

MINNESOTA STATE FAIR

NEWS RELEASE

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Despite Difficult 2020, Plans are Proceeding for 2021 State Fair

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St. Paul, Minn. – Despite the cancellation of the 2020 Minnesota State Fair, the operation remains intact, and planning is proceeding with different scenarios for 2021, State Fair General Manager Jerry Hammer reported during the 162nd Annual Meeting of the Minnesota State Agricultural Society held Jan. 11-14. The Society is the governing body of the State Fair, and the meetings were conducted virtually.

“From the day we canceled, our priority has been to ensure the future of the fair by holding our operation together,” said Hammer. “I cannot stress enough how critical our expert staff is to the success of the fair. They’re experienced pros, and there is no fair without them. Our staff is ready to go, and we can’t wait to welcome everyone back together at the State Fair.”

Hammer said that virtually all State Fair revenue dried up in 2020, and the fair reported an operating loss of \$16.2 million. The State Fair receives no state funding of any kind. The fair’s normally aggressive program of maintenance and improvements to the historic State Fairgrounds slowed dramatically. Average annual investment in facilities during the previous six years was \$12 million; in ’20, it was limited to \$2.4 million in basic essential maintenance, most of which was completed before the virus struck.

There were many successful efforts to keep fair fans engaged in 2020:

- Two State Fair Food Parades were held on the fairgrounds over five long weekends and each sold out, giving fair fans a chance to get their State Fair food fix.
- Minnesota State Fair At-Home Edition was offered on the fair’s website and social media channels and included demonstrations, entertainment, creative contests, behind-the-scenes peeks, videos and more.
- The Minnesota State Fair Online Marketplace was a searchable hub to help fair fans support more than 285 State Fair merchandise vendors by clicking through to vendor websites.
- The Minnesota State Fair competition division offered four virtual showcases that included cookie decorating, crop art, K-12 artwork and photography and quilt on-a-stick.
- The 2020 Fine Arts Exhibition of Minnesota show went on both in-person and virtually and featured works by 346 artists from across the state selected through an online juried competition.

In other business conducted during the meetings, Ron Oleheiser of Grand Rapids was re-elected to a second one-year term as president of the Society. Joe Fox of Maplewood was re-elected to a two-year term as State Fair board vice president, representing the Society’s fourth regional district. Sara Donaldson of Minneapolis was elected to fill D. J. Leary’s two-year term as State Fair board vice president, representing the fifth regional district. Wally Wichmann of Balaton and Dan Grunhovd of Gary were each re-elected to three-year terms representing the Society’s seventh and ninth districts respectively.

Mark Goodrich, the State Fair’s recently retired deputy general manager of livestock and agriculture, is the newest member of the Minnesota State Fair Hall of Fame. The fair’s Hall of Fame was founded in 1966 to recognize individuals whose outstanding service has had a lasting impact on the Great Minnesota Get-Together. Goodrich is recognized throughout North America as a preeminent expert in livestock shows and agriculture education. In 1999, he created the Minnesota Beef Expo at the State Fairgrounds, which today is regarded as one of the premier beef industry events in the nation. In 2019, Goodrich was awarded the Honorary American FFA Degree from the National FFA

Organization and was inducted into the Minnesota Livestock Breeders' Hall of Fame. In 2020, he was presented with the Dean's Award for Distinguished Friend of Extension from Minnesota 4-H.

D. J. Leary of Minneapolis retired as vice president of the State Fair board of managers during the meeting and was elected to honorary life membership in the Society. Leary is one of Minnesota's leading media and political analysts who leaves a lasting legacy at the State Fair as an architect of the fair's bonding authority, which has led to significant improvements to the fairgrounds including renovation of the historic Grandstand and major livestock facilities and construction of the International Bazaar, West End Market, Transit Hub and North End Event Center.

The Minnesota State Fair Foundation, the fair's nonprofit fundraising arm, offered its continued support to the Minnesota State Fair in 2020. During the five Food Parade weekends, the Foundation welcomed more than 3,000 fair fans who signed up to be Official Friends of the Fair. The Friends of the Fair contribute to improvements to State Fair buildings, the fairgrounds and educational programs. For more information, visit msffoundation.org.

The State Agricultural Society is made up of delegates from each of the state's 87 county fairs, plus representatives of 43 statewide associations involved in agriculture, horticulture and education. The Society is a quasi-state agency charged exclusively with the production of the annual Minnesota State Fair and management of the historic 322-acre State Fairgrounds.

The Minnesota State Fair is one of the largest and best-attended expositions in the world, attracting more than 2 million visitors annually. Showcasing Minnesota's finest agriculture, art and industry, the Great Minnesota Get-Together is always 12 Days of Fun Ending Labor Day. Visit mnstatefair.org for more information. The 2021 Minnesota State Fair runs Aug. 26 - Labor Day, Sept. 6.

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