

Creating Signage that Sells:

Guidance for Specialty
Crop Growers Direct
Marketing to Consumers

September 2014



Author

Megan Bruch Leffew

Marketing Specialist

Center for Profitable Agriculture

Acknowledgments

Reviewers

Eric Barrett

Extension Educator

Ohio State University Extension

Stacy Tomas

Assistant Professor

Tennessee Tech University

Becky Smith

Director of the Extension Center for Economic
Education and Financial Literacy

Mississippi State University

Editing, Layout and Design

April Moore Massengill

Editor, Marketing and Communications

UT Institute of Agriculture

Mary Puck

Graphic Designer



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Directional Signs.....	3
Roadside Signs.....	3
Roadside Sign Programs in Tennessee.....	6
Directional Signs on the Farm.....	10
Signs to Encourage Farm Safety.....	11
Signs to Encourage Product Purchases.....	12
Signs to Add Value to the Farm Experience.....	14
More Sign Design Tips.....	15
Summary.....	19





Introduction

Signage is an important marketing tool that can help specialty crop growers market crops directly to consumers. This publication will provide guidance to help growers effectively use signage. The various uses of signs — including directional signs and signs to encourage farm safety, promote product purchases, and add value to the farm experience — will be discussed. The publication will also provide tips for developing effective signs.



Directional Signs

Directional signs may be used on the roadside, on the farm or at the market to help direct customers to their desired destination. Signs on the roadside may also have the added benefit of informing potential customers that the operation exists or enticing them to visit.

Customers who get lost on the way to the farm or who have to slam on the brakes to make a turn may not be in the best mood upon arrival, if they reach the farm at all. Directional signs are important to help customers easily and safely arrive at the farm and begin their experience on a positive note.

Once customers arrive at the farm, they may not know where to go. Directional signs on the farm may also help reduce potential for frustration and help create positive experiences.



Roadside Signs

Roadside signs can be challenging to develop. There are often rules and regulations involved in where, when and how signs are displayed. Before designing, making or setting signs on roadsides, growers should check with the appropriate authority for any rules or restrictions. Signs not approved or signs not meeting the rules and regulations, where necessary, may be removed by the authorities.

State and Local Signage Authorities

- Signage along state routes is regulated by the Tennessee Department of Transportation.
- Signage within cities or counties are regulated by those respective entities. The planning offices and/or road departments may enforce the signage regulations.

People viewing these signs are often driving or riding in a moving car and only have a short time to look at the sign through the restricted area of the windshield, process the information and react to the information – all while driving a vehicle. When developing effective directional signs, remember that less is usually more. Motorists tend to scan signs rather than read them. Text should be concise with simple graphics as motorists will only have a short time to see the sign. A business name or logo and some indication of location is often sufficient. An indication of location may be a directional arrow with a mileage estimate or simple instruction such as “next right.”

The sign design should be consistent with other marketing messages and materials developed for the specialty crop operation. The same colors, logo, graphics and fonts should be used whenever possible to help build customer recognition of the farm.

The colors chosen for signs can greatly impact the visibility and legibility of the information. Using contrasting colors for the sign background and text will allow the text to stand out more and make it easier to read. For example, black contrasts well with any light color, and white contrasts well with any dark color. The Outdoor Advertising Association of America, Inc.¹ claims “research demonstrates that high color contrast can improve outdoor advertising recall by 38 percent.”

¹*Color Combinations and Contrasts*. Outdoor Advertising Association of America, Inc. Accessed online at oaaa.org on May 30, 2014.



According to the Outdoor Advertising Association of America Inc., the following combinations of primary and secondary colors were tested for visibility and are ranked with 1 being the most visible combination and 18 being the least visible combination.



Choose an easy-to-read font. Easy-to-read fonts are typically simple. For example, some fonts that are difficult to read are:

- Thin fonts – may make it difficult for text to be seen from a distance.
- *Script fonts* — may make it difficult to read the text at all.
- ALL CAPS – UPPERCASE FIRST LETTERS AND LOWERCASE FOR THE REMAINING LETTERS ARE EASIER FOR THE BRAIN TO PROCESS.
- Crowded letters also make text difficult to read – spacing between letters is called kerning

It is important to estimate how fast motorists may be traveling and the distance from which they will be reading the sign as they pass it. This estimate will help determine how many words the motorist might be able to read as they pass the sign and what size the letters need to be on the sign so they can be read effectively.

