

To the Fort Bend County Commissioners Court:

I, Jennifer Cheesman, the 4-H & Youth Development Program Coordinator for the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, respectfully request that the County Commissioners Court approve work time for an upcoming out-of-state field training conducted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. The 9-day Ecotourism and Agritourism Field Training will be held February 18 – 26, 2014 in Costa Rica and the requested days to be considered as work time are February 19 – 25, 2014, due to the training itinerary. All other expenses, including travel, lodging, and meals, will be paid through my personal funds, supplemented by an Extension Agent discount through Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.

This experiential field course will provide unparalleled opportunities to profit from knowledge from successful owners, operations, and communities involved in ecotourism. The training will involve tours and meetings with entrepreneurs who specialize in sustainable agriculture, education, and recreation through community involvement. By networking with Texas and global leaders in agritourism, ecotourism, biodynamic agriculture, and environmental education during the training, Fort Bend County Extension would be exponentially better equipped to design, promote, and implement youth courses and 4-H projects in the county that are currently undeveloped. An array of program implementation techniques will be covered and upon return I plan to apply them in order to develop and enhance non-traditional 4-H project areas and youth opportunities, as well as interpret the results to you and other collaborators and stake holders.

Currently underdeveloped program areas that would benefit directly as a result of information acquired at the training include:

- Personal Development & Leadership, including
 - Youth Entrepreneurship,
 - Leadership,
 - Recreation, and
 - Global Education and Awareness
- Environment Education & Earth Sciences, including
 - Forestry,
 - Natural Resources,
 - Outdoor Education,
 - Water, and
 - Wildlife & Fisheries
- Communication & Expressive Arts, including
 - Photography and Videography
- Plants projects, including
 - Horticulture
 - Soil & Crop Science

Attached is a full itinerary of the training as provided by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, as well as a chart which expands on the individual experiences and describes program relevance. Below are my proposed

implementations and expected outcomes as a result of the information collected while at the training. My goal is to execute each program, workshop, and opportunity by August 2015, which will be the end of the 2014 – 2015 academic and 4-H calendar year.

- At least two youth leadership trainings with guest speakers and a focus on youth entrepreneurship
- Two sessions of Photography For Beginners and Intermediate Photography workshops for Fort Bend County youth; one workshop session will focus on urban photography and the other will focus on nature photography
- Host an informational meeting about the Wildlife Habitat Education Program (WHEP) projects; promote and develop a Wildlife & Fisheries 4-H club to begin August 2014
- Gather and train at least 3 youth teams for the 2014 Texas 4-H Outdoor Challenge, including a team for each class – junior, intermediate, and senior levels
- At least two hands-on educational workshops to educate county youth on natural resources produced, utilized, and exported from Texas
- On an ongoing basis, work with schools to bring programs designed to promote leadership and citizenship into classrooms and afterschool programs, forging partnerships with at least 5 schools in each district in the county
- Host an informational meeting about the Horticulture 4-H project; promote and develop a Horticulture 4-H Club to begin before January 2015

Overall, the Ecotourism and Agritourism Field Training will offer information that will greatly assist the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service of Fort Bend County in developing and strengthening numerous project areas. There will also be opportunities to discuss current promotion and marketing techniques, which can be directly applied to raising awareness and expanding Fort Bend 4-H. However, most importantly, all of the information gained through the experience will be used to support, educate, and develop the next generation of leaders.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration,

Jennifer Cheesman

Date	Experience	Description	Program Relevance
19-Feb	Lands in Love Resort Tour	The Lands in Love Eco-resort is focused on nature education, environmental consciousness, healthy living, and natural resource development.	Information learned would relate to healthy living, one of the three mission areas of 4-H, as well as wildlife, natural resources, and outdoor education - three of the project areas of 4-H that are lacking in FBC.
	Forest Hike Interpretive Programs	These programs are focused on forest and wildlife education utilizing various interpretation techniques that help interested persons understand what they are experiencing.	The program will cover new interpretation techniques and program development and implementation ideas, which are essential in youth development curricula. The 4-H program areas covered are forestry, natural resources, range science & management, outdoor education, and wildlife & fisheries projects, all of which are currently underrepresented in FBC.
20-Feb	Finca Luna Nueva Tour	A sustainable rainforest ecolodge, the Finca Luna Nueva has a certified organic biodynamic farm which grows 4% of the world's tumeric and ginger, among other crops, and has an extensive medicinal plant garden.	Much of 4-H is concentrated on animal projects, and information gained during this tour would provide students raising animals with a broadened scope and knowledge base about biodynamic agriculture. Development of a program based on biodynamic agriculture could cover a multitude of 4-H areas including leadership, natural resources, outdoor education, and range science & management projects. The Finca Luna Nueva also has a medicinal garden with over 300 species of plants, and information gained here would be beneficial for students interested in plant projects.
	Hot Springs Resort Tour	Geothermal hotsprings heated by the Arenal volcano	The Arenal Hot springs tour would offer new perspectives and detailed information that could be applied for both the water and natural resources projects, separately or together.
21-Feb	EcoGlide Canopy Tour	This tour company is dedicated to providing fun experiences while educating guests on ecology, botany, and restoration practices, and providing an overall sense of nature awareness	Although the activities that this company offers may not be what 4-H focuses on, the integration techniques and principles to combine education and entertainment would be important to bring back to FBC. Projects for natural resources, outdoor education, the wildlife habitat education program (WHEP), citizenship, horticulture, biological science, entomology, and youth entrepreneurship could all be taken from information learned from this company.

