

## **It's County Fair Time!**

### **AGRI-VIEWS**

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

This coming week is the annual Geary County Free Fair. The rodeo wraps up Saturday night and the fair gears up Monday evening and goes through Thursday evening. After it's all over it's easy to say that it is a very fast four days, but it culminates months of planning and preparation by 4-Hers, the Free Fair Board and the Geary County Extension Office.

Planning for one year's fair really starts the week of the previous year's fair. As everyone goes through fair week, we think of better or different ways to do something so we write ourselves little reminders. After the fair is over everything gets moved back to the Extension Office. Inventory is counted and put away and then we relax for about two days before we start all over again!

Monday afternoon, July 18<sup>th</sup>, is foods judging. In the evening will be the 4-H horse show at the horse arena and the pedal pull in the livestock barn show ring. While quite a few exhibits come in on Monday night, Tuesday is when it gets super busy! All livestock check in on Tuesday morning. The rest of the exhibits inside the building, mainly garden crops, field crops and flowers are checked in and judging commences on most of the items. Late Tuesday afternoon is dairy and goat judging and Tuesday evening is the bucket calf and beef show.

Wednesday morning we have various other 4-H project categories that are judged. The special baking contest is Wednesday afternoon with the sheep and swine shows Wednesday evening. Thursday we get ready for the big finale with the 4-H barbecue and watermelon feed starting at 4:30 and the project/livestock auction at 7. After the auction is over, the fair wraps up, exhibits are released, and the tear down begins. Every evening from 6 to 8 we will have the ever popular ice cream social. That certainly isn't everything, but it hits some of the high points of a quick paced four days!

Someone asked me recently how many years the fair has been going on. To be right honest, I don't know. The Extension Office opened July 1, 1925 and 4-H programs started that fall. In the early years it wasn't even called a fair, it was called the Geary County 4-H Show. They wanted to keep the emphasis on 4-H, not open class or a carnival and the many other things that many people traditionally think of with a county fair. An emphasis, by the way, that still continues today. It is very likely that the first Geary County 4-H Show was in September 1926, but that's truly a question that I will need to do some more research to answer!

The early shows/fairs were often in September, truly the end of the 4-H year. But even by the mid 1940's they had moved to late August, possibly in an attempt to get the event completed before school started. By the early 1980's the date was up to the second week of August and today we're well into July. All these moves are prompted by earlier starting schools. Interestingly enough, in many of the southern states, the county fair season doesn't start until after Labor Day, possibly to avoid the summer heat.

While there have been many changes in the fair over the years, it still is a fun time when friends and neighbors come together. They watch the 4-Hers show the work in their projects. They visit, they catch up, they renew old friendships and they make new friendships. I encourage you to come out to the fair next week, whether it's for the 1<sup>st</sup> time or the 75<sup>th</sup> time, there's always things to see and fun to be had!