

THE COUNTY AND RURAL FAIR

by

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B. S. Kansas State College of
Agriculture and Applied Science, 1924

A THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

KANSAS STATE COLLEGE
OF AGRICULTURE AND APPLIED SCIENCE

1937

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is a study of a representative group of county and rural fairs. The study does not include the large fair of state wide importance or the small one-day community fair. The study is divided into six general parts; first, the purpose of the fair as stated by the officers of the organization sponsoring it; second, the legal structure of the fair association; third, sources of the physical facilities for conducting the fair; fourth, the occupations of the officers, superintendents, and financial supporters of the fair; fifth, the methods used for advertising; and, sixth, some of the educational results which the management believes are being accomplished.

The writer hopes that the information here presented will be of use to those contemplating the organization of a fair. Also that it may help others improve fairs already in operation.

LITERATURE IN THIS FIELD

There is one study by John Wellington Fromm made at the Pennsylvania State College which is very similar to this. Fromm's study (1925) covered only the small community fairs centered around a school and supervised by the Vocational Agriculture instructor of that school. These

fairs are one of the types eliminated from this study; however, some of the fairs included did have their origin in this type.

Fromm's study (1925) found teachers and students predominated as officers in those fairs. Merchants, farmers and members of the school boards following in the order named as to frequency in official positions. The methods of advertising were much the same as the data presented here shows, except for the use of automobile advertising. Automobiles were not quite so common in 1925 as now which might account for this difference.

There are a number of short articles found in periodicals which have some bearing on this subject. The most helpful articles, however, have been those by men addressing the Kansas State Board of Agriculture in their annual meetings. These addresses are published in the March quarterly report of the year in which they were given.

METHOD AND PURPOSES

Three methods of gathering data were used in this study. In cases where the writer has personally known a vocational agriculture instructor located at the place of the fair, a questionnaire was mailed to him. If the teacher was familiar with the fair organization, he was asked to complete the questionnaire; if not, he was asked to take it to an officer of the fair for completion.

In the majority of cases reported in this paper, the writer has personally interviewed the secretary of the various fairs. Some comments of these men, secured as the questionnaire was filled, are used in this paper. These personal visits were made largely in the eastern half of the state.

The third method of gathering information was through a study of the reports sent to the Secretary of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture. Each fair receiving tax funds for premium money is required by statute to send a financial statement to this board annually. Reports of 38 such fairs were studied.

Usable questionnaires were returned by 20 fair officers.

FINDINGS

Table I shows that the dominating thought in the minds of those starting fairs was the improvement of agriculture. Very few of them started with the thought of being an amusement agency for their community. Only two fairs were organized for the purpose of showing F. F. A. (Future Farmers of America) and 4-H Club projects and both originated within the last fifteen years. From the comments of the men answering these questions, several of them over seventy years of age and active in the organization of their fairs, it is evident that the people who originated the fairs studied were almost exclusively rural and improvement of agriculture

was their main interest. The fair furnished them a means of meeting, talking over their problems and comparing the results of their efforts.

Table I. The original purpose of the fair

| Question | Yes |
|---|-----|
| 1. To increase the interest in good livestock | 13 |
| 2. To increase the interest in good crops | 12 |
| 3. To build community interest and neighborliness | 7 |
| 4. Advertising medium for purebred livestock | 6 |
| 5. Advertising medium for good seed | 6 |
| 6. To promote a carnival for amusement | 4 |
| 7. To draw people to a trade center | 4 |
| 8. To give a general amusement program | 3 |
| 9. To display Future Farmer projects | 1 |
| 10. To display 4-H club projects | 1 |
| 11. Farmers institute | 1 |

There was usually more than one purpose behind the promotion of a fair. Most reporters checked from two to five of the purposes listed. The man on the street usually thinks of the fair as an amusement program but it is significant that only 20 per cent of the reports listed this as one of the original purposes of the fair.

The outstanding difference between Tables I and II is the change in rank of the purpose listed as to display of 4-H Club projects. This item was tenth in the original purposes of the fair and is a strong fourth in the present purposes. One of the most pertinent comments made to the writer by any of those interviewed was by Mr. George Harmon,

Secretary of the State Association of Kansas Fairs.