Word messages on signs must be brief. The number of words a motorist can read while traveling various speeds from a variety of distances can be estimated using average reading speeds, although growers should remember that motorists are reading while driving, so fewer words may actually be read if they need to look back at the road or are maneuvering in traffic. The number of words a motorist may be able to read from five different speeds and eight different distances from the sign are included in Table 1.²

Keep in mind that motorists traveling 30 mph will be traveling approximately 44 feet per second, and motorists traveling 60 mph will be traveling more than 88 feet per second. If signs are only viewable from 50 feet, motorists traveling 30 miles per hour would only have one second to view the message, and motorists traveling 60 miles per hour would have less than a second to read it.

Motorists cannot stare at a sign for an extended period of time to read a large number of words or make sense of a sign cluttered with words, numbers or images. They will have to scan the sign and look back to the road.

Motorists traveling
30 mph
would have
1 second
to read a sign
viewable from
50 feet

Table 1. Estimated Number of Words Able to Read by Distance from Sign and Speed Traveling

Distance from Sign (feet) ³	Speed Traveling (miles per hour)				
	30	40	50	60	70
50 ft	3	3	2	2	1
100 ft	7	5	4	3	3
150 ft	10	8	6	5	4
200 ft	14	10	8	7	6
250 ft	17	13	10	9	7
300 ft	20	15	12	10	9
400 ft	27	20	16	14	12
500 ft	34	26	20	17	15

Generally, 1 inch in letter height is needed per 30 feet of legibility distance for people to see the sign clearly. Lower case letters should be approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ height of upper case letters, not including the stems and tails on lower case letters. Table 2 provides calculations for uppercase and lowercase letter height recommendations for various viewing distances of 50 to 500 feet.



Uniform traffic standards indicate guide signs should have uppercase letters at least 6 inches in height and lowercase letters at least 4 1/2 inches in height, not including stems that rise above the height of an x, an ascender, or that drop below the baseline, a descender. Examples of ascenders are the long stems on letters such as b, d, f, k and l. Examples of letters with descenders are g, j, p, q and y.⁴

On roads with low volumes of traffic and speeds of less than 25 miles per hour, letters may be reduced to 4 inches in height for upper case and three inches for lower case. Larger letters may be needed to ensure legibility by motorists based on conditions where the sign will be placed. The uniform standards may indicate larger letter heights than proposed using the general guidelines of 1 inch per 30 feet. In these instances, specialty crop growers should consider using the larger letters indicated by uniform traffic standards

Table 2. Letter Height Needed to Read Signs at Various Distances

Distance from Sign (feet)	Upper Case Letter Height (inches)	Lower Case Letter Height (inches)
50 ft	1.7*	1.3*
100 ft	3.3*	2.5*
150 ft	5.0*	3.8*
200 ft	6.7	5.0
250 ft	8.3	6.3
300 ft	10.0	7.5
400 ft	13.3	10.0
500 ft	16.7	12.5

*Note uniform traffic standards for guide signs described in the text above indicate minimum letter heights larger than these.

²The number of words was estimated by multiplying the speed in miles per hour by 1.47 to convert to feet per second then multiplying by 3, an estimated number of words read per second.

³To help visualize distances, National Basketball Association (NBA) courts are 50 feet wide and 94 feet long. The playing area of football fields 160 feet wide and 300 feet long without the end zones.

⁴Wikipedia. Typeface anatomy. Accessed online August 11, 2014 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Typeface_anatomy.

Signs should be placed on the right side of the road. Highway signs are typically placed 12 feet from the edge of the lane or 6 feet from the far edge of the right shoulder when the shoulder is more than 6 feet wide. Highway signs are typically placed with the bottom of the sign at a minimum height of 5 feet in rural areas.⁵ Signs placed perpendicular to the road are easier to read than those that face parallel to the road. Signs facing parallel to the road only allow a quick, restricted view by motorists as they glance sideways.⁶

Signs also need to be placed so that motorists have time to slow down and make turns as needed. Drivers typically need time to process and react to the sign and then slow down to between 10 and 15 mph to make a turn safely. One general guideline indicates that a motorist needs approximately 10 feet per each mile per hour he or she is traveling to slow down sufficiently.⁷ This distance may be increased if the motorist needs to maneuver the vehicle to make the turn, there are multiple lanes of traffic, weather conditions are affecting traction, and so on. Table 3 lists estimated distances needed to slow safely to make a turn. These distances are not hard and fast rules as many variables come into play; however, they can be used as guidelines for consideration when placing signs.

