

# Howard Marklein: The fair must go on

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I recently attended the Lafayette County Fair and was the winning bidder for Gabe Nelson's turkey! I also was the winning bidder for Dylan Powell's hog at the Elroy Fair in June. I try, every summer, to bid on a couple of animals to support the hard work, commitment and dedication of the young people who participate in our fairs. My bids also fill my freezer with delicious, local meat for my family to enjoy all year.

I am thankful for Gabe and Dylan's hard work, but I am also very thankful to the people who kept the fairs going this year. I give tremendous credit and thanks to everyone who worked very hard to maintain the most important parts of our local county fairs, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and all of the challenges that have come along with it. Your get-it-done attitude has made a huge difference in the lives of the young people in our community and I sincerely appreciate your leadership. You are a true example of the strong spirit of small-town, rural Wisconsin.

While many of us attend county fairs to enjoy rides, games, exhibits and fried food on sticks, there is a lot more to the county fair than entertainment. The young people who raise animals and complete projects work very hard all year in anticipation of the fair. The fair is not only their chance to be recognized for hard work, but many of them earn significant funds during the auctions and competitions. I know many high school graduates who have paid for college with their fair earnings.

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There are also a large number of community organizations that depend on food and

beverage sales at the fair for their annual budgets. I always look forward to the ice cream, hamburgers and hotdogs that support great organizations at the fair. Food just tastes better when it is for a good cause.

This is why in several of our communities, committed leaders decided that the fair had to go on, even if it was a little different this year. They maintained the most critical, important parts of the fair – the auction and food stands – while forgoing the less important, but probably more lucrative midway rides and entertainment. They maintained the fair for what matters most and I am very grateful.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the fairs have gone on with online registrations, very strict schedules, enhanced spacing and limited exposure for people and animals. Animals had to go home regularly and exhibits were spaced out. Attendees couldn't wander the barns, as in years past, but we were welcomed to view and bid on the animals in a reasonable way. I think it worked and I am so proud of the people who worked so hard to make this happen under very unpredictable circumstances.

It is my hope that by next summer we will be back to normal. I know there are a lot of racers, entertainers, craft sellers and others who missed the fairs this year. But if there is one thing I have learned this summer, it is that local, rural, small town people can overcome big obstacles to get things done when the fair must go on. I am proud of our fortitude.

Many thanks to Gabe and Dylan for raising the turkey and the hog that will feed my family this year. Many thanks to their parents and all of the fair organizers who made it possible for Gabe, Dylan and all of the other young people to auction animals. Many more thanks to the sponsors, community members, businesses and organizations who support our fairs and turned out, despite the differences this year, to bid high and bid often. The fair went on and it mattered.

*-Marklein, R-Spring Green, represents the 17th Senate District.*