Alabama, U.S.

National Peanut Festival

By Tom Kirvan

FROM THE FIELDS TO THE FAIR

‘EASE ON DOWN THE ROW’ AT THE 82ND NATIONAL PEANUT FESTIVAL

Every autumn, a distinct scent blankets the rolling plains of southeast Alabama: the earthy, rich fragrance of harvested legumes rising from the sandy soils of the Wiregrass region near the state’s borders with Georgia and Florida. In Dothan, Ala., known worldwide as the “Peanut Capital of the World,” this aroma heralds the arrival of one of the state’s most deeply cherished agricultural traditions.

The National Peanut Festival, the largest event of its kind in the United States, takes place this year from November 6-15 in Dothan, bringing a multi-decade legacy to life under the theme “Ease on Down the Row.” Spanning 10 days, the festival transforms the sprawling 200-acre fairgrounds on U.S. Highway 231 South into a massive celebration of agricultural history, community resilience, and Southern heritage.

To truly understand the importance of the National Peanut Festival, one must look back to the economic devastation of the early 20th century. For generations, Southern agriculture was tethered strictly to cotton. However, a devastating boll weevil infestation wiped out up to 75 percent of Alabama’s cotton crops, forcing farmers into an immediate financial crisis. Turning away from the monoculture of cotton, Wiregrass farmers looked toward alternative crops that could survive the regional sandy loam.

Following the visionary agricultural advice of agronomist Dr. George Washington Carver of the Tuskegee Institute, local farmers began cultivating peanuts. Peanuts not only thrived in the local climate, but their nitrogen-fixing properties revitalized the depleted soil. By the late 1930s, the gamble had paid off, saving the region from financial ruin and solidifying Dothan as an agricultural powerhouse.

To honor this miracle crop, the inaugural festival was launched on a near-freezing Thursday, November 10, 1938. The three-day event was headlined by Dr. Carver himself, who delivered a historic keynote address showcasing the over 300 uses he developed for the humble legume, ranging

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Ball, Ball, Matthews & Novak, P.A., located in **Mobile** and **Montgomery**, specializes in M&A and corporate law, business transactions and financing, medical malpractice defense, insurance defense, transportation litigation, estate planning and probate, real estate transactions, contract drafting and review, and more.

Christian & Small LLP, located in **Birmingham** and **Daphne**, specializes in bankruptcy and restructuring; class actions; commercial litigation; estate planning, probate, and wills; labor and employment; product liability; professional liability; and more.

Image courtesy of National Peanut Festival

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from cosmetics and mechanics to livestock feed. Aside from a temporary suspension during World War II from 1942 to 1946, the festival has continuously grown, evolving from a modest civic gathering into a premier cultural institution.

The Modern Economic Engine of the Wiregrass

Today, the festival is far more than an agricultural fair; it is a vital pillar of the Southeast Alabama economy. According to agricultural data, approximately half of all peanuts grown in the United States are cultivated within a 100-mile radius of Dothan, anchoring a massive domestic supply chain.

The festival itself has expanded into a massive nonprofit enterprise managed by the National Peanut Festival Association, drawing more than 200,000 visitors annually. Financial disclosures reveal that the association generates millions in direct revenue, which is reinvested into local agricultural scholarships, youth programs, and community infrastructure.

The secondary economic impact on local hospitality, retail, and food service sectors is profound. In the weeks leading up to and during the event, out-of-town vendors, carnival personnel, and thousands of daily tourists flood regional hotels, restaurants, gas stations, and supply stores. This annual influx provides a powerful seasonal surge for small business owners across Houston County and the surrounding tri-state area.

Must-See Attractions and 2026 Highlights

For those planning to experience the festival, the 10-day schedule blends timeless fair traditions with premier live entertainment. Visitors looking for a breakdown of competitive events or ticketing options can consult the official National Peanut Festival Event Calendar.

- **The All In Credit Union Amphitheater Concerts:** The 2026 live music lineup brings prominent country music figures to the stage. Headliners for the 2026 series include Corey Kent on Sunday, Nov. 8; Lauren Alaina on Tuesday, Nov. 10; and Tyler Hubbard on Thursday, Nov. 12.
- **The National Peanut Festival Parade:** Rolling through downtown Dothan on Saturday, Nov. 14 at 10 a.m., this two-hour parade is a hallmark tradition. Featuring dozens of intricately designed community floats, marching bands, and local dignitaries, the parade represents a decades-old custom where generations of families line the streets.
- **Agricultural and Livestock Competitions:** At its core, the festival remains committed to its roots. The Grand Ag complex hosts a series of intensive livestock shows featuring youth and adult exhibitors presenting cattle, swine, goats, and poultry. Meanwhile, the premium exhibit halls host intense community competitions for the biggest peanut, artistic displays, sewing, and culinary arts.
- **The Midway and Grand Finale Demolition Derbies:** For thrill-seekers, the extensive midway provides dozens of amusement rides and games. The final weekend introduces adrenaline-fueled events to the open-air arena, including the high-octane Figure 8 Race on Friday, Nov. 13, followed by the traditional Demolition Derby on Saturday, Nov. 14.
- **Peanut Gastronomy:** No festival visit is complete without sampling the harvest itself. Food vendors across the fairgrounds serve peanuts prepared in every traditional Southern style imaginable – from massive kettles of salty boiled peanuts to freshly roasted, fried, and baked peanut confections.

Image courtesy of National Peanut Festival