

# Bald Knob Strawberries

Can you recall the satisfying flavor of the last really sweet strawberry you had with ice cream or a slice of shortcake? If strawberries are special in your memory, then you have something in common with Bald Knob, Arkansas, “The Strawberry Capital of the World!”

These small, red drops of heaven first made their appearance in northeastern Arkansas in the late 1800s. The strawberry business was a huge boost to the White County economy which had traditionally relied on cotton, mills and a box factory. By 1910 the first strawberry association was organized in Bald Knob, one of the many small towns in White County that had the ideal sandy soil for raising strawberries. By 1916 the McRae Progress newspaper estimated the town would produce enough strawberries to fill almost one hundred boxcars for distribution across the country by the end of the season.

In the 1950’s the sale of strawberries reached its peak in Bald Knob and the surrounding areas. The growers of Bald Knob alone sold \$3.5 million dollars worth of strawberries in a single year from their huge three-quarter mile shed located parallel to the Missouri Pacific Railroad. The entire community took part in the growing, picking, preparing and selling of the sweet red berries. Schools ended their spring semester by the first week in May in order for the children to take part in the picking process. Many of the residents have fond memories of picking berries for a nickel a quart.

In the 1960s strawberry sales sharply declined as other towns across the country started to grow strawberries and the transportation of this sweet crop became easier with the building of the interstate highway system. Some areas of the country can harvest strawberries earlier in the spring, but none compare with the sweetness of local Arkansas berries. Rice has now overtaken strawberries as the leading crop in White County, but there are still many farms that not only produce strawberries for sale to local grocers, they also offer visitors the opportunity to pick their own juicy berries right off the plants.

Today the reputation of the Arkansas strawberry remains strong with the help of the Annual Homefest. The three-day festival includes a strawberry-eating contest, a strawberry cake auction, the Miss Strawberry Beauty Pageant, the Mr. Bald Knob contest, a craft show, pet show, pancake breakfast, silent auction, car show, carnival and of course a Grand Parade with live entertainment. In recognition of the town’s strawberry history, the festival is held on the first weekend of May.

So the next time you are passing through northeast Arkansas, stop in to see Bald Knob’s historic strawberry sheds and train depot, now restored to house model trains, and pick up a pint of the most delicious strawberries you’ll ever taste!

## Source(s):

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