

Kepler mission - Themed corn maze attracts more than a thousand visitors

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NASA Kepler scientists Steve Bryson (left) and Steve Howell (right) interacted with the audience to explain the Kepler mission. Image credit: NASA Ames Research Center / Eric James

More than a thousand visitors turned out for the Kepler Mission-themed corn maze on Oct. 1, 2011, hosted by NASA and the Dell'Osso Family Farm of Lathrop, Calif.

The public explored and got "lost in space" inside the 20-acre corn maze which grew to approximately 10-feet tall. The maze was intricately cropped to display discoveries and images from the Kepler mission.

Kepler is the first NASA mission capable of finding Earth-size planets in or near the "habitable zone," the region in a planetary system where liquid water can exist on the surface of the orbiting planet. The Kepler

mission is managed by NASA's Ames Research Center, Moffett Field, Calif.

“It is important for NASA to participate in nontraditional outreach efforts that closely interact and engage the public with NASA's missions,” said Deborah Feng, acting deputy center director of NASA Ames. “Through this special outreach effort, NASA was able to highlight a new era of post-shuttle spaceflight by showcasing current and future programs, such as the [Kepler mission](#), and reach geographically dispersed communities.”

Opening day featured a special guest appearance by NASA Astronaut Yvonne Cagle, who signed autographs for ecstatic space fans. Shortly after opening remarks from NASA Ames' acting deputy center director, visitors to the agritourism farm were treated to interactive presentations by NASA Ames' scientists. Other engaging activities included an aerial ropes course, zip lines, train rides, pony rides, a giant pumpkin patch and a scary haunted house.

John Hogan, an environmental scientist in the Bioengineering Branch at NASA Ames, kicked-off the NASA presentations with a rousing discussion about sustainable life support systems in space. In order to leave Earth and explore space, we need to bring life support systems that perform functions similar to what Earth normally provides for us. Hogan introduced attendees to the concept of 'Spaceship Earth.' This is the idea that we live on the largest known spacecraft, flying around the sun in the vastness of space.

The planet-finding mission also was a topic of the NASA talks. Steve Howell and Steve Bryson, Kepler scientists at NASA Ames, led interactive skits engaging space fans of all ages. Audience participation helped demonstrate how the spacecraft detects planets more than 1,000-light years away by measuring the change in brightness of distant

stars.

Seven "Space Farms" around the country were chosen to honor NASA and the 50th anniversary of human spaceflight with their 2011 corn maze designs. With a unique Kepler theme to highlight space exploration, the Dell'Osso Family Farm corn maze is one of the nation's top seven agritourism farms selected for the Space Farm 7 outreach program.

The Space Farm 7 maze project enables generations to enjoy NASA's numerous contributions to space exploration in a distinct setting, combining the thrill of space with a search for a way out of the maze. With cross-agency participation from six NASA field centers, an estimated one million people are expected to visit the corn mazes.

"We are truly honored to work with [NASA](#) and participate in the Space Farm 7 outreach program," said Susan Dell'Osso, co-owner of the Dell'Osso Family Farm. "Space exploration is a critical part of our American history and we hope to educate thousands of children about the importance of [space](#) to our future. The entire population of Lathrop is proud to have been part of this venture."

The Kepler corn maze will open to the public daily throughout the month of October.

Provided by JPL/NASA

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