



# ILLINOIS. MILE AFTER MAGNIFICENT MILE.

**FOR RELEASE**  
June 20, 2006

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## **AGRITOURISM GROWING IN ILLINOIS**

*Combining tourism with agriculture is becoming a major draw for tourists*

Whether travelers want to stomp grapes and make their own wine, participate in the daily activities of a working 19<sup>th</sup>-century farm, or cut down their own Christmas tree among a herd of reindeer, Illinois offers countless opportunities for travelers interested in agritourism, one of the hottest trends in travel today. Agritourism in Illinois showcases the daily activities of farms, orchards and wineries, and gives visitors a distinctive and memorable travel experience.

"Agritourism allows people to engage in hands-on, authentic experiences while on vacation," said Jan Kostner, deputy director, Illinois Bureau of Tourism. "Illinois' numerous farms and agricultural businesses give visitors a one-of-a-kind encounter with the people, places and activities that make our state unique."

### **Accommodations**

The whole family will enjoy a rustic escape at **Bluffdale Vacation Farm** in Eldred, near Grafton. Rated by *Parent* magazine as one of the "Top 10 Family Resorts in North America," this vacation destination is light on luxury but heavy on fun. The family-owned farm has been welcoming guests for more than 40 years to join in the daily "chores" of horse grooming, duck feeding, fishing, swimming, sing-a-longs, hiking and more. Above all, guests can take a break from the fast-moving world around them and indulge in the simplicities of charming accommodations and home-cooked meals.

For more information, contact Bluffdale Vacation Farm (217-983-2854, [www.bluffdalevacationfarm.com](http://www.bluffdalevacationfarm.com)).

Hour-long sunset hayrides along a working elk farm, horseback riding beside the curves of the Mississippi and Illinois rivers, and homemade fruit cobblers are just a few of the specialties offered at **Harpole's Heartland Lodge** in Nebo. A combination quaint bed and breakfast, expansive hunting grounds and corporate retreat, Heartland's 1,200 rolling acres provide a beautiful setting for enjoying the great outdoors. Visitors can also relax by the stone fireplace, break records on the shooting clay course, barrel through the 20 miles of mountain bike trails, or simply enjoy the plethora of bird species.

For more information, contact Harpole's Heartland Lodge (217-734-2526, [www.heartlandlodge.com](http://www.heartlandlodge.com)).

### **Farms and Orchards**

America's rich prairie farm heritage is kept alive at the 19<sup>th</sup>-century **Garfield Farm Museum**, a former 281-acre farmstead and inn located in LaFox, near Geneva. Once a center for community activity, the museum now hosts a variety of seminars and events highlighting the Midwest's farming practices over

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**Governor Rod R. Blagojevich**

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the last 150 years, ranging from special shows on rare livestock breeds to classes taught on prairie, woodlands and wetlands management. Tours are available for the public on Sundays and Wednesdays.

For more information, contact the Garfield Farm Museum (630-584-8485, [www.garfieldfarm.org](http://www.garfieldfarm.org)).

Located just a short drive from Chicago, **DeKalb Farm Tours** offer an insider's look at some of the area's largest operating farms. Visitors will learn about modern farming techniques as they are led by the farmers themselves on a variety of specialty tours, including hog, soybean, corn, beef and dairy farms, as well as specialty farms with orchards, pumpkin patches and organic foods. Visitors will gain insight into how technology has revolutionized farming through analysis of animal health practices, state-of-the-art global positioning systems, feeding and growing systems and record keeping.

For more information, contact DeKalb Farm Tours (815-756-6361, [www.dekalbfarmtours.com](http://www.dekalbfarmtours.com)).

Since the mid-1800s when the first Amish families settled in Arthur, tourists have had an interest in learning more about their lifestyle. The **Illinois Amish Interpretive Center** fosters the connection between this community and today's world. Until only a few years ago, farming was the main source of income for Illinois' Amish community, primarily harvesting wheat, oats, clover and corn. At the museum, artifacts gathered from local community members help tell the story of the Old Order Amish, and travelers can also set up tours exploring the peaceful countryside and an Amish dairy farm and home. Visitors can even enjoy dinner cooked by an Amish woman and hosted in her home.

For more information, contact Illinois Amish Interpretive Center (1-888-45-AMISH, [www.amishcenter.com](http://www.amishcenter.com)).

