

County Fairs in the 'USA': Overview from the COVID 19 Pandemic Era

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Abstract

Fairs, which have been seen in several forms in various parts of the world throughout history, represent one of the oldest and most colorful events in the world. Today, the USA comes first among the countries with the highest number of fairs. County fairs, the early examples of which were seen in the 18th century in the USA, became widespread throughout the country with the agricultural-society movement. Combining traditions of agricultural education and exhibition with amusement and community traditions, county fairs are widely distributed in the United States and still attract great attention. This study aims to determine the current existence state and geographical and seasonal distribution of US county fairs, for this purpose a questionnaire was developed for fair boards' administrations to respond. In addition to the main physical, functional and administrative features of the fairs, the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic, which deeply affects the fair organizations, are among the topics discussed in the research. The findings reveal that county fairs, which can be seen in almost every state, are especially geographically concentrated on states in the Midwest region, and are mostly held in summer and August. Although the COVID 19 pandemic period has led to the cancellation of many fairs, fair board representatives have optimistic expectations that the interest will increase after the pandemic period.

Keywords: County Fairs, American County Fairs, Traditions of U.S. County Fairs, COVID 19 Effects on Fairs.

Introduction

Fairs, one of the oldest and longest-running organizations of societies, have been shaped in various parts of the world in interaction with society and culture throughout history. Depending on the variety of functions that the fairs have, various forms come to the fore in different geographies, reflecting their connections in the deep-rooted genealogy. The word 'Fair' expresses people coming together periodically on certain days. The forms of the fairs vary due to the reasons and functions of this gathering. Therefore, examples of organizations called 'fair'

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today range from local (grange, society, township fairs) to the world-scale (great world exposition). All these examples have been shaped by advancing on a common history and genealogy under the influence of many cultural, economic and technological changes, together with their historical and geographical connections.

It is difficult to determine the origin of the fairs. Although examples can be seen in antiquity (Ligt, 1993; Ful, 1998), they gained real fame in the Middle Ages. Fairs, that have got an international character with international trade, have been seen in different geographies and cultures of the world. Such fairs, which culminated in the yearly cycle of Champagne fairs in the Middle Ages, especially in Europe (Sennett, 2001; Wrigley, 1919; Neely, 1935; Face, 1958; Pirenne, 2012; Le Goff, 2008; Huberman, 2013); have also been remarkable organizations in the Arabian Peninsula (Sarıcık, 2013), Byzantium (Kastritsis, 2012), Seljuk (Sümer, 1985; Ülgen, 2012) and Ottoman lands (Erdogru, 1994; Şen, 1996; Çalışkan and Sönmez, 2018; Çalışkan and Sönmez, 2021).

Market fairs similar to those of Medieval Europe were held in all the American Colonies except Connecticut (Andrews, 1919: 120, cited by Neely, 1935:46). Considering them essential to the prosperity of towns and cities, early proprietors sometimes instituted these fairs; in 1686, for example, the first colonial assembly in New Jersey established a semiannual fair (Whitehead, 1856: 305, cited by Neely, 1935:46). They were gatherings to facilitate commerce where people came to exchange their livestock and other goods, and to indulge in various amusements (Neely, 1935:46). With the first organization in York (Pennsylvania) in 1765, fairs began to become a part of life and culture in the USA (Stroup, 2019; IAFE web).

One of the earliest county fairs with official recognition occurred in Kershaw County (South Carolina) in 1774 (Stroup, 2019:82). While selling and trading enslaved persons, cattle, horses, provisions, and other merchandise was the initial purpose for fairs, these gatherings took on the character of later fairs as people came from great distances and stayed for all four days, competed in a variety of activities for prizes, and visited with neighbors (Stroup, 2019: 162). The proliferation of county fairs in the United States began with the emergence of agricultural fairs. This process is based on agricultural society organizations. However, the period after 1850, when the golden age of county fairs began, corresponds to the peak of state and local societies. The agricultural societies created the agricultural fair in England and from there to the USA. Agricultural fairs in England and United States as nowhere else the agricultural fair developed and became, an essential part of the rural social organization (Neely, 1935:22-23). These early communities in America were evidently fairly exact copies of the European models, in so far as political, social, and economic organization were concerned. The likeness is evidenced by the records and by such relics as the New England commons and town meetings (Terpening, 1930:50). The similarity in the dates of the first agricultural fairs in England and North America can be regarded among the evidences showing kinship relations and interactions. Indeed, the Royal Lancashire Show, which is the one of the first agricultural shows in England had began in 1767 and the Royal Cornwall Show dated to 1795 (Westwood et al., 2018:148). These events were originally designed to showcase “best in breed” livestock, but soon developed into the highlight of the farming social calendar, viewed as the “must-go to” events within rural communities (Darian-Smith, 2011 cited by Westwood et al., 2018:148).

