

Potassium-Rich Foods Deter Muscle Cramps

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Spring is in full swing and park paths are full of joggers and walkers shedding that winter weight. While the workout can be refreshing, cramping muscles late in the night aren't nearly as appreciated.

As some might have been told by their old track coaches, a banana a day keeps the cramping away — or something like that. Bananas are a good source of potassium, and too low a level of this mineral may be one cause of muscle cramping.

Potassium, an essential nutrient in the diet, is an electrolyte — an ionized salt in the body that can become electrically charged.

Potassium and sodium work together across cell membranes to regulate muscle contractions,

among other critical body functions. If there's too little potassium, a condition called hypokalemia can result.

Symptoms include fatigue, muscle weakness and cramping, intestinal complications, and in a worst-case scenario, muscular paralysis.


The recommended daily amount of potassium is 2,000

milligrams for anyone 10 years or older, but some health authorities recommend up to 3,500 milligrams a day to help reduce high blood pressure.

Foods higher in potassium include a medium baked potato with skin (721 mg), one-half cup dried prunes (633 mg), one-half cup raisins (598 mg) and six fluid ounces of prune juice (530 mg).

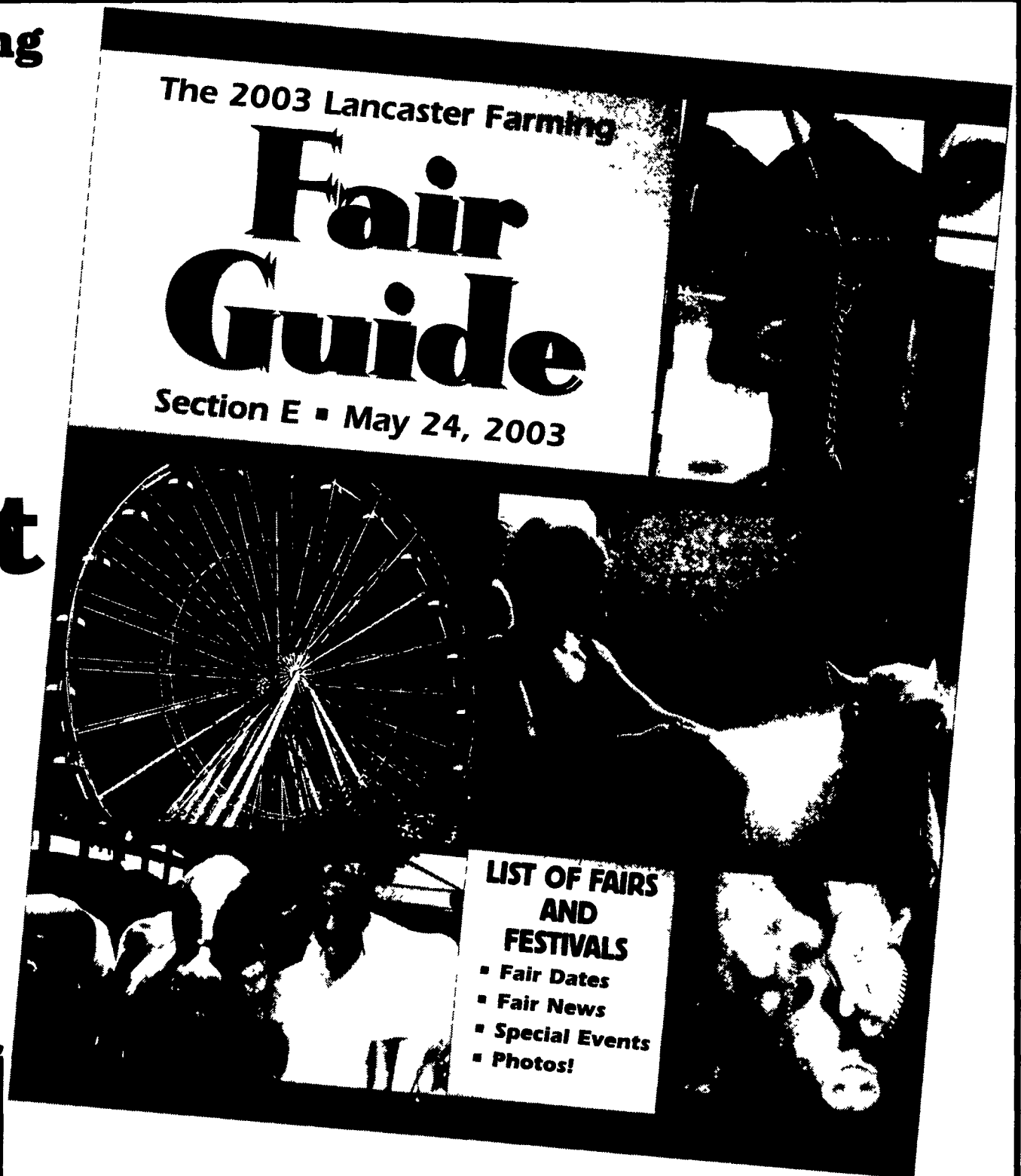
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