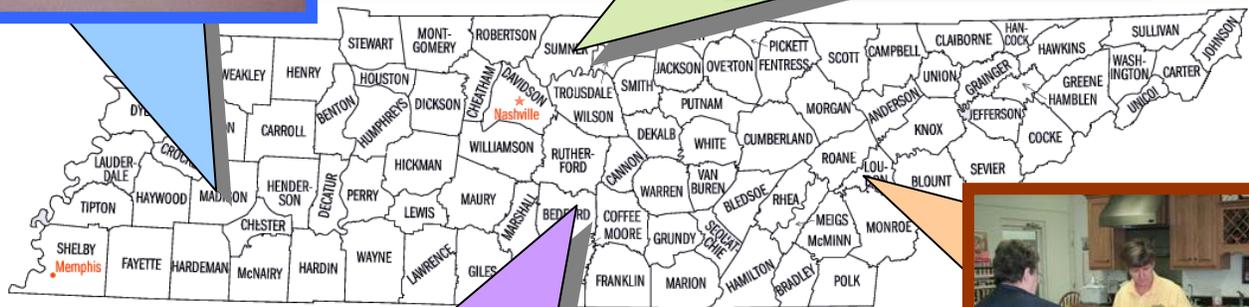


The Tennessee Agritourism Initiative

A Summary of Activities and Accomplishments

June 2006



A Report to the Tennessee Department of Agriculture
By Megan L. Bruch, Extension Specialist
University of Tennessee Extension
Center for Profitable Agriculture

Foreword

The *Center for Profitable Agriculture* is proud to have been a part of the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative since its inception in 2003. Center specialists have been involved in several aspects of the initiative, and one of our tasks was to develop a “recap” of initiative activities. The purpose of this publication is to serve as that “recap,” or in other words, describe the activities and accomplishments of the initiative.

The initiative was a partnership of at least six agencies and consisted of several different types of activities. Obtaining accurate records from all of these partners and their individual activities proved to be a challenge. Varying amounts of information and completeness of information exists for different activities. For example, a relatively large amount of information was recorded for educational events conducted while a small amount of information was reported for promotions conducted. Even with significant efforts to collect data and information on initiative activities, some activities and events that were conducted may not be included in the report.

Megan L. Bruch
Marketing Specialist



Executive Summary

The Tennessee Agritourism Initiative was a partnership of the Tennessee Departments of Agriculture, Tourist Development, Economic and Community Development and Transportation, the University of Tennessee Extension, including the Center for Profitable Agriculture, and the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation. USDA Rural Development provided \$225,000 in grant funding to conduct initiative efforts with initiative partners contributing cash and in-kind matching services.

The main goal of the initiative was to “increase farm income and make a positive impact on rural communities in Tennessee.” The goal was to be accomplished from June 2003 to June 2006 through a four-pronged approach including:

1. An inventory of the industry and survey of agritourism visitors in Tennessee
2. Training and education efforts
3. Marketing and promotional efforts
4. Continued oversight and promotion by the project steering committee

The initiative partners began initiative efforts by studying agritourism programs in other states and developing a definition of agritourism for use in Tennessee. Two studies were also conducted to investigate the agritourism industry in Tennessee.

Training and education were a major component of the initiative. Efforts included a combination of coordinated regional workshops and three-day conference as well as small-scale seminars. More than 69 events were conducted for more than 3,359 participants. Evaluations completed by many of these participants indicated that educational events were highly effective in increasing knowledge and usefulness of sessions. A comprehensive guide for agritourism entrepreneurs was also developed and released. Information gained and assistance received was expected to increase sales by respondents to the 2004 industry investigation by an average of 14.4 percent.

Another major component of the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative was promotions of the industry. Promotions activities included listing of agritourism venues on the Pick Tennessee Products and Tennessee tourism Web sites; press releases, advertisements and sponsorships; and regional agritourism brochures. These strategies have been credited with more than doubling the number of hits to the Pick Tennessee Products Web site. Agritourism entrepreneurs participating in the 2004 industry investigation expected initiative-sponsored promotions to improve their sales by an average of 10 percent.

Finally, initiative partners have provided support to agritourism entrepreneurs working to develop a statewide agritourism operators association. This association is part of initiative plans to create a sustainable agritourism effort in the state.

The Tennessee Agritourism Initiative proved to be a successful in positively impacting rural communities and increasing farm income in the state. The impact of the initiative has potential to grow into the future as agritourism entrepreneurs continue to implement knowledge learned through educational programs and use tools developed, customers first introduced to agritourism enterprises through initiative promotions become lifetime customers and spread the word about their experiences to others, and the agritourism operators association begins its work.

