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# HARDY FARMS AGRITOURISM

HAWKINSVILLE, PULASKI COUNTY



# Getting Started

Pulaski County, Georgia is a University of Georgia Archway Partnership community located in the center of the state. One of the community's top priority issues is economic development and over the past year, the Archway Executive Committee has worked to identify the county's assets for economic growth.

Working with the Archway Partnership, the community's economic development organization, United Pulaski, identified agriculture as a top economic driver and began to make plans to share the area's farm culture in new and exciting ways. With the support of the City of Hawkinsville's Better Home Town program and the local Chamber, an agritourism committee, with over twenty members, was formed to explore opportunities for farm tours.

Dr. Kent Wolfe, Director of UGA's Center for Agribusiness & Economic Development, helped identify agritourism as an economically viable option for the County to develop. He also provided the group with successful examples of agritourism

ventures and shared University research conducted on the topic. In response to this promising potential for economic growth, the Archway Partnership assembled an interdisciplinary team of graduate students to develop a comprehensive plan for Hardy Farms Peanuts. Their efforts have complemented the research completed by Dr. Wolfe's department by providing a specific action plan based on the peanut industry, Pulaski County's geography and the Farm's potential audience. The hope is that this work will lead to successful agritourism at Hardy Farms, and also serve as a guide to others in the agriculture community who hope to embark on this journey.

This summary of the students' work on the Hardy Farms project not only provides great benefit to local farms, but also demonstrates the Archway Partnership's commitment to enriching the learning experience of UGA students through interdisciplinary projects and interaction with Georgia communities.



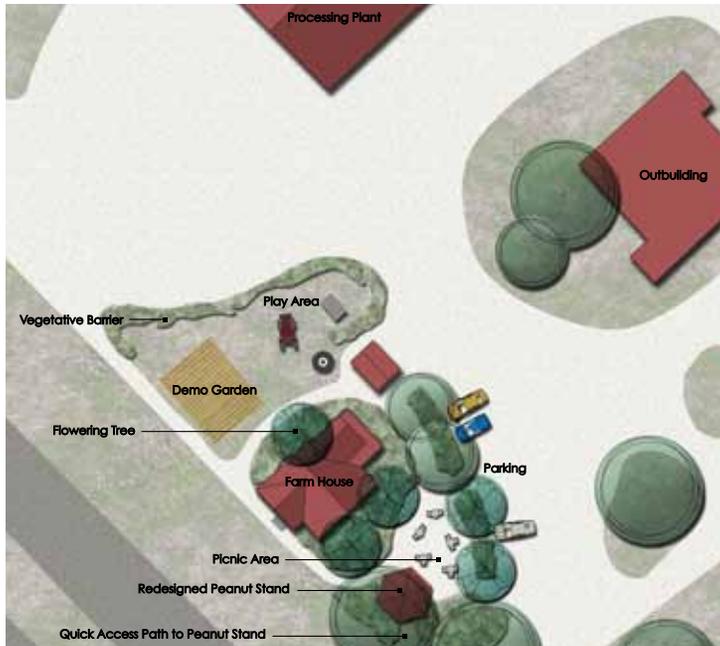
# Overview

As Georgia's largest and oldest industry, the state's economy is greatly impacted by agriculture. More than \$68.9 billion of the state's \$719.8 billion revenue is directly attributed to the growth and sale of crops. Some leading agricultural products in Georgia include cotton, peaches, and peanuts. Industry leaders have expanded their horizons beyond farming into the realm of agricultural tourism. Agritourism is the practice of touring agricultural areas to see farms and often participate in farm activities. These activities are not limited to just farm activities, but often includes the purchasing of farm branded merchandise, seasonal crop pickings and using land as venues for special events such as concerts and weddings.

The goal of this project was to develop a strategic plan for the management team at Hardy Farms to enter the segment of agritourism within its industry. The plan is proposed in two phases. Phase one involves establishing the target market and equipping the facility for regular tourism visits. After experiencing success in phase one, Hardy Farms will have the option to proceed with phase two. Phase two involves a longer term option to renovate one of the unused barns into an enclosed multi-purpose facility capable of hosting special events. This publication provides brief descriptions of the various parts of this project.