Fair organizations in the USA have become widespread with Elkanah Watson's efforts of which made him to be remembered with the entitle 'Father of US Agricultural Fairs'. Watson founded the Berkshire Agricultural Society in 1810, and had organized a fair in September 1811 in Pittsfield (Massachusetts) where awards and certificates of excellence were rewarded and parade, competitions and shows were also held. Thereafter, adoption of the Berkshire model for fairs spread quickly throughout the nation. In 1850, there were 912 county and state agricul-

tural societies that sponsored annual fairs (CDFA Report 1999; IAFE web). The establishment of considerable part of the American county fairs dates back to the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. Among these, some of the well-established county fairs that were founded in the first half of the 19th century are Skowhegan, Maine (1819); Erie, New York (1820); Great Geauga County, Ohio (1823); Lee, Iowa (1841); Medina, Barnstable, Massachusetts (1844), Ohio (1845).

County fairs still attract great attention as a cultural symbol that reflects the past and present in American society. American county fairs have been continuing to perform functions that bridge the past and the future and provide stimulating effects on local economies by undertaking promotion of the social, economic and traditional values of the local communities. As McCarry (1997) point out, "Today less than 3 percent of Americans are directly engaged in farming. Yet county fairs endure as an occasion to celebrate our agrarian traditions, to honor family, inventiveness, and hardwork. More important, perhaps, they allow us, as communities, to come together and get to know one another. County fairs also give us a chance to glimpse the American past. Yet they have lasted not by being annual historical reenactments but by evolving as American society evolves and becomes more urban" (McCarry, 1997:36).

This research focuses on county fairs in the United States and considers them with a holistic approach. In this study, the presence of American county fairs, their geographical and seasonal distribution characteristics, as well as the physical, administrative and functional characteristics are evaluated. The effects of the COVID 19 pandemic, which deeply affects all the events that bring together the crowds in the world, are also evaluated in terms of its negative impact on the district fairs.

Data and Method

Due to the lack of a prepared inventory covering all county fairs in the USA; firstly, a complete list of county fairs with their contact addresses was created within this research. For this purpose, extensive literature and internet searches were made. Annual county fair schedules were searched on the basis of states on the internet, and the official web pages of various institutions related to the fairs were utilised. Examples of such institutions are states' Food and Agriculture departments, Fairs and Expositions departments, various fair organizations (fair federations, associations) on a state, regional or national scale and some international organizations which fairs are members (IAFE-The International Association of Fairs and Expositions; OABA-Outdoor Amusement Business Association, IAAPA- International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions). It was tried to determine the county fairs in the USA as completely as possible by referring some search tools such as 'fair search, find that fair' etc. on web pages that also provide data about fairs like IAFE, CWH (Carnival Warehouse) and EDJE County Fair Page. Thus, as of 2021, 1607 county fairs in operation have been identified. However, in order to determine the seasonal relations of the fairs, it was necessary to know the organizing dates of the fairs. Almost all US county fairs have web pages or social media accounts. Other necessary information for the research (establishment dates of the fairs, contact addresses) were also obtained from these channels. A map has also been prepared in order to show the distribution of actual American county fairs on a state scale and to explain some geographical characteristics of this distribution pattern.