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	i
Executive Summary	ii
Project Background.....	1
Review of State Agritourism Initiatives	1
Definition of Agritourism	2
Tennessee Agritourism Industry Investigations.....	3
2003 Agritourism Enterprise Inventory	3
2004 Agritourism Enterprise Inventory and Customer Survey	3
Educational and Outreach Efforts and Outcomes.....	4
Spring 2004 Regional Agritourism Workshops.....	4
Web Site Development and Marketing Workshops.....	5
Agritourism: Cultivating Farm Revenue Conference	8
Additional Educational and Outreach Events	11
Agritourism Operator’s Guide	11
Tennessee Agritourism Today Electronic Newsletter	12
Educational Agritourism Resources on the Web	12
Professional Development Activities for Initiative Partners	12
Summary of Educational and Outreach Efforts and Outcomes	13
Tennessee Agritourism Promotions and Outcomes.....	14
Industry Web Sites	14
Press Releases, Advertisements and Sponsorships	14
Regional Brochures.....	15
Promotion Outcomes	15
Agritourism Operators Association	16
Summary	16

The Tennessee Agritourism Initiative

A Summary of Activities and Accomplishments

Project Background

In March 2003, a proposal was submitted to USDA Rural Development by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Tennessee Department of Tourist Development and the University of Tennessee Center for Profitable Agriculture to conduct an initiative titled *Agritourism: Turning Small Farms into Big Opportunities for Tennessee*. The proposal requested \$100,000 in grant funding to implement the project. The proposal was accepted and work began in June 2003 and was to run through June 2005. The Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation also provided funding for the initiative in the amount of \$2,500. Other initiative partners provided matching funds and in-kind contributions.

The main goal of the initiative was to “increase farm income and make a positive impact on rural communities in Tennessee.” The goal was to be accomplished through a four-pronged approach including:

1. An inventory of the industry and survey of agritourism visitors in Tennessee
2. Training and education efforts
3. Marketing and promotional efforts
4. Continued oversight and promotion by the project steering committee

In early 2004, a second proposal was submitted to USDA Rural Development by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture on behalf of the initiative partners. This second proposal was funded for an additional \$100,000 and extended the initiative’s timeline through June 2006. In 2005, a third proposal was submitted and accepted by USDA Rural Development for an additional \$25,000 to expand promotional activities for the state’s agritourism industry.

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Market Development Division provided overall leadership for the initiative. The Tennessee Departments of Tourist Development, Economic and Community Development and Transportation, University of Tennessee Extension, including the Center for Profitable Agriculture, and the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation joined the team. Representatives of all of these agencies served on the initiative steering committee. Steering committee members and their affiliations are listed as Appendix A, and minutes from steering committee meetings are included as Appendix B.

Review of State Agritourism Initiatives

One of the first activities of the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative partners was to study agritourism and visit agritourism operations in the state of Vermont, where efforts to support and improve agritourism were also being undertaken. A contingent of nine Tennessee leaders from four agencies participated in the “Vermont Agritourism Summit”

during May 5-8, 2003. The objectives of the trip were to learn about successful agritourism efforts in the state and to develop a plan to assist in building income for farms and rural communities through agritourism in Tennessee.

The first day of the trip included tours of four agritourism operations, including a dairy and maple syrup, apple, day lily, and dairy and cheese-making enterprises. The tours were coordinated by Jackie Folsom, director of the Vermont Farms Association. Ms. Folsom and board members of the Vermont Farms Association joined the Tennessee delegation for dinner to discuss Vermont's agritourism programming.

The second day of the trip included a steering committee meeting for the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative partners and the opening day of the Vermont Agritourism Conference, which lasted the remainder of the trip. During the conference, the group visited another agritourism enterprise and learned more about other state's agritourism programs.

In 2004, Tennessee Agritourism Initiative partners visited Virginia and Kentucky to investigate agritourism initiatives and learn about cultural centers promoting agritourism, value-added agricultural products, arts and crafts. Tours of centers and meetings with organizers and managers helped attendees gain a clearer understanding of organizational structure and procedures, funding strategies and success factors.

Definition of Agritourism

Following the visit to Vermont, one of the tasks of the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative steering committee was to develop a working definition of agritourism to guide the efforts of the initiative. After much deliberation and debate, the following definition was developed:

An agritourism attraction is an activity, enterprise or business which combines primary elements and characteristics of Tennessee agriculture and tourism and provides an experience for visitors which stimulates economic activity and impacts both farm and community income.

