



Agriculture & Tourism Partners of Illinois  
c/o Central Illinois Tourism Development Office

700 East Adams Street  
Springfield, IL 62701  
Ph. 217-525-7980  
Fax. 217-525-8004

December 2008, Volume XI

## Absolutely Ament

By Ross Ament, ATPI President

Greetings. As we turn another page on the calendar, I hope that everyone had a successful 2008. It certainly was an interesting one from many perspectives! With the uncertainty of what 2009 will bring, the importance of working together through your association, ATPI, is more crucial than ever. By pulling together everyone's resources, strengths, and skills, ATPI can more effectively grow the success of agritourism in Illinois.

The board of directors of ATPI met in November to analyze the past year and plan for the future. The priorities for the new year are education, marketing and providing benefits and solutions for our members.

Education means organizing the agritourism sessions at the Illinois Specialty Crops and Agritourism Conference, January 7-10, 2009. Education also means communicating to the public the importance of agritourism in Illinois. Guiding potential visitors to agritourism businesses, events and destinations in a clear, concise manner is the continued plan for marketing. The ATPI website: [www.agfun.com](http://www.agfun.com) continues to attract more and more viewers. The board also continues to evaluate ways to provide benefits and solutions to our members. We need everyone's support and assistance in enhancing the effectiveness and quality of agritourism in Illinois. At the September board of directors meeting, it was agreed to raise the dues for ATPI to \$50. This is the first dues raise since the creation of the association. The decision was carefully considered and debated in light of these challenging times. It is important that we keep this association that is solely focused on the success of agritourism for both the individual businesses and the state as a whole moving forward and growing in its effectiveness.

In looking forward to the new year, it is apparent that there is a positive opportunity for agritourism. The growing trend of families and individuals traveling closer to their home in search of unique experiences is a great opportunity for us. The increasing importance of eating locally grown foods and buying locally produced fiber products is also a plus. Couple that with the need for educating the consumer on how to best utilize these local products. It is more important than ever to link the consumer, visitor, tourist in an easy to navigate way to our Illinois agritourism businesses and destinations. If we all work together to benefit everyone, everyone benefits!

In light of that, I urge you to register now and plan to attend the 2009 Illinois Specialty Crops and Agritourism Conference and Trade Show, January 7-10 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Springfield. The sessions will be outstanding learning opportunities. The other crucial benefit is to network and share ideas with agritourism professionals from across the state. Be sure to stop by the ATPI booth.

## Hardy's Reindeer Ranch

1356 County Road 2900 North  
Rantoul, IL

Hardy's Reindeer Ranch, located in Champaign County, began in 1995 when Julie and Mark Hardy purchased their first two reindeer to help sell Christmas trees on their



## 2009 Illinois Specialty Crops and Agritourism Conference

The Illinois Specialty Crops and Agritourism Conference will be held January 7-10, 2009, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Springfield. On Thursday and Friday, January 8-9, the conference will kick off with Chefs and Culinary Educators Michael and Brigitta McGreal as the keynote speakers followed by the traditional concurrent breakout sessions on fruits, vegetables, herbs, and agritourism/marketing. Thursday evening will feature a banquet followed by the announcement of the annual cider contest winners and comments from Matt Lohr, Farmer, Speaker, and Virginia State Legislator. The agritourism/marketing track will feature sessions on how to capitalize on consumer trends, how to increase on-farm sales, and how to work with the media. Other topics will include "Creating a Successful Tourism Partnership," "Safety Considerations for Agritourism Operations," and "Virginia Agritourism." A local foods program entitled "Buy Local - Eat Healthy" on Saturday, January 10, 2009, will feature Chef Michael McGreal, Joliet Junior College, who will demonstrate the preparation of delicious and exciting dishes with fresh produce. Other sessions will include cooking with edible flowers and pairing wines with food. Trade show plans have spaces for over 50 exhibitors. Plenty of time is allowed between sessions to visit with exhibitors. To receive registration materials please contact Diane Handley at 309/557-2107 or [handley@ilfb.org](mailto:handley@ilfb.org). Visit [www.specialtygrowers.org](http://www.specialtygrowers.org) for a detailed conference agenda. We look forward to

farm. Now, after 10 years in business, the ranch has grown to 16 reindeer and 5 acres of Christmas Trees. The holidays are the perfect time of year to visit the reindeer at Hardy's Ranch! For only \$3, you can enjoy the reindeer tour and experience the beautiful animals. You will be given a treat to feed them and even get a "reindeer kiss"!! With 5 acres of choose and cut Christmas trees, you are sure to find the perfect tree for you! There are also freshly cut Douglas Fir, Scotch, and White Pine trees available. The Ranch has saws, tree shakers, and a baler for your convenience. After the reindeer tour, warm up in the barn gift shop. It is heated with a pot belly stove and hot Wassail is available while you browse the store. They have homemade fudge, cookies, gifts, and ornaments for purchase. For your large party or gathering, the Ranch offers a Western Banquet Hall. Decorated in an early western saloon theme, the hall has a stage for entertainment and performances. A delicious "chuck wagon meal" can be enjoyed with choices including smoked brisket and beans, complete with spoon and bandana. Centrally located, just 15 miles north of Champaign, the ranch is open August through December. Call to confirm holiday hours at (217) 893-3407 or visit their website at [www.reindeerranch.com](http://www.reindeerranch.com)

## Introducing: Buy Fresh Buy Local

### Central Illinois

Raising awareness of locally produced foods has just become easier in central Illinois. Through the new Buy Fresh Buy Local marketing campaign local farmers can access new markets and consumers will be able to easily identify local foods by recognizing a colorful logo. The local chapter is part of a national network of Buy Fresh Buy Local chapters working to encourage consumers to support local farmers for the following benefits: fresh, flavorful and healthy foods in the community; increased environmental stewardship; and a stronger local economy. The Buy Fresh Buy Local chapter started in June of this year and has already co-sponsored a dinner series where local restaurants serve locally produced foods. A membership directory was distributed for the central Illinois area including all farms, restaurants and retail outlets that are providers of locally produced foods. To learn more about the chapter or to find out about starting a chapter in your area, contact Illinois Stewardship Alliance at (217) 498-9707 or go to

[www.ilstewards.org](http://www.ilstewards.org).



ATPI's recently launched website, [www.agfun.com](http://www.agfun.com), is seeing tremendous results in accomplishing it's goal of marketing your attraction!! The site is consistently seeing at least 100 new visitors per day. Visitors are geographically located in cities throughout Illinois, as well as out of state visitors from Missouri, California, Florida, New Jersey, and many more. We have even had international visitors to agfun.com!! If you currently have a website on record with ATPI, it is listed and linked with your attraction's information. Remember, you can update your attraction's information listing through agfun.com as well by clicking on the link at the bottom of the opening page. We encourage you to visit the site to make sure your information is current and explore other agritourism attractions in your area!



seeing you there!



Edwards Apple Orchard, Paplar Grove, Illinois  
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