

CORNY FUN THAT WILL AMAIZE THE ENTIRE FAMILY!

By Larry Chesney

Imagine yourself wandering through an impenetrable forest of corn stalks following a puzzling labyrinth of criss-crossing trails. There's only one way out and the sun is beginning to set in the western sky. You could be lost in the dark! In a field of crop circles!! Aliens!!!

Thank goodness, it's just a corn maze, created strictly for your enjoyment by well-intentioned earthlings. It's all part of the fast-growing (pun intended) "corn maze" agribusiness that's springing up all over the country. There are over 100 corn mazes of various designs scattered from South Carolina, USA, to British Columbia, Canada. What these farm fields have in common is they all yield plenty of family fun.

South Carolinian Paul Booth got the idea for his corn maze while visiting Ohio three years ago. A farmer as well as an employee with the US Department of Agriculture, Paul had heard about the maze craze back in 1996. That's when the idea first sprouted in Utah. After learning of the educational possibilities, Paul was convinced that a corner of his 500-acre farm operation in Darlington, SC, should be set aside for a maze.

"It's a great way to get people back to their farming

roots," Paul said. "A lot of kids don't get the chance to see a working farm. This way, they can be entertained and learn a little about agriculture. It's what we call 'agritainment!'"

Paul hosts school and church groups as well as tourists during the harvest season when the corn maze is open. Everyone who enters is given a questionnaire that provides clues on how to traverse the network of paths. The questions often deal with agriculture, but the quiz can be customized. For example, a math teacher requested algebra problems for her class' visit! (A cruel twist to an otherwise fun field trip.)

If you'd like to get lost in Paul Booth's corn maze, plan to stop by between late August and mid-November. The maze is open Friday through Sunday and you can wander its corridors until well after dark. Along with the maze, there's a picnic area, restrooms, snack facilities and even a few goats.

To reach the maze, travel east on Highway 52 from Darlington nine miles to Dovesville. Turn left at the caution light and follow Dovesville Highway approximately one mile. The entrance is on the right. For more information, contact Paul Booth at 803-469-8115 or visit www.cornfieldmaze.com.

