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## Helping people find fun on the farm

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As the business of agritourism grows, a Canton man has started a consulting business to help farms attract more people.

Scott Cagle of Canton started Agri-Tour Solutions this summer after selling his share of the family business, Cagle's Dairy in Hickory Flat. He already is working with farms in Eatonton and in Texas.

"I have lived and worked in a dairy all my life," said Cagle, 46. "I have always enjoyed working with others when it comes to agriculture."

His family started Cagle's Dairy in 1951 and in 1993, while remaining a working dairy, they began tours as the business's focus shifted to agritourism.

The dairy attracts thousands of visitors each year with school and family tours, which include a hayride and a trip to the petting barn, as well as special events. These events include the cornfield MaiZE, which started in 2001; Spring Farm Days, fall bonfires and Christmas hayrides.

The dairy also has hosted visitors from around the world, most recently a group of women from the Republic of Georgia earlier this year, seeking information about the agriculture industry, including agritourism.

Cagle said agritourism is an industry that is starting to grow and he saw an opportunity to help other farms market themselves to attract tourists.

"Nobody has a background in this," he said. "It is just now in the beginnings. It really just got started in the last 10 or 15 years. It is one of the fastest growing segments of tourism."

Cagle helps farms by identifying the farms' assets and creating a destination for tourists and educational visitors. He also develops farm tours and creates special events such as cornfield mazes and fall harvest celebrations.

He said agritourism has become popular in other parts of the world, too, including Australia, New Zealand and in Europe.

Dan Rowe, deputy commissioner of tourism for Georgia, said agritourism now is starting to catch interest in this country.

"It is an important and burgeoning part of tourism in Georgia," he said. "With Georgia's agrarian roots, it is a natural fit."

Rowe said there are some economic benefits to farms beginning a tourism business.

"It creates new ways of generating revenues. Technology has been introduced to farms and farmers are looking to make sure they get a return on their investment," he said. "It also is helping to keep them employed and keeps the farms in the hands of the families that have owned them for years."

Cagle said the interest in visiting farms could be stemming from people who grew up on farms, but now live in suburbs or cities.

"People have moved away from farms over the years. If they didn't grow up on a farm, they probably visited a grandparents' farm or their uncle's farm," he said. "They remember what it was like and they want to create and share those memories with their children."

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