Table 3. Estimated Distance Needed for Motorist to Slow Safely to Make a Turn by Speed Traveling

Speed Traveling (mph)	Estimated Distance Needed to Slow Safely for Turn
30 ft	300 ft
40 ft	400 ft
50 ft	500 ft
60 ft	600 ft
70 ft	700 ft



⁵Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. 2009 Edition with Revision Numbers 1 and 2 incorporated, dated May 2012. Accessed online June 4, 2014 at http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/2009r1r2/pdf_index.htm.
⁶United States Sign Council. Sign Legibility Rules of Thumb. Accessed online June 3, 2014 at <http://www.usscfoundation.org/USSCSignLegiRulesThumb.pdf>.
⁷Guideline provided by a representative of the Tennessee Department of Transportation on June 4, 2014.

Roadside Sign Programs in Tennessee

Specialty crop growers may be interested in participating in sign programs offered in Tennessee. Two programs may be of particular interest: the Tourist Oriented Directional Sign Program and the Interstate Logo Program.



The Tourist Oriented Directional Sign Program (TODS) may be of assistance for farms or other direct farm marketing outlets located within 10 miles of a state highway. A special partnership between the Tennessee Department of Agriculture and the Tennessee Department of Transportation has created a unique sign for farm participants that includes a graphic coordinating with the Pick Tennessee Products program logo. At the time of publication, there was an application fee of \$25, an initial permit fee of \$200 per sign and an annual renewal fee of \$50 per sign. Additional details about the TODS program are available online at www.tn.gov/agriculture/marketing/signtour.shtml.

The Interstate Logo Sign Program "permits eligible businesses, which provide key services to motorists, to place their logos on Specific Service Signs along certain designated Interstates and Controlled Access Highways."⁸ Services included on these signs are camping, lodging, food, gas and attractions. Participating businesses used to be required to be open at least five days per week including at least one weekend day. A new seasonal classification allows more farms to participate in the program.



To participate, farms would have to be located within 15 miles of the interstate, have a minimum of 20 parking spaces, have drinking water and a phone available, have two clean restrooms, and be family-oriented for all ages. At the time of publication, there is an annual fee of \$527 for each interchange. In addition, participants also have to pay for the sign itself. The program is currently administered by a private firm, Law Signs LLC, on behalf of the Tennessee Department of Transportation. Additional information is available online at www.tnlogos.com or by calling 1-877-907-0036.

⁸Frequently Asked Questions. Law Signs, LLC. Accessed online June 2, 2014 at http://www.tnlogos.com/frequently_asked_questions.

Directional Signs on the Farm

Once customers arrive at the farm or other market, it may be helpful to provide them with further direction about where to park, where to get started with purchasing or picking specialty crops, and where to find important places such as the restroom facilities. These directional signs may help reduce confusion or frustration on the part of the customer, help organize vehicle and people traffic flow, and reduce time spent by the grower or staff answering questions.

Farms offering pick-your-own or cut-your-own products may want to create a large sign or fliers to hand out with a map of the farm to indicate where various crops or varieties are located. The map may include pick up/drop off points for customers when a wagon ride to the field is provided; locations of restrooms or port-a-johns; or locations where amenities such as shade, seating, photo opportunities or refreshments are available.



Signs to Encourage Farm Safety

Customers visiting farms or other direct marketing outlets to purchase products may not be aware of potential safety hazards that growers may take for granted. Signage may be used to inform customers of potential dangers and help guide them for a safe visit to the operation.

Signs at the entrance outlining any farm rules with additional reminders in other areas may be helpful. Reminders to wash hands, stay away from areas containing farm equipment or supplies, avoid farm ponds, refrain from smoking, or various other instructions may help more customers enjoy their visit to the farm in a safe manner. Signs may also indicate where customers or employees can find safety resources, if needed, such as the location of a first aid kit or fire extinguisher.

