

Agritainment farms embrace educational programs

By Ana Olvera

Digital Content Editor

There's a company helping agritainment farms add an educational component to their offerings.

Aaron Burakoff founded Evergreen Creations in 2012, to provide farms with educational programming focused on sustainable agriculture and social issues. Burakoff, working with author Joe Troiano at the time, was inspired by farmers who were reading Troiano's book "The Legend of Spookley the Square Pumpkin" to visiting children.

"I immediately recognized the power of Spookley and his story to help farmers create a fun and educational experience for visitors," Burakoff said.

Burakoff, Troiano and business partner Jonathan Flom began proactively offering Spookley-themed educational activities, marketing materials and merchandise to farmers to build their agritainment offerings.

In the book, Spookley the Square Pumpkin is teased for being different, until his differences help save the day, Burakoff said.

"His story helps farmers teach children about pumpkins and how they grow, and also demonstrates the importance of kindness and tolerance in a way that is easily understood by early learners," Burakoff said. "It is a great fit during October, which is National Bullying Prevention Month. Spookley is the official 'Spokes Pumpkin' for PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center."

Participating farms implement the program by incorporating Spookley and other characters from the book into their corn mazes, school field trips and other agritainment activities. Farms participating in the program are licensed to host screenings of an animated movie based on the book.

Triple B Farms in Monongahela, Pennsylvania,



Evergreen Creations provides farms with signs featuring pages from the Fairy Tale Trails series, right, as well as merchandise for retail sales. Photos: Evergreen Creations



has incorporated the Spookley the Pumpkin program into its Storybook Pumpkinland, which features a book display, a Spookley inflatable and a picture board with a Spookley cutout.

Owner Carolyn Beinlich said she discovered the program at a North American Farm Direct Marketing Association conference, and has

participated for about 10 years.

"When (the children) get here they say 'Oh my goodness, there's Spookley!' They all know who he is," Beinlich said. "They're all excited to see him. He almost seems to sell himself."

Beinlich said the farm sold out of the book this year and last year.

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"Spookley the Square Pumpkin is a tremendously popular Halloween icon for younger children, as he is the hero of a perennial best-selling book and movie that airs on Disney Jr. throughout the month of October," Burakoff said. "So there is a built-in awareness that helps members of the Spookley Farm Program attract and appeal to young visitors."

Triple B Farms also hosts a scavenger hunt, in which Spookley is hidden in different places in the farm. Children have to correctly answer questions to go on to the next location in the scavenger hunt. At the end, winners are presented with a stuffed Spookley the Pumpkin.

Since its inception, the program offered by Evergreen Creations has expanded to include new tales and offerings.

"As the business grew, many customers told me they wanted my help on other areas on the farm, so I developed 'Jack and the Cornstalk,' the first of the Fairy Tale Trail series," Burakoff said.

"The Fairy Tale Trail stories focus on a different aspect of agriculture – for example, 'Ciderella and the Glass Sipper' focuses on apple orchards, while 'Beauty and the Bees' highlights the important role that bees play on the farm," Burakoff said. "They each utilize a timeless fairy tale to introduce young learners to the world of agriculture."

For example, "Jack and the Cornstalk" is a twist on Jack and the Beanstalk.

"In addition to being a great fit at the farm, we've discovered that these books are also embraced by the Agriculture in the Classroom organization at both the state and local level," Burakoff said.

"As Evergreen Creations continues to grow, our focus remains on helping farmers educate, entertain and inspire their young visitors," he said.

Whether you are an established agritainment farm or are looking to break into agritainment, Evergreen Creations' offerings have several advantages for farmers, Burakoff said.



Inflatable Spookleys are often used at participating farms to highlight pumpkins, said Evergreen Creations founder Aaron Burakoff.

"We help farmers draw more visitors during the weekdays and weekends, with fun and educational activities based on our content," he said.

These "edutainment" activities include storybook readings and mazes for children and families. Outdoor weatherproof signs that contain artwork and text from the Fairy Tale Trail stories are used throughout corn mazes so children can read them as they walk through. Some farms have had

beekeepers do demonstrations for the "Beauty and the Bees" book, or host story-time readings.

"We help farmers generate more revenue in their farm markets by providing merchandise," Burakoff said.

Farms participating in the program are provided merchandise to sell, including books and plush toys.

To learn more about programs offered by Evergreen Creations, visit www.evergreencreationsllc.com. **FGN**

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