

Fairs and Festival Series –100 Years of the State Fair of West Virginia

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Educational Objectives

- Participants will appreciate the impact of the fair and festival industry in West Virginia, highlighting the State Fair of West Virginia.
- Participants will explore the rich history and mission of the State Fair of West Virginia.
- Participants will discover key fair attractions, including exhibits, amusements and food.

Fairs and festivals play a vital role in preserving community traditions, offering both entertainment and educational experiences that bring people together, and in West Virginia, there are hundreds of fairs of festivals each year.

These events are a vital part of West Virginia's tourism economy and are events that families, friends and communities look forward to each year.

The premier event in West Virginia is the State Fair of West Virginia, held each August in Lewisburg. In August 2025, this beloved tradition celebrates a monumental milestone—its 100th anniversary! The centennial fair promises to be a historic celebration, honoring a century of memories while looking ahead to the future of this iconic event.



From Humble Beginning to State Tradition: The Fair that Grew with West Virginia

In 1854, a fair was held for the first time in Greenbrier Valley, Virginia. Over the next 60 years, the Greenbrier Valley Fair, now located in West Virginia, became one of state's most popular events, attracting thousands with animal shows, carnival rides, entertainment, races and exhibits.

On March 19, 1921, the fair officially chartered their annual fair with a document and the expectation to become and remain West Virginia's largest fair. Recognizing its growing significance, the State Legislature officially designated it as the State Fair of West Virginia in 1941. However, celebrations were postponed due to World War II, leading to cancellations from 1942 to 1945. The fair would be forced to cancel one other time during the 100-year tenure—in 2020, when COVID-19 shut down large events across the country.

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Over the years, the fairgrounds expanded with new facilities, including a grandstand built in the 1960s, enabling larger shows and bigger audiences. While the fair has continuously evolved, its core mission remains the same—celebrating agriculture, family values and education. Since its early beginnings, the State Fair of West Virginia has been a cherished tradition, and it continues to thrive, blending new attractions with time-honored traditions.

The State Fair of West Virginia is the premier event that unites West Virginians from across the state. Despite the passage of time, the fair remains dedicated to its core mission, “honoring our heritage through programs that promote the traditions of agriculture, education, and family entertainment.” With something for everyone, this beloved event continues to honor its rich history while embracing the future. From August 7 to 16, 2025, the fair is celebrating its 100th anniversary, marking a century of tradition and community spirit.

Traditions, Tastes and Timeless Fun at the State Fair of West Virginia

Set on 360 acres, the State Fair of West Virginia has ample space to fill with attractions for people of all ages. From the carnival on the Midway to exhibits in the West Virginia Building to the livestock shows in the barns, concerts by the Grandstand and delicious food scattered across the fairgrounds, there is something for everyone each year. Among these many attractions, a few long-standing favorites have become cherished traditions at the very heart of the State Fair experience.

With the mission of the fair always committed to celebrating the tradition of agriculture in West Virginia, livestock and agriculture exhibits continue to be highlighted. The barns located in the Ag Village are the primary home of these attractions.



The long opening weekend always highlights the 4-H and FFA youth participants from around the state, who compete in market and showmanship classes. Each year, that show brings in approximately 400 youths from around the state. From there, the open show allows youths and adults to exhibit their breeding stock on the state stage. Ultimately, more than 3,000 individual livestock exhibits are highlighted during these events. In addition to these competitive livestock categories, there is also the Farm Credit Dairy Birthing Center, which houses 20

pregnant cows each fair, giving visitors a chance to witness a live birth, and the Friday morning Draft Horse Pull, which allows attendees a chance to witness real horsepower as teams of horses pull a minimum of 3,000 pounds.

West Virginians also have an opportunity to showcase their produce, crafts, recipes and more in the West Virginia Building. This 20,000-square-foot exhibit provides a space for local artisans and farmers to display their crafts in competitive categories. These categories include vegetables, flowers, home-canned goods, baked goods, art, quilts, photography and more. One unique class worth checking out is Christmas Tree Decorating, which requires contestants to decorate a provided



4-foot-tall Christmas tree. Keep in mind, if you are interested in submitting an entry, registration for these events is due in early July, and check-in regularly occurs on identified dates in the week leading up to the start of the fair. In addition to these open categories, competitive entries from FFA youth around the state and blue-ribbon projects from West Virginia 4-H'ers can be found in the Cecil H. Underwood Youth Center.

