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Agritourism the fastest growing tourism segment in Kentucky

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FRANKFORT, Ky. — Agricultural tourism in Kentucky, better known as agritourism, is the fastest growing tourism segment in a state where the industry as a whole ranks as the third largest business. As experiential travel gains in popularity, the variety of agritourism attractions is increasing as travelers seek out changes in scenery and pace and to expose kiddos to the many joys of nature. A wide array of agritourism attractions are rolling out the turf to welcome visitors to a lively, affordable summer season where memories are created.

Delve into the web site www.kentuckyfarmsarefun.com, the state's official agritourism web site, to search by type of attraction or location. The site offers listings for stables, working farms, bed and breakfasts, wineries, farmers' markets, orchards, nurseries and many other attractions with descriptions, photos, contacts, directions and operating hours. The site also offers information on creating agricultural itineraries and traveling specialty trails.

Here's a sampling of what's happening at Kentucky's approximately 250 agritourism destinations -- and counting -- in coming weeks:

At Highland Winery in the mountains of Letcher County, a Miners' Memory Celebration will mark Memorial Day weekend with porch-sitting recollections of retired coal miners and a full spread buffet featuring prime rib marinated in the winery's award-winning vintages. Call ahead (606-855-7968) for reservations for a special buffet served on Friday and Saturday. It's too late to book Highland's bed & breakfast accommodations for Memorial Day weekend, but you'll want to reserve another date and experience the down-home hospitality of this unique attraction in Seco. Consult the winery's listing on the <http://kentuckywine.com> web site.

The home-made ice cream made at Chaney's Dairy Barn near I-65 and Bowling Green has won national recognition and on weekends will be served up with mooovies starting June 5. Named one of the top 10 "scoop shops" in the country by Good Morning America, Chaney's dairy operation is open for tours, and on weekends family-friendly movies are featured using the side of the barn as a screen. Call 270-843-5567 or visit www.chaneysdairybarn.com to get details on the schedule.

Sycamore Ridge Farm near Shepherdsville features shearing demonstrations of long-eyelashed alpacas starting May 9. Located on the banks of the Salt River, Sycamore Ridge offers an up-close-and-personal view of alpacas in various shapes and sizes for visitors to

see and encounter. Visit www.sycamoreridgealpacafarm.com or call 502-538-2823 for information.

Welcome in summer by picking fresh berries at Reed Valley Orchard near Paris, a picturesque setting for this palate pleasing experience which starts June 11. Later in the season, summer's bounty of apples, pears, peaches and nectarines will be ripe for picking, tasting and taking home. Blueberry Jubilee and Pancake Day is set for June 27. Visit www.reedvalleyorchard.com or call 859-987-6480 for information.

At Historic McNeil's Crossing just outside of Barbourville, you can rent a teepee or tent to camp as you experience a working farm that traces its roots to the American Revolutionary War era. Besides learning about the cultivation of corn and hay -- crops basic for Kentucky's famous horses and bourbon -- go horseback riding or paddle a canoe on the Cumberland River. Call 606-546-8179 for information or check the farm's listing on kentuckyfarmsarefun.com.

Smack your lips as you near Evans Orchard and Cider Mill's u-pick fresh strawberries, peaches and vegetables (in season). In the meantime, try the scrumptious jams, honey, fried apple pies and apple cider donuts until your favorite crop is ready for harvest at Evan's near Georgetown. Visit www.evansorchard.com or call 502-863-2255 for information.

If four-footed animals have more fascination for you, then Mountain View Farm near Paintsville is the place to go to see zorses, mules, donkeys, and horses (zorses are the offspring of a horse and a zebra). More than 400 animals are on view, and trail riding is encouraged. Owner Paul Stamper said a visit to his farm, which straddles picturesque parts of Morgan, Wolfe and Menifee counties, is like "going to the zoo." Call 606-725-5635 to let him know you're coming.

Sunflower Sundries close to Mt. Olivet mixes up herbal soap, fruit jams and coarse ground mustard. Take a tour of the soap shop, kitchen and organic gardens at this farm near Blue Licks Battlefield State Resort Park, where you can find overnight accommodations and experience early Kentucky history. Visit <http://sunflowersundries.com> and call 606-763-6827 for an appointment.

Plan ahead and reserve a room at a motel, bed & breakfast or campground within easy traveling distance to your destination. Check www.parks.ky.gov for nearby state parks with lodges and dining facilities, cottages and camp grounds. Visit www.kentuckytourism.com to locate a motel, inn or B&B to make your trip to Kentucky's scenic countryside a relaxing getaway.