



## **Mt. Olive Pickle ending its 60-year N.C. State Fair run**

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All good things must come to an end, even a flavorful 50-cent Mt. Olive pickle at the N.C. State Fair.

After more than 60 years, Mt. Olive Pickle is discontinuing its participation at the North Carolina State Fair in Raleigh. The company will not operate its booth this year.

“This decision comes with great regret, as our presence at the State Fair has been a tradition for our employees and for fairgoers for a long, long time,” said Lynn Williams, public relations manager for the company.

Mt. Olive did not operate its booth in 2016 because of the timing of Hurricane Matthew – it roared through Eastern North Carolina just days before move-in at the State Fair in early October. While the company made it through the storm relatively unscathed, the broader region suffered historic flooding, damaged roads and loss of power. The company opted to focus on getting its operations back up and running in the days that followed.

This year’s decision also centers on the operational needs of the company.

“We have been fortunate in that our sales have grown significantly over time, and that means our production demands have increased,” Ms. Williams said. “In recent years we have been challenged by the logistics of pulling daily crews of employees and supervisors away from the plant to work at the State Fair for 11 days straight.”

When the company started its State Fair run back in the 1950s and for years after, its “green season” – when fresh cucumber intake is at its peak – was focused on just the North Carolina cucumber crop. Green season at that time lasted six weeks, beginning in late May and closing out in early July.

“By October things were quieter and we could turn our attention to the State Fair,” Ms. Williams said.

The company’s growth in more recent years has meant it procures fresh cucumbers from other parts of the country, extending green season well into October. Green season, now six months in length, generally requires longer shifts and production on many Saturdays.

“In the last few years production has run at least one Saturday during the fair, and it’s always a challenge to make sure we don’t pull too many folks from the same departments on any given day,” Ms. Williams said. “This year our production demands are greater than they’ve ever been, and we decided it was time to end our State Fair run.”

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For years, fair goers visited the booth to buy a pickle for 50 cents - their choice of Dill, Kosher Dill, Sweet, Sour or Hot n Spicy. They could also pick up a few scratch n sniff pickle stickers and try their hand at the guessing game to determine how many pickles were in the 2.5 gallon jar. The closest guesser each day received a gift pack assortment of pickles from the company after the fair was over.

“The biggest appeal for the booth was always the interaction between our employees and fair goers,” Ms. Williams said. “Our employees loved the opportunity to engage with the people who enjoyed our products. And fair goers enjoyed talking with the folks who actually made their favorite pickles.

“We appreciate the generations of fair goers who have stopped by the booth over the years, and especially those who made a visit to the pickle booth a part of their annual State Fair tradition. We are really going to miss being there, and miss seeing all the people.”

Mt. Olive Pickle was founded in 1926 by a group of local business people as a way to address bumper crops of cucumbers that were going to waste in the fields, lacking demand. Business leaders reasoned a new market for farmers would benefit the whole town.

Today the privately-held company manufactures the best-selling brand of pickles, peppers and relishes in the US, producing over 160 million jars annually at its facilities in Mount Olive. It employs 600 year-round and another 350 temporary workers during its green season.

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