

Then and Now—A History of the Winter Strawberry Capital of the World

Florida Strawberries — *a taste of summer all winter long!*

Fresh farm-to-market strawberries in February? Check it out. Though it's cold and dreary in many parts of the country, February is fabulous in Florida where strawberry growers are harvesting their winter crop and shipping hand-picked fruit to key markets. So, what's the back story that led to Plant City and neighboring Dover, Florida in Hillsborough County to be recognized as the Winter Strawberry Capital of the World?

Over 100 years ago, Henry Plant settled the area where most of Florida's winter strawberries are grown. Mr. Plant was a visionary and a very good businessman. He realized that if a railroad was constructed to link Plant City to Tampa, only about 23 miles away, the local farmers could develop a thriving market for their freshly harvested winter strawberry crop. So, what did he do? He built one! The town was named Plant City in commemoration of Henry Plant and his railroad, which significantly boosted commerce in the primarily agricultural community by merging it with the South Florida Railroad.

Plant City became incorporated in 1885 by a 49 to 1 vote. It had a population of approximately 350 people, thirteen stores, several hotels, a frame schoolhouse and two churches. Today, Plant City-Dover has a combined population of approximately 35,000. Originally, Plant City was a large cotton center, but after changing its primary crop to strawberries it gained recognition as the Winter Strawberry Capital of the World!

In 1980, a few strawberry growers began meeting in their homes to discuss the best way to organize a group that would represent the interests of the Florida strawberry industry. On February 11, 1982, the Florida Strawberry Growers Association (FSGA) www.FlaStrawberry.com was born and acknowledged by the state as a nonprofit organization representing the Florida strawberry industry in the areas of research, promotion and member/community service. In the years since then, the growers have met that mission and succeeded in forming a voluntary organization that represents over 8,000 acres of berries today. It was strawberries that made residents of the communities of Plant City and Dover, Florida a family. That bond and community spirit continues to this day.

It's in this area of the country where some of the sweetest, reddest and juiciest strawberries are grown. The fact of the matter is, Florida is the dominate U.S. supplier of fresh winter strawberries at a time when many parts of the country are blanketed with snow. Yes, it's true — Florida strawberries provide a taste of summer all winter long!

florida strawberries



Florida Strawberries — a taste of summer all winter long!