

May 14, 2020

From the Board of the MN Federation of County Fairs:

The MFCF Board has been meeting regularly since middle of April to monitor available information related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have been in contact with:

- AJ Duerr and Cory Bennett, MFCF's Lobbyists to follow bills that would extend fairs' ability to use the 2020 county fair grants, if they are unable to hold an event in 2020.
- Commissioner of Agriculture Thom Petersen to gather information surrounding a variety of topics, including grant funding and livestock shows.
- University of MN Extension Staff, including Dr. Jennifer Skuza, Associate Dean and MN 4-H Director, to brainstorm options for kids and events affected by the no contact order issued by Extension, currently in place through June 30, 2020.
- MN Board of Animal Health representatives to discuss how the pandemic will affect events where animals are present.
- International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE) staff to monitor the work being done in other states who are behind and in front of us on the COVID-19 curve.
- Carnivals, concessionaires, and other vendors who are concerned about health and safety, financial security and their ability to meet whatever social distancing requirements that may be in place when they come to your event.
- ...and many of you, our Minnesota fairs, who are asking for guidance, information, and support during these uncertain times.

We will continue to meet and monitor all information that is available.

As members of our own local fair boards, we are seeking the same answers that you are as we consider whether to continue planning for our events. For fairs scheduled to be held in June, the deadline for making a "go or no-go" decision is staring us in the face. For events being held in August, the calendar, while perhaps a bit more kind, is still on our minds.

No one wants to cancel or postpone an event, whether it's a high school graduation, a wedding, a class reunion....or a county fair. We are all looking for guidance. Perhaps we are even looking for someone to make the decision for us.

The IAFE has a variety of resources available for everyone, regardless of whether your fair is an IAFE member. However, if your fair is an IAFE member, additional resources are available through the members-only portion of their website.

The MFCF has compiled a list of fairs who have made decisions that alter their 2020 fair plans, and we have made that list available on the website. Fair boards who are looking

for guidance may find it useful to review the checklist included below, which has been compiled from a variety of sources, including the IAFE:

Social distancing requirements

Can your fair, or certain events on your fair schedule, be provided while following social distancing guidelines? This could include requirements like limiting areas to small groups of people or a 6' distance between attendees.

Sanitizing

Can you sanitize common spaces and surfaces, such as carnival rides, concessions counters, food stand tables, accessibility ramp railings, and bathrooms frequently?

Can you increase the number of handwash stations or areas where hand sanitizer is provided?

Volunteers

Will your fair volunteers be willing and able to provide their time in support of your event?

4-H Exhibitors

What impact does Extension's current no-contact order have on your event --- on your event offerings? If your fair is held without 4-H, can you/will you plan a separate event to allow kids to showcase their exhibits and earn state fair trips?

Vendors / Commercial Booth Renters

Will your vendors be willing and able to come to your fair? In the case of commercial booth rentals, are any of the businesses that have booths still closed due to the stay-at-home order? Will they be limited by a loss of revenues that they have experienced?

Carnival / Concessionaires

Have you communicated with your carnival and concessionaires? Has their schedule been impacted by other cancelations? How will they need to change their procedures and processes in order to keep their employees safe?

County Fair Grants

If your fair is held, can you fulfill your contracts? Are the entertainers still willing to attend your fair?

If you do not hold a fair in 2020, Legacy grant funds can be spent until June 30, 2021; so, if your fair is in June, you can carry over the funds to use next year. It is also possible to pay deposits acts that will perform at fairs that take place in July or August of 2021. However, MFCF Lobbyist

AJ Duerr is working with legislators on including language in a bill that would extend the opportunity to use those funds through June 30, 2022 to allow additional flexibility for fairs.

AgriGrant funds do need to be spent this year, regardless of whether you hold a fair.

You are encouraged to contact Lisa Sawyer with questions regarding the county fair grant projects that you submitted as part of your application earlier this year. You can work with Lisa to amend your application if your plans change.

Insurance

Is your insurance carrier willing to carry coverage for your event? Will any special event coverage that you normally obtain cover a COVID-19-related claim? Is supplemental coverage needed and/or available?

Sources of Revenues

Review your revenue sources. Will your sponsorship dollars be impacted? What impact will COVID-19 have on revenues collected through admission, parking, grandstand sales, or carnival sales?

Cost Comparison

What is the financial impact of:

1. Cancellation of the fair?
2. Having a poorly attended fair?
 - a.with a limited carnival?
 - b.without a carnival?
 - c.with grandstand events with limited capacity?
 - d.without grandstand events?
 - e.with a beer garden with limited capacity?
 - f.without a beer garden?

What if...

How would you handle the situation if a COVID-19 outbreak in your community in the two weeks following your event?

COVID-19 Preparedness Plan

Businesses who are being allowed to re-open are being asked to have a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan. It should be assumed that fairs will be expected to have similar plans in place if events are held.

Deadline?

When do you need to make your final decision? When are you required to commit funds to order supplies? When do you have down payments due for contracts?

The MFCF Board will continue to meet, and each Director is available to answer your questions. The MFCF purchased a Zoom license, and if you would like to schedule a Zoom meeting with your District Director, that option is available to you.

As you continue planning your fair, be prepared to answer the previous questions leading up to your event. Should you choose to cancel, we recommend that you have a statement or press release prepared for your local newspaper, as well as your website and Facebook page.

At the convention, it is common for us to hear that what works for one fair was not successful at another. Making a decision on whether or not to hold your fair should be based on your fair and your community, while considering recommendations, guidelines and information available through federal and state agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control, MN Department of Health, as well as your local public health agency. There is no right answer, but certainly as each day passes, concerns about how to put on a safe, successful fair are mounting.

Be safe, fair friends. And don't hesitate to reach out with your questions.