

Chairman Luick and Members of the Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about County Fairs in North Dakota and how they've shaped the State.

My name is Diane Schell. I have been President of the McLean County Fair Board for 20 years. Our Fairgrounds is centrally located in McLean County in Underwood.

All Fairs and fairgrounds, in North Dakota, are unique and offer their own set of attractions. For instance, some feature a racetrack, a horse arena or livestock show ring, and may have numerous exhibit buildings and barns. While others use rented buildings, tents, and borrowed equipment. Some Fairs run for 3 or 4 days; some run for 7 or 10 days. Most fairgrounds are used throughout the spring, summer, and fall, while a few fairgrounds have heated structures that can be used during later fall and winter.

One theme that is the same in all our Fairs is showcasing youth in agriculture. Through the years, students in 4H and FFA have been at the center of our Fairs. These students have been trained in; livestock management, welding, woodworking, mechanics, gardening and crop management, record keeping, financial responsibilities, and public speaking. All those skills are put on display at Fairs through friendly competition, awards, and monetary premiums. Many of these students later become involved in; farming, ranching, owning businesses, becoming members of numerous Boards, and even becoming State legislators.

Fairs provide an event where County residents and visitors can; visit, meet new friends, and enjoy unique entertainment in a safe environment.

In McLean County, the Fair brings all of our 11 communities together. We purchase supplies from our hardware stores, lumber yards, and grocery stores. The hotels, gas stations, restaurants, campgrounds, and bars are busy during the Fair. We support the local newspapers by purchasing advertisements, posters, and a separate publication of a Fair news tab.

It takes numerous organizations and volunteers from the County to support the Fair and in doing so they can raise money for their groups.

All Fairs showcase numerous animals. At the McLean County Fair, we have livestock shows, horse shows, rabbit and poultry shows, Barrel Racing, Ranch Rodeo, and a Petting Zoo. We've had pig racing, monkey racing, birds of prey, bucking bulls, and even a rattle snake exhibit.

Entertainment is a big draw for fairgoers. At our Fair; we have a carnival, car racing, local musical groups, magicians, circus acts, kiddie tractor pulls, and have showcased Native American dancers from White Shield and New Town several years.

Funding for the McLean County Fair Board comes from 1 mill from the County's budget. The rest of the funding needed must come from sponsorships, fees, and grants. Most of these funds are used during the Fair and other events on the fairgrounds. If the weather is good and the attendance is good, any profit is put back into buildings and grounds repair. To build anything new, the Fair Board members often must take out a loan that is personally guaranteed by these volunteers, who want to see the Fair continue and grow. Being a Fair Board member is a "Labor of Love".

Some of our immediate needs at the McLean County fairgrounds are updated restrooms, an ancillary system for the food booth, bleachers for the racetrack and horse arena, and a fence on the east side of the fairgrounds which is adjacent to US Hwy 83. We are trying to save money to replace our barn, pole barn, and beef tie-outs with 1 multi-use building that could be used year-round. We recently held a County wide meeting, where 30 people attended to discuss what a new building could be used for.

The Fair Resiliency Grant could help with these immediate needs and could possibly start the research needed for a new building. Our Board strongly supports HB 1591 and urges you to pass this legislation that will support County Fairs and the State of North Dakota.