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**MARKETING STRATEGIES OF SELECTED SMALL
COUNTY FAIRS IN NORTHERN WISCONSIN**

by

Margaret L. Fiser

A Research Paper

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree**

With a Major in

Vocational and Technical Education

Approved: 2 Semester Credits



Investigation Advisor

**The Graduate College
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ABSTRACT

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Marketing Strategies of Selected Small County Fairs in Northern Wisconsin

M. S. Vocational and Technical Education

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APA Format

The marketing strategies of 10 selected small county fairs in northern Wisconsin were studied by means of a telephone survey of the contact person of each individual fair. Small county fairs face unique circumstances in the operations of their events. The governing bodies administering local fairs varied, but most took the form of a board of directors. Events offered reflected the communities in which the specific fair operated. The cost of admission to events varied among fairs, but reflect an reasonable price. Promotion of a particular fair was adapted to the types of media that best suited the area in which the fair operated.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Persons attending county fairs today are treated to a wide variety of experiences. There are entries to pique educational or cultural interests or entertainment opportunities that may appeal to an audience with diverse tastes. There are chances to exhibit handiwork, special talents or personal projects. One may enter into friendly (or even not-so-friendly) competition with neighbors, may let the public know what goods or services he or she has to offer, or may see a variety of quality entertainment at reasonable prices.

How do fairs in Wisconsin offer these experiences to their attendees? Is there a common base that all fairs share in the planning and execution of these events?

Historically, in this country, fairs began as a way for persons in communities to get together and show off livestock or crops and, later, handiwork in a friendly competition (Grabarski, 1993; McCarry, 1997). Since that time they have grown into more elaborate affairs offering entertainment options, social and cultural offerings, eating, drinking and merriment for everyone, not just the exhibitors, to enjoy (Snyder, 1990).

The educational aspects of fairs are still of importance to the community. Almost everyone has a special interest or talent or hobby that can be used as an exhibit at a fair (Fiser, 1996). In competing, exhibits are judged at a public forum. Even persons who do not have exhibits in place are free to watch and listen and learn from the judging.

Fairs have always been of interest to the state of Wisconsin as a way of promoting community-wide educational, social and cultural opportunities and as a showplace for the community, county and state (Williams, 1997). Competitive exhibits are not the

only types of exhibits offered. Most fairs have any number of commercial or educational exhibits on hand for the persons who attend the fair to see. Reasonably priced grandstand entertainment as well as showcases of local talent are also hallmarks of local fairs (Williams, 1994)

The word "fair" may be derived from the Latin word "feria" which means holy day, and evidence of fairs can be traced back more than 2000 years into ancient Biblical times. The first fairs had religious significance. They were gatherings of the devout to pray and to praise, and the churches used these assemblies as a means of adding to their coffers.

It was a small step from the early religious celebrations to commercial endeavor. As persons came together to celebrate and financially support the church, so did they promote economical activities that strengthened their personal financial well being (Neely, 1967; Grabarski, 1993). Many goods were assembled in one spot. A participant could be rid of goods he or she no longer wanted and could find goods that he or she needed all within a short distance. Travelling actors, clowns, jugglers, acrobats, and musicians could also find a ready audience in a festive and, hopefully, generous mood. After a time, travelling merchants and entertainers made the rounds of these festivals, and a system of periodic commerce was extended gradually beyond the initial religious pilgrimages. (Neely, 1967)

Recognizing the significance of fairs, religious interests and feudal lords took full advantage of these gatherings. Both understood the significant source of revenue that fairs represented, and fairs became quite regulated. In England, law merchant was established as distinct from common law. Law merchant regulated cases of debts, contracts, trespasses, breaches of assizes, and also dealt with the collection of tolls, and the maintenance of peace and order. Modern banking practices survive from the

fair regulations of old when each area of the surrounding countryside had different types of money or exchange. It was expedient to have a vendor, then called a changeur, set up to receive deposits, certify credit-worthiness, arrange loans and make money exchanges. These are some of the same types of services offered by banks today (Neely, 1967).

In Europe, as time went on fairs lost much of their commercial importance. The industrial revolution with its surge of manufacturing added to the decline. As Europe became more civilized retail shops proliferated. In time improved communications made it possible for the order and then the delivery of goods. Standardization of products grew from new industry. All of these factors had an effect on the decreasing necessity of the fair (Neely, 1967).

When Europeans migrated to the New World they brought with them the tradition of the fair as it was known in the Old Country. In the United States the first fair consisted of one man and two sheep. In 1807 Elkanah Watson of Pittsfield, Massachusetts tied two of his best animals under a local elm tree and invited passers-by to examine their wool which he believed to be as fine as any fleece he had seen in Europe. The crowd's enthusiasm planted the seeds for his organization of the "Berkshire Cattle Show" three years later. It boasted 386 sheep, 109 oxen, nine cows, three heifers, two calves and one boar. Within 100 years of this event almost every state and province in the United States had in place some sort of agricultural festival (Neely, 1967; Grabarski, 1993; McCarry, 1997).

In Wisconsin the first county fair was held in Waukesha in 1842. A handful of exhibitors displayed their agricultural exhibits and walked away with \$40 in premiums (Grabarski, 1993). In 1997 almost 64,000 exhibitors statewide presented over 419,000

exhibits for competition and walked away with over \$888,000 in premiums (Grabarski, 1998; Williams, 1997).

A peek at the premium lists of two local northern Wisconsin fairs from the early 1900s yields differences between fairs then and fairs now. At the turn of the century agricultural exhibits and exhibits centering on homemaking dominated the categories under which one could enter (Dunn Co. Ag. Soc., 1889, 1907). While agriculture-linked exhibits are still the back bone of most fairs current premium lists do reflect the changing demographics away from rural to more urban populations. Among the categories now seen are photography, electricity, computer generated projects, and health, political and social science projects (Rusk Co. Fair Soc., 1997). These are all categories unheard of at the turn of the century.

