

It's Fair Week!

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

It's Geary County Free Fair week. The fair get's started Monday afternoon and runs through Thursday evening with a ranch rodeo on Friday evening at the horse arena. For some people, the fair may not mean anything. To some it traditionally means a carnival and rides - that happens at Sundown Salute, not at the Geary County Free Fair. But for some people, the fair is the culmination of many months of hard work. A few short days of a close knit community of friends and family gathering to admire each other's work and see who did the best and who has some things that need improving.

In a different era, the fair was often at or very near the end of the summer. In a far less connected and mobile society, families, especially farm families, didn't see others around their region very often during the summer except at church. So when the end of summer rolled around and everyone gathered for the county fair it was a big reunion. Livestock was brought in to show and compete against each other. Samples of oats and wheat or perhaps fall harvested crops from the year before were brought in. Bragging rights were being sought! But it was friendly competition and long and enduring friendships developed through the years.

When youth programs, like 4-H, came along they extended the friendly competition aspect. But they also became a focal point of ongoing educational programs helping youth to learn so many vital lessons. Many people have always thought of 4-H as being a rural endeavor but it has always been more than that. Certainly traditional projects like livestock, crops, gardening, sewing and food preparation were mainstays and taught specific skills. But what has often been overlooked are the life skills that are quietly taught along the way. The importance of having a plan, dedication to daily chores (in the case of livestock care), keeping records and then completing the project on past the fair with a finished record book describing what was accomplished and what was learned.

Then there were the skills of learning to be better communicators both in the written and oral word. Giving speeches at club meetings or contests. Presenting demonstrations to help teach a skill or lesson. How to function in a business meeting, how to work together as a team, even how to learn and to teach. To this day much of 4-H is inter-generational with everyone helping teach and everyone learning. Those were the real lessons, the life lessons, that any of us who were in 4-H learned!

Of course, today we have so many more projects than people realize, leading the way in the STEM movement (science, technology, engineering and math) - something that 4-H was doing even before it became the "in thing" to do! But yes, there is still cooking and sewing, gardening and livestock at the fair. All you have to do is walk out to the livestock barns and you'll quickly have the sights, sounds and smells of the fair! I was a 4-Her as a youth and because of my choice of careers I'm still wholly involved with 4-H and Fairs. It's a crazy busy time for a county agent, but it's an amazing few days.

I have two things that I want you to do this week. Sometime, by Thursday night, come out to the fairgrounds on Spring Valley Road. Look at the exhibits inside and look at the livestock outside. Talk to friends and strangers and appreciate what the exhibitors have done. Secondly, please leave you bugs, your weeds and your sick plants at home. I'll be glad to take a look, after this week! See you at the fair!!