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State official tells local crowd options for promoting agritourism in Ky. are virtually limitless

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By Tom Marshall

Senior Advocate writer

The state's agritourism director says "we have barely scratched the surface" of what can be done to promote agritourism statewide.

In 2002, Kentucky generated an estimated \$1 million in agritourism, which grew to \$3.2 million by 2007 and only stands to grow as it is better promoted, Stephen P. Yates told a local gathering of government officials and potential beneficiaries that met last week at Bramble Ridge Orchard.

Yates said the untapped possibilities for agritourism are boundless.

"The exciting part about agritourism is that the only thing restricting what you can do is the law and your imagination," he said.

Among those in attendance for the April 9 meeting were Danny Townsend of Townsend's Sorghum Mill, Andrea Smith of Two Sisters Pumpkin Patch, Glenn Berger of GR Freshwater Shrimp, Charlene Patrick and Donna Jones of Hickory Springs of Montgomery Daylillies and Terry and Cindy Peake from Bramble Ridge, which stand to profit from development of local agritourism.

Yates told them they need to partner with local tourism director Tracy Pearce to find ways to produce more income for their business operations.

He believes many of them will benefit as much of the public chooses to visit local destinations rather than spend more money to travel far away in the midst of the nation's current economic crisis.

"In tough economic times there's not a better way to sell Kentucky than our farms," Yates said.

It appears Montgomery and the Gateway counties of Bath, Bourbon, Menifee, Powell and Rowan may get a boost in those efforts through a matching grant that has already been given preliminary approval. An exact dollar figure on that grant has not yet been finalized, Pearce said.

There also other tools toward building local agritourism, Yates said.

He encouraged operators of agritourism destinations to utilize the division of agritourism's new Web site, [www.KentuckyFarmsAreFun.com](http://www.KentuckyFarmsAreFun.com), to sell themselves. The public can log on to the free site and learn about agritourism operations throughout the state.

Searches can be conducted by city or county, he explained, and each listing may include up to three photos.

Yates said the Web site can be used by the public as a siphon to narrow down travel possibilities. Special events and promotions are another way to draw in bigger crowds, he said.

Based on what he'd seen of Montgomery County, Yates said the community has a lot to sell. "This is very much a tourist type community because they show their friendliness and open arms to people," he said. "It comes across as very genuine and sincere."

Yates also urged local agritourism operators to capitalize on their uniqueness by making educational tours available to children.

Cindy Peake noted during a brief public tour of the orchard that hundreds of children had visited there in the past year, some of them on school trips from as far away as Johnson County. In addition to fun activities such as trying the orchard's massive apple slingshot and maze they received lessons on farming operations and educational materials to take back to the classroom, she said.

"They can learn something while still having fun," Yates told the group.

Yates said local farm operators may consider making cabins available for rent on their property or opening a bed and breakfast to boost income. Other possibilities he mentioned

include horse trails, camping and pay lakes.

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