

Countdown to the Nebraska State Fair

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By Governor Pete Ricketts

July 26, 2021

We're only a month away from one of the most important annual events for our state—the Nebraska State Fair in Grand Island. This year, the fair will run from August 27th through September 6th. It's a great way to celebrate Nebraska agriculture, cap off the summer with family-friendly entertainment, enjoy amazing food, and connect with our rich heritage.

Over the last year-and-a-half, Nebraska agriculture once again proved it could feed the world in the midst of the toughest circumstances. Our farm and ranch families kept the nation's food supply chain going strong as the coronavirus spread around the globe. Farmers, ranchers, feeders, and processors worked throughout the pandemic to make sure families across the nation had food to put on the table. Dairies helped produce milk for grocery stores and food pantries. Through it all, Nebraska ag showed its trademark grit and resilience.

At the State Fair, our farm and ranch families will be showcasing their livestock and produce. According to the USDA, Nebraska boasts the highest quality corn, soybean, and sorghum crops in the nation this year, with a greater percentage of those crops rated either "good" or "excellent" than in any other state. Meanwhile, the Beef State is breaking records for exports. The value of Nebraska beef exports in May 2021 (the most recent month of data available) exceeded \$150 million, the most ever in a single month. Nebraska beef exports from January through May of 2021 are the highest they've ever been over the first five months of a year. Great performance from Nebraska agriculture is great news for our state, since one in four jobs in Nebraska is in agriculture.

As students in 4-H and FFA compete, they will help fair-goers better understand how agriculture provides the nutritious food we rely on day in and day out. The next generation of farmers and ranchers are great ambassadors for our state's largest industry, and the future leaders of Nebraska agriculture. Be sure to check out their excellent work and to learn about how they're growing our state. Additionally, the Raising Nebraska Exhibit, a milking parlor, and combine rides also give attendees an up-close look at how our farm and ranch families run their operations.

While providing an opportunity to get in touch with our state's agricultural roots, the State Fair has become known for offering top-notch entertainment. Actor-turned-musician

Kevin Costner will take the stage with his band Modern West on September 2nd, and other evening concerts will feature Jon Pardi and Banda Los Sebastianes. The State Fair carnival, the largest amusement show in Nebraska, has all sorts of games and rides. From BMX to bullfighting, the fair serves up plenty of excitement for sports fans. At the State Fair Marathon on August 28th, runners will have a chance to qualify for the prestigious Boston Marathon. Spectators can also cheer on contestants in the 2021 Nebraska State Championship Pedal Tractor Pull.

Delicious food is one of the reasons why I love the State Fair. My favorite stop is the Nebraska Cattlemen Beef Pit where you can feast on a Prime Rib dinner or roasted beef. This year, you can even get a stamp in your Good Life Great Steaks Beef Passport! Afterwards, swing by the UNL Dairy Store for ice cream. Or try any of a multitude of foods-on-a-stick like a double bacon corndog with maple syrup! And, of course, there will be plenty of the usual fair staples available, such as funnel cakes, pretzels, and nachos.

The State Fair is also a celebration of Nebraska culture, from culinary skills to artistry. From homemade pies to meatballs, pickles, and more, our state's cooks and bakers enter their finest into one of the fair's many food competitions. Sculptors, woodworkers, painters, and quilters can submit entries in the hopes of taking home a blue ribbon. Families or businesses can also decorate a float and participate in one of the fair's daily celebration parades. And it will all be on display for you to view during your visit.

Fittingly, the State Fair also salutes our veterans every summer. On Labor Day (Monday, September 6th), veterans will be honored at both an 11:00 a.m. program and 1:00 p.m. parade. Throughout the fair, the Flights of Honor and Remembering Our Fallen exhibits will pay tribute to men and women who've made sacrifices in service of our country.

The State Fair wouldn't happen without the contributions of numerous Nebraskans, who volunteer their time. Each year, around 800 Cornhuskers collectively serve about 15,000 hours to make sure everyone attending the fair has a safe and memorable experience. If you'd like to lend a hand this year, go to www.statefair.org/volunteers to see opportunities to serve.

The State Fair is fast approaching. For a full schedule of events, visit the Nebraska State Fair website at statefair.org. Make your plan to visit now. If you have any questions about this topic or any other, you're welcome to email me at pete.ricketts@nebraska.gov or call 402-471-2244. I hope to see you in Grand Island during the fair!

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