Another change has been in admission. The Dunn and Barron County fairs both admitted "everyone and their friends" for free at the turn of the century (Dunn Co. Ag. Soc., 1907; Barron Co. Ag. Soc., 1927). While there are still some fairs that have no gate charge for admission most charge some fee to see the fair.

In the early 1900s acrobatics and harness racing topped the bill for the representative fairs. Other entertainment involved competitions for local residents that centered on the everyday skills needed for life and livelihood such as horse pulls, farmers' hitch and run races, and, for the women, a buck sawing contest (Dunn Co. Ag. Soc., 1907). Today while one may still see horse pulls at many local fairs, most competitions among local residents involve motors - truck pulls, tractor pulls, mud runs, and demolition derbies (Rusk Co. Fair Soc., 1997).

Today there are 76 state-aided county and district fairs in Wisconsin and every county has one (Williams, 1997). The operations of these fairs is overseen by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (WDATCP)

with the assistance of the Wisconsin Association of Fairs (WAF). Regulations affecting fairs in Wisconsin can be found under Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (ATCP) 160 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code.

1998 marks the 75th anniversary of the inception of the Wisconsin Association of Fairs. This organization that binds local fairs together for the purpose of the advancement of community fairs (Grabarski, 1997). The purpose of the WAF as stated in its by-laws include:

- A. promote educational benefits of fairs throughout the State of Wisconsin
- B. develop and increase benefits to be derived from fairs
- C. cooperate with and enhance the educational work of the University of Wisconsin
- D. foster and promote education in liberal arts, business, manufacturing, agriculture and cultural pursuits of all kinds
- E. enhance cooperation among members to develop quality fair programs
- F. focus on issues and concerns which pose problems for members
- G. provide a framework for solving problems which fairs encounter
- H. do all things necessary, incidental and convenient in connection with the foregoing stated purpose (WAF, 1992)

Wisconsin fairs are regulated by the state through the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. Chapter ATCP 160 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code applies to county and district fairs specifically. These regulations define what qualifies as a state or district fair, define who may exhibit at the fair, and establish premium requirements. It sets forth uniform premium standards both in what specifically constitutes a given exhibit and the amount of money that will be awarded in premium. Judging regulations are also defined, as are accounting procedures

necessary for the fair to be eligible to receive state aid for premiums paid. In 1997 the amounts paid by county and district fairs in premiums to exhibitors ranged from a \$490.75 for Milwaukee County to \$40,019.75 in Walworth County (Williams, 1998).

State aid is paid to each eligible fair based on the amount of premiums paid out by that fair in the current season. Generally the total amounts of premiums paid throughout the state exceeds the money appropriated for all fairs by the state. When this occurs, the difference between the available money and total eligible premiums paid is calculated, and each individual fair receives a pro-rated percentage with a cap of \$15,000 payable to any one fair (Williams, 1997).

Initially fairs were run by county agriculture societies. In some areas individual county board agriculture committees and their respective county Extension offices planned and executed the administration of the local fair (Chronotype, 1977). The state promotes individual agricultural or fair societies whose boards of directors assume the task of overseeing the operation of individual fairs (WAF, 1992). The powers associated with the operation of the fairs lies within the power of these associations.

Most fairs operate on a not-for-profit basis, so money to operate is a concern (Grabarski, 1996). Most budgets need to be within a few dollars from year to year. There is no bank account from good years to carry over into the lean years. Many factors, such as the weather or other big events within the areas within a short time span, affect a year's success (Grabarski, 1995; Fiser, 1995). Dealing with these concerns is a constant pressure.

Community monies are another source of concern. Other community festivals or events spring up. Community demographics change. How does a fair compete with so many other interests wanting a share of the community pie? To remain viable fairs will

have to examine ways to compete for a share of the community dollar (Liebold, 1986). How well are county and district fairs able to compete for these dollars?

The needs of small fairs, those with a total attendance of less than 10,000 persons during the run of the fair, are of particular interest. Most have smaller budgets, serve a smaller population base, represent larger geographical areas, but have a smaller area from which to draw. These factors are of special concern for northern Wisconsin county fairs, those operating in Districts 1 and 2 of the Wisconsin Association of Fairs. These districts represent the northern half of Wisconsin. The focus of this study is aimed at those small fairs which include 10 of the 37 fairs operating in Districts 1 and 2 of the WAF.

The Wisconsin Association of Fairs is divided into four districts with each representing approximately one-fourth of the area of the state. Districts 1 and 2 of the WAF include the northern-most 36 counties of the state of Wisconsin. Among these 36 counties are the least populated counties in the state and the counties with the lowest per capita incomes in the state. Of the 10 small county fairs of interest in this study all are located in counties that rank among the most sparsely populated half of all Wisconsin counties. Of the 10 small county fairs of interest in this study all are located in a county that ranks among the counties within the lowest half of all per capita incomes in the state. Of the 14 urbanized areas identified within the state of Wisconsin only three are in Districts 1 and 2 of the WAF and none of the fairs within the urbanized areas have annual attendances of less than 10,000 persons (WI, 1995; Williams, 1998).

There are many questions to consider. Do counties with similar demographics have similar attendance, similar budgets, similar marketing strategies? What types of events or entertainment is offered? What is the cost of these events to the fairgoer? How do

small fairs promote their events? How much do they spend? What types of media are used?

Statement of Problem

Increased competition for local dollars to run fairs, increased competition among local festivals, increased difficulty in recruiting volunteer help, weather, and other factors influence the outcome of the run of a fair. While there is much concern among sponsors of small county fairs (those with total attendance of 10,000 persons or less during the run of the fair) concerning marketing of these fairs, there has been little study of the marketing strategies of these fairs specifically.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to define the marketing strategies of selected northern Wisconsin county fairs with regard to their events.

Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify and categorize events offered at selected small county fairs.
2. Document admission and attendance of small county fairs.
3. Determine marketing strategies used to promote small county fairs.
4. Provide a base of general information to be used for further investigation.

