

Kennel keeps up tradition of designing his corn maze



**THE
MAZE
CUTTER**

By Lukas Eggen
The Itemizer-ObsERVER

MONMOUTH — When Airlie Hills Farm showed off its first “corn maze” in 2006 with its flower and bumble bee design, it wasn’t quite like the maze kids are accustomed to seeing in recent years.

“When we started out our very first year, we sort of had a corn maze,” maze designer Aaron Kennel said. “I don’t really count it as a corn maze. It was really small, about an acre and a half. It was something fun to do with the kids, and we had just started doing the pumpkin patch, so they helped out. We had a few preschool classes come by and we were open to the public. It started out small.”

Oh, how things have changed.

Fast forward to 2014 and Kennel, who designs and cuts the corn maze each year, had a slightly bigger canvas to work with.

“Last year’s design was pretty detailed and complex,” Kennel said. “It was a big, 10-acre maze and had a really cool eagle design.”

The maze has increased in size and complexity, but its goal remains the same from the day it started.

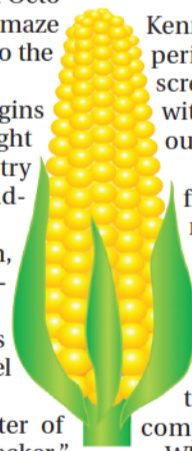
While families from throughout Polk County visit the farm in October, the work on the corn maze begins long before it opens to the public.

In most years, Kennel begins tackling the corn maze right around the time the country is celebrating its independence.

The corn is planted in early July, weather permitting.

Once the corn reaches about knee height, Kennel readies the design.

“First, I make a perimeter of the field with my GPS tracker,”



Aaron Kennel works on cutting the design into his corn maze at Airlie Farms in Monmouth. Kennel began cutting the maze on Friday.

Kennel said. “Then, I put that perimeter onto a computer screen and I start playing with designs and drawing it out.”

His inspiration can come from almost anything, Kennel said.

Once a design catches his eye, he’s ready to start cutting in mid-August, when Kennel will follow along his GPS tracked design on his computer.

What will the finished prod-

uct look like?

All will be revealed soon, Kennel said.

“I just finished my design on Friday,” he said. “It can take up to 40 hours to finish cutting and in a couple weeks, we’ll have an aerial shot of the maze.”

When Airlie Hills Farm offered its first corn maze, Kennel didn’t quite know how popular it would be, but he had hopes for what it would achieve — offer a family friendly experience for all ages.

Aside from the corn maze, 2015 will offer a hay maze, hay pyramid, trike racing, hay fort, hay rides, indoor hay slides, farm animals, wheat box and, on the weekends, pedal-karts and a dark maze.

A wristband costs \$7 during

the week and \$9 on Saturdays and Sundays, giving access to all of the farm’s attractions.

“I didn’t expect it to grow to where we’re at now,” Kennel said. “I don’t consider us to be huge, but we’re at least popular in the local area and we try to set things up in a way that makes everybody happy.”

The Airlie Hills corn maze has come a long way from its modest beginnings; but in the end, Kennel said he hopes it continues to accomplish the same goal as when he first started.

“I think it helps increase appreciation for our crops,” Kennel said. “It’s good for families and individuals to spend time outside and away from the computer and the TV, I think.”

PHOTOS BY LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-ObsERVER

It’s a-maze-ing

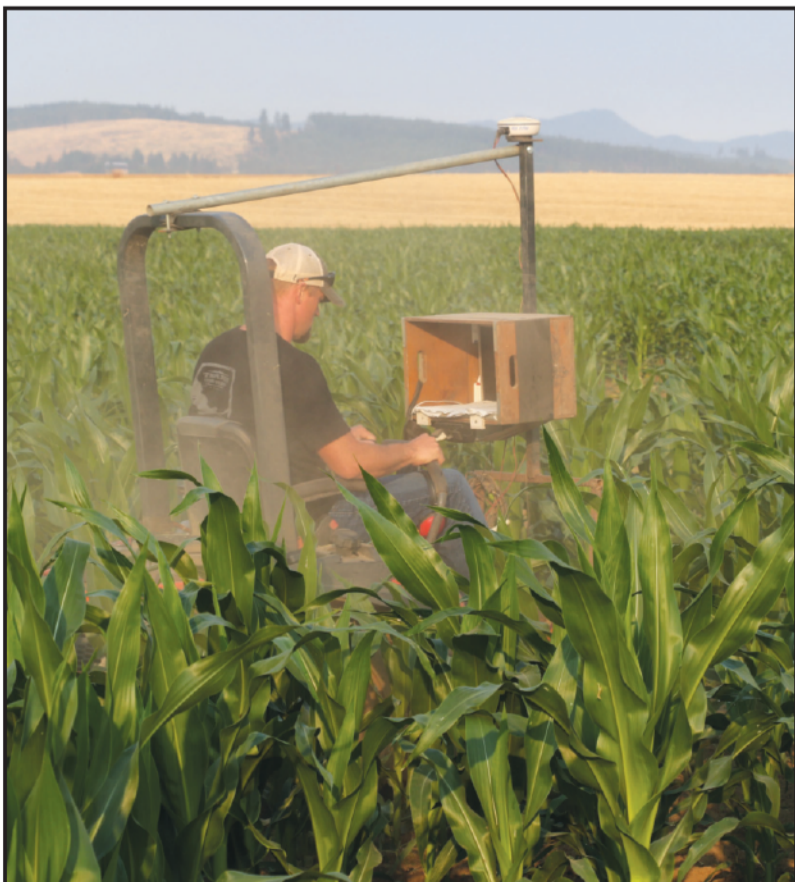
What: Airlie Hills Harvest Festival & Pumpkin Patch.

When: Oct. 1-31.

Where: 10720 Airlie Rd., Monmouth.

Activities: Corn maze, hay maze, hay pyramid, trike racing, hay fort, hay rides, wheat box, farm animals, indoor hay slides, pedal karts (weekends only) and dark maze (weekends only).

Price: Monday-Friday, \$7; Friday and Saturday, \$9.
For more information: www.airliehills.com.



Aaron Kennel creates the design for his maze on his computer, then cuts the design into the corn maze by following the pattern using his GPS and laptop.



Kennel plants the corn in early July and begins designing his corn maze soon after.