

News Release
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GROWERS NEEDED FOR FESTIVAL'S NEW 'STRAWBERRY MARKET'

Fresh, local strawberries are needed for this year's West Virginia Strawberry Festival to stock a new "Strawberry Market" planned for this year's event.

The Strawberry Festival board, the City of Buckhannon and the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) are working cooperatively with private farmers to have local berries for sale at a retail tent on Main Street adjacent to the Courthouse. Plans are to have the market open on Friday and Saturday of the festival, which is scheduled for May 10-18, 2014.

"This great festival is an excellent opportunity for local farmers to benefit from the visitors that pour into Upshur County each May," said Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick. "I believe that festival-goers are more than willing to pay a premium for fresh, local berries. But like the other tremendous food-related opportunities in our state, we need more growers to become involved."

He added that the increasing prevalence and use of high and low tunnels – low-cost, unheated greenhouse-type structures – makes fresh berries in mid-May a more practical proposition than in past years.

In past decades, local farmers produced enough berries for the festival and for export. One undated historical report in the archives of the Upshur County Historical Society notes that more than 1,500 gallons of berries were shipped to Pittsburgh. It also said that farmers would be supplying cherries, raspberries and currants later in the season.

He also said that some people who are interested in growing for the festival may not be able to have fruit this year because most varieties take more than a year to produce good yields.

"Regardless, we want to get the ball rolling on this project, which is an initiative for the economic future of our state. It's been a long time since local berries were widely available at the West Virginia Strawberry Festival. I believe if festival-goers get a taste of berries this year, they will demand them next year and in the years to come."

For more information, contact WVDA Communications Officer Buddy Davidson at 304-558-3708 or 304-541-5932.