# Funding Opportunities

In order to make many of the changes recommended in this report, Hardy Farms will need access to various types of potential funding mechanisms. The timing is perfect because the federal government is currently pushing for Americans to understand the source of their food (agritourism) as well as agrarian history (heritage tourism), and there are many federal funding options for agritourism ventures. This includes funding sources from the Georgia Department of Tourism, USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, and also USDA's Rural Development program.



Concept design for Hardy Farms agritourism accommodations and site redesign.

## SARE Sustainable Community Innovation

The SARE Sustainable Community Innovation grant funds projects that blend community development strategies with sustainable agriculture. Successful proposals include:

1. Partnerships—All relevant stakeholders in the community such as entrepreneurs, government entities, civic organizations, and producers. The more people involved, the more likely the project is to be funded.
2. Multiple Disciplines—Researchers and scientists with diverse backgrounds
3. Linkages—Projects which link farm and non-farm economic development add credibility to proposals.

Adding an agritourism aspect to Hardy Farms could create economic opportunity in Hawkinsville and the surrounding rural areas.

Hardy Farms could create a unique tourism opportunity for Pulaski County and would also have the potential to create jobs in the area and attract revenue. This project would be eligible to apply for funding of up to \$15,000.

## Georgia Department of Economic Development Tourism Division

### *Tourism Product Development*

The Georgia Department of Tourism offers grant assistance to projects that support sustainable tourism development at the local level which will maintain and/or create jobs and attract tourists. Eligible projects can include plans to expand, strengthen, or sustain local tourism related to Georgia's cultural and heritage attractions, natural resources, and cultural landscapes.

USDA Rural Business Opportunity Grants, through the RBOG program, promotes sustainable economic development in rural areas with outstanding needs. These funds can be used for a variety of projects, including economic development.

The Hardy Farms agritourism venture would present a unique opportunity to develop the Hawkinsville community through tourism and would qualify for assistance up to \$50,000.

# Student Learning

A major opportunity for Hardy Farms is in the area of education. This sample lesson plan is meant to be used for the purpose of fulfilling the agricultural requirements mandated by the Georgia Department of Education for all third graders in public elementary schools. It is a three day lesson based primarily on earth and life sciences but also touches on subjects of social studies and history. Students will learn about Georgia's agricultural legacy, in particular concerning peanuts.

Day one, students will learn about agricultural terminology and how certain crops in the state grow from seedlings to harvest to finished products. Day two, students and teachers will take a day trip to Hardy Farms in Hawkinsville, Georgia. They will experience a guided tour of the facility and learn how peanuts are grown and harvested. This process will give them a better understanding of why peanuts are so important to the state of Georgia. Day three, students will get to cook their own peanut butter cookies. By doing this, they will get the opportunity to make their own agricultural finished product. The extent of the students' agricultural knowledge will be assessed by test on the third day.

The benefit to teachers is that this lesson plan allows them to teach the students experientially and go beyond using textbooks. The benefit to students is that they get to use their visual, oral, tactile, olfactory, and tasting sense in this lesson plan. By accessing all five senses, students will better comprehend agriculture's impact on their lives.

## A Look at Georgia Agriculture



Capital: Atlanta

Population: 9,829,211

Founded: January 2, 1788 (4<sup>th</sup>)

State Bird: Brown Thrasher

State Tree: Live Oak

State Flower: Cherokee Rose

Number of Counties: 159

Largest City: Atlanta - 540,921

Nickname: Peach State

Number of Farms: 47,800

Average Farm Size: 212 acres

Total Farmland: 10.1 billion acres



[www.agclassroom.org/ga](http://www.agclassroom.org/ga)

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### Climate & Soil

- A humid subtropical climate with mild winters and hot moist summers is characteristic of most of Georgia. This, combined with a variety of soil types from the coast to the mountains, makes it an ideal place to produce a diverse variety of crops and livestock.
- Monthly average temperatures range from a high of 92.2°F to a low of 32.6°F.
- The average annual rainfall varies from 40" in central Georgia to more than 75" in northeast Georgia.
- Geographically, Georgia can be divided into eight soil provinces or major land resource areas. They are Southern Appalachian, Sand Mountain, Blue Ridge, Southern Coastal Plain, Black Lands, Southern Piedmont, Sand Hill, and Atlantic Coast Flatwoods.
- Georgia is the leading kaolin clay-producing state in the U.S. Georgia is also a leader in the production of marble, barite, and bauxite.

