



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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CONTACT: Lynne Williams
615-837-5081
Lynne.Williams@TN.gov
**Audio Clip Attached*

IT'S EASY, FUN TO BE PART OF THE COUNTY FAIR

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Tennessee county fairs are traditional, farm-related fun, says Lynne Williams, Tennessee's fair administrator, "but you don't have to be a farmer or own a cow to have something to enter in the fair."

"Coming to the fair is lots of fun already, but when you've entered something of your own in a contest, you really understand that it's your fair and that you're a part of the community," says Williams. "For children, seeing something they've made or grown or cared for out on display for the whole county to see is a thrill – winning a ribbon is just a bonus."

"There are so many categories of contests," says Williams, "and each category is separated into age and skill levels. Elementary school children who bring their favorite drawings compete against each other, and professional quilters compete against each other. If your roses have done well this year, choose your best one on the day to enter and bring it to the fairgrounds. If you took a photograph you think is pretty enough to be in a magazine, enter it – you don't have to be a professional photographer. There's an amateur category for your age group."

"Do you think that sunflower in your back yard may be the biggest in the county? Bring it to the fair and find out. Did your child make her own Christmas stocking last year? She should bring it and enter it. Once you look at a fair's catalog, you'll realize how easy it is to find something to contribute."

One category that may see lots more entries this year, according to Williams, is in the canning division. "Many people have developed an interest in eating locally grown foods and in preserving the foods they make themselves," says Williams. "Urban gardening is becoming commonplace, and sales of canning supplies like pressure cookers have skyrocketed across the nation. The county fair is a wonderful way to show off your new skills, plus find out how well you're doing."

That's really the point of the county agricultural fair, after all, says the fairs administrator. "Back in 1854, when the Tennessee Department of Agriculture was created – Tennessee's

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ELLINGTON AGRICULTURAL CENTER
BOX 40627, NASHVILLE, TN 37204
www.picktnproducts.org

very first department! – the first initiative of the department was to support the establishment of county fairs across the state. The purpose of fairs? Showing the very latest information and technology to the public so they could use it to improve their lives. Fairs were created to enrich and improve communities.”

“Fairs still do that today,” says Williams. “Agricultural fairs still give farmers the chance to see how their crops and animals compare with others, and everybody a chance to ride the Ferris Wheel, but they also give important community organizations the opportunity to reach large numbers of people who might need them. Fairs give homeowners ideas and help them discover new technologies to add value and enjoyment to their homes. In a time when choosing local and home grown foods is a national movement, fairs are on the cutting edge, giving a whole new generation of gardeners and canners encouragement and education about how to grow and safely preserve nutritious foods.”

A county fair belongs to its community, and every fair is different, says Williams. “The best way to enjoy any fair is to be a part of it, though, so be sure to bring your best plate of cookies, tomato, or artwork to enter in a friendly competition. Once you’ve really participated this way, you may decide that the best part of the fair is nowhere near the midway!”

Visit www.picktnproducts.org to find a directory of Tennessee’s county agricultural fairs and their 2010 dates. Most county fairs publish a complete listing of competitive divisions, rules and directions for entering that fair’s contests before the opening of the fair.

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