



Cultivating Tennessee Agritourism Through Risk Management Education

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Project Introduction

Expended Amount: \$39,953

This project provided educational and networking opportunities to help Tennessee farmers interested in agritourism to assess and manage price, financial and legal risk. The program included two on-farm workshops addressing farm safety and emergency/crisis response and one agritourism emergency preparedness workshop, as well as teaching and adopting customer service and hospitality curriculum at eight workshops and compiling agritourism resources at the Agritourism Ideas to Action website. The program offered sessions at the annual Tennessee Agritourism Conference and opportunities for university students and Extension agents to participate in events at the conference. Intended project results included increased understanding, evaluation and implementation of farm safety and emergency management procedures and customer service practices. The project also proposed improved understanding of regulations and liability issues and evaluation and implementation of legal risk management tools.

Project Participants

The project's target audiences were Tennessee farmers interested in or conducting agritourism and Extension agents serving clients interested in these same enterprises. These farmers, students and Extension agents are searching for methods to add value to farm products and farm resources, develop new markets, sustain family farms and increase farm revenue. Agritourism is growing in Tennessee. The 2012 Census of Agriculture indicated a 20.8 percent

increase in the number of farms offering agritourism between 2007 and 2012. The 2012 Agritourism Conference had 179 attendees with at least 24 first timers. In preparation for the 2013 conference, a survey was conducted to determine topics of greatest interest for educational sessions. The top-rated topics were customer service/hospitality, creating the customer experience, branding, marketing, and keeping and analyzing records. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture administers a cost-share program for agritourism operators who attend approved educational events such as the ones proposed in this project. Tennessee Tech University offers a major, minor and classes in the College of Agriculture for students who may be interested in operating or working at an agritourism operation. This project allowed students to participate in educational programs, learn from and network with active farmers and operators, and become familiar with Extension.

Project Area

The workshops for this project were delivered in 10 Tennessee counties: Coffee, Hamilton, Loudon, Madison, Maury, Montgomery, Putnam, Rutherford, Sullivan and Sumner. Workshop participants were from Tennessee, Mississippi and Georgia. Workshop instructors were from Tennessee, Wisconsin and Ohio. The Agritourism Ideas to Action website, although developed with Tennessee operators in mind, will be available to anyone with Internet access. Megan Bruch Leffew led a session on the website at the National Agritourism Professionals Association Conference and shared with attendees at the North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association Meeting in February 2015.

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Project Outcomes

A total of 360 people participated in educational programs offered through the project. One hundred fifty-one persons attended the Southern Style Hospitality Seminars, seventy-eight attended safety or emergency preparedness workshops, and one hundred twenty-one attended conference sessions on starting and operating (regulations) an agritourism enterprise. Ten Tennessee Tech University students and professors participated in the Tennessee Agritourism Conference. One hundred forty-nine participants indicated they increased their awareness of customer service as an important part of market planning and implementation. Forty-seven reported that they evaluated their customer service values and/or performance and considered methods to implement or improve. Forty-seven participants reported they implemented new or improved customer service methods. Sixty-four participants indicated they increased their understanding of farm safety and/or emergency preparedness. Twenty-six said they had evaluated their farm safety and emergency management procedures and established new procedures. Thirty-eight participants reported they had improved their understanding of regulations and how they apply to agritourism operations.

Quotes

Agritourism Safety Workshops –

The safety workshop was outstanding. Several ideas introduced at the workshop were implemented and signage was adopted. At least due in part to this workshop, we did not have any injuries this year during our agritourism fall festival. This workshop was instrumental in saving us money and helping to keep us injury free this year.

**Brant Crowder, Operations Manager
Old McDonald's Farm, Sale Creek, TN**

Southern Style Hospitality Seminars –

We attended the course in preparation for opening our winery. We will open December 2014. This course was an excellent opportunity for us. We have the knowledge that will allow us to open with strategies in place for customer service. I think it would be good to have the attendees meet again to discuss their ideas and successes in implementing what we learned.

Dianne Day, Delta Blues Winery, Lakeland, TN

Project Success Story

Grandaddy's Farm

Karen Dixon and her son, Andrew, participated in the Southern Style Hospitality Seminar held in August 2013 in Manchester, Tennessee. Karen and her husband, Steve, and sons, Andrew and Philip, operate Grandaddy's Farm in Estill Springs, Tennessee, where the Dixon family began farming in 1951. The Dixons raise corn, wheat and soybeans, background cattle and sell straw in their conventional farming operation. At their agritourism operation, they offer more than 35 varieties of mums and more than 100 varieties of pumpkins, winter squash and gourds at their on-farm retail market every fall. In addition, they offer educational farm tours and fall farm fun to area families. Karen and Andrew took what they learned at the Southern Style Hospitality Seminar and implemented it this fall at Grandaddy's Farm. Karen reported the following in November 2014:

"In prior years, employee orientation included only a few statements pertaining to employees' attitude and actions. After the workshop, great detail was spent on employee interaction with customers. Films were made that exemplified skills taught in the workshop and the importance of training vs. telling/showing how customer service impacts the customer and the business. Talking about the situations in the group and later role-playing in pairs of employees showed greater retention of desired skills regarding customer service. Employees seemed to "get it." There were far fewer issues for management to have to resolve for our customers this season!"

***Sandra Martini, H. L. Goodwin** and **Ronald L. Rainey**, Grant Coordinator and Co-Directors, respectively, of the Southern Risk Management Education Center, serve as editors of this report series. To learn more about risk management education programs and resources, visit the Southern Center website (<http://srmec.uark.edu>) or the Extension Risk Management Education Program link (www.extensionrme.org).

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