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Dear 4-H/FFA members and parents,

If I let my mind wander back a few... or several years, I can smell the bluing shampoo and feel the lanolin in my fingers as we prepared for show clinics, jackpots and ultimately fair. The fresh shavings under our feet in the show ring, the whir of fans and blowers in the air, and seeing ribbons pinned to the fence stalls. These are the sights, sounds and smells of our summers - memories being made in the backyard, the barn, and the show ring.

In the world we live in right now, this summer routine that we have all grown to love may look a little different. I write this to you to show my heart and let you know that I feel for you as you make the tough decisions and cope with the decisions that are out of our hands.

Though your summer projects and late nights may not end in the show ring this year, I encourage you to still pursue this dream and take in all of those memories as if the show ring is waiting for you in just a couple short months.

The thing about life and the thing that social media has reminded us all of, is that it is one thing to put a beautiful picture out there for everyone to see of how 'put together' our lives are... but then there is the work that goes on day after day, hour after hour. The work that we don't show to the world, the work that makes that final product so great.

We as ag kids know all too well the hours, the work and the late nights that go into that grand champion animal, that same work and late nights that go into the last place animal in the show ring. None of us ever raise, feed, condition and groom our animals with the plan of coming in last place... we do it with the dream of winning grand champion and work toward that goal every day and night. That work ethic and drive is what makes our 4-H and FFA kids such stand up individuals!

I implore of you all, as livestock show families, do not let this pandemic and resulting shutdown bring you down. Do not let this thwart what you work so hard for. Evaluate your **why**. Do we spend our summers with our show animals as a means of getting to the grand champion buckle and a high sale slot, or do we spend our summers in the barn as a family working together, feeding together, halter training together, washing and clipping together, kicks to the shin, rope burns through the hands, all of this live - lived together. These are memories and opportunities you will never get back, please don't sacrifice them on the chance that the show ring will not be there. Enjoy these moments with your family, your animals - no matter how many years you've done this, each one has their own personality - embrace the late nights in the barn, the early morning feedings and the ever rising feed bill.

The life that 4-H and FFA families lead, is not for the faint of heart, these youth understand life and death on a very real level because of their livestock experiences. We are raising the leaders of tomorrow and tomorrow is coming a lot faster than we think. Keep your eyes on the journey right now, not the destination, if we must take a detour, prepare to enjoy the detour, and create a detour worth remembering.

While I may not see you in the ring this fall, I can't wait to see the innovative ways that you all share your livestock summer with the rest of us, the ways that you take the lemons and make lemonade. What a beautiful honor it is that we are all learning and living through this together - from the small business on the corner, the mom and pop shop up the street, the large corporation, and the ag family. All of us together, are realizing that the world as we know it has changed and we are all learning how to live again.

Enjoy your nights in the barn, bask in the beauty of your hard work and your strong animals and keep your head up!

Stay Ag strong,

Danielle Lowry
New Mexico State Fair Commissioner