

PRELIMINARY DRAFT

April 30, 2015

MORA COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MARKETING PLAN - 2015

INTRODUCTION:

As a reflection of Mora County's demographics, its economic opportunities, and the values of its citizenry, the Mora County Strategic Plan for Economic Development adopted by the Mora County Commission in December, 2014, identifies target areas for economic development as Tourism/Recreation, Renewable Energy/Green Industry; Value-added Agriculture; and Creative Enterprises. The plan has no particular emphasis on manufacturing or oil and gas production. This marketing plan will lay out steps to inform the general public, potential businesses, both local start-ups and those from outside Mora, about both the economic needs and opportunities in Mora.

MORA COUNTY'S ECONOMIC STATISTICS:

Physical features: Mora County is predominantly rural with small farms along the Mora River, forested mountains on the western part of the County, and large ranches on in the central and eastern parts. Interstate 25 runs north-south through the eastern part of the County.

Mora County has a population of approximately 4,700 a decline of about 5.3% since 2000 and a 2.9% decline since 2010. Mora's population is also aging, the median age in 2013 was 46 years, up from 39.4 in 2000.

Median household income in 2013 was \$29,263, an increase of 19.4% over 2000 but still less than the state increase of 29.4%. However, median family income increased by 40%, to \$38,175. Mora has 23.8% of its population living in poverty; for those under 18, the poverty rate was 37.3%.

Mora's unemployment rate in December, 2014 was 13.1%; considerably higher than the state unemployment rate of 5.1%.

84.1% of Mora residents are high school graduates, very close to the state average, but only 9.5% have a Bachelors degree or higher, compared to 25.8% for the state.

Most of Mora County's workforce is employed in the agriculture/ranching/forestry, health care, and education sectors. There is virtually no manufacturing or professional services employment. Mora County is also underserved in the retail and services sector.

Mora meets the definition of a "Frontier Community" with respect to economic development in that it is an economically depressed area with a population of under 7,500 people.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE:

This plan is the first step in a much broader and complete plan to be developed once the Mora County Strategic Economic Development Plan is approved by the New Mexico Economic Development Department and Mora County identifies priorities within the Plan. Recognizing that there are immediate opportunities, this document provides a near term focus on tourism, value added agriculture, renewable energy, and creative enterprises - the general target areas named in the Strategic Plan.

MARKETING STEPS:

General:

- Collaborate as much as possible with neighboring economic development organizations, specifically, the Las Vegas-San Miguel Economic Development Corporation. Las Vegas events and activities also offer a nearby venue for Mora business. For example, Mora's Las Nueve Niñas Winery could be a participant in a Las Vegas wine tasting event.
- Participate with regional economic development organizations, such as the North East Economic Development Organization (NEEDO) of which Mora County is a member and the North Central New Mexico Economic District (NCNMED). Programs instituted by these organizations are intended to assist the region as a whole but invariably will have positive benefit to individual communities.
- Become more involved with statewide organizations such as the New Mexico Rural Economic Development Council.
- Utilize our website www.OurMora.org as a window to the world for all aspects of economic activity, especially tourism.

Tourism/Recreation:

Mora has the benefit of thousands of drive-through tourists, many from Oklahoma and Texas who drive through Mora on their way to Angel Fire, Taos, Red River, and other outdoor recreation sites, both winter and summer. Mora County also has its own destination sites, namely Coyote Creek and Morphy Lake State Parks, both well known for their fishing, and Fort Union National Monument in the eastern part of the County.

Increasing tourist's stop time in Mora has two steps. One is to reach out to the drive-through tourists and encourage them to visit our existing sites. The second is to expand the opportunities and reasons to stop in Mora for a few hours or a day.

Building on What we Have:

- Participate in regional tourism marketing avenues, such as the Las Vegas-San Miguel Chamber of Commerce Golden Triangle Tourism Brochure, and Las Vegas and San Miguel County Visitors Guide, published by Las Vegas 1st.
- Support and encourage advertising conducted by local businesses that rely on tourism such as Victory Ranch, the Mora Valley Spinning Mill, Salman Ranch, and the Cleveland Roller Mill.
- Support and encourage a “Made in Mora” online outlet store for those craftspeople who do not want to sell directly online themselves.
- Become an active participant in the NM True program.
- Ensure the Mora website www.OurMora.org continues to be both attractive and effective; and that other Mora area websites are linked to it.
- Advertise in area newspapers, such as the Angel Fire Sangre de Cristo Chronicle, that reach tourists in their communities who might want to take a day trip to Mora.
- Consider advertising in selected Oklahoma or Texas communities which are sources of our drive through tourists.
- Distribute Mora Visitor Brochures throughout the region (*Ongoing by the Mora Valley Chamber of Commerce*)
- Organize special tours, such as “The Churches of Mora County” or visits to local farmers greenhouse/hoop house operations.
- Organize day trips by tourists in Angel Fire looking for something different for a day. Mora activities could include visits to Victory Ranch, Mora Spinning Mill (Tapetes de Lana), Cleveland Roller Mill and lunch at one of Mora’s restaurants.
- Continue to develop a mutually supportive relationship with Fort Union National Monument.
- In Wagon Mound, create a marketing message that emphasizes the Santa Fe trail and the famous landmark of the Wagon Mound itself.