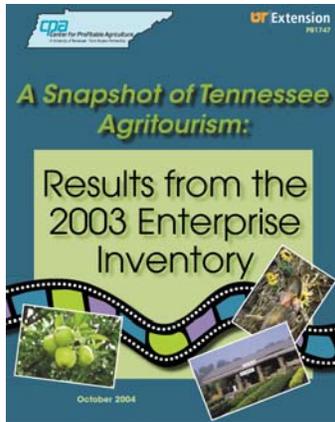
Attractions that often meet this definition include:

- *Agriculture-related museums*
- *Agriculture-related festivals and fairs*
- *Century Farms*
- *Corn-maze enterprises*
- *Farmers markets*
- *On-farm tours*
- *On-farm retail markets*
- *On-farm vacations*
- *On-farm festivals and fairs*
- *On-farm petting zoos*
- *On-farm fee-fishing*
- *On-farm horseback riding*
- *On-farm bed and breakfasts*
- *Pick-Your-Own farms*
- *Wineries*

Tennessee Agritourism Industry Investigations

Two major studies of the Tennessee agritourism industry were conducted as part of the initiative. The studies included surveys of Tennessee agritourism entrepreneurs as well as surveys of agritourism enterprise customers.

2003 Agritourism Enterprise Inventory



The University of Tennessee Center for Profitable Agriculture was tasked with conducting an inventory of Tennessee agritourism enterprises in the fall of 2003. The purpose of the study was to identify characteristics of the agritourism industry in Tennessee and to identify issues and obstacles faced by agritourism enterprises that may be addressed through research, teaching and outreach.

A telephone questionnaire and a contact list of suspected agritourism operations were developed. A total of 210 agritourism enterprise operators were successfully contacted to participate. The survey respondents provided information on the types of attractions offered and other characteristics of their enterprise, visitor and revenue information, promotional efforts, issues faced and future outlook on the industry.

Results of the study were summarized and published in a University of Tennessee Extension Publication (PB1747) titled *A Snapshot of Tennessee Agritourism: Results from the 2003 Enterprise Inventory*. A total of 1,000 printed copies of the publication were released, and an electronic version is available on the Center for Profitable Agriculture and UT Extension Web sites. Copies of the publication were distributed to all 95 Tennessee county Extension offices, the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative steering committee members, participants in more than twelve workshops and to educators in several states. Results from the study were also discussed as part of presentations to several producer and agricultural leader meetings and seminars.

In addition, the study collected data on individual enterprises to be used in initiative promotional efforts. A portion of the data collected is included on the Tennessee Department of Agriculture's Pick Tennessee Products Web site (www.picktnproducts.org) and on the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development's Web site (www.tnvacation.com).

2004 Agritourism Enterprise Inventory and Customer Survey

The work started with the 2003 enterprise inventory was continued in 2004 by representatives of the University of Tennessee, Department of Agricultural Economics. The purpose of this second study was to continue compiling a detailed inventory of the number and types of agritourism enterprises in Tennessee.

The study examined promotional methods used by agritourism enterprises in Tennessee and measured impacts of how publicly provided promotion and assistance impacted agritourism enterprises in the state. The study also determined the types of assistance currently used by agritourism operators and those still needed.

The 2004 study utilized a mail survey to gather information from 125 additional agritourism operations, making the total number of operations included in the 2003 and 2004 studies 335. Select questions from the 2004 and 2003 inventory studies were identical or similar. These questions were duplicated across the two surveys to allow for comparison and compilation of data. Participants in the 2004 study were also provided with information about how to become included in initiative promotional materials.



Results of the study were published as a report to the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative Steering Committee. The publication, called *Agritourism in Tennessee: Current Status and Future Growth, 2003-2004*, was provided to steering committee members and posted on the Department of Agricultural Economics Web site.

Surveys of agritourism operations customers were also an important part of this second study. Visitors of six Tennessee agritourism operators were asked to participate in this phase of the study by completing and returning surveys. Results of this portion of the study are pending data analyses and summary.

Educational and Outreach Efforts and Outcomes

Tennessee Agritourism Initiative educational and outreach efforts have been implemented through several methods. Educational workshops have been conducted, educational materials have been developed and initiative partners have gained knowledge and contacts through professional development events.

Spring 2004 Regional Agritourism Workshops

Four day-long regional agritourism workshops spearheaded by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture were held in February and March 2004. These regional workshops were held in Jackson, Franklin, Crossville and Morristown. The workshops offered seven sessions by tourism, agriculture and Extension professionals and Tennessee agritourism operators. Topics of sessions included an overview of the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative, agritourism promotional efforts, farm safety for farm visitors, an agritourism success story, farm liability and insurance, sign programs, marketing, and tourism organizations.