A survey was designed using the 'Google survey' application in order to achieve the purpose of this research, which started in early 2020 and took place during the COVID 19 Pandemic

period. The survey, which consists of 24 questions and Likert-type questions, was intended to gather various information from the Management Boards of the fairs. This survey further provided information on the change (increase/decrease) that the fair managements expect in the visitor numbers in the post COVID-19 period. An e-mail containing the survey link together with the invitation letter introducing the survey and its purpose were sent to the fair board representatives of all county fairs in two separate times during 2021. Questionnaires were also sent to district fairs through Facebook Messenger applications or through the “contact” forms on the official web pages of the fairs. In addition, a letter inviting people to participate in the survey was sent to the postal addresses of 75 county fairs. Despite such efforts, the returns have remained very low. The loss of motivation caused by the fact that many fairs were not opened during the COVID 19 pandemic process can be considered as the reason for this situation. Nevertheless, the management of 18 county fairs fully completed the survey. These fairs are distributed over 14 states (Table1).

While the results of the survey provide various information about the symbolic meaning, effects and functions of the county fairs, they also reflect the opinions and evaluations of fair boards for the success of fair organizations. In addition to questions about the profile characteristics of the fairs, the survey also included two questions about the COVID-19 pandemic period. In the survey, some judgments and statements about fairs were presented. The responses given by the fair board representatives were measured with five-point Likert scale, with ‘1’ being ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘5’ ‘strongly agree’.

Table 1. *The states and establishment dates of the fairs that answered the survey*

First establish date	County Fair's name	State	First establish date	County Fair's name	State
1913	Yavapai	Arizona	1874	The Bolton	Massachusetts
1883	Del Norte	California	1851	Hillsdale	Michigan
1922	Lake	California	1859	Goodhue	Minnesota
1910	Kiowa	Colorado	1886	Houston	Minnesota
1852	Allegan	Florida	1966	Dakota Thurston	Nebraska
1976	Broward	Florida	1859	El Dorado	Nevada
1975	Chattahoochee	Georgia	1938	Middlesex County Fair	New Jersey
1950	Grayson	Kentucky	1925	Box Elder	Utah
1955	McCracken	Kentucky	1896	Big Horn	Wyoming

Geographical Distribution Characteristics of County Fairs

The data we have compiled within the scope of the research shows that there are 1607 organizations that include the expression ‘county fair’ in the official name of the event. Events such as state fair, agricultural exhibition, festival, carnival, 4H and/or youth fair, rodeo&livestock show are not included in this number. It should be added here that we have determined the current state fair number of the USA as 102. If we consider the types of events that are excluded, we can estimate that the ‘fair’ events held every year in the USA are over 2000.

According to the information we obtained in the research, more than 50 county fairs are held annually in each of the 13 states in the USA which corresponds to a quarter of the total

states. Most county fairs take place in Kansas (116 county fairs). County fairs are concentrated in the states of the Midwest region of the USA, where is also known as “America’s Cereal Bowl”. County fairs seem to be concentrated in the states whose economy is mostly based on corn, wheat, livestock and dairy. Known as the corn belt, wheat belt and dairy belt of the USA; Table 2 shows all the states in three zones characterized by certain agricultural products. Although some states are covered by more than one zone, the states in these agricultural zones are the regions with the most distribution of the country fairs (Figure 1).

It is noteworthy that there are very few county fairs in some states in the Northeast region. Although there are examples of state fairs in Alaska and Louisiana, there are no examples of county fairs. Undoubtedly, the historical ties of today’s geographical distribution are also important; since the dissemination of county fairs is related to the agricultural society organization that has become widespread since the middle of the 19th century. The agricultural-society movement spread from east to west, but pretty largely through the northern states. Initiated along the Atlantic seaboard, it turned westward principally through western New York and Pennsylvania into the great valleys of the Ohio, the upper Mississippi and the Missouri. New Englanders, New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians, moving westward into these fertile valleys, brought with them the idea of the agricultural society and its fair as a part of their social heritage (Neely, 1935:85). Agricultural areas in the Mississippi River Basin draw attention as the districts where county fairs are heavily distributed. Especially the Upper and Middle parts of Mississippi Watershed, Ohio River Basin, Missouri River Basin and Arkansas River Basin areas have the most examples of county fairs. The states of the Mississippi River Basin, which are particularly famous for their wheat and corn cultivation, are quite compatible with the dispersal of well-established agricultural societies and county fairs.