Table II. The present purposes of the fair

| Question | Yes |
|---|-----|
| 1. To increase the interest in good livestock | 15 |
| 2. To increase the interest in good crops | 15 |
| 3. Advertising medium for purebred livestock | 14 |
| 4. To display 4-H Club projects | 13 |
| 5. Advertising medium for good seed | 12 |
| 6. To build community interest and neighborliness | 11 |
| 7. To display F. F. A. projects | 11 |
| 8. To promote a carnival for amusement | 9 |
| 9. To draw people to a trade center | 6 |
| 10. To give a general amusement program | 5 |
| 11. To serve as an old settlers' picnic | 3 |
| 12. To promote horse races | 3 |
| 13. To promote automobile races | 1 |

His statement was this, "One of the main purposes of the fair today must be the encouragement of boys and girls to excel in the economic production of farm products." Some communities believe in this so thoroughly that they have made their fair entirely a means of showing 4-H Club and F. F. A. projects. An example of this is the Horton Fair, a district fair that covers an area of four counties.

One of the first agricultural fairs in America was held at Cambridge, Massachusetts. Circular 69 of the Extension Department of the North Carolina State College of Agriculture and Engineering, has this to say about the Cambridge fair, Rubinow (1918), "This fair, the conception of which originated in 1801, was largely characterized by the sale of agricultural produce and cattle after the manner of the English. Premiums and prizes were not offered, the European idea as a place where exhibitors'

products could be bartered and sold prevailed." The sale of products and livestock remains one of the main purposes of the fair today, ranking third as shown by Table II.

Since livestock men tell us that a large part of the improvement of livestock must come from the purebred stock of the country, item one, which is to increase the interest in good livestock, and item three, which is advertising medium for purebred livestock, must be considered as closely related. The same reasoning would, of course, apply to item two, which is to increase the interest in good crops, and item five, which is advertising medium for good seed, in Table II.

Many fairs limit their entries in livestock to purebred animals. It is the purpose of numerous persons attending the fair to meet a purebred breeder of livestock or pure seed producer and buy the animals needed for their own herds or the seed for their own crops.

From the results shown by item 12, which is to promote horse races, it is apparent that interest in horse racing is declining at Kansas county fairs. The comment of many of the older men in fair work, is that harness and jockey racing of horses have bankrupted many fair associations in the past. This is not likely to happen again as most of those reporting this feature as a purpose of their fair stated that they held only riding races and most of those for local owners only. Automobile racing may someday take the place of horse racing but tracks for

this feature must be built first, the old horse racing tracks not being suitable for this purpose.

The Kansas law relieves the individual officer and director of financial liability for the debts of the corporation if the corporation is chartered as prescribed by the law. If it is not chartered, each one is liable collectively and individually for all debts and liabilities. It would seem that the officers of any fair for their own protection would see that the fair association secures a charter.

Table III. Legal organization

| Question | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. Is your fair a chartered organization | 16 | 4 |
| 2. Is it a stock corporation | 12 | 4 |
| 3. Is it a non-stock corporation | 4 | 8 |

Table III shows that 20 per cent do not have charters and thus are not protected.

The organizations which sold stock, as a rule, were the older ones many of them having been formed 50 to 60 years ago and several having held fairs continuously for over 50 years. The non-stock organizations usually borrow their facilities except for equipment.

Table IV shows that very few of the fair organizations hold title to the land on which the fair is held. Since most of the fairs are backed strongly by the city in which they are held, it was found that

40 per cent of the cities own the fair grounds and buildings, loaning them to the fair organization.

Table IV. Methods of securing facilities

| | Grounds | Hous- ing | Equip- ment |
|------------------------------|---------|--------------|----------------|
| 1. Owned | 5 | 7 | 15 |
| 2. Rented or leased | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 3. Part rented or leased | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 4. Loaned to the corporation | 12 | 13 | 8 |

One county owns the fair grounds and buildings and two high school districts loan the use of their buildings and grounds. This makes a total of 55 per cent of the fair bodies that borrow their ground and housing facilities from other public units.

Most of the fairs studied own the larger percentage of their equipment, about 35 per cent checking that item yes. From observing some of the equipment of those not checking yes on this item, the writer believes that most of the fairs borrow some part of the equipment for their fair.

The officers of the fair associations are predominately men of the town as shown by Table V. Only 21 per cent of the officers listed are from farms. Table II shows that 81 per cent of the fairs give as their most important reason for existence, the encouragement of agriculture and yet Table V shows plainly that 79 per cent of the men promoting fairs are from the town.

