

It's Time For The County Fair

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

If you ask 25 people to give you a description of a county fair, you will probably get 25 different answers. Sort of like the old story of the six blind men describing the elephant. Everyone's idea of "the fair" is different based, quite often, on their experiences as a kid. This year the Geary County Free Fair get's started the evening of July 20th and runs through the evening of July 23rd.

I grew up in York County, Nebraska. York County had one of the larger county fairs in the state. While I was a very active 4-Her, I still have memories of our county fair that center on the carnival, the demolition derby, the grandstand shows, the commercial exhibits and of course, the 4-H food stand! Best sloppy joes ever! To be right honest, I think most people associate county fairs with carnivals, food and shows. I went back to the fair a couple of years ago. Some things had changed, but a lot of it was just as I remembered.

The Geary County Free Fair is different than the fair that I grew up with, and I like it better! If you've never been to the Geary County Free Fair, don't expect a carnival. There honestly isn't any room for it and as close in time as the fair is to Sundown Salute, it just doesn't seem to make sense anyway. (While many folks enjoy the carnival, scheduling one for a county fair can be a real challenge and those fairs that have carnivals often are stuck having their fair when the carnival can be there!) We also don't have a demolition derby or grandstand shows, but we do have a few commercial exhibits.

We have some open class categories open to anyone in Geary County, Ft. Riley or surrounding counties. It may be too late to enter this year, but feel free to start making plans for next year. Open class categories include: food preparation, food preservation, textiles, arts & crafts, photography, floriculture, horticulture, and agriculture.

The focus of the Free Fair is the 4-Hers and their projects. While exhibiting at the county fair isn't the ONLY focus for 4-H projects, exhibiting at the fair is a highlight for many 4-H members. I can't cover everything in this column but here are some highlights. The horse show is Monday night. Most exhibits except livestock and perishable items like floriculture and horticulture are checked in by Monday evening. A lot of judging takes place on Tuesday and the livestock have to be in place by late Tuesday morning. The beef show is Tuesday evening, the sheep and swine show is Wednesday evening. Thursday evening is the 4-H barbecue and watermelon feed followed by the project and livestock auction. Then, just that fast, it's over.

The fair only lasts four days and a short four days at that. Just like the past 70 or 80 years, people gather at the fair to catch up with friends, meet new friends, have a few laughs and see what projects the 4-Hers have brought this year. There's a lot of tradition at the fair. Cooking and sewing, cattle, hogs and sheep have been exhibited at fairs since the first fair was probably held. After all, it just isn't a fair without livestock noises and smells!

But the fair is also things like photography or space tech (what we used to call rocketry). Ultimately, the fair is less about the actual project and all about what the 4-Her learns in the process. They learn how to plan. They learn the technical skills to accomplish whatever project they are in. They learn responsibility, especially when they have that animal to take care of every day through the summer. They also learn about paperwork as they complete their record books after the fair. So take an evening or two this week, come on out to the fair (1025 S Spring Valley Rd) and enjoy a little bit of tradition!