

Value-added Agricultural Success Story

Honeysuckle Hill 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



Photo courtesy of TN Dept. of Agriculture

“We used to host a fall festival at the farm for members of our church. We gave hayrides, played games and let all the children pick a pumpkin to take home. This is how Honeysuckle Hill Farm was born. We never imagined it evolving to what it is today,” according to Jeff.

Time spent on his grandfather’s farm in southeast Missouri left a lasting impression on Jeff Alsup. “I inherited a passion for farming from my grandpa, Edward Alsup,” says Jeff.

Jeff’s positive experiences as a child on his grandfather’s farm led to his desire to become a full-time farmer as an adult. In 1995, Jeff and his wife, Julie, an elementary school teacher, began looking for a small farm in Middle Tennessee and found 12 acres in Robertson County. They built a log home, planted a small orchard and acquired 20 additional acres. They also started growing a variety of fruits and vegetables and sharing them with family and friends.

In 2003, while employed full-time off the farm, Jeff and Julie opened Honeysuckle Hill Farm to the public, offering educational tours of the farm in the fall. Julie shared her educational expertise at the farm to help develop the tours.

By 2005, Jeff was ready to try to grow his farm business and sought help from the Center for Profitable Agriculture (CPA). Marketing specialist Megan Bruch visited Honeysuckle Hill to learn more about Jeff and his business. Megan then conducted a market analysis and developed a written marketing plan. Jeff began implementing many of the marketing recommendations, and Megan continued to work with Jeff to help him develop effective brochures and press releases. Follow-up visits to the farm allowed Megan and the CPA to provide Jeff with information and feedback on how to improve customer service and safety.

According to Jeff, “Megan took a special interest in our farm and was confident that we could grow our visitor volume and gross revenue with a good, sound marketing strategy. She revamped our



educational flyer and targeted it for distribution to one key market — 4,000 teachers in Middle Tennessee. This has been the most effective marketing decision we've made so far."

Since opening Honeysuckle Hill Farm in 2003, Jeff and Julie have continued to improve and expand school tour offerings. Spring tours focus on signs of spring and plant life. Early fall tours feature orchards, while later fall tours highlight pumpkins. In 2007, they added a haunted woods attraction.

Jeff and Julie's hard work and determination to succeed have paid off. Visitor numbers have increased dramatically from 3,500 in 2004 to 25,000 in 2007.

The number of people employed by the operation has also expanded over time. In the beginning it was just Jeff and one or two others. In 2007, Honeysuckle Hill Farm employed about 40 individuals. Jeff says, "On a school tour day, it would take 8 to 10 employees to handle 600 to 800 visitors. On a busy Saturday, 15 to 20 workers were needed to manage 1,000 to 2,000 visitors."

Funding for Honeysuckle Hill Farm has come primarily from Jeff and Julie's personal and farm income. For the past three years, they have diversified and expanded their agritourism operation by participating in the Tennessee Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Enhancement Cost-Share Program.

As for the future, Jeff and Julie hope to continue to grow their business by improving upon existing activities, offering more attractions, expanding into other seasons and increasing visitor numbers. They plan to add permanent rest-room facilities and a kitchen to expand food items offered to customers.



Photo courtesy of TN Dept. of Agriculture

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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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