weddings
- Top Paid Campaign: Vacation Rentals Pet Friendly Florida
- Origin of visitors: 1. Florida (drive market), [2. Georgia](#), [3. New York](#)
- Top Website Visits by City: 1. Orlando, 2. Atlanta, 3. New York
- Emerging New Market: Tampa, 168% increase

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