

Value-added Agricultural Success Story

Jones Orchard

This story is part of a special series of value-added agriculture enterprise successes in Tennessee. The entrepreneurs featured in this series have worked with Center for Profitable Agriculture specialists in various ways and achieved 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



Jones Orchard offers fresh fruits and vegetables as well as value-added canned and baked goods for sale at their on-farm markets and at local farmers markets.

*J*ones Orchard has been owned and operated by the Jones family since 1940. H. L. "Peaches" Jones started the business in Millington, Tennessee, 10 miles north of Memphis. Today, his son Lee Wood, along with Lee's wife, Juanita, and their son, Henry, operate the orchard and sell all of their produce at three fruit stands and two farmers markets. Through her cooking and canning hobbies, Juanita launched a booming value-added fruit and vegetable product business and has recently added an on-farm restaurant.

Juanita began canning jams and jellies more than 30 years ago to give to family and friends as Christmas gifts. The value-added businesses stemmed from what Juanita remembers as "taking our produce that was piling up and cooking with it so it wouldn't go to waste. One year we had so many peaches I just started making peach preserves, and our customers loved them. Then I made my 7-Up™ pound cake with peaches, and it sold. Pretty soon it was apples into apple jelly or apple cake, blackberries into jam and zucchini into zucchini bread." It was not long before interest grew so large that Juanita needed a commercial kitchen and cooler space to prepare her canned and baked goods.

A retired court reporter, Juanita researched the regulations for licensing a commercial kitchen and successfully completed the training required to operate the processing business. In 1992, she officially opened her kitchen.

The demand from existing farm stand customers was very encouraging, and sales grew steadily over the next few years. To make the kitchen investment and additional operating costs worthwhile, Juanita felt they should diversify. Rob Holland at the Center for Profitable Agriculture (CPA) assisted *Jones Orchard* in a marketing study to identify alternative clientele and marketing strategies. "Rob helped brainstorm ideas for reaching grocery stores and a mail-order clientele. He even designed and helped us register a logo to use on all our products, which we still use today."



Because of the high volume of jams, jellies and relishes they sell at local farmers' markets, the Joneses have had to increase production. "The farmers market trend is actually an extension of our on-farm customer base. They're interested in buying fresh, local products and often bring their families out to the farm stand for pick-your-own."

Another unexpected, but extremely successful addition to the Jones' farm revenue has been the on-site restaurant. "It was another of those things that just happened," says Juanita. "In 2005, we had tons of veggies that were going to spoil. I started making vegetable soup, then a vegetable plate. The response was great."



The menu has evolved to include basic sandwiches, salads and two daily specials with side items, breads, desserts, beverages and fresh fruit. This spring she had her biggest lunch crowd, serving 67 customers.

Since returning to the farm three years ago, Henry has implemented new production and marketing ideas, and his wife, Dana, is maintaining the orchard's Web site. In 2007, he planted their first crop of plasticulture strawberries and, on their first harvest day in 2008, sold everything that was picked. Henry is also concentrating on new advertising strategies.

There are many costs associated with operating the Jones' multi-faceted farm business, including insurance, advertising, utilities and labor. The large orchards and multiple market stands require additional regular employees plus seasonal orchard workers.

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Because of the growing restaurant business and demand for daily baked goods, Juanita has had to hire a cook and a baker so she can spend time canning and managing the business. "I need a bigger kitchen, but I'm 72, so I'll leave any additional expansion up to Henry, since he'll take over for us one day," says Juanita.

Until then, they will focus on their quality homegrown, homemade products to strengthen the direct sales that have led to their loyal customer base.

Our mission 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 farm 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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E12-4015-00-006-08 500-6/08 08-0252

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