

Tennessee Agritourism Today

An electronic newsletter dedicated to educating and informing agritourism industry partners

 **Extension**

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Welcome to *Tennessee Agritourism Today*

Exciting things are happening in Tennessee agritourism as evidenced by the overwhelming participation at the *Agritourism: Cultivating Farm Revenue* conference in November.

It was incredible to watch more than 280 attendees soak up experience and expertise shared by 25 presenters and network with entrepreneurs and professionals from across Tennessee and 10 other states. The responses to the conference and other Tennessee Agritourism Initiative activities are evidence of the dedication and ambition of agritourism entrepreneurs to learn and

build their businesses and the importance of the industry to rural communities.

While more educational programs are being planned for the future, I thought it may be useful to develop a method to communicate with agritourism industry partners periodically throughout the year. Thus, the idea for *Tennessee Agritourism Today* was born.

Tennessee Agritourism Today is an electronic newsletter designed to educate and inform agritourism operators and professionals who work toward enhancing the

industry. It will include information about available resources and opportunities, market trends, fundamental business concepts and other topics of potential interest. It may also provide a method to gain feedback from you about specific topics or issues.

I hope you enjoy the first issue of *Tennessee Agritourism Today*, and I look forward to trying out this new method of communication over the next few months.

Megan L. Bruch
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New TDA Cost-Share Program

By Dan Strasser, Marketing Specialist, Tennessee Department of Agriculture

Tennessee agritourism entrepreneurs are invited to apply for cost-share assistance from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture.

The new Agricultural Growth Initiative Producer Diversification Cost-Share is part of the Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program. This initiative is funded through a \$5 million appropriation in the state's budget for FY05/06 as proposed by Governor Phil Bredesen and supported by the Tennessee General Assembly.

The program allows producers to apply for 35 percent of eligible project costs with the

cost-share portion totaling a maximum of \$10,000 per fiscal year.

Proposed activities must demonstrate potential for increasing farm income and long-term benefits. Three categories of funding are eligible: marketing, farm infrastructure and specialty equipment.

Examples of activities that are typically eligible under the program include new enterprise development activities and retail shelters as well as public use considerations such as handicap accessibility features, lighting, parking

area improvements and restroom facilities. Web-site development, advertising costs and some fees associated with professional development may also be eligible. Projects must be approved in advance, and applications should include written estimates for related project costs.

For additional information and an application form, visit <http://www.tennessee.gov/agriculture/enhancement/poapp.pdf>. Questions can be directed to Ag.Growth@state.tn.us or contact Jan Keyser or Dan Strasser at 615-837-5160.

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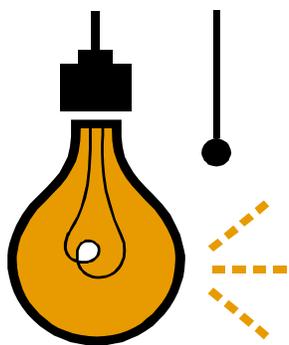


Evaluating Your Progress and Planning to Your Potential

Ahhh...winter. The hustle and bustle of the holidays has calmed and the physical aches and mental strains of agritourism activities have faded. Before spring is upon you and farm activities demand your time and energy, make use of winter down time to evaluate the past year's progress of your agritourism enterprise and plan to your potential for the coming year.

Measuring and evaluating key components of your business is vital to achieving success. Key measures can be compared to your goals for marketing, financial, customer service and risk management activities as well as your historical measures and industry benchmarks.

Evaluating your enterprise will help determine what worked and what did not so you can improve the operation for the next season. This process can help determine, for example, if the expense for that newspaper advertisement paid off, whether or not your customer service is building repeat business, and if your safety plan is effective in keeping customers and employees safe.



"Evaluating your enterprise will help determine what worked and what did not so you can improve the operation for next season."

Other more observational information can also be helpful. Watch and listen to see and learn at your enterprise. Consult your employees for observations they have made for ways to improve the enterprise. Examples of observational information include:

- Line length at the admission gate, each attraction, concession stand, restroom facilities, etc. (Do you need additional personnel to collect admissions or some method to entertain customers while they are in line? Perhaps you should consider adding employees to carry refreshments to the customers in line, like those at the ballgame with popcorn and drinks? Do you need additional concession stands or additional food choices?)
- Consumer comments related to admission price (If you charge admission, are people surprised at how low

Some examples of numerical measures that can be used to evaluate your progress include:

- Number of customers
- Gross revenue
- Net revenue
- Average sales per customer (also can be done by category such as admissions, concessions, retail purchases, etc.)