Rationale

Representing approximately 10% of Wisconsin fairs, the small fairs of the northern half of the state have unique circumstances. Most serve primarily rural counties with smaller population bases. Many of the small fairs are within areas that have the lowest per capita incomes in the state (WI, 1995; Williams, 1998). Examining the marketing efforts of these fairs will help to promote a better understanding of the ways in which these fairs work within their unique environment. Through this understanding practices can be analyzed and recommendations can be made to improve these endeavors.

By surveying and documenting events offered by small county fairs, and by surveying and documenting the marketing strategies of these fairs a base of general information will be in place as a foundation for future studies. Other types of festivals and exhibitions operating within similar environments may benefit from this study.

Limitations

The following limitations apply to this study. Any conclusions drawn from the study must be confined within these limitations.

1. Study is limited to 10 county fairs in northern Wisconsin that have an attendance of less than 10,000 persons per run of the fair as indicated in the Wisconsin County and District Fair Annual Report.
2. Small county fair is defined in terms of attendance only.
3. Scope of study is limited to the marketing efforts in general and certain events within the fair program. It does not consider any other aspect of the fair.
4. Information gathered in the study was based on the recall of the persons interviewed and reflected results of the 1998 fair season.

5. The researcher is personally involved in the operation of one of the fairs studied.
6. The researcher knows four of the six persons interviewed for this survey.

Methodology

The contact person listed in the 1998 Schedule of Wisconsin County, District and State Fairs of 10 small county fairs were selected and surveyed.

Telephone interviews were conducted covering the areas of interest of this study; organizational structure of the board of directors, attendance of the fair, list of events, attendance of the events, promotional budget for the fair as a whole, and promotional budget for the individual grandstand events. A telephone survey with open ended questions was developed for use in the interview process.

Chapter II

The review of literature for this study involves the general base of information as it is related to the state of Wisconsin's 76 county and district fairs. This information provides the groundwork for the examination of the areas of organization, events, and attendance within the structure of small northern Wisconsin county fairs. It will include a brief examination of the demographics of the areas of northern Wisconsin identified in this study. Also examined will be organizational structure and special events. The review of literature will add definition as to what constitutes a fair and to the state's role in fairs.

Districts 1 and 2 of the WAF include the northern-most 36 counties of the state of Wisconsin. Among these 36 counties are the least populated counties in the state and the counties with the lowest per capita incomes in the state. Of the 10 small county fairs of interest in this study all are located in counties that rank among the most sparsely populated half of all Wisconsin counties. Of the 10 small county fairs of interest in this study all are located in a county that ranks among the counties within the lowest half of all per capita incomes in the state. Of the 14 urbanized areas identified within the state of Wisconsin only three are in Districts 1 and 2 of the WAF and none of the fairs within the urbanized areas have annual attendances of less than 10,000 persons (Blue Book, 1995; Williams, 1998).

The 1997 Premium Listing for the Rusk County Fair details who may exhibit at the fair and is consistent with the guidelines outlined in ATCP 160 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code. Any person who is a resident of the state of Wisconsin may enter an exhibit in open class categories. In order to exhibit in the Junior class, exhibitors must be 19 years of age or less and must be a member of a recognized group that has adult leadership and an educational element. Groups include, but are not limited to

4-H, FFA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Kinship, and church youth groups (Rusk Co. Fair Society, 1997).

The majority of exhibitors in the state of Wisconsin, 77%, range in age from 5 to 19. The majority of money paid in premiums, \$650,663 of \$880,356 goes to exhibitors in this age group (Massey, 1998).

Chapter 93.23 of the Wisconsin Statutes establishes the formula for by which state aid is accorded to county and district fairs. Each receives 95% of the first \$8000 paid out in premiums and 70% of the premiums paid in excess of \$8000. There is a \$15000 cap for state reimbursement to any one fair. Only the recognized county fairs, district fairs and State fair premiums are eligible for state aid reimbursement.

An article in the Country Today (1998) written by Jim Massey summarizes the disbursement of premiums throughout the state of Wisconsin. Two years ago state aid for premium reimbursement was cut from \$650,000 to \$585,000, a cut that left many fairs feeling a financial pinch as they struggled to make up for the 10% cut (Massey, 1998). In 1998, as in the year previous, \$585,000 is available from the state for premium aid to Wisconsin fairs. This has remained stable from 1996 to 1997 and appears to be stable for the 1998 fair season. Monies to cover the state's portion of reimbursed premiums comes from a partial designation from state lottery revenues and some from general purpose revenue. In 1997 the proportion of monies provided for state aid was comprised of 99% from the State Gaming Commission and 1% from general purpose tax revenue dollars (Massey, 1998; Williams, 1998).

Junior and open dairy classes are the backbone of county and district fairs in the state with respect to the amount of dollars paid in premiums. \$130,186 of the \$888,356 total paid in premiums went to dairy exhibitors. Cultural arts ranked second at \$94,508, and was followed horses at third with \$86,169; soil science at fourth with

\$51,357; and foods and nutrition at fifth with \$48,842 (Massey, 1998; Williams, 1998).

The image of the county fair as an event for rural persons only is a concern. As populations shift from more rural settings to more urban settings this notion must be dealt with if fairs are to survive. It may be no accident that the most urban county in the state has the fair with the fewest exhibitors (Williams, 1998)!

Despite the rural image of county fairs and the dwindling number of farms in the state of Wisconsin, Bob Williams, County and District Fair Coordinator for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is optimistic that fairs will be able to maintain a healthy number of livestock exhibits. While the number of exhibits and exhibitors has fallen slightly in the past four years, the number of exhibits shown per exhibitors has risen as has the average number of dollars earned per exhibitor (Williams, 1998).

The 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997 annual reports of Wisconsin County and District Fairs show the economic impact county and district fairs have on the state of Wisconsin. In 1997 the total receipts of all 76 fairs were \$15,985,200. Total expenditures were \$15,525,280. Both figures have more than doubled over the past fifteen years (Williams, 1998).

Review of the operating budgets shows Milwaukee County Junior fair with the smallest operating budget at \$1900 and near-by Walworth County with the largest at \$1,701,739. In the northern two district of the Wisconsin Association of Fairs the spread is \$16,414 for Pepin County to \$932,917 for Shawano County (Williams, 1998).