Amongst the vendors and exhibits all over the grounds are free entertainment. In years past, this has included unique animal exhibits from other habitats, thrilling daredevil stunt shows, hypnotists and comedians, and more. While these are available to all, the major headliners perform by the Grandstand each night, and these ticketed concerts often bring people from far and wide to the fair. Over the years, that stage has hosted music greats, like Johnny Cash and Loretta Lynn, but in recent years, the lineup has strived to be inclusive of a variety of music styles, from country to Christian to rap, and performers representing different generations. Those performers begin being announced in January of each year, so keep an eye out for future concerts.

While many exhibits and shows around the grounds are free, the Midway at the State Fair of West Virginia provides some of the favorite entertainment for kids and adults alike in the form of over 45 rides. These require tickets or a wristband to ride; however, those tickets may be worth it for a look at the entire grounds from the top of "The Dutch," the massive Ferris wheel that becomes visible as you drive upon the fairgrounds. The fair still offers traditional nostalgic rides, like the carousel, swings, Tilt-A-Whirl and Sizzler, but it also has some newer



rides for the thrill seekers. The Beast, one of those rides prone to having a line, sends those brave enough to give it a try spinning high into the air and upside down. The Midway is always packed, but it is worth checking out what they have year after year.

While on the Midway, don't miss your chance to check out Fat Albert's, a popular game in which participants bet a quarter on the color they think a rat is going to pick on a wheel.

Finally, whether you are there for the exhibits, the livestock shows, the free entertainment, the concerts or the rides, the fair food is sure to get your attention. Again, there are some foods that have been a staple at the State Fair of West Virginia since the 1950s. Ben Ellen

Donuts started in a tent in 1952, and today, they have a prime spot in their own building right by the Grandstand. They serve a single item, their cinnamon-sugar cider donuts. Speaking of cinnamon, Son's-Sational Cinnamon Rolls' line starts backing up well before their window opens each morning. These delicious homemade rolls are a must-have for many visitors. Trudy's Dairy World is another sweet treat option with a long history at the fair. The Hlay Family has been serving homemade ice cream from Trudy's since the 1950s. In recent years, they have gotten in on the fun of the New Fair Food Contest with new ice cream flavors. Fork'et Me Not has been a fan favorite in that category in recent years with a variety of unique food options. Other savory favorites to consider around the grounds are a



Greenbrier East FFA ham sandwich, a Cattleman's Association steak sandwich or a fresh ear of corn. As with the entertainment, exhibits, amusements and vendors, the concessions offer something for everyone.

Honoring the Past, Embracing the Future

From its early days as the Greenbrier Valley Fair to its current status as the state's premier event, the State Fair of West Virginia has grown and evolved while staying true to its core mission: honoring agriculture, education and family entertainment. Each summer, thousands of people travel to southern West Virginia to spend time at the fair, and for each of those people, there is something different and new to experience. Whether it's a child's first taste of a cinnamon donut, a teenager making new friends in line for The Beast or families supporting each other in the livestock barns, the fair continues to create connections and lasting memories for all generations. As the State Fair of West Virginia celebrates its centennial, it invites visitors to help it honor the past, enjoy the present, and look ahead to an exciting future filled with even more traditions, tastes and timeless fun. There is truly no better place to experience the heart of West Virginia than at the fairgrounds in Lewisburg each August.

Discussion:

1. Have you been to the State Fair of West Virginia? If so, what was your favorite part of the fair. If not, do you have a favorite fair/festival that you have attended? What would you recommend as a "do not miss" part of your fair?
2. If you could pass down one memory or tradition from the fair to younger generations, what would it be? Incorporate a share session at one of your monthly meetings or create a memory board or display of club members of fair memories throughout the years to display at your local fair/festival.
3. Do you have a favorite traditional fair food? Consider a potluck of fair/festival foods at your next meeting!

Resources

State Fair of WV Website: <https://statefairwv.com>

Nester, D. (2025 March 20) "State Fair of WV receives the prestigious 'Centurion Chamber of Commerce' designation from WV Secretary of State." Secretary of State Kris Warner. <https://sos.wv.gov/news/Pages/03-20-25-B.aspx>

WSAZ News Staff (18 June 2020). "The State Fair of West Virginia cancelled." WSAZ 3. <https://www.wsaz.com/content/news/The-State-Fair-of-West-Virginia-canceled--571342141.html>

WV Tourism: <https://wvtourism.com/must-see-state-fair-of-wv/>

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