These four workshops reached 338 individuals for a total of 2,022 participant hours of training. At the conclusion of the workshops, evaluation forms were completed by 178 participants with the following results:

- ◆ Participants rated the workshops 4.34 on a scale of 1 (not effective) to 5 (very effective) in providing information needed to enhance the success of their current or potential agritourism enterprise or in preparing them to serve their clients on agritourism issues
- ◆ 17 percent of participants intended to use the information learned at the workshops to assist agritourism entrepreneurs with their businesses
- ◆ 13 percent of participants intended to use the information to improve or expand their existing enterprises
- ◆ 10 percent of participants intended to use the information learned to better market their enterprises
- ◆ 9 percent of participants intended to use the information in establishing an agritourism enterprise
- ◆ 8 percent of participants intended to use the information to improve safety and to obtain liability insurance

These and additional results from the evaluation forms, including participants suggestions for future training topics, were summarized in a publication, *2004 Agritourism Workshop Series: Evaluation Summary*. The summary publication is included as part of Appendix D.

Web Site Development and Marketing Workshops

The UT Center for Profitable Agriculture provided leadership for two rounds of Web site development and marketing workshops. The first round was held in November 2004 and included three workshops, one each in Nashville, Jackson and Knoxville. The second round was held in March 2005 and included workshops in Nashville and Knoxville. Dr. John Toman, director of information technology for the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, provided instruction for the day-long programs. Lynne Scott, Web

designer with UTIA, provided instruction for a portion of the Knoxville workshop in March 2005.



Dr. John Toman provides individual assistance at the Nashville workshop.

The workshops were conducted using a combination of lecture and hands-on application of concepts using a laptop laboratory. Dr. Toman provided participants with a notebook containing presentation slide print-outs, worksheets, software instructions and Web resource information. A CD containing a Web site template and software was also provided.

During the workshops, Dr. Toman provided participants with a basic introduction to the Internet, web searching and e-commerce to familiarize them with fundamental terminology and concepts. Participants were then given the opportunity to practice Web searches on agritourism topics. Web design principles were discussed to help participants in creating a pleasant and functional design, providing useful information to users and allowing the site to be found through searches. Examples of actual Web sites with common design mistakes were shown. Participants learned what questions to consider when planning their own Web site. They worked through worksheets provided by Dr. Toman to analyze their competitors' Web sites and how to develop focus for their own. Dr. Toman used a Web site template designed for the workshop and demonstrated Web site building techniques. Participants used the template and Netscape Composer software to practice these techniques and to begin the development of a Web site for their enterprise. Their Web site was saved on a disk and sent home with them to continue their work. Finally, participants were taught the importance of marketing their Web site and methods to accomplish this task. E-mail marketing was also discussed.

The two rounds of workshops provided training in Web site development and marketing to 80 participants for a total of 480 participant hours. In November 2004, a total of 52 participants completed the first round of training with 17 in Nashville, 18 in Jackson and 17 in Knoxville for a total of 312 participant hours of training. In March 2005, the second round of workshops reached an additional 28 participants, 13 in Nashville and 15 in Knoxville, for a total of 168 participant hours of training.

The number of participants at each workshop was limited to allow the instructor to provide individual attention to attendees. Pre-registration for the workshops was required.



Evaluation forms were completed by 34 participants immediately following the November 2004 workshops. The following is a summary of information learned from these evaluation forms:

- ◆ Participants gave an average rating to the workshops for “improving knowledge” of 9.06 out of 1 (not effective) to 10 (very effective).
- ◆ Participants gave an average rating to the workshops for “usefulness” of 9.16.
- ◆ Participants gave an average rating to the workshops for “quality of instruction” of 9.48.
- ◆ The workshops received a cumulative score, rating the combined effectiveness of “improving knowledge,” “usefulness” and “quality of instruction,” of 92.3 percent.
- ◆ 68 percent of participants intend to use the information and skills learned at the workshops to design a Web site for their agritourism enterprise.
- ◆ 65 percent of participants intend to build a Web site for their enterprise.
- ◆ 35 percent of participants intend to market their site with information and skills learned at the workshop.
- ◆ Participants particularly liked the hands-on approach of the workshop.
- ◆ Participants suggested the workshop be lengthened in time to sufficiently cover the material and have more work time.
- ◆ Participants suggested a follow-up session to provide a review, build on information presented and receive feedback on their Web sites.

Complete results from the evaluations are available in a publication, *2004 Web Site Development and Marketing Workshops: Evaluation Summary*. The summary publication is included as part of Appendix D.

