



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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November Conference Set to Support, Solidify State's Agri-tourism Industry

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – A statewide conference for current and potential agri-tourism operators has been set for November 7-9 at the Embassy Suites of Cool Springs near Nashville.

"Agri-tourism: Cultivating Farm Revenue" will offer educational sessions, a trade show featuring products and services directly related to agri-tourism enterprises, and the opportunity for those participating to consider forming a statewide industry organization.

"This is the conference we've been looking forward to for two years," says Dan Strasser, agri-tourism specialist with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. "This is the point in Tennessee's agri-tourism history that we can offer people interested in this industry a level of information, expertise and support that in the past they would have had to go to another part of the country to receive.

"Until now, major agri-tourism farmers in Tennessee have needed to travel to the Midwest, the West Coast or the Northeast to find the products, ideas and practical support they needed to keep their businesses growing from year to year. Now, we plan to offer the same type of trade show, the national experts, the research findings, and the industry forum that will propel Tennessee agri-tourism to an even stronger, more sustainable level."

The conference is being conducted as part of the state Agri-tourism Initiative, a cooperative effort among the departments of Agriculture, Tourist Development, Economic and Community Development, the University of Tennessee Center for Profitable Agriculture and Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation. The aim of the initiative, supported in part through grants from the USDA Rural Development program, is to work with farmers, local chambers of commerce, visitor bureaus and others to build farm income, expanding tourist income in rural communities and establishing a sustainable, long-term agri-tourism program.

"Farmers interested in corn mazes can meet corn maze developers at the industry trade show," says Strasser. "Farmers interested in adding strawberry patches or in growing mums can meet manufacturers of cartons and containers, irrigation systems and greenhouses. Successful, long-time agri-tourism farmers from across the country will be on hand to educate and inspire.

"There will be two tracks that a participant can choose during the conference: a track of sessions and opportunities for those already involved in agri-tourism, and a track for potential agri-tourism operators to explore and learn more about what it takes to create a good farm fun activity, business or direct-farm market.

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Agri-tourism Industry Conference 2

“Last but not least, our own state’s agri-tourism operators will have the opportunity to meet together, discuss statewide goals for the industry, plot a course for their future and form a statewide organization to better direct and carry out those goals.”

“Agri-tourism is a fairly new term relating to modern farmers’ adaptation to marketing their products and services directly to a non-agriculture minded public,” says Strasser. “Today’s farmers have opportunities not granted to previous generations in that America’s traditional family farms are becoming an attraction to urban populations. This means agri-tourism operations can educate and entertain the public while creating new income for their farms.”

The term agri-tourism refers to any activity, enterprise or business which combines both agriculture and tourism, providing an experience for visitors and stimulating economic activity for both farms and local communities. Agri-tourism includes corn mazes, “pick-your-own” pumpkin and strawberry patches, orchards, farm tours, on-farm retail markets and festivals, on-farm petting zoos, on-farm bed and breakfasts and on-farm equine trails.

“Agri-tourism already has a significant impact on Tennessee’s economy,” says Strasser, “and that impact is likely to grow.

“In 2002, agri-tourism operations in Tennessee hosted more than 3.5 million visitors. Those customers spent up to \$400 per visit, with 30 percent of enterprises earning between \$1 and \$10 per visitor. Annual gross sales for some individual enterprises in 2002 amounted to more than \$1 million. Agri-tourism also accounts for a significant number of full and part-time jobs in Tennessee, both year-round and seasonally.”

For more information about the conference, contact Strasser at (615) 837-5298 or e-mail to Dan.Strasser@state.tn.us. Registrations for the event will be processed by the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation; to register, contact Jana Pullan at (931) 388-7872 or by mail, TFBF/ Agri-Tourism, P.O. Box 313, Columbia, TN 38401.

For more information on agri-tourism in Tennessee visit www.picktnproducts.org or www.tnvacation.com.

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