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Kurt Ellison

Sue King, left, Home Arts Department head, and volunteer Gerry Ghiorzi sort out some fair entries.

County Fair 'crisis': No apples

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If local apple pickings are a bit tart to the taste, outsiders could get called on for pie detail, Santa Cruz County Fair officials anticipate.

As the judges munch away in the apple-pie baking contest taking place Tuesday (opening day), they'll be paying attention to appearance, flavor and texture.

They may not be as concerned about the origins of the ingredients, even though guidelines specify only Pajaro Valley apples are to be used. Officials wouldn't be surprised if this rule is observed in the breach by

many this year because local apples are late in maturing.

"It's up to the pie baker to take a chance — it's like going to Reno," said Ed Silva, chairman of the event held on the Paddy Smith Park stage.

But enough varieties, such as Gravensteins and Kings, are available at outlets such as Silva's Apple Barn and the Gizdich Ranch. After tomorrow, when Golden and Red Delicious apples treated with the growth regulator ethrel are released, stores will stock local apples.

And then, "a lot of people have a tree or two," in their yard, Silva said.

"There's apples out there," agreed fair manager John Kegebein.

Jess Brown, manager of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, sponsor of the pie event for 14 years, said he has heard growers say cool weather is the culprit for lack of flavor in local apples.

If so, Brown is prepared for "bland-tasting pies."

The contest normally draws between 40 and 60 entries and is among the first events of the six-day fair beginning Tuesday.

In other fair developments, the fair board yesterday afternoon approved a new beer poli-

cy. Those fairgoers planning to buy beer this year must purchase tokens and wear a wristband testifying that the bearer is of drinking age.

Other fair plans appear to be in order. From the entrance, 500 blooming marigolds spell out "50th anniversary" in golden letters.

Inside, more than 14,000 plants in their unfurled splendor line walkways and adorn other pedestrian routes through the 30-acre grounds.

The landscaping and display accent is on continuity in exhibits reflecting the anniversary

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time feature.

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theme.

This year the number of entries appears to be up from the 7,900 judged last year. Men in particular are making a strong showing in home arts, especially cooking entries, Kegebein said.

Commercial exhibitors, too, will sport a new look, with canopies replacing the open-air, flea-market-like booths of the past.

"We want this to look like a county fair," Kegebein said.

Outside the former 4-H building are the garden displays of eight local organizations, a first-

A couple of Native American groups still plan to set up their horticultural exhibit, which will double as a backdrop for their dancing demonstrations.

The building was converted this season to an International Pavilion, a new department of the fair dedicated to celebrating the ethnic diversity of the Pajaro Valley. Hispanics, Chinese and Italians are among the groups represented.

And the vantage point to see it all is a seat on the new ferris wheel being set up in the quad between the buildings.

"You can get a complete view of the fair from there," Kegebein said.