These measures can be taken on a seasonal, weekly or daily basis, although the more information collected the better you can evaluate the business. You can also track details such as weather conditions or timing of advertisements or promotions that impact attendance and revenue.



your fee is or grumbling at how high it is? Are you effectively communicating everything that is included in the admission? If you charge a fee per activity, are people frustrated at having to dig in their pockets every time they turn around?)

- Safety issues (Do your safety inspections or incident reports indicate issues that need to be addressed through maintenance, repairs, rules or policies?)
- Customer comments about how they learned about your enterprise (Did she receive your brochure in the mail or did she learn about your operation from a mother at the PTA meeting? Did he hear your advertisement on the radio on the way home from work or read the press release in the newspaper?)

Evaluating the business can keep you from making mistakes over again and help you to capitalize on opportunities. Use measurements and observations to plan improvements for next season. If you have not measured your progress or made observations throughout the season in the past, make plans now to do so in the future.

Additional information on evaluating your enterprise is provided in several chapters of the *Agritourism in Focus* publication discussed in the "Resource Review" article of *Tennessee Agritourism Today*.

Resource Review

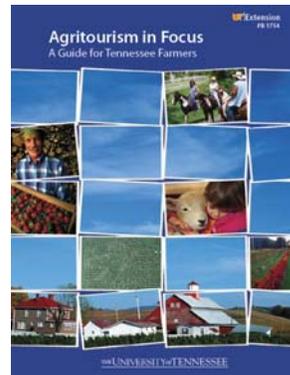
A new publication is available to assist farmers and agritourism operators in the development and management of agritourism enterprises.

Called "Agritourism in Focus: A Guide for Tennessee Farmers," the publication is a comprehensive resource intended to assist farmers and agritourism operators in the evaluation of agritourism enterprise opportunities, planning of agritourism enterprises and with solving issues and obstacles faced by entrepreneurs.

The publication contains 10 chapters with topics including business planning, marketing, customer

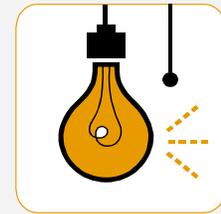
service, risk management, safety considerations and regulations. "The publication is designed to be interactive, allowing users to work through exercises and relate fundamental business and management concepts to their specific situations," explained Megan Bruch, a University of Tennessee Extension specialist with the Center for Profitable Agriculture and lead author of the publication.

The publication is among the efforts sponsored by Tennessee Agritourism Initiative partners. Initiative partners include the state's departments of Agriculture, Tourist Development and Economic and Community Development; the



Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation; and UT Extension, including the Center for Profitable Agriculture. Funding for the initiative has come, in part, from USDA Rural Development.

The publication is available from local University of Tennessee Extension offices, the Center for Profitable Agriculture or on-line at <http://cpa.utk.edu>.



*"The **Agritourism in Focus** publication is designed to be interactive, allowing users to work through exercises and relate fundamental business management concepts to their specific situations."*



The *Agritourism: Cultivating Farm Revenue* conference was held November 7-9, 2005 in Franklin, Tennessee. 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.

The conference provided an opportunity for participants to learn through educational sessions, a trade show, networking opportunities and educational materials.

Conference materials and photos are available on-line at <http://cpa.utk.edu>. A summary of conference evaluation forms is also available on-line.

Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences and resource development. University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and county governments cooperating. UT Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

Upcoming Events

Organizational Meeting for the Tennessee Agritourism Association

February 27, 2006, 11am
Stonehaus Winery,
Crossville, TN

All interested agritourism operators are welcome. For more information or to

RSVP for the meeting, contact:

Dan Strasser, Tennessee Department of Agriculture at 615-837-5160 or dan.strasser@state.tn.us

Vera Ann Myers, Myers Pumpkin Patch and Corn Maze at 423-235-4796 or veraann@xtn.net

Your Turn

Is *Tennessee Agritourism Today* a worthwhile endeavor? If so, what topics would you like to see covered in future issues?

E-mail your thoughts and suggestions to mlbruch@utk.edu.