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Across the Agricultural Reserve, Montgomery County's farmers are preparing for the annual Farm Tour and Harvest Sale, which will be celebrated on July 25th and 26th. This year's event is one of the biggest, and most diverse, in the tour's 26-year history.

"We have 19 farms participating in this year's tour, which is exciting for us," said County Executive Isiah Leggett. "The farm tour is a great way for residents to meet growers, contribute to the local economy, protect the environment and support a secure food system. The eat-local movement is alive and well in Montgomery County."

Montgomery County started the Farm Tour & Harvest Sale 26 years ago to help consumers get to know their farmers. The event coincides with the state's annual Buy Local Challenge, which takes place the last full week of July. The Buy Local Challenge was conceived and launched in 2007 by the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC) to highlight the economic and environmental benefits of eating locally grown food.

"The farm tour is a unique opportunity for people to experience the Agricultural Reserve as a center of commerce that provides us with healthful food and fantastic educational activities," said Sally Sternbach, Montgomery County's acting director of economic development.

"Some of these farms are normally closed to the public, but our farmers like to open up each July for the tour. People in our region are very curious about working farms and they ask great questions," said Jeremy Criss, manager of the agricultural services division for Montgomery County.

While many farm tour participants have been in business for multiple generations, (like Lewis Orchards open since 1888!), this year's Farm Tour and Harvest Sale will also feature some newer farms, like Soleado, the only lavender farm in the County, and Madison Fields, a 400+ acre enterprise that uses equine therapy and farming to help children and adults with autism and other special needs.

As always, this year's farm tour will feature tractor rides, pony rides, pick your own produce, music, picnic areas and food booths.

The Farm Tour and Harvest Sale will take place rain or shine on Saturday July 25th and Sunday, July 26th. Please check the brochure listing for the time that each farm will open and close.

To learn more about the participating farms and plan your weekend accordingly, visit <http://www.choosemontgomerymd.com/features/montgomery-county-farm-tour>.

For updates on the event, be sure to "like" Montgomery County Farm Tour and Harvest Sale on Facebook, and follow @MCDED and #MoCoFarms on Twitter. You can also call (310) 590-2823.