In June 2005, 48 participants in both rounds of the Web site development and marketing workshops were asked to participate in a follow-up mail survey, 30 from the November 2004 workshops and 18 from the March 2005 workshops. The objectives of the survey were to determine how participants had used the information from the workshops, collect information to determine the financial benefit the participants had received due to the workshops and determine if an advanced version of the workshop was desired. Out of 48 surveys mailed, 27 were returned for a 56 percent response rate.

In the three to six months following the workshop, thirteen respondents or 48 percent used the information to “plan a Web site,” 11 respondents or 41 percent “improved their ability to communicate with a Web developer,” and ten respondents or 37 percent “made improvements to an existing Web site.” Five respondents or 19 percent used the information to “build a Web site,” and three respondents or 11 percent each used the information they learned to “market a Web site” and “hire a Web developer.”

Respondents reported a total of \$7,575 in expense savings and/or revenue increase in the three to six months following the workshops. Respondents reported average benefits of \$76 saved in class or workshop fees, \$210 saved from not having to hire Web developers, and \$175 saved from better communication with their Web developers. Respondents also reported an average increase in sales for the period of \$751 and other benefits of \$467.

Assuming financial benefits experienced were similar across the entire sample (48), total financial benefits can be estimated for the period of three to six months following the workshops at over \$21,000. The average financial benefit per participant is estimated at \$445.

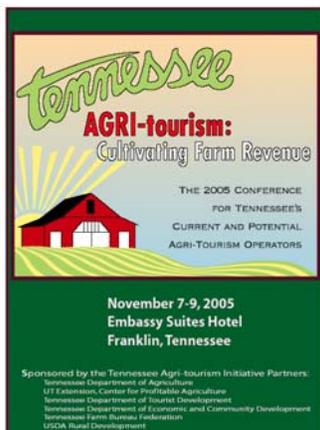
All but two survey respondents indicated they would have been willing to pay at least \$25 in registration and up to \$150 for the workshop. On average, respondents would have been willing to pay a registration fee of \$54 for the workshops.

A total of 18 respondents, 67 percent, indicated they would be interested in an advanced workshop. Most often, respondents reported interest in more hands-on work in building a Web site and additional marketing information. January and November were most often ranked first choices when respondents would likely be able to participate in an advanced workshop. Nashville and Knoxville were the most preferred locations for an advanced workshop.

Complete results from the follow-up survey were summarized in a publication, *Results of a Follow-up Survey to 2004 and 2005 Agritourism Web Site Development and Marketing Workshop Participants*. A copy of the publication is included as part of Appendix D.

Agritourism: Cultivating Farm Revenue Conference

The *Agritourism: Cultivating Farm Revenue* conference was held November 7-9, 2005 at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Franklin, Tennessee. Sponsored by the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative partners, the conference aimed to build farm income in the state and was one of the culminating efforts of the initiative.



The conference provided an opportunity for participants to learn through educational sessions, a trade show, networking opportunities and educational materials. The conference offered 18 educational sessions with the assistance of 28 speakers and moderators. Participants also had access to a trade show with 17 exhibitors who showcased products and services available for agritourism entrepreneurs. Networking was encouraged during sessions, at breaks and meal events. Participants were provided with a conference notebook which included session materials and speaker contact information. Participants were also given a copy of the new agritourism guide for Tennessee farmers.

A total of 284 participants attended the event. While over 90 percent of participants were from Tennessee, attendees also traveled from Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio and Virginia. A total of 117 evaluation forms were completed and collected for a response rate from participants of 41 percent.

More than a third of respondents, 36 percent, indicated the term *agritourism operator* best described them. *Farmers interested in agritourism* followed closely with 32 percent of respondents. Agriculture industry professionals/educators and tourism industry professionals accounted for another 19 percent and 8 percent respectively.

Respondents were asked to indicate the effectiveness of each session they attended in improving knowledge, usefulness and quality of instruction on a scale ranging from 1 (not effective) to 10 (very effective). For effectiveness in improving knowledge, average ratings ranged from 7.28 from 54 respondents in *The Realities of Agritourism* to 8.93 from 54 respondents from *Update on Tennessee Liability Laws*. Average rankings for usefulness of the sessions ranged from 7.36 for *The Realities of Agritourism* to 9.03 from 30 respondents for *Cultivate Revenue through Excellent Customer Service*. Quality of instruction average rankings ranged from 7.20 for *The Realities of Agritourism* to 9.48 for *Cultivate Revenue through Excellent Customer Service*. On average, respondents rated the conference an 8.66 in improving knowledge, an 8.75 in usefulness and an 8.86 in quality of instruction.



Conference participants and speakers network while enjoying a break for lunch.

