

Florida Strawberries signal a start of Spring

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A few weeks ago, I took a quick weekend trip to Florida to visit one of the agricultural commodity group festivals I've been hearing about for a few years. The Florida Strawberry Festival is held annually at the beginning of March in Plant City, Florida. Plant City is located between Tampa and Orlando along I-4 and the region is one of the bright spots for Florida's agriculture industry.

As you drive along I-4, you are surrounded by fields of strawberries and family operated farm stands filled with fresh produce. However, the Florida Strawberry Festival has more of a state fair feel rather than a small community agricultural festival. The festival includes concerts by numerous bands (this year's lineup included Willie Nelson), carnival rides, livestock, and youth sewing and baking contests. Despite the typical festival and fair activities, there is definitely a focus on the local agricultural commodity the festival is appropriately named after and the family farms that make the event possible.

Sprinkled throughout the many vendors were a wide variety of strawberry items, ranging from t-shirts, hats, cookbooks, and socks to edible delicacies. Local farms had provided visitors with the opportunity to try fresh strawberry lemonade, chocolate covered strawberries, strawberry preserves, strawberry bread, strawberry cookies, and strawberry pizza. One of the most popular stops on the strawberry foodie trail was the St. Clement Catholic Church's strawberry shortcake buffet.

There are several take-home lessons from this festival. Agricultural producers capitalized by providing numerous ways for visitors to try fresh strawberries. Providing unique items sprinkled throughout the vast fairgrounds encouraged visitors to explore more of the festival and spend more money with local producers and vendors.

If Highland County had a festival focused on one agricultural product, what do you think would be the best representation of the county? Once you have made your selection, think of how many ways that product could be made into another value-added product.

While it is peak season for strawberries in Florida, it is the peak season in Ohio to consider what to plant for this year's growing season and plan accordingly. Strawberries are grown locally in Highland County and can be an added item to your garden or farm. Depending on the variety of strawberry plants, it is estimated that one strawberry plant may produce up to one quart of fruit during the first fruiting year in Ohio.

For more information about growing strawberries in Ohio, contact the Highland County Extension Office at 937-393-1918.

Upcoming Programs:

Video Production 101 will be held on Monday, March 25, 2019, at 6 PM at the Lynchburg Public Library in Lynchburg, OH. The topic of this program will cover the basics of video productions for beginners and will be presented by Brooke Beam. If you have a small business and would like to incorporate more videos into your marketing plans or you are interested in learning the basics of video production, this program is for you!

The topic of the **Highland County Monthly Extension Programming** for March will be **Storytelling for Video Production**. The program will be held on March 27, 2019, at 10 AM. Attendees will learn about the different kinds of documentary films and how storytelling impacts the audience's perception of videos. The program will be held at Ponderosa Steakhouse in Hillsboro and is free to attend. Attendees are encouraged to purchase lunch on their own at Ponderosa. Please RSVP to reserve your seat by calling 937-393-1918.

Global Climate Change Update with Dr. Thomas Blaine will be held on April 25, 2019, at 6 PM in the Large Meeting Room in the basement of 119 Governor Foraker Place, Hillsboro, OH. Come and learn about the history of climate change, its current trends, and outlook. Hear how it applies to your backyard, farm, and everyday life. RSVP to reserve your seat by calling 937-393-1918.