Customers may be more apt to heed warning signs that provide a reason they should follow the direction provided. For example, a sign saying “Avoid Drowning – Stay Away from Pond” may be more effective than a sign that only reads, “Stay Away from Pond.”

Growers may develop and produce their own signs, find signs developed by other organizations or work with a sign company. The state department of agriculture or health may have some applicable signs or sign designs for use on the farm. The National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety has also developed some signs that can be printed or produced for use on the farm. These signs are available for download at www.safeagritourism.com/Resources.aspx.



Signs to Encourage Product Purchases

Signs may also be used to help customers decide what to buy or entice them to purchase products. These signs are typically displayed at the point of purchase — the location where customers are shopping or making purchasing decisions.

At a minimum, signage should indicate the product name and the price of the product. Prices should always be displayed in order to create a comfortable, credible shopping environment for customers. Some customers will not purchase products when prices are not displayed. Customers may feel like the price is not consistent for all customers or that the product is likely too expensive. Listing prices on signs also saves growers' time by not having to answer questions about pricing. Growers can spend more time engaging customers, answering other questions, building relationships and conducting sales transactions.

Point-of-purchase signage can go much further than just informing customers of the product name and price. For specialty crops, signs may be able to indicate the specific variety of the product and the characteristics or suggested uses of various varieties. For example, which varieties of apples are best for eating fresh, baking or making applesauce.

Point-of-purchase signage may also list product benefits, promote complementary products or incorporate creative selling phrases to help "sell the sizzle" of the product. For example, signage may describe the health benefits of kale or suggest the customer not forget some fresh basil to go with the tomatoes — both with recipe cards nearby for scrumptious dishes. One creative sign described the carrots being offered: "We're ugly but SWEET!"

Listing prices on signs also saves growers' time by not having to answer questions about pricing. Growers can spend more time engaging customers, answering other questions, building relationships and conducting sales transactions.



When the product itself cannot be shown at the point of purchase, a picture menu can be effective in helping customers decide to what to purchase. Notice the pictures of meals in restaurant menus or at drive-through windows, for example.



If multiple items are being offered with a picture menu, growers should consider putting their most profitable items at the upper right corner of the menu as the item placed in that location is purchased more often than items placed in other locations on the menu. If a grower has several categories of products, the most profitable items should be shown at the top of each category to promote more purchases of this item.

Directions

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F (165 degrees C). Grease loaf pan. Mash raspberries with fork; remove seeds. Combine flour, sugar, cinnamon, and baking soda in bowl. Mix in eggs and oil. Stir in raspberry mixture until batter is just moistened. Bake in loaf pan for 1 hour. Cool in pan for 15 minutes. Remove from pan and slice. Serve warm.

September Recipe

Raspberry Banana Bread

Ingredients
Original recipe makes 1 loaf

3/4 cup frozen unsweetened raspberries, thawed	1/4 teaspoon salt
1 ripe banana	1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour	1 cup white sugar
3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon	2 eggs
1/2 teaspoon baking soda	1/2 cup vegetable oil
	1/2 teaspoon lemon extract

PREP	COOK	READY IN
25 mins	1 hr	1 hr 55 mins

www.BluOrchard.com

Signs may also include a picture of a finished recipe for products that are being featured or may be less known to customers. Copies of the recipe could be made available for customers to take home.

Signage may also remind customers about products that will be available in the coming weeks or months. For example, a strawberry grower may use signage to promote the upcoming blueberry, pumpkin or Christmas tree season.

Visit Our Fall Market

Opening September 15

Pumpkins
Gourds
Mums

Blu Circle Orchard

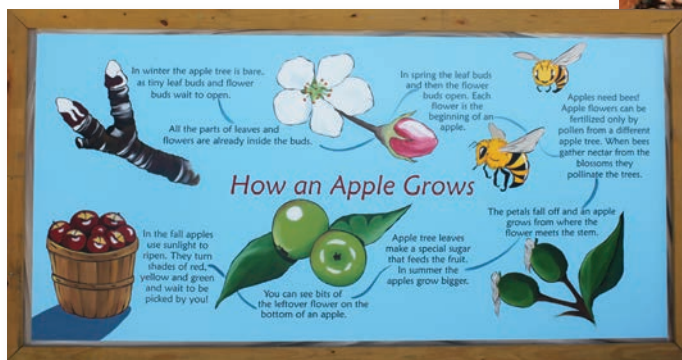
Signs to Add Value to the Farm Experience

Customers visiting direct farm marketing outlets to purchase specialty crops are often interested in more than just a quick sales transaction. Part of what makes the farm products desirable to customers is often the experience that goes along with purchasing the product and learning about the farm story.

