



2020 CANCELLATION

The 2020 Minnesota State Fair was canceled on May 22, 2020.

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A message from Minnesota State Fair General Manager Jerry Hammer:

"Dear Friends,

We've been working hard and doing our very best with preparations for the 2020 State Fair. The picture was cloudy in March, but things have cleared up considerably since then. Right now is the time of year when things need to really take off if we're going to have a fair, but we can see that we're out of runway and can't get off the ground. There will be no State Fair this year.

Like everything during the past few months, it's complex and difficult. The State Fair is built on a vast network of agriculturists, vendors, artists, entertainers, competitors, amusement operators, sponsors, State Fair staff and thousands more who always give their very best. They are the pillars of the fair, and almost all have been affected during the past two months. Some are doing okay, but many have eroded including some who provide our biggest and best programs. It's a challenging time for our determined young people in youth agriculture programs. More and more livestock exhibitors, entertainers and attraction operators are concerned with going on the road this summer. Some commercial exhibitors are past their deadlines for getting products, and now there's even a question of adequate supplies for food vendors. And many are having trouble finding people who are willing to work in crowds.

This will have a big impact on thousands of businesses and the tens of thousands of people whose talent, dedication and love bring the fair to life. We understand exactly what they're going through because we're going through the same thing.

We'll face those challenges because the most important thing is your health. No one knows what things will be like at fair time, but we need to make decisions now based on what we know today, not how we hope things will be in August. And right now, all of the science says that if things go well, we'll still be walking very carefully in three months. That's far from ready to run a mass gathering marathon like the State Fair. Can you see social distancing on a Park & Ride bus, or at the Bandshell? One at a time on the Giant Slide? Can you imagine standing six feet apart in line for cookies? Me neither.

The State Fair needs to be a full-on celebration. That's what makes it very special for so many of us, including young fair fan Addie who is 5 years old. She starts kindergarten this fall and she said, "I love the fair. There are a hundred things to do there. And it's my

birthday. It's my favorite time of year."

Millions of people love the fair just like Addie, even if it's not their birthday. And that's exactly why we can't have a fair this year. We owe it to you now, and we owe it to posterity to give you the very best that we possibly can in a safe environment. By taking the tough road today, we guarantee that the fair's future remains hopeful and bright.

A month ago, my good friend Carlos wrote, "If there's no fair this year, it's because they love us and want to see EVERYone next year." He's right. That's the heart of the matter. We want to see you all for many years to come, when we can celebrate in true State Fair style.

So this isn't a difficult decision. It's the only decision. It's the right thing to do. As we go through this strange summer, we're extremely grateful for the understanding and support of everyone who makes the State Fair possible – especially the millions of fair fans from around the globe. The best thing we can all do right now is to help the world recover and heal. In the meantime, your team of State Fair pros is working hard to come back bigger, better, stronger and smarter in '21. We'll see you next year at the Great Minnesota Get-Back-Together."

Frequently Asked Questions

Why was the 2020 Minnesota State Fair canceled?

This was by far the most crucial decision that our staff and board have had to work through in two generations. But as our general manager says in his statement, "It's not a difficult decision. It's the only decision."

The Minnesota State Fair is one of the largest events of its kind in the world. Agriculturalists, vendors, exhibitors, entertainers, amusement operators, sponsors, volunteers, the media, thousands of people – the network of those we count on to present the best fair possible is vast.

We have heard from these folks that they are facing some of the most challenging times they can remember. Enduring financial hardships by agriculture, small business, nonprofit and corporate communities; navigating evolving health and safety guidance; working through their staff layoffs; hiring employees willing to work in challenging conditions; determining how to travel safely; presenting entertainment when performers haven't been able to get-together; producing competition entries when school is not in session and youth agriculture programs are not at full operation; and overcoming countless other hurdles are all playing a role in whether or not these folks would be able to participate in the fair at all, and if they could, what that participation would look like.

Given the course of this world pandemic and what health experts are pointing to now, social distancing, face masks, disinfecting protocols and temperature monitoring will still be with us in August in order to keep us, our families and friends healthy. The fair is a fair for everyone, not just for guests, vendors, volunteers, exhibitors, entertainers, employees and others who are healthy or at lower risk. With this cloud over us, it doesn't seem right to be getting together to celebrate.