### Crops & Livestock

- Georgia produces almost half of the peanuts produced in the U.S. each year. Their value was more than \$401 million in 2009.
- Georgia was the first colony to produce cotton commercially, first planting it near Savannah in 1734. Georgia ranks third nationally in cotton production. Its value was more than \$700 million in 2009.
- Although Georgia is called the Peach State, it actually ranks third in United States peach production behind California and South Carolina. In 2009, the Georgia peach crop sales totaled \$60 million.
- In 1986, Georgia passed legislation giving Vidalia onions, known by many as the sweetest onion in the world, legal status and defining the 20-county production area. The Vidalia onion was named Georgia's official state vegetable in 1990.
- Vegetable production has increased significantly in Georgia. Georgia's top five vegetables are onions, watermelon, tomatoes, sweet corn and bell peppers.
- Georgia leads the nation in broilers and value of egg production. In 2009, broilers were valued at \$4 billion dollars and eggs at more than \$570 million dollars.
- Beef cattle are raised in all of the counties in Georgia.

### General

- One of out of seven Georgians works in agriculture, forestry or a related sector.
- Agriculture contributes more than \$67 billion, or about 12%, annually to Georgia's \$787 billion dollar economic output.
- More than 65% of Georgia is in forestland. Forestry is a \$16.7 billion per year industry in Georgia.
- Georgia's top ten commodities in order of their rank are broilers, cotton, eggs, timber, peanuts, horses, beef, greenhouse products for ornamental horticulture, dairy, and container plants from nurseries.
- Georgia ranks first in the U.S. in the production of peanuts, pecans, rye, eggs and broilers.
- Coca-Cola was invented in May 1886 by Dr. John S. Pemberton in Atlanta, Georgia.
- Plains is the home of Jimmy Carter, the 39<sup>th</sup> President and a Nobel Peace Prize Winner in 2002.
- Georgia was the first state to charter a state university, The University of Georgia, was founded in 1785.

Sample lesson plan created for the educational supplement of the Hardy Farms project.

A major component of this plan is the connection of the farm to the community. Specifically, a target audience to involve in participating and assisting with tours is the elderly population. The impetus behind involving this group was to incorporate story telling, oral histories and to act as tour guides to the student groups. Older adults seek experiential activities that are educational, challenging, community-oriented, and that create a sense of nostalgia and this experience provides all of these aspects.

## RECREATIONAL:

*"I want to 'be' in the place I visit—get a feeling for what it would be like to live there."*<sup>1</sup>

- The facility could offer bicycle tours with bicycle rental options.
- Kid friendly activities would allow grandparent-caregivers to do fun things with their grandchildren.

## EDUCATIONAL:

*"It's appealing to get the 'inside scoop'—to see the scenes behind the scenes, to feel that I've spent my time in a unique experience that not everyone can take part in."*<sup>2</sup>

- A docent/guide program of volunteers could offer seasonal tours. This plan would require a volunteer training program. Learning

modules for volunteer staff might include: Hardy farms history, peanut farming process, customer relations and safety.

- A community kitchen could offer:
  - "Cooking with peanuts" classes (using guest teachers)
  - Peanut recipe development and community cook-offs
  - "Regional heritage" cooking demonstrations or a companion/cookbook to sell
  - Seasonal cooking demonstrations for peanut-filled recipes

## COMMUNITY HERITAGE:

*"I like the idea of exploring. I have always been attracted to the kinds of trips that you go out and do things—like going to the community and being part of it."*<sup>3</sup>

- The facility can create a historical snapshot of the community by telling the story of the farm within the context of the county's history. Organizers may solicit community members' contributions such as names, stories, maps and historical photographs of the county.
  - Area historical societies may be willing to design and contribute to history projects based at the farm.
- Grant funding may be available to create a cultural museum that tells the history of peanut farming in Georgia.

<sup>1</sup> *Baby Boomers and Educational Travel* (2007) p. 24/<sup>2</sup> *Baby Boomers and Educational Travel* (2007) p. 20/<sup>3</sup> *Baby Boomers and Educational Travel* (2007) p. 20

# Media & Public Relations

Media and Public Relations suggestions are very important for any business. In this section are suggestions for Facebook, website content and organization, a sample press release with guidelines, a media list for surrounding areas, and information on state opportunities.