Table V. Occupations of the officers and superintendents

| | Farmer | Merchant | Business man* | Banker | Editor | Teacher | Town Housewife | Farm Housewife |
|------------------------|--------|----------|---------------|--------|--------|---------|----------------|----------------|
| Officer | | | | | | | | |
| President | 8 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 | | |
| Vice president | 8 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Secretary | 2 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 0 | | |
| Treasurer | 4 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 1 | 0 | | |
| Superintendent | | | | | | | | |
| General Superintendent | 6 | 4 | 2 | | | 2 | | |
| Canned Goods | | | | | | | 9 | 11 |
| Baking | | | | | | | 10 | 10 |
| Sewing | | | | | | | 9 | 10 |
| Quilts | | | | | | | 7 | 10 |
| Dairy and Beef Cattle | 19 | | | | | 1 | | |
| Sheep | 18 | | | | | 1 | | |
| Swine | 18 | | | | | 1 | | |
| Poultry | 9 | 6 | | 2 | | | | |
| Crops | 17 | | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| Fruit | 16 | | | | | 1 | | 1 |
| Concessions | 3 | 7 | 4 | 1 | | 1 | | |
| Superintendent Totals | 93 | 17 | 8 | 3 | | 8 | 35 | 41 |
| Percentages | 72 | | | 28 | | | 54 | 46 |

* Business man is distinguished from the merchant as one who sells his services rather than goods

If we consider the occupations of the superintendents of the various divisions of the fair, we find the above condition reversed. The officers have selected farmers 80 per cent of the time for superintendents of the crops and livestock divisions. In departments for women, they

have shown about an equal preference as between farm and town women.

This table would indicate that it is the town man who takes the responsibility of the business of conducting the fair and calls in the farmer to supervise the departments which most directly affect him.

In all cases except two the fair superintendents served without pay. At Hillsboro, Mr. L. H. Harms, Secretary of the Marion County Fair, stated his position this way, "We pay our superintendents and then I don't mind asking them to stay all night to see that stock is taken care of properly." The other point of view, the most common one, was stated by Mr. T. F. Morrison of Chanute, "We never pay any superintendent as we feel that if the man could be hired he wouldn't be worth hiring for a fair."

Slightly more than 50 per cent of all county fairs are held during the third and fourth weeks of August and the first and second weeks of September. There is a tendency for most of the fairs to avoid the third and fourth weeks of September as those are the usual dates of the Kansas Free Fair at Topeka and the Kansas State Fair at Hutchinson. Also there is a preference for dates before these fairs just mentioned as 69 per cent of all county fairs are held previous to that time.

Table VI. Dates of 1936 fairs

| Dates by weeks | Number of fairs held |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| August 2 to 8 | 1 |
| August 9 to 15 | 2 |
| August 16 to 22 | 4 |
| August 23 to 29 | 11 |
| August 30 to September 5 | 8 |

Table VI (continued)

| <u>Dates by weeks</u> | <u>Number of fairs held</u> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| September 6 to 12 | 6 |
| September 13 to 19 | 3 |
| September 20 to 26 | 2 |
| September 27 to October 3 | 4 |
| October 4 to 10 | 5 |
| October 11 to 18 | 1 |
| October 19 to 26 | 1 |

There are three factors of almost equal importance which determine the dates of fairs. Several of those reporting stated that they always tried to avoid the large state fairs and local nearby fairs because conflicting dates hurt both the attendance and the number of exhibits at their own fair. The fair management attempts to attract the whole family to their exhibition so more than 50 per cent try to hold their dates before the start of school so as to draw as many of the children as possible.

Table VII. Factors that control dates of fairs

| <u>Factor</u> | <u>Checks</u> |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Time of nearby fairs | 10 |
| 2. Beginning of school | 10 |
| 3. Time of state fairs | 8 |
| 4. Maturity of crops | 2 |
| 5. Anticipated weather | 2 |

Fifty per cent of the fairs reporting use the three-day period. Several times the reporter made the comment that it takes one day to put the fair up and one to take down so actually a three-day fair is two

