

Extension Notes

Personal Column for June 22, 2010

By Gary Hall, Iowa State University Regional Extension Education Director

The County Fair-- Teacher Extraordinaire

County Fair is a great teacher. I learned how to have a super water fight! That might be what we remember but there are many other lessons taught at the fairs.

So much can be learned by not only youth but by adults too. Behind-the-scenes personnel at the fair, usually volunteers, such as the superintendents and helpers that clean the buildings, record the entries, prepare the displays, and serve in the food stands get little glory for their efforts, but are a necessary, vital part of any successful fair. Their selfless acts on behalf of our youth not only provide them with a sense of worth but the youth become better citizens as they learn from the adults about how to provide tremendous community support.

Animal lovers often find empathy with an exhibitor that bravely controls a large steer or heifer when the critter really doesn't want to be in the show ring in the first place. That same exhibitor after being humiliated, stepped upon, and sometimes drug by an ungrateful project may fight back tears as they are congratulated by the judge for their efforts

“What real value is there in any of this?” The question comes from many who are unfamiliar with the ways of rural America. To realize the full impact of the County Fair you must experience it. Here are just some of the good things I have witnessed.

First of all, responsibility is a prime value that can be seen at the fair. Completing a project or working with animals and dealing with their needs is an excellent teacher of responsibility.

Cooperation with family members, club leaders and other members lead to a valuable attitude of self worth and esteem.

People skills, judging, supporting decisions with reasons, are lifetime, values that are learned through the county fair and 4-H.

Yes, I am a great fan of 4-H and the County Fair. The reasons for supporting them have become clear to me over the years. I have witnessed first-hand the genuine worth these learning tools play in young lives as well as in the lives of those whose youth has faded long ago.

So when you visit the County Fair think of all the work that went into the event, the projects and the events at the fair. Then take a minute to pause and congratulate the 4-H youth, the parents and everyone who contributes to the County Fair on a job well done.

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Contact: Gary Hall, 2023 S Federal Ave, Mason City, IA 50401, 641-425-3116,
garyhall@iastate.edu