

Tennessee Agritourism Today

An electronic newsletter dedicated to educating and informing agritourism industry partners



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Agritourism Conference Set for January

A second conference for agritourism entrepreneurs and farmers considering an agritourism enterprise will be held January 22-23, 2007 in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

The *2007 Agritourism: Cultivating Farm Revenue Conference* will include educational sessions, a trade show and opportunities to network with other entrepreneurs and service providers. "The first conference held in November 2005 was attended by more than 280 people from 11 states," says Megan Bruch, marketing specialist with the University of Tennessee's Center for Profitable Agriculture and one of the conference planners. "The feedback from that conference was overwhelmingly positive, and we hope this conference will be even more successful."

The 2007 conference will feature presentations on branding, marketing, pricing, risk management, evaluating resources, growing enterprises, hospitality, safety, and visitor characteristics and preferences. The conference will also include several

"Agritourism in Action" sessions where participants will hear from experienced agritourism entrepreneurs.

Conference participants can get in on the action by bringing photos of their operations or marketing materials to display in a special exhibit at the trade show called "Agritourism in Action: Show Your Stuff." Participants can also choose special "networking topic tables" to share in conversations with other attendees about a topic of interest over lunch.

"Sharing ideas and experiences among entrepreneurs is very valuable," says Dan Strasser, agritourism coordinator with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture and another of the conference planners. "We are incorporating several activities to facilitate networking during the two day conference."

The conference is among efforts sponsored by the Tennessee Agritourism

Initiative partners to build farm income in the state. Initiative partners include the state's departments of Agriculture, Tourist Development and Economic and Community Development; the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation; and UT Extension. Funding for the conference has come, in part, from USDA Rural Development, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture and the Tennessee Agritourism Association.

Conference information is available online at the Center for Profitable Agriculture's Web site at <http://cpa.utk.edu>. Online registration can be accessed on the site as well. There is a registration fee of \$75 if registered by December 15. Late registration is \$125.

Early registration is encouraged as space is limited.



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Earn New Customers and Keep the Old

Many Tennessee agritourism operations are in full swing for the fall harvest season. Web sites have been created and updated, brochures have been mailed, advertisements have been scheduled and signs have been posted. Months of preparation and planning have given way to the long days and short nights of educating and entertaining visitors.

While planning and implementing marketing strategies are vital to the potential success of agritourism venues, what customers experience once they come to the enterprise is just as important in keeping those visitors as customers and earning new customers.

A customer's experience at an enterprise greatly impacts the bottom line. Need proof? Consider these statistics:

- ◆ It costs 3 to 5 times more to replace than to keep a customer
- ◆ A satisfied customer will tell 4 to 5 others about their experience
- ◆ An unsatisfied customer will tell 7 to 13 others about their experience
- ◆ Almost 32 percent of visitors in a 2005 study of Tennessee agritourism enterprise visitors

learned about the enterprise through word-of-mouth referrals

Does this mean you should give up all of that other advertising and promoting? Absolutely not! But, it does mean that it is very important to provide customers with excellent customer service while they are visiting your enterprise and to work to generate positive word-of-mouth referrals.

Here are some basic tips for providing excellent customer service:

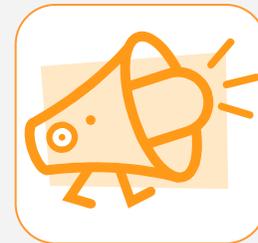
- ◆ Be well-groomed and dressed consistently with the desired image of the enterprise
- ◆ Immediately welcome customers with a friendly greeting
- ◆ Smile and use positive body language
- ◆ Display a positive attitude
- ◆ Be courteous and polite
- ◆ Keep facilities clean
- ◆ Listen to customers
- ◆ Use the name of the customer if at all possible
- ◆ Maintain eye contact
- ◆ Treat each customer as a special guest
- ◆ Promise only what you can deliver
- ◆ Anticipate customer needs and try to meet them

- ◆ Be knowledgeable about your products and services
- ◆ Get to know customers
- ◆ Thank customers for their business
- ◆ Invite customers to come again
- ◆ Communicate customer service expectations to employees and provide training

In addition, do not be afraid to ask satisfied customers to tell their friends about your operation. Have extra business cards or brochures on hand to send with them to give others.

Providing excellent customer service is a vital component of agritourism operations. It can help your business to earn new customers by generating positive word-of-mouth referrals and build loyalty among existing customers.

To learn more about customer service and hospitality, check out Chapter 5 in the *Agritourism in Focus* publication available on-line at <http://cpa.utk.edu> and be sure to attend the concurrent session on the topic planned for the *Agritourism: Cultivating Farm Revenue Conference* in January.



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Tennessee Agritourism Association Formed

Tennessee agritourism entrepreneurs now have another way to network and work cooperatively with one another. The Tennessee Agritourism Association has been formed to provide informational, networking, educational, and other activities that support agritourism operations and promote quality growth and development of agritourism in Tennessee.

Existing agritourism establishments may become "active members" of the organization with one member of the enterprise having voting rights in the association. Dues for active members are \$50 per year.

Persons interested in agritourism or representatives of organizations whose activities are pertinent to the purpose of the association, including but not limited to UT Extension personnel, tourism professionals, and members of rural service organizations may become "associate members." Associate members do not have voting rights. Dues for associate members are \$25 per year.

The first officer team elected by the founding members is:

- President – Vera Ann Myers, Myers Pumpkin Patch & Corn Maze

- Vice President – David Black, Corn Maze & Pumpkin Patch at Oakes Farm
- Secretary – Marty White, Freshwater Ranch
- Treasurer – Jeff Alsup, Honeysuckle Hill Farm
- Parliamentarian – John Ring, Ring Farms

To learn more about the Tennessee Agritourism Association, contact one of the officers or Dan Strasser at the Tennessee Department of Agriculture at dan.strasser@state.tn.us or 615-837-5160.

"The Tennessee Agritourism Association has been formed to provide informational, networking, educational, and other activities that support agritourism operations and promote quality growth and development of agritourism in Tennessee."

Market Minute

"Cultural, educational and nostalgia tourism, regional cuisine, and special events are expected to continue as major tourism growth markets," according to Brett Warner and Ed Mahoney of Michigan State University in a presentation at the 2006 North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association conference.

Some agritourism activities overlap or complement these types of tourism. Consumers who are looking for cultural,

educational and nostalgia tourism, regional cuisine, and special events may be interested in a farm experience, value-added or other farm products.

Agritourism entrepreneurs may capitalize on this trend in several ways. Entrepreneurs may consider incorporating agriculture, farm or family heritage educational activities or special events into their operation or promoting these activities to additional audiences.

Agritourism enterprises with activities that may appeal to the cultural, educational and nostalgia, regional cuisine, and special events tourists should also work to develop cooperative and cross marketing strategies with complementary tourism sites. The synergies among enterprises may create a stronger overall draw or experience for tourists.



Upcoming Events

Tennessee Agritourism Association Meeting

Nov. 27, 2006, 11am CDT, Arcy Acres Crossville, TN

All interested agritourism operators are welcome. For more information, contact:

Dan Strasser, TN Dept. 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

2007 Tennessee Agritourism Conference

January 22-23, 2007 Pigeon Forge, TN

Southeast Region Agritourism Council Meeting

January 24, 2007 Pigeon Forge, TN

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.