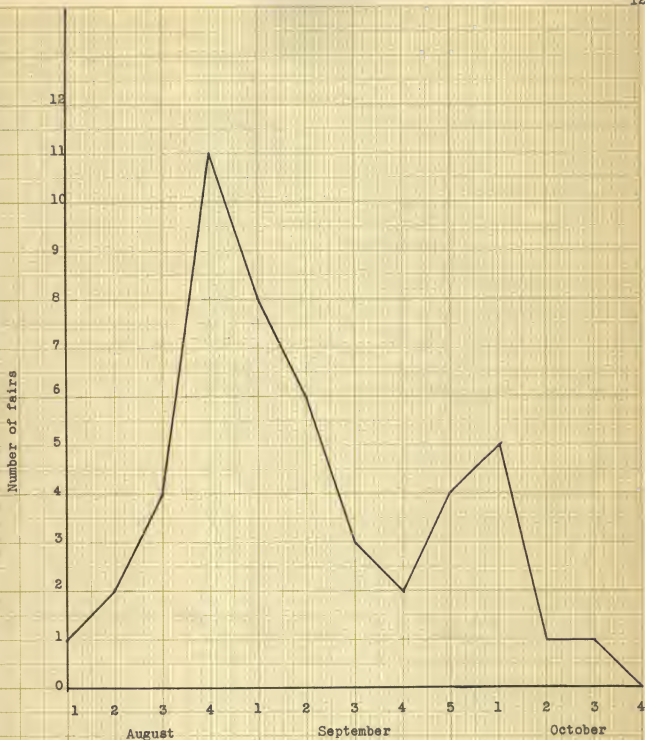


Figure I. Show dates of 1936 fairs by week periods

evenings and one day in length. Every person reporting believed that the length of his fair period was satisfactory for his locality.

Table VIII. Length of the fair period

| Days | Number reporting |
|------|------------------|
| 3 | 10 |
| 4 | 6 |
| 5 | 5 |
| 6 | 1 |

The indication is, from Table IX, that many organizations in addition to the Fair Association are involved in the actual handling of a fair. The group most frequently called upon is the County Commissioners. This group is asked to allow the use of county materials such as snow fence, planks for platforms, and to make a tax levy for the fair. All of the counties in which the data for this table were gathered are counties in which there is a Farm Bureau Organization. It would seem quite logical that this group and its subsidiary, the 4-H Club, would rank second and third respectively.

Table IX. Organizations which contribute to the support of the fair by furnishing personnel, labor, money, or facilities

| Organizations | Number |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| County Commissioners | 20 |
| Farm Bureau | 16 |
| 4-H Clubs | 14 |
| Vocational Agriculture Department | 12 |
| Chamber of Commerce | 11 |
| Future Farmers | 11 |

Table IX (continued)

| <u>Organizations</u> | <u>Number</u> |
|----------------------|---------------|
| City | 8 |
| High School Board | 4 |
| Lions Club | 3 |
| Cooperative Club | 2 |
| Rotary Club | 1 |

The group that in many cases is the fair's strongest supporter is the Chamber of Commerce. In several cases, notably at Horton, Iola, and Hillsboro, the fair officers and boosters were also the Chamber of Commerce leaders and quite naturally are putting all the power of that body behind the fair.

In most cases where a vocational agriculture department is located in the high school, the teacher and students are called upon for assistance by the fair association. Several of the teachers stated that they felt that too much of the labor of fair preparation and dismantling was expected of the boys and teacher.

The Kansas law provides that a properly recognized county fair may use up to \$2,000 of tax money for the paying of premiums on exhibits other than speed. The County Commissioners must provide this money upon certification by the proper fair officer of the amount spent for this purpose.

Table X. Methods of financing the fair

| <u>Method used</u> | <u>Number using</u> |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| County tax levy | 18 |
| Carnival concessions | 17 |
| Eating concessions | 13 |

Table X (continued)
Method used

| <u>Method used</u> | <u>Number using</u> |
|--|---------------------|
| Catalogue advertising | 13 |
| Sale of advertising space on the grounds | 12 |
| Admission to programs, races, etc. | 11 |
| Entry fees of exhibitors | 10 |
| Donations by individuals | 8 |
| Sale of stock | 7 |
| Admission to the grounds | 7 |
| Donations by organizations | 7 |
| Membership in the fair association | 4 |
| Taxing units below the county | 2 |

There are of course certain requirements set up by this law which the fair association must meet. Ninety per cent of the Kansas fairs studied have been using this money.

There are 38 county fairs which reported to the State Board of Agriculture in December of 1936. These fairs spent a total of \$49,733.20 of tax money. This was \$3,313.50 more tax money than the law would have permitted the fairs to use. This can be explained by the fact that in the financial statement, cost of ribbons and judges were not always listed as premiums paid and yet can legally be paid from tax money.

These same fairs paid total expenses of \$132,455.00 including premiums. The outstanding point about this figure is that the fair management has paid \$2.00 for things other than premiums for each \$1.00 spent for premiums.

This appears to be a large expenditure for entertainment at an exhibition which has as its primary purpose the improvement of agriculture.