Business of the Wisconsin Association of Fairs, whose purpose is to promote the interests of fairs throughout state, is conducted by an eight member board of

directors. This board is made up of a combination of eight directors with two each elected from the four districts representing the county and district fairs within the state of Wisconsin. Voting members of the WAF consist of officers, directors, managers and board members who are involved with a county or district fair that receives state aid. The organization of the entity that conducts local fairs is left to the counties and local organizations (WAF, 1992).

The Rusk County Fair Society is contracted by Rusk County to conduct its fair in Ladysmith. This society is an example of one of the ways in which the bodies conducting local fairs are organized. It consists of a 10 member board of directors with nine members elected from throughout the county and one member appointed to represent the interests of the Rusk County Agricultural Committee. The society has full rein in the execution of all fair-related business (Rusk County Fair Society, 1987).

A 1996 survey conducted by Jane Grabarski for the WAF examined the compensation for the managers of 46 responding Wisconsin county and district fairs. The fairs were grouped according to the amount paid out by the fair in premium dollars. The small group consisted of 13 fairs with premium payments of up to \$6,999. The medium group consisted of 14 fairs with premiums paid falling between \$7000 and \$13,999. Nineteen fairs comprised the large group and had premium payments of \$14,000 or more.

Six of the 46 responding fairs had no manager position. Gross salary for small fair managers ranged from \$0 to \$3600 per year with no benefits. Medium fairs paid managers from \$250 to \$15,723 per year with one fair paying some benefits. Large fairs paid managers between \$400 to \$75,000 per year with six offering some benefits. Two thirds of the responding fairs had no full-time manager. Only one fair manager of the 40 manager positions listed in the survey had a full staff (Grabarski, 1996).

Fairs are staffed primarily with volunteer help. Conducting an event that runs for an average of four days and can have over 15,000 people in attendance is no small feat. Many local service organizations contribute time and money that are invaluable to the fairs which they serve (Grabarski, 1997).

A major problem facing small county fairs is the inability to attract a sufficient crowd to make grandstand entertainment profitable. The 1994 Fall District 1 meeting of the WAF held in Phillips addressed this problem.

Most fairs have not expressed a problem drawing grandstand audiences for motor sports events such as truck or tractor pulls, demolition derbies or mud bogs (Fiser, 1994). In the past seven years for the Rusk County Fair only one year has seen a motorized event that failed to at least break even (Fiser, 1997). In the words of a fair board member for Langlade County uttered at the 1996 WAF Annual Convention in Milwaukee, "If we could attach a motor to Mr. Potato Head we would draw a crowd!" (Fiser, 1996). This sentiment was echoed by Fiser in the annual fair critique of the 1993 Rusk County Fair. "It is my opinion that had we been able to attach an eliminator to (Australian country singer) Horsborough and send him down the track we would have made money in the grandstand."

Local music festivals that bring in big name entertainment such as Country or Rock Fests in Cadott, Country Jam in Eau Claire or the Hodag Festival in Rhinelander are also felt to have a negative impact on local fairs' ability to draw an audience large enough to sustain a grandstand show (Fiser, 1994). While the public expresses a desire to see a singer or a band in the grandstand (Fiser, 1995) entertainment with any name recognition is seldom available for less than \$10,000. Typical of small fairs is the Rusk County Fair in Ladysmith with a total budget of \$5000 for its grandstand act

(Effertz & Stanger, 1992). Grandstand receipts at that fair have been as low as \$1000 (Effertz, 1992).

There is general concern among small fairs as to what to do with the slot that may have been reserved for a singer or a band in the grandstand. Many have switched to other types of events in hopes of attracting more persons into the grandstand (Fiser, 1994). Among the alternative entertainment offered have been compact car and truck demolition derbies, motor cycle racing, rodeos and horse racing (Fiser, 1994; Massey, 1998). Free stages with local entertainment at smaller fairs and free stages at larger fairs have also been tried with some success (Massey, 1998).

In *The Agricultural Fair*, Wayne Neely's (1967) comprehensive work on the history and function of fairs, three purposes of the county fair are cited. The first, as a social institution, is to reflect and uphold the social climate of the community in which the fair operates. The second function is to serve as a vehicle for education, and the third function is to provide recreational outlets (Neely, 1967).

The social element is manifest in several ways. Local boards, social entities in their own right, assure continuity in the planning and execution of a fair. Local control also ensures that local interests of the community will be addressed. Elements can be drawn from the whole community and used to promote the community as a whole (Neely, 1967).

Exhibitions at local fairs provide the educational opportunities in several ways. As an active participant, the exhibitor's work is judged against an ideal. In this way the participant's time and effort are rewarded, as is the participant's learning with regard to the project. Government agencies, civic groups or educational institutions may set up exhibits for the visiting public to peruse, may hand out information, or may have a representative present to answer questions. Finally, manufacturers or merchants may

use the fair as a means to inform the public of goods or services that they have to offer (Neely, 1967).

Recreational activities are the third vital purpose of the agricultural fair. Recreational activities may take the form of games or contests in which fairgoers may participate. These may range from physical activities like races or sawing contests to talent contests to horse, tractor, or truck pulls in which the participant is pitting his or her talent against that of his or her neighbor. Also included in recreational activities are the various shows available for the fairgoer to watch (Neely, 1967). Entertainment as part of the recreational scene at local fairs is one of the areas within the scope of this study.

Chapter III

The methods and procedures used in this study are explained under the headings Research Design, Sample Selection, Instrumentation, Procedure, and Analysis.

Research Design

This study is designed as a descriptive study. Interest in the marketing activities of small county fairs provided the basis for the survey. Interviews were conducted by telephone as to the marketing strategies used by small fairs with regard to the following categories Fair Location and Length, Attendance, Admission, Promotion, and Grandstand Events.

