

# Tennessee Agritourism Today

An electronic newsletter dedicated to educating and informing agritourism industry partners



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## Agritourism Conference Joins Hort Expo in January

The fifth Tennessee Agritourism Cultivating Farm Revenue Conference will be held in Nashville on January 28-30, 2010. This year marks the first time the conference will be held in conjunction with the Tennessee Horticultural Expo.

"This year's conference offers agritourism operators another prime opportunity for professional development through educational sessions and networking," says Megan Bruch, marketing specialist with the University of Tennessee Center for Profitable Agriculture.

Featured speaker, best-selling author and business consultant Bob Negen will share his customer-focused business philosophies to help participants "Explode Sales" and "Develop a WhizBang! Staff." His practical and motivational sessions will help participants bring more people to their business, provide them with better service and increase revenue.

Back by popular demand, "Agritourism in Action" sessions will feature agritourism operators who will share lessons learned from their agritourism experiences. "Panels of operators will discuss innovative farm tours and creative farm animal attractions and will answer questions from conference participants," according to Bruch. "Additional conference sessions will address labor regulations, business structures, USDA Animal Exhibitor Regulations and the new agritourism liability law."

On Saturday, participants will have the opportunity to see area agritourism operations first hand on the post-conference tour. By being held concurrently with the Horticultural Expo, agritourism operators will also have access to sessions on fruit and vegetable production, issues related to grapes and wine, flower production, farmers markets and more.

The agritourism conference is sponsored by the Tennessee

Agritourism Initiative partners including the Tennessee Departments of Agriculture, Tourist Development and Economic and Community Development; the University of Tennessee Extension; Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation; and the Tennessee Agritourism Association.

Additional information about the conference including a tentative agenda and registration instructions is available on-line at the Center for Profitable Agriculture's Web site at <http://cpa.utk.edu> or on the Tennessee Horticultural Expo site at [www.tnthe.com](http://www.tnthe.com). Register by January 5 to receive the early registration rate of \$100. Late registration is \$125.

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## Spotlight on Agritourism: Mayfield Farm and Nursery

### Michael Mayfield Mayfield Farm and Nursery

McMinn County  
www.mayfieldfarmandnursery.com

This is the second year of “major operations” at Mayfield Farm and Nursery near Athens, Tennessee. The operation opens in the spring with an on-farm retail market full of fresh fruits and vegetables grown on the farm. In mid-September, through the first week of November, the farm offers a corn maze, pumpkin patch and family fun as well as school tours. Fall decorations are available as well as gift items in the Country Store.

Owner, Michael Mayfield, says that themed events during the fall have been helpful in getting customers to the farm. This year, the farm hosted an antique tractor show, a blue grass night and the “Mater Olympics.”

Billed as the “largest tomato fight in North America,” the Mater Olympics pitted University of Tennessee Knoxville students, alumni and fans against those of the University of Tennessee Chattanooga. Mayfield said the idea stemmed

from a session by Jon Schallert at the 2009 Tennessee Agritourism Cultivating Farm Revenue Conference. “He talked about having a monument or something that you could say you were the biggest, largest or best at to help make your business a destination,” says Mayfield. From his international travels, Mayfield recalled that Spain had a huge tomato fight event and decided to give it a try on his operation. A few hundred participants paid \$5 and donated 5 cans of food in order to hurl cull tomatoes at one another. Proceeds benefited food banks in Knoxville and Chattanooga. The event garnered publicity across the state.

Mayfield Farm and Nursery already has a unique history in the dairy business to draw upon. With a barn built in the 1930s and a functioning dairy parlor, the agritourism operation has incorporated the Mayfield Dairy connection into educational tours and other activities.

Agritourism was an attractive industry to Mayfield for several reasons. He sees

potential in the local food movement. He likes growing fruits, vegetables and plants. He likes event planning and gets satisfaction out of the “madness of it” all. The seasonality of the business is also a positive to Mayfield.

One of the biggest challenges for Mayfield has been narrowing down the long list of possible things to do on the farm to what was reasonable to be able to do. Being able to focus on one project at a time and do it well has been a key to his success thus far. Another challenge has been finding people who are willing to do seasonal work and who are trustworthy to work at the operation.

Marketing is a challenge for all agritourism operations. Mayfield has been pleased with customer response to local radio for both the farm market and the maze. He indicates it is important to choose a station which appeals to the operation’s target audience. Mayfield tried billboards on Interstate 75 and on local roadways, however, he is not sure whether he gained a return on the investment made. A Web site, social media

and newspaper ads were also a part of the overall marketing plan.

Mayfield has learned many lessons that could help other agritourism operators or farmers interested in agritourism. “Research before you do anything,” he says. “Know the market and what kind of demand exists. Have a plan. You can always change it as you go along but have one to start. Make sure you find your niche – how you can be different and unique. You have to have your heart and soul in it too. You have to love doing it because it is stressful and hard work.”

Mayfield learned to consider what consumers want and not base decisions solely on his preferences. “I hate beets,” says Mayfield. “I didn’t think anyone liked beets. Next year I am going to grow five times more because we couldn’t keep them on the shelf!”



## Pumpkin Field Day Resources Now Available

The University of Tennessee held its "Pumpkin Field Day" on October 9 at the West Tennessee Research and Education Center in Jackson, Tennessee. Approximately 85 producers attended the event. Topics covered during the field day included pumpkin and gourd varieties, disease management, pest

management, weed control, marketing and more. Resources from the event are now available online at <http://vegetables.tennessee.edu/pumpkinfieldday.html>. Pumpkin displays will remain up through November at the WTREC at 605 Airways Blvd. in Jackson.



## Market Minute: Tennessee Farm Fresh

Agritourism operators who direct market farm products to consumers may be eligible for marketing opportunities available through the Tennessee Farm Fresh (TFF) program. Interested producers should apply now to receive the full benefit of 2010 membership.

TFF promotes members through listings on the TFF Web site and in a professionally printed directory. Advertising

through media such as TV, magazines, radio, trade shows and more drives consumers to the farm listings.

In addition to these promotional benefits, members receive a TFF marketing tool kit for use on their operations. TFF members also receive professional development and networking opportunities through

educational events offered by the Center for Profitable Agriculture.

Find applications on the TFF Web site at [www.tnfarmfresh.com](http://www.tnfarmfresh.com). The program has an annual fee of \$100.

TFF is made possible through a partnership of the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture.



Learn more at [www.tnfarmfresh.com](http://www.tnfarmfresh.com) or by contacting program coordinator, Tiffany Howard at (931) 388-7872 ext. 2763 or [tmullins@tfbf.com](mailto:tmullins@tfbf.com).

## Upcoming Events

### Tennessee Agritourism Association Meeting

December 14, Location TBA in the Pigeon Forge area

Contact Vera Ann Myers at [VeraAnnM@comcast.net](mailto:VeraAnnM@comcast.net)

### Tennessee Agritourism Conference to be held as part of the Tennessee Horticultural Expo

January 28-30, 2010  
Nashville Airport Marriott

More information and registration available at <http://cpa.utk.edu>

### North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA)

February 5-12, 2010  
Lancaster, PA  
[www.nafdma.com](http://www.nafdma.com)

