



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Note: Digital images of the conference logo are available in 2-color or black and white versions. We also have a digital image of Earl Tywater. Please e-mail Kelly@WhiteLoafRidge.com to request a logo or photo.

Apply now for NAFDMA's 2006 Earl Tywater Scholarship

The North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA) is now accepting applications for its 2006 Earl Tywater Scholarship, which provides financial aid for two members of a farm family to attend the 2006 North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Convention. The convention will be held Jan. 9-16, 2006 at the Hyatt Regency Austin in Austin, Texas.

Applications are being accepted now through Sept. 1, 5 p.m. EDT. Applications are available in the Back Forty (members-only section) of the NAFDMA Web site at www.nafdma.com. You can also request an application by calling the NAFDMA office at (413) 529-0386.

The scholarship, valued at more than \$1,200, pays for two people from a farm family to attend the conference, the pre-conference bus tour, workshops, and the NAFDMA awards banquet. (Scholarship recipients pay for transportation to and from the convention, as well as hotel and meals not included with convention registration.)

Last year's scholarship recipients were Rita and Mike Stepp, JH Stepp Farm/Hillcrest Orchard, Hendersonville, N.C.

"My husband, Mike, and I went to the convention, and we were overwhelmed," says Rita. "We learned so much." The Stepps enjoyed networking on the bus tour and throughout the entire convention, and they gleaned many ideas, including product ideas for their new gift shop and how to better handle school tours. They also may add a special event or festival to their farm activities this year. Mike attended a pumpkin session in which he learned what types of pumpkins sell best, and they're growing some of them this year.

The networking with their NAFDMA peers didn't end when they left the convention. Rita says they still regularly contact their colleagues.

“It’s encouraging to see how people are still able to maintain the family farm,” says Rita. With three generations helping out on the farm, keeping the family business thriving is important.

Hillcrest Orchard is owned by Mike Stepp, his sister Sonya Hollingsworth and their father, JH Stepp. The family moved to the farm in 1967. In 1972, JH decided to try pick-your-own apples. They worked out of a car until they built an 8-foot by 8-foot stand. Three years later, they built the apple house, and in 2004 they opened a new retail store. In addition to 22 varieties of apples, they also grow pumpkins and offer tours.

“Overall, we were just so thrilled that we were able to go to the convention,” says Rita. The family lost 30 percent of the 2004 crop due to hurricanes and couldn’t afford to attend. With all of the ideas they’re implementing this year as a result of attending the convention, Rita expects to see an increase in their bottom line.

The Earl Tywater Scholarship is open to any current NAFDMA member who has never attended a NAFDMA conference. Applicants must meet several eligibility requirements, including an established need for financial support and a willingness to share the NAFDMA experience with farmers in their home state.

The Earl Tywater Scholarship Selection Committee will review the applications, and the recipient will be announced on Nov. 1.

The Earl Tywater Scholarship Fund was established as a memorial to Earl Tywater of Earl’s Fruit Stand, Franklin, Tenn. Earl was a founder and director of NAFDMA whose appetite for learning and becoming a better marketer was endless. In honor of that passion, the NAFDMA board of directors, in cooperation with the Tywater family, established the fund in Earl’s memory.

The North American Farmers’ Direct Marketing Association is the leading farm direct marketing association in the world. It promotes and fosters the growth of farm direct marketing throughout North America. Its members support their family farms by selling millions of dollars worth of farm-grown produce directly to consumers at farm stands, farmers’ markets, pick-your-own farms, consumer-supported agriculture, agritourism venues, and other ever-growing innovations in direct producer-to-consumer agricultural marketing methods. Find out more about the organization at www.nafdma.com.