Sample Selection

Small county fairs have been identified, for purposes of this study, as those fairs having a total attendance of 10,000 persons or less during the run of the fair. Total attendance for each fair in the northern two districts of the Wisconsin Association of Fairs (WAF) was established using the mean of the total attendances listed for these fairs in the 1994-1997 Wisconsin County and District Fairs Annual Reports. Using this criterion, 11 of the 38 fairs in District 1 and 2 of the WAF were identified as being small. Counties considered for this survey were Ashland, Buffalo, Florence, Forest, Iron, Pepin, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Vilas, and Washburn.

The contact person listed in the 1998 Schedule of Wisconsin County, District and State Fairs of small county fairs were contacted for the survey. Of these eleven one person was unavailable to interview. The titles of the persons contacted included three presidents of the boards of directors, six secretaries or secretaries/treasurers, and one county employee who did not have a title with regard to the fair.

Instrumentation

A telephone survey with open ended questions was developed for the interviews. Questions were grouped by related topics into the categories Fair Location and Length, Attendance, Admission, Promotion, and Grandstand Events. Grandstand events were further broken down into attendance, admission and promotion for each individual event. Space was allowed for general comments.

A pre-test of the instrument was conducted through an interview of a similar fair outside of the fairs identified for the purpose of this study. The following observations were made in regard to the instrument and the following corrections were made.

1. The length of the test interview exceeded the fifteen minute estimate for the execution of the interview. Length allowed for the length of the interview was expanded to twenty-five minutes.
2. Exact information would not be available within the confines of this interview format. Data would be based on the best recollection of the interviewee. Data would be placed in categories and ranked by the researcher based on the information provided by the interviewee.
3. A question concerning the cost to the fair was vague. The researcher would inquire as to different types of costs incurred regarding the cost of the event. Even with further definition, this question was too vague, and not usable at the completion of the interviews.
4. Attendance of the events needed to be clarified as to whether it included the participants of the event or only the viewers. Only the persons viewing the event were of interest in this survey.

A copy of the introduction, the conclusion, and the survey instrument follows.

Introductory Statement:

Hello, I'm Peggy Fiser and I'd like to talk to you about your fair.

I am a graduate student at UW-Stout, and this interview will help me meet the requirements for my degree.

I am interested in the marketing efforts of smaller fairs in northern Wisconsin, and I hope that the information gathered will be of help to my local fair and other small fairs in the area.

I anticipate that the total length of the interview will be about 25 minutes.

While I have gotten your name as the contact person for your fair from the 1998 Schedule of Wisconsin Fairs, you will not be identified by name, title or by the name or location of your fair in the final draft of the paper.

May I interview you concerning your fair?

Concluding Statement:

Thank you for your assistance in this survey

Would you like a copy of the results when the survey is completed?

Survey Instrument**(Introductory Statement)****Survey Info:**

Name: _____

Date: _____

Title: _____

Time: _____

Board of directors? Yes No

Call back? _____

Number: _____

Manner chosen: _____

FAIR: _____

Location: _____

Length of fair: _____

Dates/time of year: _____

ATTENDANCE: _____

By day of week: M_____ Tu_____ W_____ Th_____ F_____ Sa_____ Su_____

How is attendance calculated: _____

For the fair? _____

For the grandstand? _____

ADMISSION COST:

Gate admission? _____

Parking Fee? _____

Comments: _____

PROMOTION OF FAIR:

Amount *Fair* spends on promotion? _____

What types of media or methods do you use to promote your fair?

Percentage of ad budget:

Newspaper _____ Radio _____ TV _____ Flyers/ posters _____ PSAs _____

Other(Type) _____

Sponsors promote: (How?) _____

Comments. _____

WHAT EVENTS DO YOU OFFER IN YOUR GRANDSTAND?

(Attach a separate **EVENT** sheet for each event listed)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

EVENT: _____

Day & Time: _____

Attendance in 1998: _____

Admission? _____

How is attendance calculated? _____

Is any part of the cost of this event provided through sponsorship? (Explain)

How many years has this attraction or event been offered at your fair? _____

Have you held this event on the same day each year? Yes No (Explain)

Do you plan to offer this event again next year? Yes No Undecided

Why/Why not? _____

PROMOTION OF EVENT:

Part of the total promotion package only? Yes No

If no to above, amount *Fair* spends on promotion? _____

What types of media do you use to specifically promote this event:

Percentage:

Newspaper _____ Radio _____ TV _____ Flyers/ posters _____ PSAs _____

Other(Type) _____

Sponsors promote (How?) _____

Overall comments about this event: _____

(Concluding Statement)

Procedures

During the last week of November and the first week of December, 1998, the contact person listed in the 1998 Schedule of Wisconsin County, District and State Fairs were surveyed by telephone. The telephone survey covered the areas of interest of this study: organizational structure of the board of directors, attendance of the fair, list of events, attendance of the events, promotional budget for the fair as a whole, and promotional budget for the individual grandstand events. Twenty-five minutes was allowed for the length of the interview. While all questions on the instrument were asked in the same manner and the same order, some leeway was allowed in the interview to pursue or clarify information. For example, several counties indicated that they did not have a grandstand, but did indicate that they held the types of events of interest in this study. In those cases the events were referred to track or arena events for the course of the interview.

Analysis

The data collected was grouped by like categories as taken from the instrument, and will be described in the following chapter. As this is a descriptive study only descriptions of the data apply.

Chapter IV

The contact persons of 10 small county fairs in the northern half of Wisconsin were contacted by telephone and interviewed as to the following areas of their respective fairs: governing boards, attendance, amount spent on publicity and the types of media used, and grandstand or track events offered for entertainment and general comments regarding their fairs.

Governing Boards

Eight of the 10 fairs surveyed operated under the direction of a board of directors. Two fairs were run by personnel out of their respective county Extension Offices. One fair was run by three individuals who received a stipend from that county to oversee the fair, but were not otherwise employed by the county.

The boards of directors varied in size and in the method chosen. Four of the boards were comprised of members elected by the membership of an association or society during an annual meeting. One board of directors chose members to fill vacant positions during an annual meeting. One board of directors was appointed by the county agency responsible for overseeing the board. Two boards were comprised of whoever "just showed up."

