

Enjoy a Tradition, Come to the Fair!

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Next week, July 24 - 27 is the Geary County Free Fair. The schedule is pretty much like it has been in recent years. Monday evening is the horse show and youth pedal tractor pull. Most of the indoor exhibits come in during the afternoon and early evening. Tuesday is when the livestock are checked in and a lot of the judging of indoor projects happens. Tuesday afternoon - evening are the goat and beef shows, Wednesday afternoon is the cat show and in the late afternoon - evening the sheep and swine shows. Thursday evening we have the annual 4-H barbecue and watermelon feed followed by the 4-H Fair Auction.

I was out at the fairgrounds the other morning. It was quiet. I was working in the barns getting some preparations done so I was out of the way with my chores before everyone else started their preparation over the weekend. It was quiet. I sat down on a fence and just looked around. It was the proverbial calm before the storm. Or perhaps what it looks like just before the circus used to come to town. Like every year before this I know what a difference a couple of days would make.

In a bygone era, the county fair was at the end of the summer sometimes even after school would start. A lot of the rural community may not have seen much of each other for most of the summer. The county fair was the time for everyone to come together, to show off the summer's production, to catch up on the news of the county and to just relax for a few days. Later on, when cars became more common, a lot of this socialization occurred on Saturday nights when everyone came to town. But in so many ways, the fair is still that gathering point for a certain segment of society.

Every fair in every county in every state, and there are county fairs all across this country, is a little bit different. Some fairs are huge and run for several weeks with massive entertainment and special events. Many county fairs in California are bigger and longer than our Kansas State Fair. I grew up with a county fair in Nebraska that had a large carnival, a demo derby, a tractor pull and a large building full of commercial exhibits. I went back to it a few years ago and that commercial exhibit building wasn't nearly as big as I remember it used to be!

Since living here in Kansas I've gotten to attend over 25 different county fairs. Some are a lot like ours, some are a little bigger, but each and every one has a different feel to it. What I've always appreciated about the Geary County Free Fair is that the focus is on the 4-Hers and their 4-H projects. These 4-H members are amazing young men and women. They are spending time learning subject matter, whether that be cooking, woodworking, photography or how to raise livestock. But deep down inside of that "fun" stuff, there's serious stuff. There's learning how to plan and how to execute that plan. There is problem solving and sometimes trial and error, or what I like to refer to as the scientific process. They start 4-H learning from older 4-Hers and club leaders and by the end, they have become the teachers helping those younger 4-Hers in their club and from other clubs in the county.

The one thing that doesn't seem to change from fair to fair, is the sense of community. Everyone comes together for the same purpose: to acknowledge the hard work and the lessons learned as the 4-Hers show off another year of 4-H project work. So come on out to the fairgrounds next week and join me in acknowledging and appreciating the hard work of those outstanding young women and men.