Building “More to Do in Mora”:

- In cooperation with the Mora Arts and Cultural Compound (ACC), develop the ACC into a visitor destination
- Support the restoration of the St Vrain Mill and its eventual use as a Mora Cultural Center.
- Create a network of farms to act as hosts for group visits and tours interested in sustainable agriculture in Mora. *(Also an action under Value-added Agriculture)*
- Encourage and support an “Outfitter Cooperative” to jointly market the hunting/fishing/hiking opportunities in Mora.
- Expand the number of rooms available for overnight stays, either through B&Bs or a small motel.

Value-added Agriculture

Even though Mora was once the “Breadbasket of New Mexico,” with hundreds of small farms producing grain, Mora simply doesn’t have the land available to evolve its agriculture base into the industrial agricultural model common in the Midwest. Mora still has many small farms, most of which are too small to provide a sustainable income with conventional farm practices. However, these small farms are large enough to host greenhouses and hoop houses, and most have sufficient water available to enable significant production of specialty crops, lettuce, tomatoes, etc. Under the Los de Mora Agricultural Cooperative, value added, small scale agriculture has established itself in Mora over the past several years.

The challenge is to expand the market for these products. The opportunity is to tie the marketing of Mora agricultural products with a consumer awareness of Mora itself.

- Actively pursue contracts with end users (grocery stores, restaurants) on a sufficient scale to enable Mora producers to continue to expand their operations. *(This is an ongoing effort of Los de Mora Agricultural Cooperative.)*
- Create a “Made in Mora” brand that can be used by any producer meeting the quality standards.
- Create a network of farms to act as hosts for group visits and tours interested in sustainable agriculture in Mora. *(Also an action under Tourism)*
- Assist Las Nueve Niñas Winery in Statewide marketing to increase the visibility of both the winery and Mora.

Renewable Energy/Green Industry

Mora County shares a characteristic with the rest of New Mexico - a high elevation climate with an abundance of cloud free days - making it an ideal place to take advantage of solar energy. In addition, western Mora County has thousands of acres of pine forest, many overgrown and in need of thinning, and therefore an ideal source of woody/biomass. The immediate renewable energy opportunities in Mora are in solar and woody biomass. Large scale wind energy in the eastern part of Mora County is a future possibility.

Solar:

The concept of a community solar facility in Mora has the opportunity to make electricity more affordable to Mora residents and therefore increase the sustainability of living in Mora. Given that agreement(s) can be reached to establish such a facility, marketing must focus on attracting local buyers/investors, particularly those residents who do not have the land or roof area to install their own systems. Themes should include cost savings and the general benefits of "going green".

The County could also enhance the message of the benefits of solar by utilizing solar electrical generation at its major buildings, i.e. the Mora Independent Schools Complex, and the County Courthouse.

Woody Biomass:

While Mora has an abundance of woody bio mass, so does every other community in north central New Mexico so Mora has no real competitive advantage. The question becomes one of market demand. At this time, there is no available market analysis available that would answer the question of where can we sell our product. The first step in marketing Mora's wood by products is a market analysis to answer if there is a large enough market for a processed wood products (bio char for example) that would justify an investment in the means of production.

Wind Power:

Marketing of wind power opportunities must await the feasibility analysis of such a facility, focusing on infrastructure cost compared to other locations in the region. If such analysis shows a measurable advantage, an outreach to wind power generation companies would be in order.

Creative Enterprises.

The popular perception of a “Creative Enterprise” is generally that of an individual artist or craftsman at one end of the scale to a tech savvy entrepreneur at the other. Mora has a significant number of people who fit into the artist category, hardly anyone who is a high tech entrepreneur, but there are many who have created a business by utilizing the internet. Enhancing creative enterprise in Mora will have to be a two pronged activity: one, increasing the opportunity (a business development activity) and two, increasing the participation of local residents in the creative enterprises and attracting new residents into area on the basis of the opportunities here.

Local Participation:

Mora, through the Mora Arts and Cultural Compound, is already undertraining to increase local involvement through the offering of classes, workshops, etc. to encourage and develop local artisans. Increased participation means an increased number of items to be offered to tourists or online outlets. *(See Actions under Tourism)*

Attracting New People:

For decades, New Mexico has been a life style destination for artists and artisans, although Mora so much because very few people outside the region are familiar with Mora. However, for many with a sense of independence and a taste for a rural setting, Mora is an ideal place. As the local artist and artisan community grows, potential newcomers would find a supportive, like-minded, community. At the other end of the technological scale, Mora’s growing internet capability allows technical specialists, professionals, and online retailers the opportunity to conduct their business from Mora.

To that end, the County should consider an advertising campaign directed toward “outsiders” (most likely older retirees) touting the advantages of living in Mora. Advantages cited would include clean air, great views, open country, low tax rate, adequate internet, etc.

NOTE: This plan is a first “for comment” draft circulated for input and comment and as such, parts of it may be changed, delated or expanded upon.