

Tennessee State Fair

Key Takeaways

- The Tennessee State Fair and Exposition Commission, chaired by Commissioner Hatcher, voted to recommend the Wilson County location to Governor Lee as the future site for the Tennessee State Fair.
- In the most recent legislative session, a Farm Bureau priority issue, SB1155 by Senator Ferrell Haile and HB1286 by Representative Pat Marsh, which made a technical correction in state statute to allow the Tennessee State Fair to be transferred to the Wilson County Fairgrounds, passed in both chambers.
- There are additional funding needs for infrastructure to help the Tennessee State Fair be one of the best in the nation.
- In the fiscal year 2021-2022 budget, \$560,000 (non-recurring) was allocated to provide grants in equal amounts to each county and regional agricultural fair in the state to be used for operational expenses, programs, and services.

Questions

1. What is your vision for a successful State Fair?
2. How can all 95 counties be engaged in the State Fair?
3. Does your county or regional fair have financial needs?

Background

The Tennessee State Fair and Exposition Commission voted to recommend the Wilson County location to Governor Lee as the future site for the Tennessee State Fair.

In 2020, the Tennessee State Fair and Exposition Commission, TCA 4-57, chaired by Commissioner of Agriculture Charlie Hatcher, began the search for a new home of the State Fair. The Commission sent a notice to all counties requesting those interested in becoming the new home for the State Fair submit an Expression of Interest (EOI). Three counties submitted EOIs. Commissioner Hatcher named a committee of five individuals knowledgeable of the facility, capital, and location needs of a successful fair to conduct a thorough review of the EOIs. At the completion of their review the committee submitted their recommendation to the Tennessee State Fair and Exposition Commission. **The Commission subsequently voted to recommend the Wilson County location to Governor Lee as the future site for the Tennessee State Fair.**

The Wilson County Fairgrounds was recommended as the ideal location for the Tennessee State Fair for a multitude of reasons. The \$50 million facility includes 280 acres, 117,000 sq. ft livestock facilities, a 78,060 sq. ft expo center, seven buildings with 16,570 sq. ft., a 26,000 sq. ft. arena, 86 acres of parking, and a historical village with over 60 buildings that come to life with activities during the fair. The Wilson County Fair has a historically strong volunteer base with over 1,600 volunteers and is the largest fair in the state with an average attendance of over 600,000 individuals.

In the most recent legislative session, a Farm Bureau priority issue, SB1155 by Senator Ferrell Haile and HB1286 by Representative Pat Marsh, which made a technical correction in state statute to allow the Tennessee State Fair to be transferred to the Wilson County Fairgrounds, passed in both chambers.

Included in the final fiscal year 2021-2022 budget is \$5 million (non-recurring) to fund needed capital improvements and maintenance to the fairgrounds and \$300,000 (recurring) for the annual facilitation of the fair.

Wilson County’s EOI suggested the need for funding for various projects which could position the Tennessee State Fair as one of the top state fairs in the nation. **The following are examples of identified infrastructural needs which will be funded through the budgeted \$5 million (non-recurring) and potential future state budget allocations:**

<p>Road Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address traffic challenges for fairgoers exiting from Interstate 40. • Add an exit to accommodate livestock trailers entering the area. • Widen multiple roads. • Provide a road around the perimeter of the fairgrounds to improve traffic and access. <p>Building Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made in Tennessee Building for state exhibits • Agriculture learning center • Livestock tie barn • Livestock panels for new tie barn spaces 	<p>Utility Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address water run-off and drainage issues. • Expand electrical and water service. • Improve cell service and broadband access for mobile phones/point of sale/social media/surveys. • Additional restroom facilities. <p>Other Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storage facility • Security wands and cameras at gates • Parking area expansion
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This funding includes 36 percent of the \$14 million necessary and requested for infrastructure funding.

The funding set forth by Governor Lee and approved by the General Assembly is highly valued and an excellent step toward a strong, agriculturally based State Fair focused on celebrating agriculture and economic activities statewide. There are still needed improvements for the State Fair to fulfill its potential of recognizing Tennessee production, promoting youth and community involvement, and providing educational opportunities for fairgoers. **This funding includes 36 percent of the \$14 million necessary and requested for infrastructure funding.** Approximately \$9 million is needed to successfully host the Tennessee State Fair at the Wilson County Fairgrounds.

In the FY21-22 budget, \$560,000 (non-recurring) was allocated to provide grants in equal amounts to each county and regional agricultural fairs.

County Fair Funding

In the fiscal year 2021-2022 budget, \$560,000 (non-recurring) was allocated to provide grants in equal amounts to each county and regional agricultural fairs in the state to be used for operational expenses, programs, and services. The purpose of this funding is to help county fairs recover lost revenue from the COVID-19 pandemic. Some county fairs suffered financially even prior to COVID-19, and canceled fairs or reduced attendance only made the situation worse. This funding is greatly appreciated as a state fair is only possible with strong, well-funded county fairs.

Policy
 We support a strong well-funded, agriculturally based Tennessee State Fair focused on celebrating agriculture and economic activities statewide. An agricultural fair provides the opportunity to recognize the “best of the best” of Tennessee production, promotes youth and community involvement and provides quality educational opportunities for fairgoers along with traditional food, fun and entertainment. A quality Tennessee State Fair should provide an outdoor classroom opportunity for the many consumers who want and need to know and understand more about today’s agriculture and the economic drivers of Tennessee. Location is key to the success and since a function of the Tennessee State Fair is to bring the country to the city it should be housed in a highly populated region easily accessible to many.