



The 4-H Fair: Showcase of the Year

What is a County 4-H Fair?

One of the most exciting events which takes place each summer is the annual county 4-H fair. The fair is the culmination of the year for both 4-H members and volunteers; it is a showcase of all that is accomplished during the 4-H program year.

The county 4-H fair is an event designed primarily to evaluate and display the project work of youth participating in 4-H programs. Some 4-H fairs are part of a larger "county fair," while others are strictly 4-H fairs. A fair can be a one-day mall show, or a week-long event with amusements, commercial exhibits and rides, or anything in between. Some fairs have admission fees; others do not.

Different activities take place at different fairs. Some fairs focus on traditional fair activities such as project displays, animal shows, and craft demonstrations. Other fairs include features considered to be currently popular, such as karate demonstrations, video games, and commercial exhibits ranging from water filter companies to other community organizations.

The focus of each fair depends on many factors, including goals and strengths of the local 4-H program, fair location and available facilities, local ordinances, and fundraising needs of the county 4-H program. Most fairs include a variety of events in order to encourage family participation.

Preparing Your 4-H'ers for the 4-H Fair

It is the 4-H volunteer leader's job to take an active part in encouraging and assisting 4-H youth in participating fully in the 4-H fair. Ideas on how you can help are listed below.

- *4-H Mail* – Read your 4-H mail thoroughly all year long. Be sure to inform your members of any fair-related information as it becomes available.
- *The 4-H Fair Mailing* – In late spring or early summer, most county 4-H offices send out a fair mailing. This often includes exhibit catalogues (also called "premium books" or "class lists"); requests for help before, during, and after the fair; information related to specific projects or events happening at the fair; and registration forms, sign-up sheets, and information on how to enter 4-H projects in the fair. Review all of this information carefully with your 4-H members. Assist them in obtaining and completing any paperwork they may need in order to take part in the fair.
- *Exhibiting Your Club Members' Projects and Skills* – Carefully review items in the fair mailing which pertain to the projects that your club members carry. Look for any project-related events or activities (i.e., members in the clothing project might take part in the fashion revue). Check to see if record books are required in order to exhibit in certain classes or divisions. If so, assist members in completing record books to meet requirements.
- *Exhibit Tags and Registration Forms/Pre-Fair Club Meeting* – Plan a special club meeting a week or so before pre-fair judging and/or fair deadlines. This is a good time to help 4-H'ers complete exhibit tags, registration forms, and any other necessary paperwork.
- *Project Judging* – Look for information pertaining specifically to project judging. Often this takes place prior to the fair, sometimes at a different location. Make sure that your 4-H'ers are aware of when, where, and how their projects will be judged. This will help to insure that there won't be any disappointment.



- *Animal Exhibits and Shows* – Animal projects usually must meet special state-wide requirements related to health/immunization records. Check with your county 4-H staff for information about these requirements or in making any arrangements necessary to meet them. Animal project members should also be aware of show dates, times, and requirements, as well as special rules your county may have for exhibiting animals.
- *Open Events/Helping Out at the Fair* – Encourage your members to take part in events open to all 4-H'ers and/or other youth. The fair is a great opportunity to meet people from other towns and to make new friends. 4-H'ers should also be encouraged to volunteer to help with fair responsibilities, such as set-up, take-down, and staffing booths as needed at the fair.
- *Events for the Whole Club* – Be sure to take part in club-oriented events and activities held at the fair. These may include club booth exhibits, a parade of clubs, club demonstrations or presentations, or taking on a fair set-up task as a club. Working as a club provides members the chance to learn teamwork and cooperation.
- *Involving Parents* – Persuade parents to become involved. Ask them to assist with club activities; encourage them to be present at all fair events and activities in which their child is participating. Invite them to your special pre-fair meeting. This is a good time to help parents understand the how-to's of preparing for the fair, as well as how judging, competition, and recognition fit into the 4-H program. Communicating with your members' parents at this point will help prevent misunderstanding and disappointment later. Don't be afraid to ask 4-H parents for help—after all, as their child's 4-H leader, you provide them a valuable service all year long.
- *Understanding County Fair Regulations* – If your 4-H fair is part of a county fair, be sure members understand all county fair requirements and regulations, as well as 4-H guidelines and requirements.

Volunteer Jobs at the Fair: The Key to Success

The success of any 4-H fair depends on the participation of adult volunteers. This includes 4-H leaders, parents, and other interested adults. Adults can serve in many capacities, such as:

- Serving on the county 4-H fair committee, association, or board, often a year-round commitment. This group is generally responsible for planning the event and recruiting volunteers to assist. If your fair is part of a county fair, you may be able to serve on the county fair board.
- Serving as chairperson of a specific fair event or committee, such as serving as project superintendent, barn manager, food concession chair, show committee chair, chair of commercial exhibits, etc.
- Assisting with a specific event or committee, such as helping in a food booth, assisting with project entries, participating in fair set-up or fair take-down, etc. Helping to recruit other adults and youth to assist.
- Serving as a volunteer judge. Some counties prefer that active club leaders do not judge in their own counties; however, other counties often welcome the expertise of an active club leader from another county.
- Exhibiting in adult divisions where available.
- Volunteering to do a special demonstration or presentation either on your own or with your 4-H'ers (i.e., craft demonstration; square dance performance).
- Helping the 4-H fair committee or 4-H staff in general, such as running errands, distributing posters, selling tickets to an event.



Goals of the 4-H Fair

As you and your members prepare for the fair, it's good to keep in mind the purposes for holding a 4-H fair. Although 4-H fairs differ throughout the state, the following are some goals shared by many New Jersey counties.

- Evaluate 4-H project work and recognize accomplishments of youth participating in 4-H programs during the past year.
- Serve as a showcase for the public to observe 4-H projects, both on display and in action.
- Educate the public about the 4-H program in general, as well as specific subject matter areas of current interest and concern.
- Attract youth and adults to become involved in the 4-H program as 4-H members and volunteer leaders.
- Provide youth and adults opportunities to develop and demonstrate their leadership abilities through planning and conducting the 4-H fair.
- Provide the community with a family-oriented, fun and educational event.

Some counties also depend on the annual 4-H fair to raise funds in support of the year-long 4-H program. In counties where the 4-H fair is part of a larger county fair, there is often a special emphasis on cooperation with other community organizations and agencies.

Making the Most of Your 4-H Fair Experience

The best way to have a positive 4-H fair experience is to GET INVOLVED! This means preparing your 4-H members, encouraging their parents to become involved, and volunteering to use your skills and talents to help your county fair be a big success. For more information on how you can become involved in your county 4-H fair, call your county 4-H staff!

Written by Rita Natale Saathoff.

References

4-H Clover Tales, Somerset County (NJ) 4-H Newsletter, January 1990.



Did You Know...



The official 4-H emblem is green with white H's - the 4-H colors. The white symbolizes purity. The green represents nature's most common color and is emblematic of youth, life, and growth.

For more information on New Jersey 4-H, please visit www.nj4h.rutgers.edu.

Cooperating Agencies: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and County Boards of Chosen Freeholders. Rutgers Cooperative Extension, a unit of the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, is an equal opportunity program provider and employer.