

What's Yummy

MAPPING THE FAIR BY FOOD BOOTH BY EPHRAIM PAYNE

Whether you treat snack time as a treasure hunt or plan out your prospective meals months in advance, the Oregon Country Fair offers something for every taste, with a cross section of world cuisine from Afghan fare to Peruvian cuisine, Greek standbys and everything in between. With 66 food booths plus a handful of strolling vendors, OCF boasts myriad options for fairgoers who work up an appetite strolling the grounds or dancing to the beat at one of the many sound stages.

Hankering for a slice of pizza, fried rice or salad? Head to the Main Stage. Find the Tofu Palace or cheesecake and pie booths at the front of the Fair or hit the new loop for burritos and tamales. Chill at Snow Cone Jack's in Chela Mela with a bicycle-power-produced shaved ice and pig out on locally grown organic produce at the Cooperative Fruit booth in the Community Village.

In a unique twist on festival food service, OCF bans pre-packaged food sales, requiring vendors to cook everything in the forest. That presents an interesting challenge, says Food Committee Member Jonah Alves of the Tofu Palace, who has worked the Fair for 35 years. Vendors have mastered it over the years by learning to bring in tons of fresh water and ice and by building battery-powered booths that can be recharged with the help of the Peach Power Solar Station.

For the past several years, the Fair has encouraged vendors to source their produce as locally as possible and to favor organic food while also avoiding GMOs.

According to the Food Committee's Louise Lumen, food is a pretty big deal for Fair folk. What people are going to eat tops the list of pre-Fair conversations along with what shows are playing, she says, and veteran fairgoers stroll the

grounds with friends in order to share treats and taste more of what's cooking.

"Everyone who attends the Country Fair has their own food traditions," says Lumen, whose must-nosh list includes pizza, cheesecake, fruit salad, stir fry and fresh-squeezed lemonade when the temperature starts to soar. "It starts becoming a topic of conversation around May, with everyone talking about the food they are going to eat at the Fair this year."

While craft vendors come and go from year to year, Fair

folk can be sure of what they are going to eat because food vendors come back year after year. Alves estimates that 90 to 95 percent of food booths have been at the Fair for over a decade. Besides the Tofu Palace, longtime OCF food stands include such diverse establishments as Get Fried Rice, Dana's Cheesecake Bakery, Springfield Creamery and Bangkok Grill.

Lumen says that in addition to offering fairgoer favorites, established vendors work hard to spice up their menus with new offerings. And, says Alves, fairgoers can make culinary discoveries with an adventurous spirit and a copy of the ever-handy Peach Pit.

"You kind of have to look for things — there's little booths tucked in everywhere — it can be like a scavenger hunt looking for exactly what you want," he says. "Sometimes you'll discover something new that you didn't know was there." ■



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