



## .....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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It is Nebraska State Fair time! Anyone that knows me well can tell you that this is one of my favorite times of the year. I love everything about Nebraska's big celebration of agriculture, our heritage and traditions. Involvement in the Nebraska State Fair has been a ritual for me for many years. I remember going to Lincoln for my very first State Fair. I believe it was around 1955 and I had the opportunity to go with my dad and grandfather. They were going there to look at farm machinery and livestock, but I think in many ways it was social for them too, much like it is for me. Their catching up with relatives or other fellow farmers and stockmen gave me plenty of time to crawl on and marvel at these shiny new wonders or to walk through the barns to see the best livestock in our state and maybe the world! I don't think I have missed a year ever since, either as a wide eyed farm kid marveling at the carnival rides or all the sights and sounds and "oh – so many people" or in later years as a 4-H and FFA exhibitor, participating in the Nebraska State 4-H Livestock Judging Contest, then as a college student, and finally my adult years as an FFA Advisor and Extension Educator. And no I never get tired of it!

I know that it is hard for my family and probably a lot of other people to understand just what I see in spending my days and evenings at a "hot, dirty and boring" event like livestock shows, county fairs and especially the Nebraska State Fair. I have written in former columns about what I like about these venues, the values I see for our youth and the comradeship that comes with sharing that same feeling with other people just like me. The nice thing is that about six years ago it was moved to a fabulous location with wonderful buildings and a brand new dedication to agriculture! There has been new life breathed into the State Fair and it feels good. Nebraska, after all, is about agriculture and one out of three people in Nebraska are employed in an agriculturally based career in agriculture. It is what rural American and especially rural Nebraska is all about. It is fun to see the amazement on people's faces when they first walk into the Livestock Exhibit Hall and Show Arena. I believe it is even more enhanced with the Nebraska Building which has the theme "Raising Nebraska", which features of course – Nebraska Agriculture and does make you go WOW! Just to the south end of the building is the Nebraska Games and Park exhibit which also is outstanding and very much worth seeing. These are just a few of many!

It still gives me goose bumps to see a great lineup of cattle, hogs, sheep (or you name it) strutting their stuff in the arena soil, or the bevy of activities and efforts of parents and youth getting their animals ready for show. It is hard to describe the smell, the excitement and the anticipation that seems to hang in the air. Among all the other things that the State Fair provides, this is the major attraction for me. It never gets old, only my body does! As a County Extension Educator, former ag teacher/FFA advisor and former cattle producer - who had students and even a daughter that loved to show cattle, I am fully aware of the time and effort of a large number of people that work together to make shows and exhibitions possible. This list of people includes the exhibitors, family members, breeders, veterinarians, 4-H club leaders, FFA advisors, award sponsors, show management, and other volunteers working behind the scenes. There are countless hours of time and significant dollars dedicated to the successful completion of a show. So why do we do it? What is significant about the fair?

Regardless of what some people may think, I was not around when the concept of holding livestock shows began. I can speculate that the goals of those involved were relatively simple. I am pretty certain that exhibitions or expositions, and eventually county fairs were started as a means to showcase local agricultural production, learn about new technologies, and let folks learn about what was considered the industry standard for crops or of a particular species of animal for that era. I would bet further that those county venues led to a group of people betting on their county stock and deciding that they needed a statewide exhibition or exposition to settle the bragging rights. I'm sure that some folks were motivated by making a little bit of profit off the event or perhaps a chance to show off and especially sell their pedigrees as well!

As an Extension Educator and/or Ag Teacher, I would be remiss not point out the direct benefits to 4-H and FFA youth that participate in livestock shows. Youth that participate in junior shows have the opportunity to learn many lessons that can better prepare them for adulthood. Project participation prepares youth who desire to become involved in production agriculture in the future a sound knowledge base to work from when developing their own herds. Besides learning about animal husbandry, 4-H and other youth programs can provide the opportunity to develop leadership, responsibility, teamwork, ethical decision-making skills, etc. through their participation in livestock shows. Our ag youth rock!!!

I do believe possibly the most important purpose for having venues like the Nebraska State Fair grows in significance with every passing day. Shows and exhibitions provide animal agriculture with a golden opportunity to better educate an uninformed public about what we produce and the methods we use to accomplish food production. The public's disconnect with production agriculture is growing in rural and urban settings alike. I believe it is the responsibility of every exhibitor, family, farm, or ranch that participates in a show to tell the public about our positive role in feeding the world. Outside of family functions or acquaintances at school or your job, when will you have a better opportunity to tell the story about how we raise our product? It is easier to tell the story at a show because you have the animal on hand to assist with "show and tell!" Yes – it really is as easy as that! The whole 10 days are full of wonderful things to see, eat and experience. I hope to see some of you at the open shows and especially at the 4-H and FFA livestock shows at the Nebraska State Fair!

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](mailto:dlienemann2@unl.edu) or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>