

Ag Education at Fairs

Only 1.8 % of our population lives or works on a farm. In addition, many fair visitors are several generations removed from family farms; making it important to connect today's consumers with agriculture.

Consumers and agriculture opportunities

Are you ready.... to advocate for agriculture; to tell your story; to bridge the gap between producers and consumers? Here are some ideas:

- * Take advantage of invitations to deliver educational programs, presentations, demonstrations or exhibits
- * Design interactive activities or educational exhibits
- * Have key take-home messages that are short and basic
- * Utilize signage to help educate fair visitors
- * Focus on any of these: animal care, food production, crop production, progress and efficiency in food production, food safety, nutrition, agriculture technology and how farmers care for their environments and produce food to feed the world
- * Many youth and adults do not know where their food comes from or what products are raised or grown in Michigan, or in their local community
- * Welcome conversations and be prepared to answer questions about life on the farm and Michigan agriculture
- * Train volunteers on how to connect children and adults to agriculture

Ideas from around the state and country...

- * Have announcers promote agriculture facts during the shows and pulls
- * Cass County and Fowlerville have crops planted at various stages with accompanying educational signage
- * Tie in activities with Kid's Day and consider using quizzes
- * St. Joseph County built a display on hog production
- * Plant crop plots or demonstration farms to show where fruits and vegetables come from
- * Several fairs have baby animals or barnyard displays

To contact an expert in your area, visit people.msue.msu.edu, or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3364).

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- * Many fairs have "Miracle of Life" or "Newborn Animal" exhibits and/or show videos of birthing
- * Show videos on local ag in food booths or display signage
- * Ogemaw has a garden planted and maintained by Master Gardeners
- * IAFE has traveling agriculture education exhibits
- * Toy farm equipment display to simulate a farm
- * Clubs make educational posters or booths for the barns, using a theme of agriculture production, health or ag facts
- * St. Clair does "Who wants to be a dairyaire?"
- * Newaygo has an electric cow and are planting an orchard
- * Cheboygan has by-product displays
- * Allegan has a fiberglass steer and hog; "Farmer for a Day"
- * Genesee has sheep shearing contest
- * UP State Fair has a "Growing Up Foresters" exhibit and a Farmer's Market
- * Monroe will have exhibitors giving presentations on stage about their projects
- * Shiawassee has a Youth Education Agriculture Day where they set-up stations in each barn and kids go around to the stations; each barn does a presentation and has activities
- * Kent County has a Children's Hunt, and has kids talk to the public
- * Display educational information in empty cages
- * State Fair of Texas has a miniature farm where kids can plant seeds, gather eggs and drive a tiny tractor before harvesting crops
- * Offer school field trips and planned educational programs
- * Saline Fair has a "Taste of Agriculture" program
- * Gratiot has a "Let's Brag about Ag" program
- * Ingham has a display on products made from Michigan commodities, crop identification displays and shows how many people a farmer feeds using plates and cups on tables
- * Great Lakes State Fair had an "Animal Agriculture Public Education Award" contest across all species
- * Ohio State Fair has an art contest for K-12 to illustrate how "Ohio Ag is Cool". Fourth graders get in free and they experience 9 interactive "Ag is Cool" stations such as milking a life-like cow, identifying bugs under a microscope, comparing weights of animals and humans, etc.
- * Minnesota State Fair has a "Moo Booth" where visitors follow the farm-to-table process
- * Texas and Indiana have Food & Fiber Pavilions used to educate the public about agriculture and the diversity of the state. Often have stores selling items made in that state or doing product samples. Have interactive exhibits and demonstrations by Extension, Farm Bureau and commodity groups.
- * Indiana FFA has a building at their State Fair with a miniature or putt-putt golf course. Each hole has a sign with facts about Indiana agriculture.
- * Visit www.breakfastonthefarm.com for more resources

For more information contact MSU Extension educators Nancy Thelen 734-222-3825 or Mary Dunckel 989-354-9870

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