Evaluation form respondents were also asked to rate several components of the conference on the following scale: 1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Average, 4=Good and 5=Excellent.



Amanda Ziehl conducts a session on *The Secrets of Grants and Loans* to conference participants.

Average ratings ranged from 3.77, between average and good, for the trade show to 4.79, between good and excellent, for the conference notebook. Conference facilities earned an average rating of 4.65. Selection of topics was rated at 4.47, and value for the enterprise/profession received a 4.46. Conference registration and quality of sessions/speakers followed with 4.44 and 4.43 respectively. Meals received an average rating of 4.29.

Seventy-six respondents indicated they would take away between one and 300 ideas from the conference for a total of 1,309 ideas, an average of 17 ideas per respondent. Thirty-three respondents indicated the ideas would bring them up to \$50,000 in monetary value within five years. The sum of estimates from the 33 respondents totaled \$330,900 with an average of just over \$10,000 per respondent. Within five years, respondents expected to realize monetary value between \$2,500 and \$500,000 for a total value of almost \$2 million. On average, respondents were estimated to realize more than \$60,000 within five years.

Respondents were asked to describe how they would use the information learned at the conference. The most responses, 24, were received on the topic related to *sharing of the information with others*. *To better or improve their enterprise* and *marketing* received 20 and 19 comments each. Nine comments were made related to *ideas for enterprises* and *grants/funding*. *Business planning* and *networking* each received eight comments. Respondents also planned to use the information they learned at the conference to *diversify or grow their enterprise*, *start or set-up an enterprise*, *to pursue sponsors* and in *decision-making*.

Respondents were asked to indicate how the conference could have been improved. Eighty-five respondents provided suggestions on everything from the length of the conference and how to improve sessions to cost of the conference and how to make the conference rooms more comfortable.

All respondents indicated that some type of educational event was needed in the future. Ninety-two respondents, 79 percent, indicated a similar conference should be an annual event.

Suggestions for topics to be included in future educational programs were also requested from respondents. *Insurance and liability issues* received the most comments with nine related comments. *Grants and grant writing strategies*, *legal aspects* and *marketing* topics each received seven related comments. Five respondents suggested the same topics as this conference with reemphasis and updates.

Complete results of the conference evaluations were summarized in a publication, *Tennessee Agritourism: Cultivating Farm Revenue – Conference Evaluation Summary*. The publication is included as part of Appendix D.



Commissioner Givens talks with a trade show exhibitor at the conference.

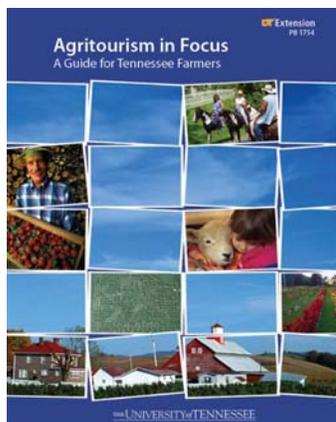
Additional Educational and Outreach Events

In addition to events described previously and that were organized and implemented formally as part of the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative, initiative partners also participated in educational and outreach events hosted by other groups. Partners participated in more than 59 additional educational and outreach events reaching more than 2,660 participants in at least six states (TN, NC, KY, GA, AL and MS.) Types of events included Extension producer and agent training events, area leadership program events, chamber of commerce events, and commodity and producer organization meetings. Lists of educational and outreach events for June 2003 to June 2006 including date, location, event, number of attendees and presenter(s) are included as Appendix C.

Agritourism Operator's Guide

Another major component of the initiative's education and outreach efforts was the development of an agritourism operator's guide, titled *Agritourism in Focus: A Guide for Tennessee Farmers*. The guide, coordinated by the UT Extension Center for Profitable Agriculture, contains information of use to farmers considering an agritourism enterprise, planning an agritourism enterprise or improving an existing enterprise.

The guide presents fundamental information relevant to agritourism entrepreneurs and provides interactive exercises to allow users to relate information to their situation.



The guide contains 10 chapters of topics critical to the success of agritourism operations:

- Chapter 1: An Introduction to Agritourism
- Chapter 2: Preliminary Evaluation: A Snapshot of Your Potential
- Chapter 3: Business Planning
- Chapter 4: Marketing
- Chapter 5: Customer Service
- Chapter 6: Risk Assessment and Management
- Chapter 7: Safety Considerations
- Chapter 8: Regulations
- Chapter 9: Agritourism Resources
- Chapter 10: Personal Evaluation II: A Snapshot of Your Progress

The operator's guide was printed as a UT Extension publication (PB1754). It was distributed to participants in the *Agritourism: Cultivating Farm Revenue* conference and made available at all 95 county Extension offices and through initiative partners. An electronic version of the publication is available online at the Center for Profitable Agriculture's Web site at <http://cpa.utk.edu>.