The number of seats on the board of directors varied among the boards surveyed from 3 to 28 seats. One board contained three members. Five fairs were served by nine member boards that were elected from the association or society membership. Three of those boards also had an additional representative that was appointed to the fair board by and from the county board. One fair board of directors contained 12 members. One board contained 28 members.

Run of the Fair, Admission and Attendance

Three and four days were the prevalent length of the fairs surveyed. Five held three-day events, and four held four-day events. One fair listed a week long run, but had activities for fairgoers for only the last three days. The four fairs with the four-day runs had the largest attendance figures of the ten fairs surveyed.

Two fairs did not track attendance at their fairs. Five fairs tracked attendance through ticket sales. Two fairs tracked attendance through the number of cars parked. One fair estimated the number of fairgoers through the number of exhibitors.

Admission costs varied among the fairs. The admission charged ranged from \$2-\$3/day, \$3-\$6/ Season's Pass and the price also varied with age. Parking fees for the two fairs that tracked admissions through the number of cars parked were \$2 for one fair and \$3 for the other. Three fairs charged neither people nor cars admission to the grounds.

Attendance at the fairs studied varied from 700 to 10,000. The attendance of the two fairs that did not track attendance was unknown. One fair had an attendance of 700. One fair had an attendance of 2500. One fair had an attendance of 3500. One fair had an attendance of 7000. One fair had an attendance of 8000. Two fairs had attendances of 9000 each, and one fair had an attendance of 10,000. The mean of the fairs that tracked attendance was 6200.

Of the ten fairs studied two did not spend money on advertising. Any advertising of their fairs was done through outside donors or sponsors. Budgets for the remaining eight fairs ranged from \$400-\$3500. One fair spent \$400. Two fairs spent \$1500 each. One fair spent \$2000. Two fairs spent \$2500 each. One fair spent \$2700. One fair spent \$3500. The mean spent for publicity among the eight fairs with publicity budgets was \$2075.

The percentages of the budgets allotted to various media types varied greatly. When all fairs were averaged together approximately a third of the collective budget was spent on newspapers, a third was spent on radio, and a third was spent on flyers or posters. None of the fairs in the survey spent any of their budgets on television ads, however, two fairs did take advantage of television public service announcements (PSAs) afforded to them. Two fairs used radio PSAs. Only two of the ten fairs surveyed committed money to promote specific events individually.

Grandstand Events

A total of 26 events were offered as grandstand-type entertainment among the 10 fairs. Two fairs did not have this type of entertainment. Two fairs had one event each. One fair had two grandstand events. One fair had three. One fair had four. Two fairs had five. One fair had six.

Demolition derbies and horse pulls were the most widely offered among the fairs. Each provided entertainment at five different fairs. Tractor pulls were offered at three fairs. Two fairs had truck pulls, two fairs had mud runs, and two fairs had bands. Among events offered singly were a talent show, a go-cart race, an ATV race, a garden tractor race, a pony pull, a rodeo, and a youth band contest.

The youth band was offered at one fair as the Friday evening entertainment. Admission was free, and attendance was unavailable. This event had been an attraction at this fair for the past three years, and the fair planned to continue this event.

This same fair offered an ATV race on Saturday afternoon as a lead in to its mud run. Admission was free and attendance was unavailable. This was the first year for this event, and the fair intended to repeat the event again next year.

A talent show was offered at one fair. A preliminary contest was held Thursday evening at 5:30pm, with final competition on Saturday afternoon at 4pm. Admission to see the event was free, and attendance was estimated by the fair at 100 persons for each show. This contest had been held at different days and times in the past in an effort to find the best slot. This attraction had been offered for the past six years, and the fair intended to hold it again next year.

A garden tractor pull was offered at one fair. It was held at 6:30pm on Thursday evening. Admission was \$1 and attendance was calculated from the admission. Attendance was rounded to 500 watchers. This event had been held at this fair for the past 10 years and the fair intended to hold it again next year.

The above fair also held a pony pull at 1pm on Saturday. Admission to watch was free and attendance was unavailable. This was the first year for this event, and the fair intended to offer it again next year.

A rodeo was offered at one fair on Friday evening at 8pm and again Saturday afternoon at 3pm. Admission was \$5 in advance, and \$8 the day of the rodeo. Attendance based on admission receipts was 1500 for Friday night and 500 for Saturday afternoon. It was the first year for this event at this fair, and it will be offered again.

One fair offered go-cart races at 7pm on Thursday evening. Admission was \$3, and attendance was set at 150. This was the first year for this event at this fair, and the fair intended to offer it again next year.

Two fairs offered musical entertainment. One fair has had a band as entertainment for over 30 years. Admission was free, and attendance was estimated as 300. This event has been a staple as this fair's weekend evening entertainment, and will be offered again. The second fair offered an a cappella group for shows at noon, 2pm.

and 6pm on both Saturday and Sunday. Admission was free and attendance was estimated by the fair at 250 persons per show. This event had been a feature of the fair for the past four years and the fair is undecided as to whether to hold the event again.

Two fairs held mud runs, both fairs held them on Saturday, one fair at noon and one fair at 2pm. Admission was \$3 and free respectively. Attendance was 650 and unavailable, respectively. Both attractions had been offered over ten years at each fair. Both on the same day and time. Both fairs intended to offer this event again.

Two fairs held truck pulls. Both were offered on Saturday night at 7pm. Admission was \$3 for one fair and \$5 for the other. Attendance was 800 and 200 respectively. This event was the usual Saturday night offering for both fairs and would be offered again. This was a ten year event for one fair and an over twenty year event for the other.