Guests can revel in the holiday season year-round at the family-owned **Hardy's Reindeer Ranch** in Rantoul, where 16 Alaskan reindeer, five acres of ready-to-cut pine trees, and an old-time Western-themed banquet hall provide a magical experience. In the fall, Hardy's gigantic corn mazes challenge the adventurous to maneuver their way through towering corn stalks and other surprises.

For more information, contact Hardy's Reindeer Ranch (217-893-3407, [www.reindeerranch.com](http://www.reindeerranch.com)).

What began as a small farm stand in Belleville in 1837 is now the country's largest pick-your-own orchard. **Eckert's Country Store and Farms** is an entertainment facility encompassing a broad range of agricultural activities for the whole family. With three locations scattered across Southern Illinois, Eckert's hosts a variety of events throughout the year, including wine tastings, cooking demonstrations and gardening seminars. For the kids, haunted hayrides, bonfires, Billy Bob's pig races, animal petting areas and the popular Mine Shaft slide are just a few of the attractions that will keep their attention for the entire day. After an exciting day, Eckert's delicious baked goods are a must for the ride home!

For more information, contact Eckert's Country Store and Farms (618-233-0513, [www.eckerts.com](http://www.eckerts.com)).

### **Outdoor Activities**

For the avid hunter and all-around nature lover, the **Big Oak Hunting Paradise** in Lincoln offers excellent conditions for deer, bird and turkey hunting on their private grounds. As a family-run hunting and farming operation for over 100 years, the employees at Big Oak specialize in helping their guests get a prize shot. Guests are encouraged to bring their equipment, and Big Oak will take care of the rest: overnight accommodations, day hunts, snacks and group outings. Outings typically last for five days and six nights, with transportation and meals provided.

For more information, contact Big Oak Hunting Paradise (217-732-4238, [www.big-oak.com](http://www.big-oak.com)).

### **Wineries and Vineyards**

Illinois is home to more than 60 wineries that offer an array of fun and informative experiences for wine aficionados, including everything from wine tastings to grape stomping to winemaking lessons. Wine lovers from across the Midwest can enjoy an assortment of festivals during the second annual Illinois Wine Month this September. Winery owners are happy to showcase their seasonal varietals at wine tastings, music and food festivals and other celebrations during the peak fall harvest season and throughout the year. In addition, Illinois' two wine trails give travelers the unique chance to experience several wineries in one day.

The new **Northern Illinois Wine Trail** connects 15 of Northern Illinois' popular wineries, all of which are a one to two hour drive from the Chicagoland area. For travelers looking to escape the bustle of the city and for anyone looking for a personalized wine experience, these wineries combine old-fashioned hard work, passion and superior customer service. The Northern Illinois Wine Trail plays host to two can't-miss events: the Vintage Illinois Wine Festival, Sept. 16 and 17, at the lush Starved Rock State Park, and Galena Cellars Vineyard & Winery Nouveau 2006 Festival, Nov. 17 and 18 in historic Galena.

For more information, contact the Northern Illinois Tourism Development Office (815-547-3740, [www.visitnorthernillinois.com/wineTrailWineries.html](http://www.visitnorthernillinois.com/wineTrailWineries.html)).

The **Shawnee Hills Wine Trail**, spanning Jackson and Union counties in Southern Illinois, connects eight wineries along a 25-mile trail. Vineyard tours can be arranged at each of the wineries and many offer opportunities to participate in the winemaking process by stomping grapes and learning about the various types of fruit used. Of course, sampling seasonal varietals is always a guest favorite. Nestled in the rolling hills and picturesque vistas of Shawnee National Forest, guests are encouraged to relax among some of the most beautiful scenery in the Midwest and enjoy a simpler way of life with great wine and good company.

For more information, contact the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail (618-893-2623, [www.shawneewinetrail.com](http://www.shawneewinetrail.com)).

To get travelers started on their agritourism travel plans, the Illinois Bureau of Tourism offers additional information on one-of-a-kind attractions, events, accommodations and bookable 3-Day Getaways through the Bureau's Web site, **[www.enjoyillinois.com](http://www.enjoyillinois.com)** or its travel counselors at **1-800-2CONNECT**.

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Media materials and downloadable images are available on the Illinois Bureau of Tourism online media center at **[www.illinoismediacenter.com](http://www.illinoismediacenter.com)**. Additional photography may be obtained by contacting Julie Connolly at [julie.connolly@edelman.com](mailto:julie.connolly@edelman.com), 312-233-1246, or Emma Douglas at [emma.douglas@edelman.com](mailto:emma.douglas@edelman.com), 312-240-2730.

*The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.*