

Value-added Agricultural Success Story

Dixon Farm & Granddaddy's Farm

This story is one of a special series of value-added agricultural enterprise successes in Tennessee. The entrepreneurs featured have worked with specialists at the Center for Profitable Agriculture in different ways to achieve various levels of start-up, sustainable and long-term enterprise success. I hope their stories will be interesting, informative and inspiring.

Rob Holland, Director, Center for Profitable Agriculture

The Dixon family farm in Franklin County was purchased by Charles Dixon in May 1951. Corn, hay, cattle and crimson clover were the main commodities produced. The family farming tradition continues today with Charles' grandson Steve, his wife Karen and their three children, Andrew, Stephanie and Philip. Row crops and beef cattle are currently the main focus of production.



Granddaddy's Farm grows 45 varieties of mums offered for sale at their on-farm retail market.

In 2000, Steve and Karen started looking for additional enterprises to generate new revenue for the farm and to get their children involved in the operation. Steve explored the potential for products such as squirrel corn with a plan to expand into fall decorations such as cornstalk bundles and straw bales.

The same year, Steve submitted an application to the Center for Profitable Agriculture (Center) to help him evaluate his idea and to get assistance with marketing issues such as pricing, packaging and advertising. Rob Holland, a Center specialist at that time, visited the Dixons to learn more about their ideas and find out how he could help.

Rob investigated wholesale and retail opportunities for bagged squirrel corn, cornstalk bundles, wheat straw and other fall landscape decorations. He provided the Dixons with information about planning a value-added agricultural business, salesmanship, customer service, advertising, developing marketing materials, identifying product characteristics and getting products to market.

At Rob's suggestion, the Dixons contacted fruit-stand managers in the Middle Tennessee area and took orders for cornstalk bundles, since there seemed to be stiff competition for wholesaling squirrel corn. Sales grew from 2,000 bundles per year to 5,000 per year.



The barn houses a retail store for pumpkins, gourds and other fall decorations, as well as the animal exhibit.



Center for Profitable Agriculture marketing specialist Megan Bruch visits with Andrew Dixon at Granddaddy's Farm.

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The cornstalk bundle business, according to Karen, "achieved the goal of giving some business experience to our children. It was a process all five of us could do. Working with our children as business partners achieved a mutual respect for each other on another level. The business was great for our young children to earn some spending money and gain a sense of business."

The new business helped the Dixons network with area agritourism entrepreneurs as well. When a nearby operation discontinued its fall agritourism activities in 2006, the owner encouraged the Dixons to consider starting an agritourism venue and even provided some guidance.

The Dixons became interested in the possibility and again contacted the Center for assistance. Specialists Rob Holland and Megan Bruch visited the farm to discuss the market potential for an agritourism operation and answered a variety of questions the Dixons had about regulations, liability issues and marketing. As plans progressed, the couple continued to consult Center specialists and attended several workshops and conferences on agritourism planned in part by the Center.

In the autumn of 2006, the Dixons opened Granddaddy's Farm to the public with a fall market, farm activities for families and school tours. The market offers decorative items for sale and farm activities like a corn maze, hayride to the pumpkin patch, moonlight hayride, half-mile nature trail to a spring and a farm animal exhibit.

Steve and Karen's 19-year-old son, Andrew, is heavily involved in the planning and operation of the agritourism enterprise. Andrew says agritourism operators should "know what you're getting into before you start. There is a lot more to it than most people think." He says their family was surprised by how much behind-the-scenes work it takes to get everything ready.

Andrew says his goal for the operation is to "grow and bring in more revenue for the farm." He hopes the agritourism operation will help him continue to be involved in his family's traditional agriculture operation.

The mission of the Center for Profitable Agriculture is to help farm families improve income by identifying new ways to add value to food and fiber products through processing, packaging and marketing. We focus on three areas:

- **Working with families and entrepreneurs to analyze value-added agricultural enterprises;**
- **Implementing market development studies to determine the viability of new products;**
- **Conducting educational programs for Tennessee farmers and agricultural leaders.**

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