Tennessee Agritourism Today Electronic Newsletter



The first issue of *Tennessee Agritourism Today* was released in February 2006. The electronic newsletter was designed to educate and inform agritourism operators and professionals who work toward enhancing the industry. It includes information about available resources and opportunities, market trends and fundamental business concepts.

The newsletter is posted on the Center for Profitable Agriculture Web site and a notification of availability is sent to an e-mail list of 350 individuals who have attended initiative events or expressed interest in agritourism and all UT Extension personnel.

Educational Agritourism Resources on the Web

Agritourism was added as a major topic for educational purposes on the Center for Profitable Agriculture Web site at <http://cpa.utk.edu>. Educational publications and presentations were made available for viewing and printing, initiative news and events were promoted, and a record of initiative activities was listed.



Professional Development Activities for Initiative Partners

Yet another component of the initiative's training and outreach included professional development activities for initiative partners. In order to learn more about agritourism around the country and around the world and better enable the initiative partners to serve Tennessee agritourism entrepreneurs, a delegation of initiative partners attended three North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA) conferences.

In February 2004, six initiative partners attended the NAFDMA conference in Sacramento, California. Participants included Linda Shelton of the Department of Agriculture; Alan Galloway, Alice Rhea, and Jerri Lynn Sims of UT Extension; and Megan Bruch and Dan Wheeler of the UT Center for Profitable Agriculture.

In February 2005, five initiative partners attended the NAFDMA conference in Boston, Massachusetts. Participants were Dan Strasser of the Department of Agriculture; Jerri

Lynn Sims and Alan Galloway of UT Extension; and Megan Bruch and Rob Holland of the UT Center for Profitable Agriculture.

In January 2006, Dan Strasser and Laura Fortune of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture and Megan Bruch and Amanda Ziehl of the UT Center for Profitable Agriculture participated in the NAFDMA conference in Austin, Texas. Strasser also participated in a pre-conference tour near San Antonio.

Initiative representatives were also involved in two Southeast Region Agritourism Forums. These forums bring together professionals who work with agritourism operators in several southern states to network and learn from one another. Dan Strasser and Amanda Ziehl attended the event in June 2005 in Georgia, and Dan Strasser and Megan Bruch attended in February 2006 in North Carolina.¹

A group of initiative partners traveled to West Virginia and Kentucky to tour agritourism venues and investigate cultural centers promoting agritourism, value-added agricultural products, arts and crafts. The group learned about how the centers were organized and factors of success.

These professional development experiences were valuable in educating initiative partners in the opportunities and obstacles of the agritourism industry. The participants learned valuable information that they were then able to use in the development of educational programs and materials for Tennessee agritourism entrepreneurs. The participants were also able to network with agritourism entrepreneurs and educators across the nation. These contacts were of great assistance to initiative partners throughout initiative activities.

Summary of Educational and Outreach Efforts and Outcomes

Educational and outreach efforts have been a major part of the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative. To date, the initiative partners have been involved in conducting more than 69 educational events for more than 3,359 participants. A comprehensive operator's guide was developed and an electronic newsletter has begun to be published. Numerous presentations and other educational tools have been developed, utilized in educational events and made available on the Center for Profitable Agriculture Web site.

The response by participants to the educational efforts has been extremely positive as evidenced by the workshop and conference evaluation summaries. Results of the 2004 enterprise inventory, conducted prior to the conference and several other educational events, also indicate a positive response and impact of these activities.

Relevant excerpts from *Agritourism in Tennessee: Current Status and Future Growth, 2003-2004* by Jensen, et al. are printed below:

¹ Tennessee will host the Southeast Region Agritourism Forum in January 2007.

- ◆ Respondents were asked about attendance at agritourism workshops sponsored by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture and/or the UT Extension Service as part of the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative. There were 136 responses to this question. Fifty-six of the respondents, 41.2 percent, said they had attended agritourism workshops and/or events. Among the 56 who had attended workshops, 44.6 percent indicated the information given at these workshops and/or events were very helpful, 39.3 percent indicated that it was somewhat helpful. Only 4 percent found the workshops not to be helpful at all.
- ◆ The information from the workshops that respondents found to be most beneficial included marketing, networking, new tourism ideas, hearing the experiences of other operators, and insurance information.
- ◆ When asked to estimate by what percentage the information and/or assistance they obtained from the workshops will influence their agritourism sales in the next year the responses varied from 0 to 50 percent. The mean response they projected was a 14.4 percent increase in sales.

