

STATE FAIR @ TEXAS

Written By: M. Hess | Photos Courtesy Of: State Fair Of Texas

Each year, millions of Lone Star loving Texans and out-of-state visitors make their way to Dallas's Fair Park and the State Fair of Texas. Visitors are searching for fried favorites, exhilarating rides, livestock competitions, the largest new auto show in the Southwest, and so much more. While everything is, in fact, bigger in Texas, the state's fair did not start off quite so large.

Deep-Rooted Growth

Known as a showcase of Texas tradition and family-friendly fun, the roots of the State Fair of Texas were first established in 1886. "Since its humble beginnings as a local fair and exposition, the State Fair of Texas has grown tremendously, both in size and significance," explained Karissa Condoianis, Director of Public Relations for the State Fair of Texas. "Now one of the largest state fairs in the nation, the State Fair of Texas continues to evolve."

Originally two separate entities, the Dallas State Fair and Exposition and the Texas State Fair and Exposition, the "State Fair of Texas" as we now think of it officially merged in 1887. "In 1904, the fair sold its property to the City of Dallas, under an agreement that set aside a period each fall to hold the annual exposition," Condoianis explained. "As part of these new terms, the fair was reorganized and renamed the State Fair of Texas. In addition, new bylaws were written that established the State Fair as a nonprofit organization."

The agreement stipulated the fair would produce an annual event, pay its operational expenses, and reinvest net revenues from the event into maintaining and improving the park and its surrounding areas. Carried out for more than 100 years, the terms of this agreement serve as a reminder of the State Fair's deep-rooted history and its connection to Fair Park and the city of Dallas. "After serving as the State Fair's home for a whole century, Fair Park was officially designated a National Historic Landmark in 1986 because of its historical significance," Condoianis said.

The 2015 State Fair of Texas, themed *Passport to Texas*, will run September 25 through October 18.





Celebrating Texas Culture & Tradition

Open annually for 24 consecutive days, the State Fair of Texas is now the longest-running fair in the nation as well as one of the largest. Boasting 277 acres of shows, live music, exhibits, food, rides, and games, the fair has something for everyone. Fairgoers have been known to consider the State Fair "a must for any native or transplant Texan," but patrons should be prepared for a lot of walking.

"There is so much to do and see that you need more than one trip," said Lisa, a recent visitor to the fair. "I had fried bacon, a corny dog, fried okra, went to a wine tasting, sampled some craft beer, listened to music, saw my dream car, [and] bought some fudge and praline pecans, all in six hours." While she only planned to stay a short time, she ended up spending the day. "It was so amazing that we didn't want to leave," she said. "On the way out, we found some German food and beer next to one of the big stages and sat down to listen to the band."

Shared History, Shared Future

More than a century of shared history connects the State Fair of Texas to Fair Park. "From its longtime devotion to Fair Park to its lasting dedication to fairgoers, the State Fair considers tradition an essential component of its organization," Condoianis stated. In an effort to establish and continue valued traditions, the fair annually celebrates all things Texan by promoting agriculture, education, and community involvement through quality entertainment.

One of the most well-known icons of the fair is its famous 55-foot tall cowboy Big Tex. "He holds a special place in the heart of many Texans," explained Condoianis. "Since 1952, Big Tex has towered over the annual State Fair of Texas in the heart of Fair Park, wearing his signature Dickies cowboy shirt and jeans, size 96 boots, and a 95-gallon hat. His charming greeting welcomes millions of fairgoers each year."

Likely the fair's most well-known claim to fame, fried food favorites have visitors and culinary masters alike flooding the gates of Fair Park. "Whether it's grabbing a funnel cake, a turkey leg, or trying the newest food, fairgoers have their annual food traditions at the fair," Condoianis said. "I think it is safe to say that the Fletcher's Corny Dog is one many fairgoers enjoy during their annual visit to the State Fair of Texas, however, food at our fair goes far beyond this."

Condoianis noted Texans like to be inventive with their food. Few things are better evidence than the creative entries in the annual Big Tex Choice Awards. Contest winners receive national recognition and a large increase in exposure during the fair. "Big Tex Choice Award finalists have been sweet, savory, and everything in between," she said. "With prizes going to the Best Tasting and Most Creative Foods, concessionaires go to great lengths to create something bigger and better, year after year."

Previous finalists have ranged from fried Sriracha balls to fair-themed drinks like funnel cake ale. Some of these include fried butter, fried Coke, fried bubblegum, fried Thanksgiving dinner, fried PB&J, and the fried bacon cinnamon roll.

While one may not want to hit the Midway immediately after ingesting their favorite fried fancy, it is a destination patrons will not want to miss. Among its many rides is the Texas Star Ferris Wheel, celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. Reaching more than 225 feet high, this iconic Ferris wheel offers riders romantic views of the Dallas skyline, the same one that *USA Today* voted the best skyline internationally.

More than 100 shows, exhibits, and activities are included in fair admission. Families can enjoy live music on one of the fair's four stages, a nightly evening parade, celebrity chef performances, BMX bike performances, pyrotechnic light and water shows, interactive kid zones, mini circuses, and the Big Tex Barnyard.

"When it comes to the State Fair of Texas, agriculture and education go hand-in-hand, not only as pillars of the organization, but also as fundamental features of the Lone Star State and its history," according to Condoianis. "The State Fair of Texas integrates these two elements into a variety of events, exhibits, and hands-on activities that are both enjoyable and informative. Educational programming activities entertain adults and kids alike and range from feeding furry friends at the petting zoo to learning about different livestock species during daily guided tours of the barns."

Although many Texans and visitors are enthusiastic about the fair itself, many locals and dedicated visitors suggest taking the DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit) to avoid traffic in the areas around the fairgrounds. Patrons may also want to consider attending the fair on a weekday, as opposed to the weekend, when the crowds are thinner.

Not only can fairgoers create lifelong memories with family and friends, they can do it with the satisfaction of knowing that proceeds go to a good cause. Proceeds are reinvested into Fair Park through capital improvements, and given as scholarships to deserving youth throughout the Texas. They are also used to support the Fair Park museum facilities and community outreach programs, and to improve the State Fair's operation.

Condoianis stressed, "Through its rich and lengthy history, it remains evident that the State Fair of Texas serves not only as an annual celebration but as a unique destination that brings people together and allows them to create lifelong memories."

