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National Agritourism Conference Coming to The Rock Ranch This Week

THE ROCK, Ga. (February 24, 2013) – More than 400 farmers from all over the United States and Canada will descend upon The Rock, GA on March 1, 2014. Why this unique gathering of agricultural entrepreneurship? A Corn Party, of course. This year will mark the 14th annual MAiZE Corn Party, a National Conference for agritourism operators that is held each year in a different part of the U.S. and allows for networking, regional tours, continuing education and a bountiful harvest of ideas. It is an honor that the group has selected Georgia for this year's edition.

A 1500-acre ranch, The Rock Ranch will host this group and conduct a workshop of sorts during their tour of Georgia farms. Conference goers will rotate through stations to learn about the operations of this working cattle ranch and agritourism venue that is dedicated to "Growing Healthy Families". The Rock Ranch is owned by Chick-fil-A founder S. Truett Cathy and saw approximately 100,000 visitors in 2013. While the Rock Ranch is a key stop on the bus tour portion of the conference, conference goers will spend several days touring Georgia farms and hearing from keynote speakers representing Herschend Entertainment, Chick-fil-A and others.

A growing nationwide trend, agritourism is anything done on a farm for the purpose of education or entertainment and is a combination of Georgia's two largest industries. Jeff Manley, president of The Georgia Agritourism Association and GM of The Rock Ranch said, "Agritourism is a great tool to help diversify income and preserve small family farms across our nation. It is also quite valuable as a teaching tool to educate youth about how food gets from the farm to their tables and make them aware of the importance of farming."

While the collective annual income of this group exceeds 200 million and the combined acreage owned represents over 3 million acres of some of America's best farmland, this is not a culmination of big Ag producers, but rather a gathering of farm entertainers. Bringing them to Georgia is The MAiZE Inc, founded in 1996 by Brett Herbst. Herbst and his team have designed more than 2,500 corn mazes and The MAiZE has helped install corn mazes in 260+ communities in the United States, Canada, Poland and Europe.

"What's surprised me more than anything is how agritourism has filled an entertainment gap that we didn't even know existed," Herbst said. "People, young and old, have thanked me time and time again for providing a source of recreation that is fun for all ages, clean, educational and unique. It's somewhere you can have fun and learn a little something about agriculture."

For more information visit www.georgia-agritourism.org, www.therockranch.com or www.themaize.com.

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