Only 15 per cent of the fairs report that they collect no money from the sale of rights to carnival companies or other entertainment of that type. It was the opinion of several secretaries that the fair could make more money by selling concession rights on a percentage basis to individual owners of merry-go-rounds, ferris wheels, and so-called rides than it could by selling all concession rights to a carnival company. Several other fairs have sold their carnival rights to the same company for a number of years and seem to be very well satisfied.

Most fairs charged for catalogue advertising. In cases where no catalogue advertising was sold the merchants were asked for some other form of paid advertising.

The state law prohibits the charging of admission to the exhibits if county money is used to pay premiums. Many fairs to avoid this, charge only admission to the grandstand for programs held there. Others charge admission to the grounds but not to the buildings on the grounds in which the exhibits are held and if the law is not interpreted too literally this would seem to be permissible.

Every fair studied reports that they give some form of ribbon and some cash awards. The amount of the cash awards varied with the amount of money which was available. A large majority gave as their purposes in giving cash awards the following: first, to pay the expense of the exhibitor in making the exhibit, and, second, to encourage a large number of exhibits.

In order to determine the frequency of special classes for exhibitors a list was checked. It was found that the following classes were present in the percentage of cases listed:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| 4-H classes..... | 85% |
| F. F. A. classes..... | 35% |
| Combined F. F. A. and 4-H..... | 10% |
| Junior classes--below 14 years..... | 50% |
| Exhibitors limited to the county..... | 40% |
| Exhibitors limited to the state..... | 5% |

In all of the cases studied, the 4-H and F. F. A. classes were limited to the county or to the counties adjoining the town in which the fair is held.

The eleven forms of publicity listed in Table XI are the ones used by most fairs. It would be safe to assume that the effectiveness of the various methods is about in the order of the listing in this table. In several cases the men reporting were partial to one method of advertising and for the use of that fair the method was many times a highly effective one.

Table XI. Forms of publicity used by fairs

| Kind of publicity used | Per cent using |
|--|----------------|
| 1. Local newspaper articles | 100 |
| 2. Mailing out of catalogues | 95 |
| 3. Posters | 85 |
| 4. Paid advertising in newspapers | 50 |
| 5. Bumper signs on cars | 40 |
| 6. Window stickers on cars | 35 |
| 7. Personal visits to community meetings | 30 |
| 8. Large daily newspaper articles | 30 |
| 9. Banners on streets | 20 |
| 10. Radio announcements | 10 |
| 11. Special news sheet | 5 |

The purpose of advertising is to make people conscious of the fair and then the programs and attractions offered must draw them. Of all the items listed in Table XII only four are provided by people outside of the community, which would prove that fair managers feel that the talents their neighbors or their children can offer attract people most. The comments of the people supplying the data for this table make it evident that the attractions vary from year to year. An attraction may draw well for several years, then something else will have to be substituted for it in order to keep people's interest.

Table XII. Special attractions offered

| Attraction | Per cent using |
|--|----------------|
| 1. Programs by local talent | 80 |
| 2. Programs by paid entertainers | 75 |
| 3. Judging of exhibits at definite hours | 60 |
| 4. Athletic contests | 60 |
| 5. Horse pulling contests | 50 |
| 6. 4-H Club programs | 40 |
| 7. Horse races | 40 |
| 8. Horse shows | 10 |
| 9. Speakers | 10 |
| 10. Comic races | 5 |
| 11. Auto races | 5 |

Programs by paid entertainers were used by 75 per cent of the fairs but many of those using this type of entertainment indicated that it cost too much for the value the fair gets from it.

Horse pulling contests are used by 50 per cent of the fairs reporting. Many of those not using this attraction seemed interested and anxious to learn more about how they are conducted. Horse races are still used by 40 per cent of the fairs but very few of them allow professional riders or horses other than local ones to compete.

The material for Table XIII was given by people who themselves are seldom exhibitors at the fair but were able through their contacts to give quite accurately the purpose the exhibitor had in mind when making the exhibit. The first two items far exceed the others in the frequency with which they are listed as the main purpose.

Table XIII. Why exhibitors show their products

| <u>Purpose of exhibiting</u> | <u>Number checked</u> |
|--|-----------------------|
| 1. To display a superior product or animal | 14 |
| 2. To win a cash prize | 12 |
| 3. To excel his neighbor | 6 |
| 4. To win a ribbon | 4 |
| 5. Others of his group are competing | 3 |
| 6. Advertising value | 2 |

The attitude of the business man towards the fair, as indicated by the response on items one and three is a selfish one. He feels that the fair will benefit him directly by bringing more people to his place of business. Through coming to the fair, people will become acquainted with the town and come back again. Some of them think that the premium

money paid will be spent in their stores.

