



.....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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I am finally sitting in air-conditioned comfort in my easy chair and reflecting on the past couple of weeks. After months of planning, tons of paperwork and organization, a big part of the summer experience is over. It is hard to believe that our County Fair is over and we will soon be getting ready for the Nebraska State Fair and Ak-Sar-Ben! In that rumination, it came to me how gratifying it was to see so many people pull together to make their respective county fairs happen. It is what makes the rural areas what they are. It is indeed a piece of Americana and a validation of the Midwest work ethic. In all of the fairs that I have been involved with over the years, this year's edition is memorable. Not because of the numbers of exhibits or exhibitors, not necessarily because of the quality of the exhibits, but mostly because of the intangibles.

When you spend so much time planning, organizing or even choreographing something like a county fair, it is the little things that speak the loudest. It is how smoothly it runs, the work of the judges and ring stewards. It is how the youth and adults interact and most importantly the feel of the fair! I have to tell you that this fair just plain felt good. There wasn't the drama that sometimes persists, or the things that just seem to go wrong. It was good seeing people working together, helping each other and the fun that adults and youth were having. There was the pleasant feel of family and community that should come with events like this! It doesn't matter what county you are in or what time of summer it is, county fairs are special!

I know I am not alone appreciating all those that come together to pull off what has become the largest social event of rural America. If you didn't get a chance to attend your local fair, let me paint a little picture for you. The old adage says "If you can't smell the livestock, you are not at an authentic county fair." Anyone that walked through the sheep, swine and beef barn knows that aroma and knows it is what makes the fair tick. There was the incessant sound of always hungry beef, sheep, goats, hogs and the cackling of nervous hens, roosters, ducks and geese. It is so nice to see those bright, smiling and sunburned faces of those young kids in their 4-H and FFA T-shirts, excited for the day and for another adventure at the Fair.

This really is a slice of America that persists here amid the uncertainty of weather during the typical Nebraska summer. "Rockwellian" it may be, but it's something we dare not let go of because it's so real. It becomes a big family reunion, with a sense of camaraderie among people who perhaps haven't seen one another all year. And beneath it all, there lurks the spirit of competition, whether it's for the best sewn dress, best dressed goat, or the Grand Champion Market Steer. You would have seen young people, leaders, parents and even grandparents all helping the exhibitors as they washed, blew out, clipped, combed, and applied various dressing and prepare their respective animal to parade - with hopeful others- in front of the judge who determines the ribbon placing and perhaps their chance at a championship run.

You would have seen appreciative audiences "oohing and ahing" at the show animals or the laughter as the show pigs race across the show arena - free from their confining pens. You would have had seen giggling kids running through the grounds and petting the plethora of animals that just love the attention. One of my favorite fair events is the Rainbow Classic with our future "showmen" interacting with the judge to the pride of parents- especially when they ask "When can I show animals like the big kids?" which always brings a smile to my face. You would have seen future 4-Hers being rolled around in strollers by mothers and fathers who talk about their days at the fair and the memories that it brings back.

You would have had seen giggling kids running through the grounds and petting the plethora of animals that just love the attention or itching for the annual water fight. You would have seen future 4-Hers being rolled around in strollers by mothers and fathers who talk about their days at the fair and the memories that it brings back. It's a mixture of old and the new! 4-H and FFA exhibitor t-shirts, cowboy hats, seed corn caps, and sunburned faces. It is a site that only people who frequent livestock shows and fairs understand. It's not all livestock, of course. There was the open class entries, static exhibits of photographs, clothing, foods, and all kinds of things in the buildings outside of the livestock area. The music by the band that blasted from the open air auditorium as the sun went down. You would have seen people sitting in the now-empty show arena, just relaxing and talking over the day or taking protection from a fast moving storm. Those things are what make the fair a special thing to people in rural America. That is what it is all about. That is what makes it real. This is rural America. But it is more than that. I encourage everyone to read <http://forfarmandranchwomen.com/2015/07/21/4-h-is-not-about-fair/>

I want to take the opportunity to congratulate all of our exhibitors, for not only their accomplishments, but also for their demeanor and conduct. It is nice to hear the admiration from the judges about our kids! I want to personally thank everyone who is involved with the local county fair. Not just those at Webster County, but all the county fairs across the country. There are so many volunteers all across our state who work hard to keep this tradition alive and well. Thank those folks and the local ag society, Extension staff or fair board for all they do. Don't forget the 4-H and FFA leaders who help guide our youth. I for one am proud to be a part of that tradition and am determined to help insure that the Rockwell picture continues. I cannot even think of summer without the County Fair! I still approach the fair as the wide-eyed kid that saw the championship animals and that big Ferris-wheel at the Franklin County Fair so many years ago! It is so good to see people pull together to prepare, put on and clean up after another great county fair. That is what it is all about. The county fair is community. It is as the motto of the Webster County Fair contends: "Family owned, farm raised and county proud!"

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email to: dlienemann2@unl.edu or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>