Why couldn't we wait to decide?

In a typical year, preparing for an event the scale and scope of the State Fair is a year-round operation and a mammoth undertaking by all of the partners we describe above. While many of us have been able to pause some things over the past two months, we can't hold off any longer. Supplies, food and equipment orders, travels plans, staffing and more all need to be finalized now.

While we don't know what August will bring, we do know that we have to make decisions based on what we know today, not what we hope the world will be like in August.

Our greatest responsibility is to ensure that the fair remains strong and resilient now and for future generations. If we continue planning, investing and purchasing what we can't unwind, and if this ever-evolving health crisis takes a bad turn and forces our cancellation in a month or two or after we open our doors, we will have dug an immense hole that would be difficult to climb out of. This would affect our State Fair for years. In the same vein, we don't want any of our partners to be in that hole with us.

Did you consider modifying the fair by limiting attendance, instituting social distance guidelines and requiring face masks and temperature checks?

State Fair staff explored countless potential scenarios and determined that first, these were not feasible and, second, a fair under these severe restrictions is not the Great Minnesota Get-Together that we all love.

Here are some of the things we had trouble imagining: Social distancing on a Park & Ride bus, in line for cookies, corn or merchandise or to see crop art, the llama costume contest, a newborn animal, draft horses, the parade, a Bandshell concert or any entertainment for that matter; determining which Grandstand ticket holders won't be able to come to the concert because we have to reduce the crowd size; adequately staffing our operation when a large portion of our employees and volunteers are in higher-risk groups, may not want to work in crowds or in booths where social distancing is not possible, or put themselves at risk by undertaking the extensive sanitation efforts required; vendors and exhibits closing down when one employee gets sick; disinfecting every Ferris wheel gondola and every seat and handle after every passenger on a Midway ride; requiring gate attendants to take everyone's

temperature and then turning away families when one member measures slightly out of the acceptable range; a handful or fewer people on the Giant Slide and one person per boat on Ye Old Mill; no overnight dorm experience for 4-H youth, some of whom travel long distances to participate in the fair; eliminating a sizable percentage of livestock exhibitors to reduce barn capacity and traffic; people wearing face masks at a fair where eating is one of the main reasons we attend.

The question of limiting attendance is a good one. These are the logistics we considered: How do you limit attendance when guests are coming and going constantly through a dozen gates? If we cut down to a handful of gates, how would we handle thousands of people waiting in line? If we limit the sale of tickets by day, we'd have to plan for everyone, including employees and volunteers, to be at the fair at the same time moving about the fair socially distanced, which means so few guests that it isn't financially sustainable for the fair and our vendors. If we sold tickets by day in advance, how would guests feel if, on their day to come, there was a thunderstorm or a conflict arose and they had no other option to use their tickets?

Consider all the Herculean efforts that businesses and organizations are undertaking to start or keep their operations running, then multiply that by our thousand booths, stages and exhibits and other spaces – and then add in tens of thousands of guests. That is the scope of what the fair encompasses. And, we keep coming back to the idea that the Great Minnesota Get-Together should be a celebration where we all can gather together to enjoy each other. To undertake these types of restrictions runs counter to who we are.

We know that some year-round amusement parks and months-long sports are looking to restart, and if they need to tweak their operation as they learn more about how their modifications are working (or not), they have the time to do that. In our short 12 days, we do not.

Could the fair be extended in days in order to space out the crowds?

Even in years when we aren't facing a crisis, we have explored the possibility of extending the fair beyond its current 12 days. The challenge is that the Minnesota State Fair doesn't operate in its own bubble. Our fair is part of an intricate web of fairs and expositions across the country. Many of our vendors, exhibitors, rides, attractions and production equipment are a part of this web and travel from one event to another throughout the spring, summer and early fall. Although many events have been canceled this year, it is logistically difficult for those who travel this circuit to crisscross the country. Even for locally based vendors, running and staffing an operation beyond 12 days is challenging. A large portion of our agriculture program builds on Minnesota's county fairs; the State Fair's timing is positioned to allow for maximum participation by 4-H, FFA and other agriculture exhibitors. In addition, because of the start of school in Minnesota, we do not feel we can extend the fair past Labor Day.

