



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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** Audio Clip Attached*

State's Strawberry Growers Geared Up for Great Season

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Tennessee strawberry farmers not affected by recent floods are either happily picking or happily anticipating a great crop this year, depending on where they live. Tennessee's famous strawberry harvest starts in the west, where elevations are lower and warmer, and progresses east across the state to ever higher and cooler climes.

"Additionally, strawberries ripen continually on the plant over several weeks. Varietal differences extend the overall season even more," says Pamela Bartholomew, agritourism coordinator with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture Bartholomew. "If you really wanted to, you could start picking strawberries near Memphis today and pick all the way to Mountain City until the middle of June."

The West Tennessee strawberry crop is already in full swing, according to Bartholomew. "Right now is the perfect time to go to Green Acres Farm in Milan," says the specialist. The Parkins family has been growing the Chandler variety for the past 11 years on their Medina Highway farm. "All their strawberries are pre-picked on the farm and waiting for you. They're open seven days a week starting at 8 a.m." Call Green Acres Farm at 731-686-1403 to learn more.

James Spears, with Circle S Farms near Lebanon, says they currently have 20,000 plants with berries ready to pick, but that the crop still won't reach its peak harvest for another couple of weeks. "Strawberries aren't the only thing you'll find at Circle S, either," says Bartholomew. "Owners Nelson and Emmie Lou Steed make sure visitors have fun when they come out to pick strawberries. They have farm animals for children to pet, so they can learn a little bit more about agriculture." Learn more about Circle S Farms at www.tncirclesfarms.com or call 615-210-8145.

Jack and Stanley Ritter of Ritter Farms in Rutledge say they were able to produce all-natural strawberries for the first time this year. The Grainger County farm has eight acres of strawberries with two different varieties, Sweet Charlies and Chandlers. Chandlers, says Jack Ritter, are the preferred strawberry for canning or making preserves. Some strawberries are already ripe, report the Ritters, who predict the biggest part of their crop

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will be ready to pick in about three weeks. "Strawberries are late this year due to the hard winter," says Jack Ritter. Contact Ritter Farms at 865-767-2575 or visit www.ritterfarms.com.

"Call ahead before visiting a farm to be sure there are berries ready to pick, and that the farm is open at the time and day you're planning to visit," says Bartholomew, "then take advantage of a great year for Tennessee strawberries."

Find directories for local strawberries, farms and farmers markets at www.PickTnProducts.org. Find strawberries recipes on the Pick Tennessee Products Web site at "Cook Now."

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