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Community Garden exhibit lets Fairgoers see, learn and taste!

Learn about the many benefits of "locally grown," get gardening tips and more

BLACKFOOT, ID (August 31, 2011) -- Visitors to the Eastern Idaho State Fair can learn about, see – and even taste – some of Eastern Idaho's locally grown fresh produce, at the Fair's new Community Garden exhibit, sponsored by the Idaho Central Credit Union.

Located in the West Events area of the Fair, the Community Garden exhibit will feature raised-bed, contained gardens of fresh produce, including tomatoes, zucchini, squash, peppers and herbs. Fairgoers can talk with representatives from the Blackfoot Community Garden who will be on hand to offer information on community gardening, raised-bed gardening and how to get involved with community gardening in other local communities. This healthy community resource first opened in May 2011 and offers plots for growing fresh food, gardening classes and other tools to help gardeners. Community gardeners can grow food for their own tables – or contribute their produce to local food banks feeding individuals and families in need.

"Agriculture has been a vital part of the Eastern Idaho State Fair throughout its 109-year history, and we are seeing an increase of community gardening and locally-grown produce throughout Eastern Idaho," said Fair manager Brandon Bird. "We hope our community gardening exhibit will encourage people to start their own garden that will feed their own table – or others in need."

The exhibit will offer a special Tomato Tasting on Wednesday, September 7, from 4pm to 7pm. Here, Fairgoers can taste as many as 16 varieties of heirloom tomatoes grown right in the Fair's Community Garden.

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The Community Garden exhibit also will be featured at the Eastern Idaho State Fair's private, invitation-only *Farm Fresh Feast*, presented by the Idaho Farm Bureau, on Thursday, September 1. Similar in theme to "The Endless Feast" airing on PBS, this elegant, five-course seated dinner will showcase all locally-grown produce and meats from farms in the Fair's 16-county district. In addition, many of the dishes served at the meal will include vegetables and herbs grown at the Community Garden exhibit.

"This special evening is a way for us to recognize many local growers who play a key role in feeding communities here locally, throughout Idaho and the nation," said Bird. "Our Farm Fresh Feast also is a way for the Fair to thank our sponsors, commissioners, board members and other key stakeholders whose continued support enable us to make the Fair a fun, memorable and educational experience."

Josh Swain, executive chef from Stockmans Restaurant in Idaho Falls, is planning the menu and will serve as Feast chef. The evening will begin with appetizers in the Community Garden; guests will then be shuttled to the long, communal-style dinner table, located in the Grandstand arena.

The hors d'oeuvres will feature ingredients from the Community Garden, as well as heirloom tomatoes to be used in the soup course. Downtown Bread Company, a local Blackfoot bakery, will provide bread for three of the courses. Wood'n'goat Dairy will be providing goat cheese, and Portneuf Valley Brewing will be pouring a light beer and a non-alcoholic Sasparilla beverage. There will be a salad course of local mixed greens tossed in a homemade vinaigrette dressing. The main course will feature grass-fed, grilled beef, raised by local rancher Mark Pratt, and free range chicken with roasted fingerling potatoes and grilled zucchini and summer squash. The dinner will be paired with local Idaho wine and pressed cider. Dessert will include a raspberry cheesecake made with goat cheese; locally produced coffee and hot chocolate will complement the dessert.

During the meal, guests will learn about the produce and meat they are eating from the local farmers who are providing the ingredients to the Farm Fresh Feast.

The Eastern Idaho State Fair returns to Blackfoot September 3-10, 2011. Complete schedules and 2011 Fair information can be found at www.funatthefair.com or by calling (208) 785-2480.

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*An annual tradition for 109 years, the Eastern Idaho State Fair is a favorite destination to over 200,000 visitors, creating fond memories and unforgettable experiences to all ages. This year's theme, **It's Udderly Fantastic**, is a celebration of Idaho's agricultural heritage – a vital part of the Fair throughout its history. From entertainment to agricultural heritage, every aspect of the Eastern Idaho State Fair is udderly fantastic!*