Why couldn't the fair be postponed?

For many of the same reasons that it is not possible to extend the fair beyond 12 days, there are no other dates that are feasible to squeeze in preparation for and production of the size and scope of the Minnesota State Fair other than the window we are currently in. Because of this, we are not able to postpone the fair to later dates, but we will instead look forward to presenting the fair during its scheduled 2021 dates, Aug. 26-Sept. 6.

Who made the decision to cancel the fair this year?

This decision was made by the board of the Minnesota State Agricultural Society, which is elected by delegates representing all 87 Minnesota county fairs and dozens of statewide agricultural groups. The executive vice president of the board serves as the fair's general manager. Considered a quasi-state agency because the society's existence is included in state statute, the Minnesota State Fair is self-supporting and, at this time, has not received state government appropriations or public money since 1949. As the COVID-19 public health crisis has evolved, State Fair officials have monitored guidance from federal, state and local government agencies and health experts. As we considered a cancellation of this year's State Fair, we received the support of Gov. Walz and the Minnesota Department of Health.

Has the fair been canceled in the past?

Since its inception, the fair has been held every year with only six exceptions: in 1861 and 1862 due to the Civil War and U.S.-Dakota War, in 1893 because of scheduling conflicts with the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, in 1945 due to federal government travel restrictions during World War II, in 1946 due to a polio epidemic, and in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

How will the State Fair survive without 2020 fair revenue?

There is no doubt that we will face challenges, like every business and organization enduring this crisis. It will be hard for everyone whose livelihood is impacted by the State Fair. Our fiscally sound operation will be able to withstand a year without a State Fair, and our year-round full-time staff members are committed to doing all that we can to present a grand Great Minnesota Get-Together in 2021 that fair fans have come to expect at a fairgrounds that continue to be iconic and beautiful. We're extremely grateful for the continued support of everyone who makes the State Fair possible – especially the millions of fair fans from around the globe.

What will happen with State Fair livestock competitions and horse shows?

The 2020 State Fair livestock competitions have been canceled, and it has been determined that an alternative or virtual event is not feasible. Check back in the winter and spring for updated information about the 2021 fair. To get the latest State Fair competition news in your inbox, join our email list.

What about non-animal competitions (creative activities, fine arts, K-12, etc.)?

We are moving forward with our fine arts competition! Learn more.

What will happen to the Milk Run?

The 2020 Milk Run has been canceled. Learn more.

How can I still support the Minnesota State Fair?

A year without a fair will present challenges – not just for us, but for our numerous partners, exhibitors, vendors and more. If you'd like to support the Minnesota State Fair, you can do so through the Minnesota State Fair Foundation. The Foundation is the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to enriching the unforgettable memories and traditions you experience only at the Minnesota State Fair. To learn more about the Foundation, its impact and how to contribute, visit the Foundation's website.

What is the economic impact of the Minnesota State Fair?

The year-round operations of the 2018 Minnesota State Fair generated \$268 million in economic impact for the Twin Cities, plus additional unmeasured impact throughout the Midwest, according to the most recent economic impact study. In 2018, the State Fair supported more than 12,000 full-time, seasonal and part-time jobs with \$76.9 million in direct earnings for Twin Cities residents. In addition, the State Fair's annual operation generated \$9.9 million in state and local taxes. Check out the findings of the 2018 State Fair economic impact study.

What will happen to non-fair events?

Each of the dozens of events held at the State Fairgrounds throughout the year is presented by an outside, independent organization. These rental clients follow the guidance of local, state and federal government agencies and health experts and will make decisions about postponing or canceling their specific events accordingly. Please contact the presenting organizations directly for status updates. We have posted some information, if known, on our Fairgrounds Events Calendar.

How can I ask additional questions?

Please fill out a contact form. We will get back to you as soon as possible.

Printed from www.mnstatefair.org. Check back for the most current information.