



SMOKY MOUNTAIN FARMERS SAY, “Y’ALL COME!”

Agritourism is Growing in the Mountains. When Joan Glover’s husband, Mike, told her he wanted to move to the Smoky Mountains and raise gourds, she thought he was... well, out of his gourd. But things have worked out rather nicely for the Glovers, proud owners of Sleepy Hollow Farm, in Swain County, North Carolina. “Mike’s a certified herbalist, so he knows his way around the garden,” says Joan. “We raise organic veggies—tomatoes, beets, broccoli, cabbage, melons, you name it,” she says. “And we just love to welcome visitors to the farm.”

Gourds, Birdhouses and Brown Eggs. So what does one do with gourds? “I make them into all kinds of things,” says Mike, “from flower pots to birdhouses.” Mike and Joan also operate a store in Bryson City where visitors can browse among merchandise, from fine jewelry and quilts to brown eggs. (Joan has named every one of her 26 chickens.) The store is also the home of one of the world’s only gourd museums.

Pass the Sourwood, Honey. Quintin Ellison and Kelley Penn also welcome visitors to their farm, Balltown Bee Farm, but they would prefer you call first for an appointment (sometimes they’re knee-deep in honey). “We love to tell visitors about beekeeping,” says Quintin. “In fact, we’ll even teach them how to set up their own apiaries.” (That’s the official name for a bee yard.) “We sell sourwood and poplar honey—with or without the comb,” adds Kelley. Quintin and Kelley also raise organic vegetables, most of which they sell at nearby farmers’ markets. Their produce includes organically grown lettuce, beets, corn and, their specialty, shiitake mushrooms.

It’s A-maze-ing! Just east of Bryson City is Darnell Farms, where the roadside produce stand is loaded with beans, cucumbers, peppers, squash, strawberries, tomatoes and corn, depending on the season. “We invite vegetable lovers to shop at the stand or ‘pick their own,’” says owner, Jeff Darnell, “but if you’re just coming for fun, we’ll tell you to get lost—in our corn maze.” Each fall Jeff and company cut a tangle of paths through the tall stalks of their cornfield. Visitors are then challenged to enter and see if they can find their way out—or spend the rest of their lives wandering through the corn. Darnell Farms also offers regular music festivals, in addition to their Strawberry Jam Festival, TomatoFest and TimberFest. It all takes place on the rich bottomland along the Tuckaseegee River, where the Cherokee Indians once tended their fields of corn, squash and beans.

Preserving Traditions—and the Environment. The movement to preserve agricultural traditions is taking off in Swain County, 87% of which is national park and national forest lands. Farms where tobacco was once grown are now going back to the old ways—raising organic vegetables, berries, apples, goats and Jersey cows. That’s good news if you’re a visitor who enjoys stepping back in time for a taste of life as the early mountain settlers might have experienced it. It’s also good news for the environment. “The small farmers around here are very mindful of organic methods,” says Quintin Ellison. “We want to preserve this special place for generations to come. And we’re happy to share that philosophy with our visitors.”

For more information on touring the Smokies, contact the Swain County Chamber of Commerce, 210 Main Street, P.O. Box 509, Bryson City, NC 28713; chamber@greatsmokies.com; or 800-867-9246.