Three fairs held tractor pulls, one on Saturday evening at 7pm, and two fairs held the pulls on Sunday with a show at 12:30pm for one fair, and shows at 12:30pm and 7:30pm for the other. Admission was \$3 for the fairs that had one show only, and \$2 per show for the fair with two shows. Attendance varied. The fairs with single shows had attendances of 100 and 150. The fair with two shows had an total attendance of 400 between the two shows. All were long standing events at their respective fairs, with one in place for 15 years, and two with over thirty years a piece standing. Usually the tractor pull was held at the same day and time each year except for one fair that indicated that it had had to move the day and time recently due to scheduling conflicts. Two fairs will offer this event again, and one is undecided.

Five fairs offered horse pulls. Days and times varied, Thursday evening at 7:30pm, Friday at 6pm, Friday at 6:30pm, Sunday at 1pm, and Sunday at 2pm. Three offered free admission. One fair had an admission of \$1, and one fair had an admission of \$2.

Attendance figures were unavailable for two fairs. The three remaining fairs had attendances of 100, 150 and 200. The standing of this event was unknown for one fair, ten years for one fair, and over 20 years for three fairs. All of the fairs held the event at the same day and time each year, and four of the five fairs will offer it again. One fair is undecided about whether to offer the pull again.

Five fairs offered demolition derbies in their grand stands. Three fairs held them as Saturday events. One fair scheduled the demo derby at 1pm. Two fairs held their demo derbies at 7pm on Saturday evening. One fair had a Sunday showing at 7pm. One fair held two Sunday events, one at noon, and one at 5pm. Attendance varied greatly among the five fairs. One fair had an attendance of 250. One fair had an attendance of 650. One fair had an attendance of 950. One fair had an attendance of 1500. One fair had an attendance of 1750. The two fairs with the least amount of attendance had held this event for less than 5 years. The three fairs with the most attendance had all held the events at their respective fairs for over 20 years. All demo derbies were held at the same day and time each year, and all will be repeated.

Information concerning the grandstand events is summarized in Table 1. The results of the survey are compared for each event, the day and time offered, admission to the grandstand, number of spectators in attendance, number of years offered at each fair and whether the fair intends to offer the event again.

Table 1**Summary of Grandstand Event Information**

EVENT	Day & Time	Admission	Attendance	No. of Yrs	Again?
ATV Races	Sa, 1pm	Free	Unavailable	1	Yes
Garden Tractor Pull	Th, 6:30pm	\$1	500	10	Yes
Go-cart Races	Th, 7pm	\$3	300	1	Yes
Pony Pull	Sa, 1pm	Free	Unavailable	1	Yes
Rodeo	F, 8pm; Sa, 4pm	\$5 & \$8	2000	1	Yes
Talent Contest	Th, 5:30pm; Sa, 3pm	Free	200	6	Yes
Youth Bands	F, 8pm	Free	Unavailable	3	Yes
Music	F, Sa, & Su, 8pm	Free	300	30+	Yes
Music	Sa & Su, Varies	Free	1500 Total	4	Undecided
Mud Run	Sa, Noon	\$3	650	10+	Yes
Mud Run	Sa, 2pm	Free	Unavailable	10+	Yes
Truck Pull	Sa, 7pm	\$5	200	10+	Yes
Truck Pull	Sa, 7pm	\$3	800	20+	Yes
Tractor Pull	Sa, 7pm	\$3	100	15	Yes
Tractor Pull	Su, 12:30pm	\$3	150	30	Undecided
Tractor Pull	Su, 12:30pm, 7:30pm	\$2	400	30	Yes
Horse Pull	Th, 7pm	\$2	100	25+	Undecided
Horse Pull	F, 6pm	Free	Unavailable	Unknown	Yes
Horse Pull	F, 6:30pm	\$1	125	20+	Yes
Horse Pull	Su, 1pm	Free	200	10	Yes
Horse Pull	Su, 2pm	Free	Unavailable	20+	Yes
Demo Derby	Sa, 1pm	\$5	250	3	Yes
Demo Derby	Sa, 1pm	Free	650	5	Yes
Demo Derby	Sa, 1pm	\$4	1750	20+	Yes
Demo Derby	Su, 7pm	\$5	950	20+	Yes
Demo Derby	Su, Noon, 5pm	\$5	1500	20+	Yes

Comments

Comments given during the interview fell into three main themes, community involvement, expanding the fair, and comments about specific events. While all of the fair spokespersons who expressed an opinion touched on the difficulty of attracting and maintaining adequate numbers of volunteers, three fair spokespersons expressed concern over what they felt was a lack of community interest for the success of the fair. One cited a problem with a staff member who had embezzled funds over eighty

years ago as the source of community apathy. This led to a lack of endorsement by county officials that has carried into the present. One spokesperson cited a lack of an adequate space to hold its fair, and an apathy on the part of the county to assist in providing one. One spokesperson cited what she felt to be a low priority given to the fair by county officials as the source of that fair's lack of support. The three fairs that expressed a lack of community concern all had attendances in the lowest third of the 10 fairs surveyed.

Three fair spokespersons indicated that the fairs in which they served were considering expanding days for next year's fairs. One fair intended to go from a three-day run to a four-day run. Two fairs intended to go from four-day runs to five-day runs. One of the two fairs cited a need to add a day to expedite the judging of exhibits. The remaining two fairs cited a desire to be able to offer more or different entertainment.

Comments on the entertainment centered around which events were the biggest draws and which events did not seem draw audiences. Demolition derbies, which were held by five fairs were cited as the biggest draws for four of those fairs. Mud runs, which were held by two of the fairs in 1998, and were an attraction for one other fair that had not held one in 1998 due to scheduling problems, were also cited as one of the biggest draws by the three fairs that held them.

Tractor pulls, held at three fairs garnered mixed reviews. One fair cited the tractor pull as its biggest draw. One fair cited the tractor pull as such an "iffy" event that it was undecided as to whether to offer it again. Horse Pulls, which were offered at five fairs, had the same mixed review. It was cited by one fair as its biggest draw. One fair cited the horse pull as its least attended event. The latter fair was undecided as to whether to hold it again, but felt that perhaps the time slot was the problem. The

spokesperson was unsure if it could be replaced with anything that would be a bigger draw.

