

Spotlight on 2011 South Carolina Watermelon Queen Holly Whatley

Summer is in full swing and with hot temperatures and trips to the beach, lake, or river, now is the perfect time for local watermelons as a tasty, cool treat. And what could possibly be better on any summer afternoon than a sweet, juicy South Carolina watermelon? Watermelons are at their peak and are a ripe and healthy snack versatile enough for all ages.

The official face and spokesperson for South Carolina's watermelon industry is the South Carolina Watermelon Queen. Chosen each January at the annual Watermelon Growers Association meetings in Columbia, the queen spends the next year traveling promoting the industry. As this year's South Carolina Watermelon queen, Holly Whatley has been busy promoting local watermelons at events around the state. The Traveler's Rest native has a constant stream of summer events planned with in-store promotions, television appearances, parades and festivals to attend. She even stopped in Charleston to throw out the first pitch at the River Dogs Game on June 24, and greeted fans post-game with free samples of watermelon, fresh from local growers.



Holly Whatley
2011 SC Watermelon Queen

Whatley's reign as Watermelon Queen began in January 2011. Since being crowned, she has attended queen training in Miami, Fla., demonstrated watermelon recipes, participated in promotions, and learned more about watermelons and agriculture overall.

Whatley, a recent graduate of Presbyterian College, where she played basketball, did not grow up with a farming background. Prior to her experiences, she was unfamiliar with the origin of her produce.

She said during the training in Miami visiting a south Florida watermelon farm, her eyes were opened not only to how vital agriculture is, but also to the long hours that go into producing a crop. This experience, along with others over the past six months, has created a greater appreciation for farming and agriculture for her.

"It's a livelihood based on faith," Whatley said of farming.

South Carolina grows both seeded and seedless watermelons in eight different counties equaling 10,000 acres grown statewide. The watermelons from SC are sold locally and go as far as Canada, according to Brad Boozer with the SC Watermelon Growers Association.

As South Carolina Watermelon Queen, Whatley stays busy promoting locally grown watermelons throughout the state. For the rest of the summer, Whatley will be traveling throughout the state and nationwide. She will travel to Washington, D.C. later this summer, with some local growers, to meet with members of South Carolina's Congressional Delegation.

Whatley said she feels extremely honored to be queen, and will continue representing South Carolina through early 2012. In February, she will compete for the national title in Amelia Island, Fla.

It's not all watermelons for Whatley, as a talented singer/songwriter, she just released her first album and is working with some Nashville heavyweights to take her singing career to the next level. Whatley said

she'd love to use her business background and love of baking to attend the Art Institute of Charleston and then run her own pastry café one day. But for right now she can be found crisscrossing the state wearing her sash and crown promoting an iconic summertime favorite.

For more information about South Carolina's watermelon industry or refreshing recipes and the nutritional benefits of watermelon, visit <http://www.scwatermelons.com>.