

Going from festivals into the fields and farms

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During the past few weeks you and your family may have enjoyed one or several of the many harvest festivals and related events here in Franklin County. In addition to these, there are places where you can directly connect with the farming traditions and bountiful harvests of our region. This is the time of year to enjoy corn mazes, pumpkin patches, and apple orchards.

A corn maze is like a printed maze you complete with a pencil in a book or on a piece of paper. The corn maze, however, is a giant life-size puzzle created in a specially planted and trimmed cornfield - and you are the "pencil" that navigates the twists, turns, and path options to successfully reach the exit.

Physical mazes and labyrinths have actually played important roles in society for more than 4,000 years to bring luck, for rituals, and for spiritual enlightenment. Many private and public Victorian gardens included hedge mazes. Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia created its famous hedge maze on the grounds of the Governor's Palace in the mid-1930s as part of a historic restoration. Modern corn mazes, known in Britain as maize mazes, may have been inspired by the fascination with crop circles that began in the early 1990s. Corn mazes are a relatively new offering for on-farm "agritainment" in the U.S.

Corn maze farmers take great pride in the intricate 3-D designs they create, sometimes guided by computerized programs, and using GPS to create and cut the paths of the patterns. Corn maze designs represent works of art, geometric figures, whimsical patterns, and theme-related configurations that can be visually appreciated only by an aerial photo or map. Once you're in the maze, you rely on your memory of the visual pattern, or use maps that are placed at essential points in the maze.

In Franklin County, you can enjoy corn mazes at Bonesteel's Gardening Center in North Bangor, at the Cherry Knoll Farm in Burke, and at Tucker Farms in Gabriels, where you can visit the "Home of the Great Adirondack Corn Maze."

This year, Tucker Farms is celebrating the tenth anniversary of their corn maze. Tom Tucker of Tucker Farms said his family's decision to first offer a corn maze was to supplement their income from their main crop, Tuckers Taters. Their seed potatoes are bought by commercial growers, farm stand growers, and gardeners throughout North America. Local chefs, retail stores, and consumers who appreciate the distinct flavors and textures of the varieties Tucker offers, buy their tablestock potatoes.

Tucker says people enjoy the exciting experiences of mastering the challenge of the maze, and look for strategically placed 'mailboxes' with illustrations of the maze to help them determine the path to follow. When asked about how small children react to being in the maze, he reported that kids three to five years old often seem to fare better than adults. "They just follow the path until they find the route. Adults tend to overanalyze what they think they should to do next."

The Tucker Farms Corn Maze is open every Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 1 p.m. until dusk until the last weekend in October. Flashlight Nights are Friday and Saturday night from dusk until 10 pm. On Friday, October 18, the "Hunter's Moon," the special full moon for October, should make for an especially memorable experience. Staff make sure everyone is out of the maze and accounted for before the grounds are closed. After sunset, guests enjoy a bonfire and all the fixings to make smores.

You can access the maze at Tucker Farms at 112 Hobart Road, which intersects with Route 86, just south of Gabriels, and about 15 minutes north of Saranac Lake. For more information, visit their website at http://www.tuckertaters.com/corn_maze.