Among the grandstand events mentioned by three fairs that had gone by the way were musical entertainment in the grandstand. One fair that currently had musical entertainment in the grand stand was undecided about whether to continue. High cost of the event to the fair and poor attendance were the cited reasons that each fair gave for its decision. Among the events that will be tried in the future by fairs that do not yet hold these events are a rodeo for one fair, motorcycle drag races for one fair, and an antique tractor pull to augment its present tractor pull for one fair.

Chapter V

Summary

Wayne Neely lists social, educational, and recreational purposes as the three functions of fairs. With these noble purposes in mind fairs are indeed a vital part of the community in northern Wisconsin.

Factors unique to northern Wisconsin may make it difficult for fairs to fulfill their commitments to serve the community. Changing demographics, competition, finding able volunteers, restrictive budgets, smaller populations all figure into the operation of a small fair. This survey examined ways in which small fairs worked within their limitations.

A telephone survey was developed. The contact persons for 10 fairs that had an attendance of less than 10,000 each were contacted for interview.

Conclusions

It was found that 80% of the surveyed fairs functioned under the direction of a board of directors. The two fairs that did not have a board of directors were among the smallest fairs of the study.

All fairs had three-day or four-day runs. The four bigger fairs had four-day runs. The smaller fairs had three-day runs.

Half of the fairs tracked attendance through ticket sales. Three fairs had a means of estimating fair attendance based on exhibits or cars parked. Two fairs did not track attendance.

The price of admission to the fair grounds varied from free to \$3 per day to \$5 per day, with Season's Passes varying from \$3 to \$6 for the run of the fair. Grandstand

admission varied from free to from \$1 to \$5, with one event costing \$8. This represents very affordable entertainment.

Eight of the 10 of the fairs contacted had promotional budgets, and all 10 of the fairs did some type of promotion of the fair as a whole. Only 2 of the 10 fairs did an extensive amount of promotion of individual events. Both did this type of promotion as a matter of course to highlight important information that may have been lost in a comprehensive fair advertisement. One of the two fairs using special advertising did so to draw attention to a new event. Generally the higher attended fairs showed more concern over promotion. It could not be determined from this survey if the attention to promotion was influenced by attendance or if attendance was influenced by promotion. While there were some events that were duplicated among several fairs, all of the fairs had at least one event that was unique to that fair.

Sponsorship was used to some extent by all of the fairs, but was not widely used as a means of financial support for individual events. Sponsorship appeared to be an one resource that could be cultivated in the future to assist fairs which operate on tight budgets.

In making the decisions as to what to offer as entertainment most fairs seem to be responsive to the community in which they functioned. This can be seen in the number of well attended long standing events as well as the types of new events offered.

Recommendations

This study has implications for recommendations in two areas. Recommendations for small fairs and recommendations for further study.

Recommendations for Small Fairs

The fairs of the study met the needs of the community in which they function. It should be remembered that these fairs serve an important social, educational, and recreational function within their counties. There are several areas that the small fair may want to address in order to effectively meet the needs of the community and of the fair. Among the areas are sponsorship, public service announcements (PSAs) and other free publicity, community support, competition, and tracking.

While all fairs within the study indicated a connection to sponsors, only two fairs actively pursued sponsorship as a means of funding the grandstand events offered. Many businesses and industries use sponsorship as a means of showing community. This may be an area that could be tapped for financially strapped small fairs.

Less than half of the fairs surveyed tapped into PSAs as a means of getting their word out. This advertising is free. Finding media groups that will provide this service may take some investigation, but the result will be another source of added funding at no cost to the fair for promotion for the fair.

The free flowing comment offered during the interview process often included what would seem to be a frustration over the lack of support within some communities for the fair, or a lack of commitment from some county officials for the success of the fair. The three fairs that expressed a frustration over a lack of community support fell into the least attended third of the fairs surveyed. Community support seems to be a key factor in the success of these fairs. It is vital to promote a positive and cooperative effort within the community. This also seems to be critical in the recruitment of volunteers for all aspects of the function of the fair.

Many small fairs are faced with competition from many other local events such as art festivals, music festivals, or individual city or village celebrations. The local fair

must understand the nature of the competition, and it must find its niche and promote the unique aspects of the fair.

Small fairs need to have a system of tracking the attendance, where and what money is being spent, and what programs or events are bringing a return on the dollar. Events with large returns may help subsidize less profitable endeavors, but offerings that are ill attended and costly to run should be evaluated.

Recommendations for Further Study

This survey opens questions for other areas that are related and are of interest. Among other areas for further research are cost analysis, volunteerism, community support, governing boards, program evaluation, the tracking of several fairs over several years, and a comparison of fairs with other local festivals.

Small fairs often function on very limited budgets. As not-for-profit organizations fairs are limited in how much they may profit, and are limited in what they may do with the profits. A study of where the dollars are spent and where the dollars are earned would help in decision making regarding activities of small county fairs.

Since by far most of the work associated with small fairs is voluntary, and since it takes a great deal of time and effort to plan and execute a fair, a study of the benefit of voluntary help to the operation of a fair would be of interest. Such an investigation would shed light on the cost benefit to the small fair and to the community.

It was noted that the spokespersons of fairs that were among the least attended expressed frustration over a lack of community support. A detailed analysis of the attitudes of the community toward the local fair, and the effects that attitude may have on community support would be beneficial to the understanding and promotion of community

It was noted that the fairs that were among the higher attended of the 10 fairs surveyed had what appeared to be the most organized boards of directors. Analysis of the effectiveness of the functioning of the board of directors would add understanding to the work of not-for-profit, volunteer panels.

An inside analysis of the functioning of a particular fair may be a tool for its evaluation. A systematic evaluation of a specific fair would help identify areas in which the fair was effective, and would also identify areas that could be improved.

Fairs are open to the public for just a few days each year. Many factors can influence a fair's run. Tracking several fairs over several years would provide a more accurate pattern of trends for small fairs.

Fairs and festivals share certain characteristics. Fairs and festivals operate in competition with each other. A comparative study would help clarify each one's role within the community.

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