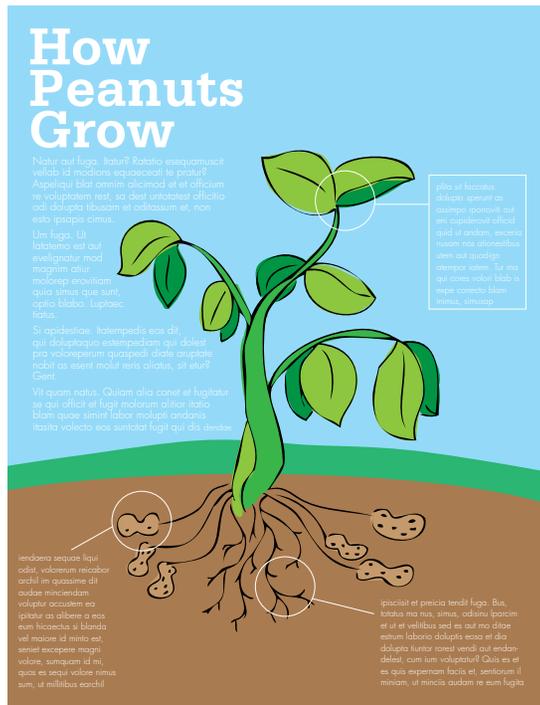
The Facebook section gives suggestions on improvement and new ways to gain followers. There is information on when to post, what to post, and how to know if your posts are reaching the most followers. Following this Facebook guideline will not only help in attracting new followers, but will encourage current followers to interact with the page more often.

There is also a section on ways to improve the content and organization of the Hardy Farms website. Listed is information about how to organize the page to better suit your needs as well as illustrate content needed.

A sample press release and guidelines will assist in writing press releases for events. The sample comes from the Georgia State Boiled Peanut Championship.

There is also a media list that will be useful for the areas surrounding Pulaski County. The contacts can be used when you would like to promote a story about Hardy Farms and/or when there are events to promote. This is a great way to reach out to surrounding areas through radio, television, and newspapers.

A state opportunities section describes opportunities on how to promote Hardy Farms after it is a destination spot. It describes Georgia Grown and the benefits of attaining a silver level membership. It also describes the benefits of attending the Georgia Grown Symposium, which will happen again in 2013. Additionally, there is a section about the Department of Agriculture's Bulletin Calendar and how to list Hardy Farms events throughout the year. The Department of Agriculture will also write a press release about an event if it is something the public needs to know. Lastly, there is information on the process of getting state signage for Hardy Farms on the highways and streets.



Sample infographic posters to supplement the agritourism and educational aspects of the farm.

# Next Steps



## Hire Agritourism Director

In order to be fully committed to this venture, Hardy Farms needs to hire a person whose sole responsibility is to manage agritourism. This person would be responsible for contacting the target elementary schools and assisted living facilities. The Director would present the agricultural lesson plans to the Bibb, Houston, and Pulaski Boards of Education. In addition, this person would handle tour scheduling during the weekdays and lead tours. The Director will be the primary contact person for all agritourism inquiries and have expertise in the field. Another benefit of this position is that it helps the existing management team not to divert attention away from their daily responsibilities at the farm. Possible candidates might be some of the retired county agents in the Pulaski county area.

## Expand Branded Merchandise Catalog

Currently, the Hardy Farms website sells branded t-shirts and hats online, but these items are not sold at the peanut stands. Each of the 20 road stands and the stand at Hardy Farms should be places where customers can purchase peanuts and merchandise. In addition to t-shirts and hats, coozies, key chains, and figurine toys should be available as well. With each sale, the employees working at the stand should direct anyone wanting to know more about boiled peanuts to visit Hardy Farms. This merchandise helps build the brand.

## Increase Promotion of the Hardy Farms Brand

In the tri-county area of Bibb, Houston, and Pulaski counties, there is no signage for Hardy Farms along the major roadways. By placing signs similar to the one in front of the cottage on major thoroughways with distance and direction towards the farm, Hardy Farms can increase awareness for potential agritourists. Another way to bring awareness to potential tourists is to put up store displays inviting customers who bought boiled peanuts to visit the farm.

## Prepare the Farm for Tourism

First aid kits need to be placed in all buildings tourists will enter. CPR training is needed for working with students. Wheelchair ramps should be added onto the cottage porch to allow for handicap access and additional liability coverage should be explored.