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MEDIA RELEASE
 STATE OF TENNESSEE
 DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 October 24, 2007

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**State Cost Share Awards Announced for Farm Innovation,
 Diversification Projects**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – For more than 300 farmers across Tennessee, the hope to expand or improve their farming operations just became a reality. State Agriculture Commissioner Ken Givens today announced Ag Growth Initiative awards totaling nearly \$1.7 million to help 312 Tennessee farmers invest in new or expanding areas of agriculture.

The Ag Growth Initiative is part of a program established in 2005 by Governor Phil Bredesen and funded by the Tennessee General Assembly to spur farm investment in Tennessee. The Governor encouraged farmers to utilize the program for innovation in remarks at the 2007 Tennessee Small Farmer Recognition event in August.

“We want you to try new things, and we want to support your new endeavors. By staying innovative, open to change ready to adjust to the times and demands of the market; by staying in touch with advances in technologies and techniques; and most of all by staying willing to try something new, small farmers can blaze big trails for the State of Tennessee,” Bredesen said.

In its third year, the Ag Growth Initiative is helping farmers expand or improve their operations through production of diversified agricultural products. Diversified agricultural products include agritourism, aquaculture, bees, fruits and vegetables, horticulture, goats and sheep, organics, value-added products, viticulture and others as approved by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture.

“We’re making a real difference for farmers who want to be farming in the future, and who have an entrepreneurial mindset to succeed. Thanks to Governor Bredesen and the Tennessee General Assembly, we’ve been able to double the cost share awards this year for specialty farm projects statewide,” said Givens.

The Ag Growth Initiative is part of the Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program, which provides a variety of cost share opportunities for farmers and also includes programs aimed at cattle improvement, hay and feed storage, and animal health improvement.

Through the Ag Growth Initiative, Tennessee farmers can apply for reimbursement of 35 percent, up to \$15,000 in some instances, for eligible cost share activities. The dollars are meant to help farmers who want to install farm infrastructure, purchase specialty equipment and/or market their diversified farm products. Applications are then reviewed for eligibility, ranked and approved on a competitive basis, based on project plans and the potential to increase farm income.

In the first two years of the program, the department has funded 352 projects totaling more than \$1.4 million through the Ag Growth Initiative.

The 312 projects funded this year represent a wide range of new and emerging agricultural investments. Funding by project category for this year breaks down as follows:

Agritourism – 39

Aquaculture – 3

Bees and honey – 17

Fruits and Vegetables – 42

Specialty Livestock (sheep and goats) – 87

Horticulture – 66

Organics – 9

Value-added Products – 8

Viticulture – 41

Farmers interested in submitting a proposal for funding will have a chance to apply again next year. For more information about the Ag Growth Initiative, contact the Tennessee Department of Agriculture at (615) 837-5346, or via e-mail at Ag.Growth@state.tn.us. Information about the TAEP can be found online at www.picktnproducts.org.

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Please see [attached list](#) for number of projects approved and dollars allocated by county. For more information about specific projects in your area, contact Jan Keyser at (615) 837-5346 or Ag.Growth@state.tn.us.

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