Tennessee Agritourism Promotions and Outcomes

Promotion of Tennessee’s agritourism industry was also a major component of the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative. Promotion activities under the initiative included listing of agritourism venues on industry Web sites; press releases, advertising and sponsorships; and regional tourism brochures.

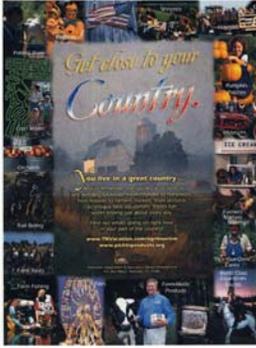
Industry Web Sites

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture’s Pick Tennessee Products Web site (www.picktnproducts.org) and the Tennessee Department of Tourism’s Web site (www.tnvacation.com) became promotional tools for agritourism venues. Information from the 2003 agritourism inventory was used to begin listing operations on these sites including operation name, description and contact information. Additional operators were able to list their enterprises by contacting the respective departments.



Press Releases, Advertisements and Sponsorships

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture developed and distributed press releases seasonally for different types of agritourism attractions throughout the initiative.



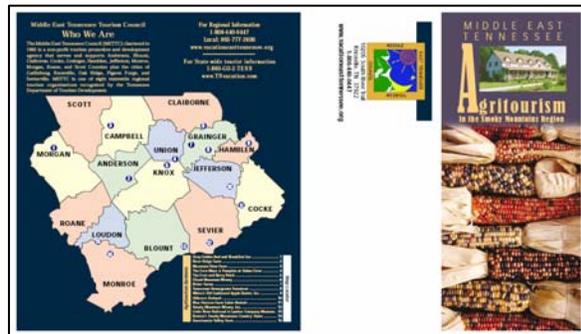
The Tennessee Agritourism Initiative placed advertisements in two issues of the Tennessee Vacation Guide highlighting the industry in the state and directing readers to the industry Web sites. Many agritourism enterprises involved in the enterprise inventories were also provided individual listings in the guide. Efforts continue to increase the number of agritourism enterprises listed in the annual publication.

Advertisement on radio and sponsorship of public radio and television allowed the initiative partners to promote agritourism statewide. The ads and announcements promoted specific types of agritourism operations open during the season when the ads were aired. For example, TDA promoted equine trails, strawberries, flowers, farm fishing, pick-your-own produce, wineries, farmers' markets and fresh fruit during the summer of 2005.

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture and the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association sponsored ten "Pick Tennessee Products Cooking Schools" across the state in 2005. The schools promoted the purchase and use of Tennessee farm products by consumers and made the 1,027 participants aware of operations in their area where products could be purchased.

Regional Brochures

Funds were made available from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture "Ag Tag" program and the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation for the eight regional tourism organizations to assist in the development and printing of regional agritourism brochures. The brochures are being used to promote agritourism enterprises in each of the regions. Funds were made available for 2005 and 2006.



Promotion Outcomes

Promotions by the initiative contributed to a dramatic increase in the number of hits on the Pick Tennessee Products Web Site. In September 2004, the number of hits on the Web site almost doubled (from 45,000 to 84,000). The following month, hits increased again to 103,637, the highest number of hits in the history of www.picktnproducts.org.

The 2004 enterprise study asked participants to estimate the effect government sponsored promotions (Tennessee Department of Agriculture website at www.picktnproducts.org; the Tennessee Vacation Guide at TNVacation.com; and regional, county, or local tourism guidebooks or websites) would have on their operation in the next year. There were 63

responses to this question. These operators estimated the promotions would increase their sales by 0 to 50 percent. The mean response was approximately a 10 percent increase.

Agritourism Operators Association

As part of the initiative partners' efforts to create a sustainable agritourism effort in the state, operator interest in an agritourism association was investigated at the November 2005 *Agritourism: Cultivating Farm Revenue* conference. Interested operators met briefly following the conference to discuss the possibility of forming an association, some potential goals and objectives of such as organization and the next steps. Since the conference, the group has held three organizational meetings during which they have developed and approved bylaws.

Summary

The Tennessee Agritourism Initiative proved to be successful in positively impacting rural communities and increasing farm income in the state. The unique partnership formed by initiative partners brought together a unique combination of resources and skills that were instrumental in achieving this success.

The impact of the initiative has potential to grow into the future as agritourism entrepreneurs continue to implement knowledge learned through educational programs and use tools developed. Customers first introduced to agritourism enterprises through initiative promotions may become lifetime customers and spread the word about their experiences to others. The agritourism operators association will provide networking opportunities and allow entrepreneurs to leverage their resources in continuing to build and improve the industry.