



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 17, 2009

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“PARTY ON!” AT LOCAL FARMS FOR AFFORDABLE FUN

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - Thinking about a family reunion, but nobody wants to chip in for that hotel ballroom? Worried about where to have your wedding so you can still afford a honeymoon? Wondering where in the world you can give your employees the annual event their families have come to expect without bankrupting the company? With the national economy still struggling, many people are forfeiting foreign locales and high end destinations, looking instead to keep their celebrations local.

As a result, farms are becoming popular venues for events that once were held only in fancy rented halls or hotels. Company picnics, family reunions, and church events can be expensive, and the need to “scale back” is leading party planners to discover that a local farm can provide everything needed and more – at a lower price than theme parks and resorts.

“It would be a shame not to get your family together for a reunion, or to cut your wedding so far back that you don’t get to share that day with all the friends and family you wish you could,” says Thelma Ring, of Ring Farm near Columbia. “It’s important to take time to be with the people you love.”

If anybody knows about love, it’s Johnny and Thelma Ring. They’ve been together since they were 13, ever since Thelma started 7th grade at the school where Johnny spotted her, “the prettiest girl in school,” and decided right then that she was the one. They were engaged by 16 and married at 18. Forty-eight years later, it’s obvious that sharing their happiness and their farm is a way of life for them.

It just makes sense that the couple recently added weddings to their long list of farm offerings, which already included camping, bonfires, picnics, wagon rides, a pumpkin patch, a play area, a corn maze and a cotton maze.

“We have such a pretty place,” says Thelma. “There are so many spots to choose from on our farm that are just perfect for outdoor occasions, and if the weather turns bad, we have two big pavilions. It seems like, once the decision is made to have the wedding here, the bride just relaxes. Nature does a lot of the decorating for you, and there’s no need to look for some other place for the reception – there’s enough room for everybody.”

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"Tracy Ford, with the Wild Turkey Ranch near Lebanon, notes that just because the setting is rural doesn't mean the event can't be stylish. "You and your guests are surrounded by beautiful country in a very private setting. The décor, menu and entertainment for a particular event can be as rustic or as elegant as you want; our facilities were built with that in mind. Outdoor weddings with a horse-drawn carriage, indoor Christmas parties, straightforward corporate meetings – we do it all."

In Ridgetop, Smiley Hollow's facilities are so extensive – with a putt-putt golf course, large play area, kitchens, a rustic banquet hall complete with raised dance floor and a whole rustic village of little shops and store fronts – that the place has served as the site of numerous music videos and music business events. In fact, if you've seen Disney's Hannah Montana movie, you've seen Smiley Hollow – it was used as the "county fair" location for Hannah's/Miley's concert scene.

"We have little churches and big companies, who've been coming to us for years," says Ted Smiley. "When your group is scheduled, there's nobody here but you, no matter how small your group is. We have covered structures for 2,000, but we've had as many as 6,000 people here at one time. All meals are prepared on site, by Smiley family members, from Smiley family recipes. Smileys know how to have a good time – and we know how to make sure you have a good time, too."

To find farms across the state with facilities for your next celebration, visit www.picktnproducts.org.

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