

Make Plans To Visit The Fair

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I grew up going to county fairs. My entire family was in 4-H, so being the youngest of five children, we were at the fair every year. I have wonderful memories of being at the fair. The sights, the sounds, the smells, even the tastes are buried deep in my memory and soul. The sounds of the animals in the barns, wandering through the carnival with my older siblings, and the taste of that sloppy joe at the 4-H Food Stand are still crystal clear all these decades later. I'm still convinced that the secret ingredient in those sloppy joes was mustard! There's something special about the county fair.

Since those early days I've managed to visit a lot of county fairs across the country. Some I've just dropped in on to visit, some I've had the privilege to judge. Every county fair is different. County fairs are a reflection of both the agriculture of that region and a reflection of the people that live there. Some fairs are big, some are quite small. Some county fairs are very competitive while other fairs focus more on the accomplishments of the 4-H members and their exhibits. A county fair really develops its own personality over the years.

But as different as each county fair is, there is a constant thread that runs through each and every fair I've ever visited. That constant thread is what I'd call community. For however long a county fair runs, it becomes its own little community. You eat meals together at the food stands. You watch the events together. The only time you may do something with those people, through the entire year, is at the fair. You applaud the champions and you encourage those who needed to work a little bit more on their project.

County fairgrounds are special places. While different events and activities may take place at them during the year, for those few days of "the fair" they take on a different feel. I was at our fairgrounds a few days ago. It was quiet and calm. And now, for the next few days it comes to life as that special community where we get to share in the accomplishments of the 4-Hers.

I know a lot of folks think a county fair just isn't a county fair if there isn't a carnival. I don't agree. You can go to carnivals and midways all over the country that aren't part of a fair, and it just isn't the same. What makes a county fair special is the people that are there. It's the 4-H youth, the leaders, the parents and all the volunteers that make it happen. It's the grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends that come out to support and encourage this year's 4-Hers and maybe even reminisce a little of 4-Hers, friends and fairs gone by.

The Geary County Free Fair is cranking up. If you hurry you can still catch the rodeo Saturday evening. Many non livestock projects will start coming in on Monday night, including the ever popular foods judging (and the chance to buy some of the food projects!) Then Tuesday morning the fair hits full speed as the livestock arrive and the rest of the projects come in to be displayed and judged. But if you want to experience the fair, you have to hurry, because by Thursday night it's all over and calm and quiet returns to the fairgrounds.

By some measures, we have a small fair. But you'll get a feel for the community while at the fair and you'll notice that the focus is really on the 4-Hers. These young men and women truly are tomorrow's leaders. So please take some time to come out to the fair. Take some time to eat some ice cream, make some new friends and renew old friendships.