



4-H Today Blog

4-H Professionals

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What I Learned Judging at the Bangor State Fair

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You can learn a lot at a fair, or, at least be reminded of what you should already know!

It is fair season in Maine. I counted 29 fairs listed on the Maine Association of Agricultural Fairs website. Maine has large fairs (like Fryeburg Fair and Skowhegan State Fair) and small fairs (such as Houlton Fair and Monmouth Fair). Windsor Fair, a large fair, touts itself as a “progressive fair.” Ossipee Valley Fair, small, calls itself an “old-fashioned” fair. Waterford World's Fair says it is a small family fair. Union Fair says it is a large family fair. I assume they are both talking about the size of the fairs and not the families that attend! Union Fair, by the way, is famous for including the annual State of Maine Wild Blueberry Festival. Maine has at least 25 of those (festivals, that is), as well, including the Lobster, Moxie (a Maine soft drink), and the Internet Cat Video festivals!

Most of the agriculture fairs, large or small, old-fashioned or progressive, small family or large, have some 4-H involvement – which keeps the 4-H educators of Maine hopping during the summer. Don't even try to connect with the 4-H Educator in Kennebec County during fair season. She has FIVE fairs in her county. That almost seems UNfair! However, it is fair to say Maine enjoys its fairs.

On August 4, I got to go to the Bangor Fair (large). I was a 4-H Educational Exhibits judge judging exhibits put up around the fair by 4-H'ers, 4-H Clubs and, in an “open” class, farms. Exhibit exhibitors can win some pretty

good premiums too. First place was \$450!

I learned a lot from these exhibits. I learned beef products are used in the process of brewing Guinness Stout, Holsteins came from the Netherlands, and, depending on how you look at it, a cow has either one stomach with four parts or four stomachs - the argument rages!

I also learned, or re-learned, some other things.

1. Drink water.

I didn't need a bottle of water until our host gave me one, then I realized how much I needed it!

2. If something's worth doing, put your all into it.

It was clear that some exhibitors valued their work. Others seemed to value the premium. The exhibitors that got the premium gained our respect for how much value they put into their work.

3. If you are going to present information, talk like you know what you're talking about.

Act like you know what you're talking about and speak so someone other than yourself can hear you. There were a few times during the afternoon that I thought I was going deaf. When I could hear them, I sometimes wondered if they believed what they were saying! But those who acted like they knew what they were talking about, and spoke so we could hear them, they got the most points.

4. It is O.K. to delegate. One person can't do everything.

Sometimes we think we can do it all ourselves. Most times, we can't.

5. Maybe, if the right approach is used, we all CAN get along.

At least three tired, opinionated judges left alone in a hot room can!

6. You have to keep track of your mileage if you want to get reimbursed.

Darn.

7. It's not how large you are or how long you've been doing something that counts, it's what you put into the "doing" that makes the difference.

We saw some exhibits that were put up by high-powered organizations and farms with long histories that, too often, missed the mark. The exhibit that impressed us the most was put up by a little 4-H girl, written in her own hand. She could have taught those big guys a lot!

8. People won't know you are 4-H unless you tell them.

We get so used to being "4-H" that we forget to use the name. Only one out of the 14 4-H exhibits we judged included the name "4-H" in the exhibit. By the way, that one won.

9. It is best to leave before the crowds show up.

Unless you are selling something!

10. We like animals, especially cows.

At the end of the day I asked a little girl what the best part of the Bangor Fair was. "The ANIMALS!" she