



## Agri-tourism and Local Foods at Long & Scott Farms

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*Long & Scott Farms, P.O. Box 1228, Zellwood, FL 32798*

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**Long & Scott Farms, a 1200-acre vegetable farm in central Florida, celebrated its 50th anniversary in Feb. 2012. Its longevity is due in part to the innovative choices made over the last 10 years to diversify operations from a strictly wholesale producer of Zellwood sweet corn, cabbage, and pickling cucumbers to also include a local foods and agri-tourism oriented marketing strategy. The most successful of these alternative farm concepts is Scott's Maze Adventures, an annual fall corn maze that has an attendance of nearly 30,000 annually in recent years. A seasonal retail farm market and café have also been established, which is a hub for the consumer supported Produce Club, providing 55 members weekly baskets of freshly harvested local produce. Other additions to the farm operations have been a catch-and-release fishing pond, and holiday and special events that include hayride tours of the farm. The farm also has a web-based presence, [www.longandscottfarms.com](http://www.longandscottfarms.com), and social media Facebook and Twitter, as well as an online monthly newsletter that allows them to market to new audiences.**

Long & Scott Farms is a fourth-generation family farm that celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2012. It is located 3 miles west of Zellwood and 5 miles south of Mt. Dora, FL, and has 1200 acres straddling Orange and Lake counties. The farm is adjacent to the 20,000 acres once known as the Zellwood Muck Land. Ten family farms had been farming the area since as early as the 1940s and 1950s until 1998, when the St. Johns Water Management District purchased all of the muck farms in an effort to reduce phosphorus nutrient discharges into Lake Apopka (Neal et al., 1996). This left Long & Scott Farms as the only major vegetable farm with significant acreage in the east-central Florida area. Suddenly without the networking, shared experiences, knowledge, equipment, but most of all the amount and variety of produce that was grown, the farm needed a new direction and determined it was time to reinvent itself. The availability of rail and truck transportation hubs drawn to large farming areas to move highly perishable produce to markets have traditionally been a key ingredient of successful vegetable production in Florida (Whidden et al., 2004). Locally grown, sourced, and marketed produce may change that trend as the local food movement gains popularity (Hodges and Stevens, 2013).

A decision was made to focus on two major areas to ensure continued successful operations of the farm. The first was to go back to basics and concentrate on the primary crops that had sustained the farm over the years and improve on them as much as possible. These crops were pickle cucumbers and sweet corn grown in the fall and spring, cabbage in the winter, and turfgrass year round. The pickling cucumbers and cabbage were sold to both fresh and processing markets. The sweet corn was branded and Long & Scott Farms is presently the only farm left selling Zellwood sweet corn. The farmers established branding for all of its products, developed relationships to grow the brands and increase sales with only the best customers. This was accomplished by supplying consistently safe and high quality produce.

The second focus was on the "back to the farm/local food movements" that were appearing around the country, and to ex-

pand the existing on-site farmers market. Also, the focus was on providing events that were fun, educational, and entertaining for the whole family. Outreach to school and scout groups, tourists' organizations, and local food groups began, with advertising to let them know that the farm was a place they could come, get involved, and see how their food is produced. The anchor for this activity was a corn maze that has become an annual event since 2003. Recent years have seen an average of 25,000 people each year going through the corn maze. Each year a different patriotic, farm scene, or logo design (Fig. 1) was chosen for the maze with educational game sheets to achieve the best learning experience possible. A tower stands above the maze with an overview of the entire area so visitors get an idea of what the maze is like. There is a mist maze to cool you down after finishing the walk.

Farm tours are conducted on the "Sweet Corn Express" hayride where visitors can learn about the farm's production



Fig. 1. Scott's corn maze featuring the Fresh From Florida logo, fall season, 2010.

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practices while viewing the crops growing in the fields. There are playgrounds with swings, see-saws, tractor tires, and a sand pit for the children to enjoy. There is a zip line, a catch-and-release fishing pond, a wind tunnel, and a 40 × 60 ft jumping pillow for a parent and child to share. There are also vendors on the weekends with great food and snow cones. A permanent tree maze in the shape of an ear of corn was established with ligustrum trees. This maze was called “Cornfusion” and is designed for year-round use in conventions, team building, family reunions, and other large group events. A pavilion that seats 500 was built and can be rented for special events including music concerts, weddings, Easter eggstravaganzas, and more.

Scott’s country market has tripled in size since its opening in 1997, adding a gift shop in 2003, a walk-in cooler in 2004, and a country café in 2012. New events are added each year to keep the destination fresh and enjoyable for repeat visitors. A variety of seasonal fresh produce is grown specifically for the on-site farmer’s market and other items for sale are purchased from local growers, including honey. In the fall of 2012, Scott’s Produce Club, a community supported agriculture venture, was started and currently has 55 members. Members can sign up for weekly baskets of fresh produce to be picked up at the farm 2 days a week or at the Apopka Farmer’s Market on Saturdays. Delivery for

large orders is also available. All of the produce is either grown on Long & Scott Farms or sourced from other local farmers.

The latest new events at the farm are a spring U-Pick operation with vine-ripe tomatoes, purple green beans, and conch peas grown on plastic mulch with drip irrigation. U-Pick strawberries are planned for winter after the fall corn maze. Long & Scott Farms continues its family tradition with the original founder still on site daily and very active, with years of experience. His son, daughter, and their children, all are working to keep this piece of Americana thriving for future generations.

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