Customers visiting farms to purchase specialty crops are likely interested in learning about the producers, how the products are grown or the history of the farm. Signage can be used to help educate and inform customers and add to their experience at the farm. By telling the farm story, specialty crop growers may help build relationships with customers and customer loyalty for the farm. Signage may be used to explain the history behind farm buildings, uses of farm equipment, how a certain crop is grown or a value-added product is produced, about the farm family and more.

The customers' experience of meeting the farmer, visiting the farm or picking their own product often adds value to the product. Customers may want to document their experience with a photograph. Specialty crop growers may capitalize on this desire by creating an eye-appealing photo opportunity. A unique scene for customers to stage a photo complete with a sign showing the farm name, the year and the farm's website URL will be a reminder to customers to visit every year. Signage can also suggest that customers share their photo on social media sites and may even offer a contest or drawing for a prize for customers who do so.

Signs can help leave a lasting experience of a farm or other market outlet as well. An attractive sign at the exits can thank customers for supporting a local farm and invite them to come again.



More Sign Design Tips

Color and font concepts discussed previously in the section on roadside signage apply to all signs. Text size recommendations for signs viewed by non-motorists such as visitors to the farm, however, are different than those signs that will be viewed by motorists.

A guideline used by many sign companies is that every 1 inch of letter height provides 10 feet of readability with the best impact, although it can be seen and read from a longer distance. This will also be impacted by the colors used for the background and text, the font style and space between letters (kerning). Table 4 presents the readable distance from the sign for maximum impact, the maximum readable distance and the letter height needed to accomplish the distances. The distances will vary up to 10 percent with different color combinations.

Table 4. Letter Height Needed for Signs Distances for Maximum Impact and Maximum

Readable Distance from Sign for Maximum Impact	Maximum Readable Distance	Letter Height
(feet)	(feet)	(inches)
30	100	3
40	150	4
60	200	6
80	350	8
90	400	9
100	450	10
120	525	12
150	630	15
180	750	18
240	1,000	24
300	1,250	30
360	1,500	36
420	1,750	42
480	2,000	48
540	2,250	54
600	2,500	60

Source: California Institute of Technology

When designing signs on a computer, 72 point font typically prints to 1 inch in height although different font types will vary. If 4-inch-tall letters were needed, then 288 point font ($72 \times 4 = 288$) would be a place to start.

Growers should check and double-check spelling and grammar. Even spell check functions on a computer may not catch all errors. It is a good idea to develop a draft of the sign and get someone else to review the draft for grammar and spelling mistakes. Then, review the final product as well to make sure a mistake has not been made before posting the sign.

Placement of signs should be such that they are easy for customers to see. In an area where there are a lot of objects or people, signs may need to be placed up high where customers will be able to see them.



All signs should be neat, concise and truthful. Rather than crossing out text such as a price on a sign and writing a new price on it, a new sign should be made. Keep text as concise as possible as people will likely not spend a lot of time standing and reading a lengthy amount of text. Many signs will just be scanned. Be sure to use accurate terminology and only truthful and allowable claims.

Signs should be made to hold up to the sun and weather and remain in good condition. Creating durable signs is important in keeping the signage looking nice. Signs at the point of purchase for nursery plants, for example, may be printed or backed by cardstock to maintain shape and laminated so they can be easily wiped free of dirt and protected from water. Signs made for use outside may be made from quality plywood, painted with high-quality exterior enamel paint, and covered completely (front, back and all edges) with a clear-coat UV protectant.



