

**OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,  
FOOD AND FORESTRY**

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**ODAFF's Jelly Making Trails program**

**wins national award**

Agriculture placed in the hands of the consumer.

That's one definition of the growing trend known as "u-pick" farms.

The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFF) recognized the popularity of such farms and in the spring of 2016 launched the "Jelly Making Trails."

On the trails, consumers can pick produce off the tree or the vine, from the orchard or the patch, and it's quite possible not everyone makes it to the kitchen and the jelly making process before deciding to enjoy the fruits of Oklahoma.

The program took little time to ripen into a success. As a result, the "Jelly Making Trails" program earned the Marketing in Excellence Award, given by the North American Agricultural Marketing Officials, at the annual NAAMO conference, held this

month in Manhattan, Kan. Each state is allowed to submit an application for this award. The field is then narrowed down to a select few that are invited to present their project at the conference. The states then vote for the winner.

“This prestigious award was launched to recognize innovative and effective agriculture marketing practices,” said Jamie Cummings, former Agritourism Coordinator and now International Programs Coordinator. “This recognition allows these effective strategies to be shared across the nation with the other state marketing teams and transfer the knowledge about these effective projects.”

The need or opportunity for such a program has developed as more and more consumers have shown interest in knowing where their food comes from, said Meriruth Cohenour, an ODAFF Agritourism Coordinator.

“In response to this, there has been an increase in farmers planting crops for the specific purpose of a ‘u-pick’ farm where the public can come to the farm, learn about the way the food is grown, meet the people who care for and harvest the food, and enjoy outdoor family time,” Cohenour said.

The Agritourism team at ODAFF developed the Jelly Making Trails project. The trails were determined based on geography in order to allow consumers to plan trips around the farms. Any

agritourism producer offering a chance to pick or purchase specialty crops was included.

During the first year, 47 producers participated with the busiest months being May to August.

“We provided on-farm education pieces such as crop fact signs, jar labels and stickers to each producer,” Cohenour said. “In addition, we distributed maps with all of the producers grouped geographically in ‘trails’ through the [okjellymaking.com](http://okjellymaking.com) site and through all of our face-to-face marketing opportunities. We also launched a social media campaign to help increase awareness.”

The “Jelly Making Trails” program was funded through the USDA’s Specialty Crop Block Grant program.

“We are so grateful to have the opportunity to utilize these funds in order to increase consumer awareness of fresh food availability in our state,” Cohenour said.

The response to the trails has been very positive as consumers really get engaged with the idea of picking their own produce. Also, by seeing what was available all over the state, consumers got excited about travelling to new places and getting to try various produce.

This year, the second of the program, 53 producers participated.

The 2017 campaign focused on education. The Agritourism team created a 12-page educational booklet that focused on ways to handle produce, nutritional facts and the different types of jellies and jams and other products that can be made from the produce.

“I believe the main reason this project has been successful is that consumers are engaging with the producer,” Cohenour said. “When they visit the farm they make personal connections with the farmers and they learn so much about the way their food is grown. This positive experience encourages them to seek similar opportunities, thus making the Jelly Making Trails material a very valuable resource.”

Moving forward, the Agritourism team plans to seek out more farmers that wish to offer these types of experiences and then continue to inform the consumers of these opportunities.

“We hope to turn some of the educational material from this year’s project into an interactive web experience next year,” Cohenour said.

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Photo caption: Jamey Allen, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFF) Director of Market Development, from left, Meriruth Cohenour, Agritourism Coordinator, and Jamie Cummings, a former Agritourism

Coordinator and now International Programs Coordinator, are shown accepting the Marketing in Excellence Award, given by the North American Agricultural Marketing Officials, at the annual NAAMO conference, held this month in Manhattan, Kan. ODAFF received the award for the “Jelly Making Trails” program.



Photo caption: Consumers are shown at a “u-pick” farm.

