

2009 Tennessee Agritourism Conference January 26-27

Registration Now Open

NASHVILLE, TENN.

The 2009 Tennessee Agritourism Conference is set for Jan. 26-27 at the Chattanooga Marriott and Convention Center.

"This conference has become a 'must attend' event for many of the state's most serious agritourism farmers, who continually upgrade their professional skills and their farms' attractions," says Pamela Bartholomew, agritourism coordinator for the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. "For aspiring agritourism farmers, the conference is a way to begin to assess whether they and their farm operations are well suited to this new farm business. New or prospective farmers get the chance to spend lots of time with experienced operators who can share plenty of useful stories and ideas. That makes getting started less costly in terms of time, dollars and anxiety."

The term agritourism refers to the increasingly popular part of the agriculture industry that involves inviting the public directly onto the farm for activities or farm products.

"Those who really succeed in agritourism operations enjoy being around other people, sharing their lives and farms," says Bartholomew. "They also have to be open to learning a lot of business practices and strategies they've never had to have in place in their farm management plans. There's advertising and marketing to consider, and insurance issues. Incorporating the core curriculums of local schools into your farm activities is something one doesn't consider when planting row crops. The successful agritourism farmer stands with one foot in the retail world and one foot in the field, which can be quite a stretch."

Also new for the 2009 conference is a pre-conference tour to local farms in the Chattanooga area, including an orchard, a "fall fun" agritourism farm and a winery. There will be contests for the agritourism operation with the best Web site, brochure, and tee shirt. Awards will be given out at the banquet on Monday night.

"These contests give participants the opportunity to show off their best efforts for an audience who can really appreciate the work," says

Bartholomew. "Seeing the variety,

creativity and quality that's already being put to use is a great tool to help other farmers get inspiration and know-how to make their own promotional efforts better. Finally, winners can take home a press release to send to their local newspapers; we all know that free publicity is a good thing—especially when you can let your community know you've won an award!"

"We'll have the breakout sessions and trade show our conference participants have come to count on," says Bartholomew. "Everyone also will still have that once-a-year opportunity producers get to talk to each other – in specific scheduled sessions dedicated to current industry issues, or just out in the hall or at a banquet table. The experts we bring in always have a lot to teach us, but our own farmers who are succeeding right now on Tennessee turf will be teaching each other, too." The conference trade show features service providers and representatives from other businesses useful to agritourism operations.

The annual membership meeting of the Tennessee Agritourism Association will also be held during the conference.

The conference is sponsored by the Tennessee Agritourism Initiative partners to build farm income in the state. Initiative partners include the state departments of Agriculture, Tourist Development and Economic and Community Development; the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation; USDA Rural Development; the UT Center for Profitable Agriculture; UT Extension; and the Tennessee Agritourism Association.

Registration can be completed online by visiting www.PickTnProducts.org. To register by phone, call UT Conferences at 865-974-0280. For those who register for the event by Jan. 15, the cost is \$100; after Jan. 15, the cost to register is \$150. Rooms must be reserved directly with Marriott Chattanooga at 800-841-1674 or online at www.marriott.com/chadt. Participants should ask at the time rooms are reserved for a special conference rate of \$89 plus tax per night. For more information about the conference program, contact Pamela Bartholomew at Pamela.Bartholomew@TN.gov or 615-837-5348.

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