Date	Experience	Description	Program Relevance
21-Feb	Chocolate Rainforest Tour	The Rainforest Chocolate Tour is an educational experience that takes participants through the entire production process of cocoa, from seed to powder.	Although Texas agriculture isn't focused on the cocoa plant, there are so many possibilities for programs within and outside of 4-H using program ideas and information from this tour. Already I have several ideas to create something similar and promoting Texas offerings and productions through hands on education.
	Night Hike Interpretive Program	The night hike program will focus on interpretation, similar to the forest hike interpretive programs, but will incorporate techniques and processes for nighttime nature programming.	Just like the day hike program, the night hike interpretive programs will offer interpretation techniques and program development ideas. It would lend itself to forestry, natural resources, outdoor education, and wildlife & fisheries project ideas and development as well.
22-Feb	Proyecto Asis Wildlife Preserve	The Proyecto Asis Wildlife preserve tour will offer opportunities to network, as well as observe programming which emphasizes conservation and social development.	4-H and youth development emphasizes community/civic service and giving back but it is an area that needs growth in FBC. The Proyecto Asis Wildlife Preserve has been successful in creating a program where people will pay to volunteer - having the opportunity to network and learn methodology for obtaining, keeping, and growing volunteers would be very beneficial for 4-H citizenship projects. There is a wealth of knowledge that could be obtained by observing and partaking in programs designed to focus on social development.
	National Tourism Institute	The Costa Rican National Tourism Institute is the governing and policy making body of the Costa Rican government. It established a process for certifying entities in sustainable tourism and oversee and implement the program.	One of the 4-H project categories that is very underdeveloped is Personal Development and Leadership, which includes Youth Entrepreneurship, Leadership, Recreation, and Global Education and Awareness. All the information, history, and implementation techniques given through the tour at the National Tourism Institute could be used to help members looking to begin projects in this category.

Date	Experience	Description	Program Relevance
23-Feb	Hotel Punta Leona & Private Wildlife Preserve	Hotel Punta Leona is a fully functioning hotel, but it is known for the 750 acres of transitional forest. It is one of the most important private preserves in Costa Rica and functions as a research center in addition to an environmentally sustainable hotel.	Information and networking attained through the tour of Hotel Punta Leona & Private Wildlife Preserve would be highly beneficial. Not only would it offer a wealth of ideas and implementation techniques for youth programs and 4-H projects including citizenship, but it would also provide opportunities to meet with leaders in marketing, service, and conservation. It is also a socially responsible entity, working with the national government and surrounding communities, which would offer opportunities to learn how FBC Extension could encourage and promote 4-Hers and other county youth in doing socially responsible projects.
24-Feb	Jose's Crocodile Tour	This river tour is designed to introduce people to the endangered American Crocodile and other important animal and plant species in Costa Rica	The tour is unlike any type of experience, and it's blending of education and entertainment is essential in development of programs that attract people. Acquired marketing ideas and program development techniques would help improve programs and projects currently conducted through Fort Bend 4-H. It would also bring a new perspective to creating and implementing Wildlife & Fisheries, Youth Entrepreneurship, and Recreation projects.
25-Feb	Carara National Park	The Carara National Park is uniquely located at a transition zone between the rainforests and tropical dry forests of Costa Rica.	The natural resources, wildlife, and educational opportunities at the Carara National Park would provide ample opportunities to gain ideas and information that would be beneficial in promoting 4-H projects focused on those specific areas of interest.

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Dr. Eugenio Gonzalez

Director of the Texas A&M Soltis Center in Costa Rica



Paul L. Serff

Texas Travel Industry Association
—President Emeritus, Adjunct
Professor in Recreation, Park
and Tourism Sciences at Texas
A&M University



Lloyd Martinez

Owner of Paradise Tours
and Certified Professional
Tour Guide in Costa Rica



Stephen Brueggerhoff

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
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Best Practices in Ecotourism and Agritourism Field Training



Feb 18-26, 2014

Topics:

- ◇ Marketing
- ◇ Wildlife Conservation
- ◇ Ecotourism
- ◇ Agritourism
- ◇ Certifications
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ITINERARY-9 DAYS

- ◆ **Tuesday, 02/18**
 - ◆ Arrive in San Jose
 - ◆ Lodging at Don Carlos Hotel, San Jose
- ◆ **Wednesday, 02/19**
 - ◆ National Museum
 - ◆ Lands in Love Resort
 - ◆ Forest Hike Interpretive Programs
 - ◆ Lodging at Soltis Center
- ◆ **Thursday, 02/20**
 - ◆ Tour of Finca Luna Nueva
 - ◆ Visit Hot Springs Resort
 - ◆ Lodging Soltis Center
- ◆ **Friday, 02/21**
 - ◆ EcoGlide Canopy Tour Company
 - ◆ Independent Lunch in La Fortuna
 - ◆ Chocolate Rainforest Tour
 - ◆ Night Hike Interpretive Program
 - ◆ Lodging at Soltis Center
- ◆ **Saturday, 02/22**
 - ◆ Proyecto Asis Wildlife Preserve
 - ◆ National Tourism Institute
 - ◆ Lodging at Soltis Center

- ◆ **Sunday, 02/23**
 - ◆ Hotel Punta Leona & Private Wildlife Preserve
 - ◆ Beach Tourism
 - ◆ Photo Assessment Activities
 - ◆ Lodging: Hotel Punta Leona
- ◆ **Monday, 02/24**
 - ◆ Jose's Crocodile Tour with Lunch
 - ◆ Independent Dinner
 - ◆ Lodging: Hotel Punta Leona
- ◆ **Tuesday, 02/25**
 - ◆ Carara National Park
 - ◆ Personal Leisure
 - ◆ Group Dinner & Discussion
 - ◆ Lodging: Hotel Punta Leona
- ◆ **Wednesday, 02/26**
 - ◆ Flight Home