Summary

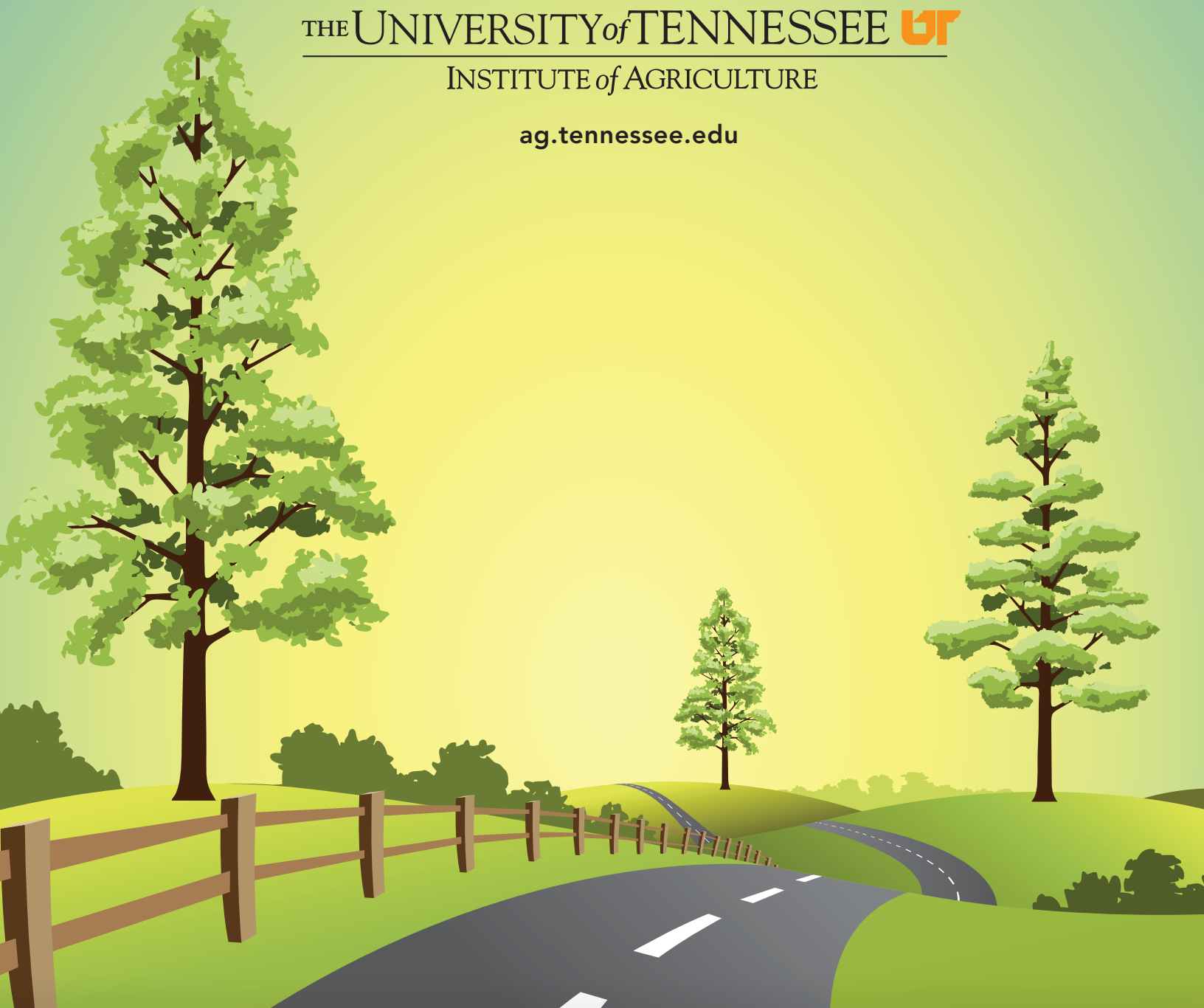
Signage can be a key tool to help specialty crop growers direct customers to the farm, guide customers to the right location on the farm, promote farm safety, encourage product purchases, and add value to the farm experience. By following key sign design and placement guidelines, specialty crop growers will be able to provide improved customer service and manage their time more efficiently.



THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE 

INSTITUTE of AGRICULTURE

ag.tennessee.edu



This publication was funded, in part, through the United States Department of Agriculture's Specialty Crop Block Grant and administered by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture.

Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences, and resource development. University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and county governments cooperating. UT Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.



United States
Department of
Agriculture