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For the Record: 10/18/07 »

Maze welcomes farm visitors

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By **Emily Buehler**
 Correspondent

The weather's been a bit irregular lately, but whether it's sunny and hot or breezy and cool, you can't go wrong spending an October weekend out at a farm. The growing season is wrapping up and many local farms end their season with a harvest festival of sorts, welcoming visitors who want to see what the farm is like. There are pumpkins and mums for sale, animals to visit and my favorite new tradition: the cornfield maze.

McKee's Cedar Creek Farm is no exception. Located in Rougemont (about ten miles north of Hillsborough), Cedar Creek Farm raises beef cattle, feed corn, wheat and soy. The family's been farming since the late 1700s, and when they stopped raising tobacco they were looking for ways to diversify their products. David McKee began doing landscaping work, and in 2000 the family decided to grow a cornfield maze. The maze is a way to share the farm with visitors and make a little extra income.

The McKee family creates the maze themselves. The corn is planted in June. When it is about two feet high, stalks are pulled out to create the maze, which then continues to grow for the rest of the summer. The design is truly a work of art: Past designs have included a farmer in the field, UNC's Old Well and the clock tower from the Hillsborough courthouse and a cornfield reproduction of a local artist's painting of a Carolina cabin in the woods. The maze is ready at the end of September. After it closes for the season, the dried-out feed corn will be harvested and the field replanted with wheat.

Vickie McKee greets visitors at a welcome tent by the side of the cornfield. She shows us aerial photos of the field and points out the start and finish of the maze. She also points out an escape route along the backside of the maze; visitors can find it by heading for the tree line. Her youngest son is patrolling the maze with his buddies, looking for visitors who might need help getting out.

There are two mazes cut into the field. Along the front, giant letters spelling "McKee's Corn Maze" are cut into the field. This is the two-acre children's maze. Along the path, children can find all the letters of the alphabet, different colors and shapes, four hole-punching stations and fun facts about the farm. There are also pictures of birds and critters hung from the stalks.

The other 12 acres are the big maze, which has eight hole-punching stations hidden in it. Some visitors like to stretch out their journey through the maze by finding all eight stations before they leave.

Perhaps even better than the concept of a corn maze is the haunted corn maze, which happens at dusk the weekend before Halloween and concludes on Halloween. At the McKee's the haunting begins on a trail through the woods and ends in the cornfield. There

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are tunnels, foggers, strobe lights and plenty of spooks; Vickie describes it as family friendly and appropriate for children over ten. The spooks are all family and friends.

Next to the cornfield is a shady picnic area where families are eating lunches from coolers. There's a swing set and a playhouse and pens with some of the farm's animals. The walkway leading back to the tent and parking is lined with large pumpkins. A peaceful mood embraces the whole place.

The maze is only open through Halloween, so plan a visit soon. For hours and details, call the McKees at 732-8065 or visit their website at www.mckeecornfieldmaze.com.

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