

Agritourism trip to give guests Appalachian experience

By Katie Pratt

SANDY HOOK, Ky., (August 20, 2008) – With its natural beauty, vibrant history and colorful locals, the Appalachian culture has intrigued people for many years, but unless individuals have ties to the area, they likely have never experienced it. That is about to change. During the week of Sept. 29-Oct. 4, visitors will get a slice of life tucked in the hills of eastern Kentucky through a multi-county bus tour focused on agritourism.

The bus tour is the first such venture by the Eastern Kentucky Foothills Eco-Agritourism Corporation, a group comprised of community and business leaders from Carter, Elliott, Morgan, Menifee and Wolfe counties.

“Kentucky Entrepreneurial Coaches Institute offered a mini project about new opportunities on the farm through agritourism and alternative crops, and these were some of the counties that were interested in it,” said Gwenda Adkins, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension family and consumer science agent in Elliott County. Possessing a background in environmental education and tourism, Adkins has served as an advisor to the group and board member since its formation.

These counties’ economies largely were dependent on tobacco revenues. In the post-buyout period, community leaders see agritourism as an opportunity to generate money for the local economy and educate others about the area’s heritage while helping local farmers diversify their operations.

“We had to do something to help the local farmers,” said Raymond Hurst, Wolfe County judge executive and the board’s chairman. “If this is successful, it could be a big boost to them and the local economy.”

The six-day tour will feature many stops unique to eastern Kentucky including bluegrass music, talented folk artists and craftsmen, historical reenactments and dramatic views of the mountains, gorges and waterfalls. They will also visit farms that produce a variety of agricultural commodities. Unique agricultural stops include a sorghum farm, miniature horse farm and Mountain View Farm in Ezel, one of the largest mule farms in the United States.

The tour also will highlight local businesses. Guests will stay at local hotels or bed-and-breakfasts and shop at local stores that offer a wide variety of crafts and antiques. They will also eat local cuisine, much of which was grown in the area. One of the dining highlights is the Smokey Valley Truck Stop in Olive Hill, featured on the Food Network’s program, “Diners, Drive-ins and Dives.”

On Sept. 29, guests will board a bus in Louisville and Lexington and travel to Carter Caves State Resort Park in Carter County where the tour begins.

Space is limited, and slots are available on first come, first served basis. For more information or to register for the tour, contact Hurst at 606-668-3040.