

Life *in the* Valley

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Bauman Farm's Fall Harvest Festival features more than 25 attractions, from traditional activities like corn mazes and hay rides to the less traditional like laser tag and obstacle courses. The festival runs through Monday, Oct. 31.

Festival

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stead, they'll have a daytime maze sans the scares. A number of factors led to the decision, from a lack of volunteers to a shuffling of management, said Lone Pine manager Stephanie Jensen.

The farm has what could be considered agritourism parts of its operation. Take, for example, a popular animal-feeding system that allows people to feed a goat for the price of a gumball, with pulleys and separate pens housing the livestock.

But Jensen said the first priority of Lone Pine is its farming.

Farm owner Brian Bauman said that for his family business to stay competitive, it has to find alternative ways to earn money.

"You're seeing small businesses diversifying," he said. Being able to grow new interests for patrons is why Bauman's Farm has been in business since 1895, he said.

The decision to add the new laser game comes as Bauman looks to capitalize on a part of his family business that accounts for 20 percent to 25 percent of its yearly profits. That's up from 10 percent to 15 percent a decade ago, he reckons.

But he doesn't want to lean too much on revenue from the rides, because if it rains all October and turnout is low, "I don't want to tell my kids there's no Christmas," he said.

At times activities can stray from a focus on educating people about farm life into just fun. It's "like agritainment almost," said Fery.

There won't be any laser pumpkin shenanigans this October in Salem at E.Z. Orchards, though, which tries to keep its monthlong event an educational and traditional festival.

"We're not doing zip-lines and jumping pillows," said co-owner John Zielinski outside the orchard's storefront on a recent afternoon.

Instead, patrons can go through a corn maze in the shape of the state of Oregon, with signs posted inside to mark where cities like Salem and Pendleton would be. There's information on the signs to give explorers a lesson about the areas.

Among other customers, about 7,000 school children come through the harvest festival each year. Zielinski said on a sunny weekend day in October, around 2,000 people could attend the events; on a rainy day, that might drop to 350. He declined to talk about how much share of the overall business the festival season accounts for.

But increased foot traffic from the harvest event usually means bolstered sales at E.Z. Orchards' retail front for donuts and other products.

"We can't even keep up in October," he said.

Inside the shop, people can also buy hard cider that Zielinski said has made its way around the nation, from Oregon



Visitors take a hay ride to the pumpkin patch on Thursday, Sept. 29, at Bauman's Farm in Gervais. The farm's Fall Harvest Festival runs through Monday, Oct. 31.



Lucy Hyland, 4, feeds sheep in the Livestock Stable on Saturday at E.Z. Orchards Harvestfest. The festival features a corn maze, pumpkin patch and hay rides.



Adoni Sauer, 2, of Portland walks through the pumpkin patch at Bauman's Farm in Gervais.

to Washington, D.C. Its first vintage was 2009, and it went up for sale in 2010.

A cousin of Bauman's started a hard cider product for their farm recently, another example of their diversification. Now there's a hard cider tasting room at the Gervais location.

Separately, Bauman is staring at a wage increase on the horizon that will

raise his labor costs over time when he employs a lot of high school students for the harvest festival.

Legislation has passed in Oregon to raise its minimum wage in increments in coming years.

He's willing to take a chance on the teenagers because he needs the help, but he worries about the higher costs to give them work and a resume line.

"It's not like it's money that's going back into working families," he said.

But labor has already been an issue for Bauman, who said he's had fruit fall on the ground because there's no one there to pick it.

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