

The Realities of Agritourism

Panel of Tennessee Agritourism Operators Facilitated by Jerri Lynn Sims, UT Extension Area Farm Management Specialist

Bradley's Kountry Acres and Greenhouse

Bradley's Kountry Acres and Greenhouse in Cotton Town, TN is owned by Mike and Cathy Bradley. When they started their lives together 36 years ago, Mike and Cathy's father were in the dairy, row crop and tobacco production business. They continued this arrangement until 1996 when Cathy's father wanted a semi-retirement and their son indicated that he didn't want to return to the farm. As this is an issue many families face today, they decided to make a change in their enterprises. The cows were sold and they bought their first greenhouse to grow tobacco transplants in. About this time, they decided to enter the Pick-Your-Own market with one acre of strawberries. It took them about 3 years to establish a good customer base for the strawberries.

Today, they have expanded to 3 greenhouses with one extra shade house that is used for overflow in the spring. In the spring, Cathy has bedding plants, hanging baskets and ferns that she grows in these houses. In the fall, she grows mums and pansies. For the first time, they planed no tobacco this year but do still raise about 40 acres of soybeans. They have 8 acres of pumpkins with plans to expand next year. This year in conjunction with her brother, they offered peaches to their customers. Mike has a planting of blackberries that he will be expanding over the next few years. For their loyal customers, this year they will be offering 4 ½ acres of strawberries all grown on plastic.

Country Cove Christmas Tree Farm—Joe and Judy Clayton

Country Cove Christmas Tree Farm was started by Joe and Judy Clayton in 1990. The land was purchased after searching for about 2 ½ years. The first trees were planted in February 1991. They started out planting about two acres per year, which was 2400 trees, and later backed off to half that number. Primarily grown are Eastern White Pine and a few Leyland Cypress. Both of these species culture well and hold their needles well after harvest. They also offer per-cut Fraser Fir that are stored in water until time of sale. The first harvest by customers was in 1998.

Joe's education is as a Forester with 30 years experience with the U.S. Forest Service and 12 years with the Tennessee Division of Forestry as Assistant State Forester. Judy's education and experience is as a teacher and executive secretary. None of their education and experience adequately prepared them for Christmas tree farming! This is a labor intensive operation that can be done by anyone who is willing to work, learn and deal with people. It is very satisfying, pleasant outdoor work and provides plenty of good exercise.

Country Cove is a choose-and-cut operation that encourages families to come to the farm. They provide a handsaw and the families go to the field, select a tree, cut it and bring it to the barn. Joe then shakes and bales the tree for easy transport. They also operate a "Christmas Cabin" that has decorations and ornaments. Their objective is to "create a Christmas memory" for a family, while providing a retirement income for themselves. You can visit their website at <http://www.countrycovetrees.com>.

Myers Pumpkin Patch and Corn Maze—Vera Ann Myers

When making the journey to East Tennessee in the fall to view the mountains and the changing of the leaves, you should add Myers Pumpkin Patch and Corn Maze to your fall destination. Located in Bulls Gap, TN, Myers has been in the pumpkin business for 16 years. They also operate a full time, family dairy operation of 200 cows.

Vera Ann Myers was a school teacher and feels that the education of children is vitally important to the success of our future. When the Myers decided to start a family of their own, Vera Ann left her formal education career and decided to make agriculture education her main priority. She has been hosting school tours for several years as well as growing pumpkins. They also operate a 24 acre corn maze for weekend visitors. For the excitement seekers there is a haunted maze option at night. This maze will be harvested at the end of the season and used as feed for the dairy cows.

This year's theme is "A Taste of Tennessee" and has focused on the different products that are produced here in Tennessee from farms. It also focuses on the three geographical areas of the state and the different specialty products that come from each.