

+first GEAR

Fair Play



A BODY HAS TO REALLY STAND OUT to get the attention of the more than 3 million visitors who attend The State Fair of Texas every year. It seems 52-foot-tall Big Tex, with his 75-gallon Stetson hat and size 70 boots, is just the guy for the job.

For some 6 decades now, Big Tex has been the fair's official greeter, booming "Howdy" about 60 times a day to fairgoers during the event's 24-day run. He may as well be welcoming all of us who trek to our respective county, state and regional fairs held each year throughout the U.S. and Canada.

While they offer many of the same attractions—adrenaline-pumping midway rides and food galore—each of these fairs has a twist all its own. Whether that's towering Tex, the Iowa State Fair's cow sculpted from butter or the log-sawing contests of the Prince George's Exhibition, there's a little something that speaks to local heritage, as well as agriculture.

From livestock competitions to displays of quilt-making and tractors, farm and ranch life has been at the center of fairs and expositions since they were first held in colonial North America more than 250 years ago. Thankfully, it's a tradition that continues today, offering new generations a chance to join in on all the fun. —Des Keller

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