

## ADVENTURES

## Meet Me At the Fair

This autumn, it's time to fall back in love with fairs and all they do to support their communities.



By CAA Staff | Sep 10, 2024 · 4 min. read

The aroma of caramel corn in the air. Rows of jewel-hued jams. The sound of baa-ing sheep. Few things stimulate nostalgia like fall fair season. Long a staple of rural life, these annual celebrations harken back to a time when traditions and stories were handed down through generations like a cherished family recipe. But more than just that yearly spin on the Ferris wheel, these autumn gatherings—some of which date back 50 years or more—are just as relevant today, providing education, hands-on experience and interaction with farmers. As regional 4-H clubs have always known, getting kids excited about agriculture is key to the long-term sustainability of our food sources. As the air gets cooler and the leaves start to turn, consider a visit to one of these festive fairs in both urban and rural Western Canada.

### GREAT WHITE NORTH PUMPKIN WEIGH-OFF & FAIR

Forget Charlie Brown—it's the great pumpkin, in Smoky Lake, that's circled on Albertans' calendars. Just a 90-minute drive north of Edmonton, the province's pumpkin capital welcomes visitors to its annual Great White North Pumpkin Weigh-Off & Fair (October 4–6 this year). This family-friendly festival kicks off Friday evening with live music, food and beverages that highlight what the community has to offer. "From the corn maze to the beer gardens and bouncy castle, the entire event is hosted by local enterprises," says Michelle Wright, president of the Smoky Lake Pumpkin Growers. Though the fair continues through to Sunday, with competitions for pies, jams and unusual vegetables on the schedule, the signature event takes place Saturday night. That's when the local high-school's graduating class decorates a derelict car, and onlookers cheer as a 700-pound pumpkin is dropped from a crane, crushing the car. And if 700 pounds sounds impressive for a pumpkin, consider that Don Crews, a mason from the city of Lloydminster, set a national record at the fair's Weigh-Off in 2022 with a gourd that grew to 2,537 pounds.

### AG EX

It's all about the cows in Brandon, Man., where the AG EX—the province's largest all-breeds cattle show—celebrates its 51st year this fall (October 23–26). The goal? To provide purebred cattle breeders a showcase for their programs and, in a broader sense, educate the public about cattle breeders' contribution to provincial agriculture. To that end, the youth program MooMania! gives students from grades 3 to 5 a chance to participate in a mock cattle show and auction. According to Dallas Johnson—past co-chair of the event and current director and member of the executive board of the Manitoba Provincial Exhibition—the AG EX is a great kickoff to the fall season. "People will often combine a trip to the fair with a Brandon Wheat Kings hockey game or organize a family event to culminate with the year's harvest."

### CANADIAN WESTERN AGRIBITION

Located in Regina, the Canadian Western Agribition is our nation's largest agricultural and livestock show. First held in 1971, it has since developed into a lively mix of Indigenous culture, an adrenaline-pounding rodeo and "the Super Bowl of beef shows," according to Breanna Franklin, the event's marketing and communications manager. This year's Agribition (November 25–30) once again expects to draw producers, exhibitors and competitors from all over the world—and spectators. A key part of its mandate is to bridge the gap between rural and urban lifestyles through education and entertainment. "The evening events are the ones you don't want to miss," says Franklin. "The four-day pro rodeo packs the Brandt Centre, as the winners of the Maple Leaf Rodeo qualify to compete at nationals."

This autumn, it's time to fall back in love with fairs and all they do to support their communities. Choose from a cornucopia of annual events—there's sure to be one in a small town near you, with mouth-watering treats and fun contests for building cherished family memories to last a lifetime.

### BEST IN SHOW

Cash prizes and bragging rights are both on the table—winner takes all at some of Canada's quirkiest fall fair contests.

- It's BYOZ at the local country fair's zucchini races in Chestermere, Alta.—wheels and axles are provided.
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- Oh baby! The infant with the chubbiest cheeks wins a prize at the Caledonia Fair in Caledonia, Ont.
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- Contestants chomp down as many cloves as possible at the Windsor, N.S., Garlic Fest's garlic-eating contest.
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- What makes a vegetable the oddest? Find out at the Port Hope Fair in Ontario.

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