Table XIV. What is the business man's attitude toward the fair

| Attitudes | Checks |
|---|--------|
| 1. Good because it brings money to town | 8 |
| 2. Is of benefit to exhibitors | 8 |
| 3. Draws people to town so he supports it | 6 |
| 4. Good for the town | 3 |
| 5. Is already here so is tolerated | 1 |

Others take the attitude that a good fair teaches and helps the farmers of the community and that the good that is done will some day come back to the town in increased farmer-purchasing power. If this last were not the attitude that some take, few fairs would exist today. Table V shows that the officers of the fairs are largely business men and merchants. If the sources of financial support are studied carefully in Table X, it will be seen that the most of the financial support comes from the town.

When we consider all of these things it is doubtful if we can censure the town man for his attitude especially when he does help the farming population of his district through supporting a good fair.

As a school for teaching the principles of judging, the fair, according to most reporters, served as a satisfactory medium. Most of them felt that it was best suited for teaching individuals rather than teams of 4-H and F. F. A. members.

When asked the same question about the advisability of holding a judging contest a majority opposed the contest idea for teams and they were equally divided on a contest for individuals. The general opinion was that few exhibitors wanted to show their stock in a contest before being officially judged and that after they were placed by the judge too many contestants know how the animals were ranked.

Table XV. Some educational values of the fair

| Question | Yes | No |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Is your fair a good place to teach judging? | 14 | 3 |
| a. To F. F. A. teams? | 8 | 1 |
| b. To 4-H teams? | 9 | 1 |
| c. To individuals? | 12 | 0 |
| 2. Would a judging contest be advisable at your fair? | | |
| a. For teams? | 5 | 8 |
| b. For individuals? | 5 | 5 |
| 3. Has your fair increased the amount of good live-stock in your territory? | 18 | 2 |
| 4. Has your fair increased the amount of good seed in your territory? | 16 | 3 |
| 5. Do you think your fair helps train men for other community activities? | 17 | 2 |
| 6. Do you think that a man gains educationally by making an exhibit? | 18 | 2 |
| 7. Is community interest in the fair on the upgrade or at least holding even? | 19 | 0 |

Most reporters stated that in their opinion the class could be placed by the individual of the crowd as the judge did his placing. The judge could then be asked to give reasons for his placings and the individuals learn from his reasoning.

Most of the persons questioned thought that their fairs had improved both seed and animal quality in their districts. Where the reporter answered no to this question the writer found that his fair was a large carnival and not in reality an agricultural exposition.

As a training school for community workers most of those questioned indicated that those who worked with the fair also worked at other community activities more readily because of their fair experience. Of those reporting 90 per cent indicated that the exhibitor was taught something through his having been an exhibitor. If a man wins he probably learns less than if he places below first, was the opinion of several of those questioned. The lower placing man wants to know why he did not win. In attempting to learn this he has to study and quite naturally gains some valuable information.

Every fair studied reports that community interest in the fair is gaining or is at least stationary. This speaks well for those who have carried these fairs through the depression and drought years.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The agricultural and home-making exhibits are the basis of all county fairs.
2. The encouragement of young people in the following of agricultural pursuits is becoming a more important function of the fair.

3. Most fair associations are stock corporations.
4. Very few fair associations own the land they use.
5. More than 50 per cent of the fairs are held in borrowed buildings with borrowed equipment.
6. Fairs are used to help build trade centers.
7. Basically fairs are educational but various amusements are used to encourage attendance.
8. Entertainment far overshadows education in some county fairs.
9. Fair organizations are dependent upon sources other than tax money for the promotional expense of the fair.
10. Tax money is used by 90 percent of county fairs to pay premiums.
11. The promoters of most fairs are town men.
12. The work of preparing and caring for exhibits is done largely by farm people.
13. Most fairs are held in the latter part of August and the first part of September.
14. Local newspapers support their fairs 100 per cent.
15. Home talent entertainment is the best attraction to get attendance at the fair.
16. Fairs, in general, are accomplishing their principal purpose--the improvement of agriculture in their district.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author is greatly indebted to his major instructor, Dr. C. V. Williams, for his invaluable assistance in outlining the problem and for his constructive criticism; to Professor A. P. Davidson for his constructive criticism; to his wife, Ruth Williamson, for her patient checking of manuscript material and to the large number of teachers and secretaries of fair associations who supplied the data used.

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