

Produce Going Fast at the Zucchini 500!

Imagination, creativity, local foods and loads of fun describe the recent Zucchini 500 at the North Carolina Research Campus Farmers Market in Kannapolis.

N.C. State University and North Carolina Cooperative Extension planned this fun event to help raise awareness of the Research Campus farmers market and to encourage people to support their local farmers. The event also introduced children to new fruits and vegetables. This was one time parents encouraged their children to play with their food!

Bobby Waltrip, of the legendary Waltrip racing family, added lots of excitement as he called the race. Tara Vogelien with N.C. State University helped Waltrip keep the event moving.

Fifty zucchini cars, outfitted to compete in four categories, packed the judges tables prior to the race. One category was School Spirit theme, and the Wolfpack fans didn't disappoint!

Another category was the NASCAR theme, with many participants decorating cars to look like the cars of their favorite NASCAR drivers. Boogity! Boogity! Boogity!

To tie in with the health and nutrition focus of the research campus, organizers included a Most Nutritious theme and encouraged children to add lots of fruits and vegetables to their cars.

A prize was given for the overall most creative in both the 9 and under and 10 and up age groups.

The judges created a most creative scientific category to recognize one car.

The last category was fastest, which was awarded to the person who owned the zucchini car that made it to the bottom of the track first! Between heats, some cars required a pit stop for wheel repair and maintenance. Others encountered equipment failure shortly after the green flag dropped. Though many zucchini cars left the track with dents and loose parts, the vegetable crashes were all part of the race day fun. But in the end, one car from each age group was declared the speed machine.

Every child who participated received a certificate, a coupon for a free ice cream sundae from Bruster's Real Ice Cream and a fruit-themed stuffed animal from the Dole Food Company. Winners of the prize categories received Summer Shootout Series tickets from Lowe's Motor Speedway. Other prizes included a free 3-month family membership to the Cannon Memorial YMCA for one lucky family and an ice cream cake from Bruster's.

The event was promoted through local newspaper and television media with the overarching theme of eating locally and having fun!