

Connecting Communities, One Fair at a Time

Laughter, fascination, and pure joy filled the barn aisles as I walked my show calf to the wash rack every morning. Fairgoers would stop to pet her, snap pictures, and ask questions, and I always welcomed it. Watching their curiosity turn into excitement created lasting fair memories for me. I loved sharing my calf and giving them a glimpse into agriculture they might not experience otherwise.



County fairs are a summer staple in Wisconsin, drawing crowds from all walks of life. In fact, over three million people attend county and district fairs in Wisconsin every year¹. While the reason for attending may vary from livestock shows to carnival rides, the real appeal goes deeper. These fairs serve as a bridge between urban and rural life, creating shared experiences while continuing to evolve to attract new generations.

Exhibiting projects is one of the most powerful ways fairs bring people together, from livestock and homegrown vegetables, to crafts, baked goods, and sewn outfits. The variety of exhibits reflects that there is a special place for everyone to be involved in the fair. No matter your experience level or where you come from, the fair offers an opportunity for everyone to contribute and feel a sense of community.



Education is another essential piece of the fair's role as a bridge between urban and rural life. Many attendees are unfamiliar with agriculture, yet fairs make learning about it approachable and engaging. Interactive exhibits, such as petting zoos, crop displays, and milking demonstrations, allow visitors to experience agriculture firsthand. These moments spark curiosity and appreciation for Wisconsin's local food system, allowing consumers to understand that our farmers produce safe and nutritious food every day, and that buying local products helps to support our state's producers and processors and keeps money within our communities. By turning education into an experience, fairs help close the gap between consumers and producers.

Fairs also play an important role in supporting youth programs such as 4-H and the National FFA Organization. These programs are open to a wide range of participants and help young members develop valuable skills like leadership, responsibility, and teamwork. 4-H and FFA are active year-round, giving participants a deeper sense of purpose and community. They also provide opportunities to explore new projects and interests to showcase at the fair.

Wisconsin fairs are also constantly evolving to remain relevant and inclusive. For example, at the Lodi Agricultural Fair, they host an annual pie auction that anyone can bake and compete in, with the proceeds helping to support the fair. To keep up with new trends, this year they have introduced a sourdough baking contest to appeal to newer interests and expand participation. Events like these create a shared sense of purpose while encouraging involvement beyond traditional exhibits. As fair secretary Lori Ripp explains, “Fairs are about food, family, and fun. Whether you’re learning about the genetics of an animal, how to grow a better potato, or just trying to eat as much fun food as you can, there’s a place for you at the fair.”



Wisconsin fairs remain essential because of their ability to bring people together. By blending tradition with innovation, the 73 county and district fairs in Wisconsin² continue to connect urban and rural communities through shared experiences rooted in learning, participation, and community.

Sources:

1. “DATCP to Offer Training Webinar for County and District Fair Judges.” *DATCP Home DATCP to Offer Training Webinar for County and District Fair Judges*, 19 Apr. 2024, datcp.wi.gov/Pages/News_Media/CountyDistrictFairJudgesWebinar.aspx.
2. “County & District Fairs.” *DATCP Home County & District Fairs*, datcp.wi.gov/Pages/AgDevelopment/FairsAndShows.aspx. Accessed 8 Apr. 2026.