



Yamhill County Fairgrounds & Event Center

Dear Oregon Legislators,

Since there was not a 2020 Yamhill County Fair, most would think dropping fair funding makes sense. Since holding the Fair was not an option due to COVID-19 Governor mandated shutdowns, then why must we still need full funding? The truth of the matter is we need funding now more than ever to ensure not only that Fair 2021 can happen, but so we can also continue serving the youth and public in our community.

From the start of this epidemic in March, our Yamhill County Fair Board and staff have made a point to hope for the best and prepare for the worse. That was proved when we became a sanctuary for people and animals escaping the fires last fall. We had over 750 animals on the property for 11 days. This was a cost to the fairgrounds that was not covered because FEMA will not reimburse for farm animals. WE served people from 5 different counties. So, we ate those cost, because those people had lost enough. We shut down community enriching projects we have spent months and years planning for, limited staffing to preserve resources, and put our noses to the grindstone working on the small things that still made a difference in the community. We hoped Fair would be an option but made sure we spent extraordinarily little in case things escalated and Fair was cancelled, leveraging resources to the extent possible to maximize productivity under our self-imposed financial constraints. We did our due diligence to protect our budget, while preparing ourselves to go full force in the few months prior to Fair if it did happen.

The Yamhill County Fairgrounds serves over 500 youths in our community, above and beyond the Fair. Once our county was moved from phase 1 to phase 2, many of these programs are still functioning, and serving the youth that would have been here for Fair. Moving forward we will have a 4-H horse fair, The Portland Karting Association track is still running on reduced capacity, the City Parks archery program is scheduled to be here, the OSU youth tractor driving training, junior rodeo, multiple equine events/practices/meetings/

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fundraisers, and we are planning on hosting an auction for all 4-H and FFA meat animals for our county youth. All of these activities require secured funding and pay exponential dividends in benefit to youth and community both financially and experientially. Without staging and hosting a full-blown fair, we are still functioning in a safe manner to provide services to our youth. This is especially important in our current climate to maintain as many opportunities for our youth to continue to have hope in their future, and educational opportunities and practical experience, and work towards a 2021 Fair. Keeping our youth's moral and work ethic going strong is what Fair is all about ultimately. Dropping programs or raising costs due to limited funding from the government must not happen and would have severe adverse impacts for both youth and community members throughout the county.

Many of the programs we have put on hold have been replaced with Yamhill County Health Department's screening programs and Covid Shot Clinics along with PPE hand out by OSU and the Department of Agriculture. Also, many of the Civic groups meet here as they can meet under open covered structures on the property and maintain proper spacing and group numbers.

Though we were unable to employ our typical army of youth for the fair, we still are actively running our Yamhill County Fair Ambassador's scholarship program with two Seniors heading out to college. Normally, our fair would employ around 30 youth for parking, interns for pre-fair preparation, ambassadors, and multiple concessions stands hire our local youth as well. We look forward to having them all back full force next year. This year without these positions many families and youth will already face financial impact and subsequent hardships.

But we are not just about the youth. Families leave farms and cities to see the wonders, visit friends, neighbors, local civic servants, and their local politicians at the fair. Since 1854, Yamhill County Fair has provided all these opportunities for our youth *and* adults to connect to the past that is as relevant today as it was 166 years ago. Community engagement through Fair enriches lives, educates and provides a glue to hold the community together with positive focus on similarities and demonstrates the success possible through community members working together. This is crucial as a moral and social imperative during these trying times where all too many events and news are focused on divisive topics and events which lower morale and community standards. The economic benefit to our local community from the Yamhill County Fairgrounds is over \$6.5 million. Though we are missing out on much of that economic infusion this year, we hope our continuing support with smaller events can still help support our community.

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It is not surprising that we must embark on a defense for the fairgrounds in our Oregon communities during these trying times. It is our duty, as ambassadors of McMinnville Fairgrounds in Yamhill County, to fight for the oldest fair in Oregon and ask for funding, to continue supporting our youth, our adults, and the proven beneficial culture we provide that should not be ignored.

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,
Yamhill County Fair Staff and Board

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