Table 2. States in Corn, Wheat and Dairy Farm Belts and county fairs held in these states

States	Number of county fair	Corn Belt States	Wheat Belt States	Dairy Belt States
Kansas	116			
Minnesota	93			
Iowa	86			
Nebraska	82			
Ohio	81			
Illinois	72			
Wisconsin	67			
Oklahoma	58			
Indiana	56			
Missouri	56			
Tennessee	52			
Michigan	51			
Colorado	37			
Texas	35			
North Dakota	23			
Wyoming	23			
South Dakota	13			

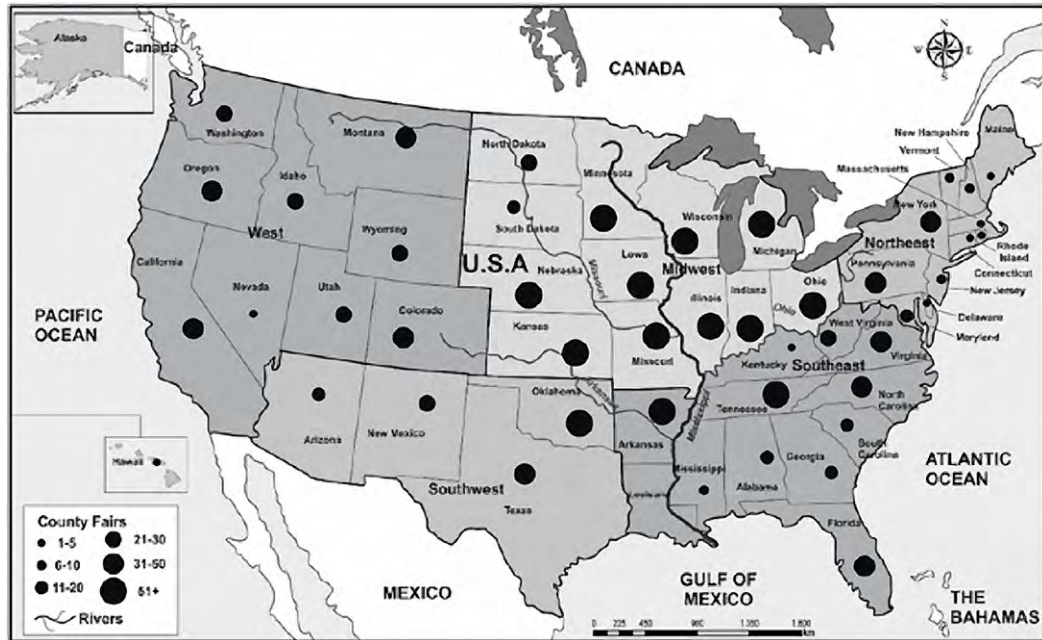


Figure 1. Distribution of county fairs by state and geographic region in the USA (For the representation of regions and rivers, this map drew on McInnes, 2016: 1280; National Geographic, map of the U.S. Regions)

Summer is merely the county fair season in the USA. Three quarters of the county fairs are held in the summer (1196 county fairs). Autumn also hosts high number of events (332 county fairs). The states that most prefer to organize county fair events in the fall are Georgia, Carolinas, Arizona, Oklahoma, Texas and Hawaii. While a total of 63 county fairs were held in spring; the least organization took place during winter (16 county fairs). Florida, one of the sun belt states, draws attention with 9 county fairs held in the winter season. These are also known as mid-winter fairs.

Main Characteristics of U.S. County Fairs

Fairgrounds: County fairs are located on smaller grounds than state fairs. But there are also exceptions. Some large-scale county fairs, such as Erie, are much larger in land size than many state fairgrounds. Erie fairground covers 111,3ha and includes 112 permanent buildings and structures, 4 green parks and 15,000 parking spaces (Erie County Fair web). Kern County Fair, another big fair in the USA, has 64,7ha of fairground. The fairground sizes of the 18 county fairs that responded to the survey are very different from each other (Table 3). Ownership of fairground lands in the USA also varies (Table 3).

Fairgrounds often host various events throughout the year, providing effective use cases. Fairgrounds provide affordable facilities for numerous public or community events, including weddings, cultural gatherings, exhibitions and trade shows and veterans services events. Fairgrounds are regularly used by Emergency Services and Forest Service for fire camps, evacuation centers, and command posts in almost all states (CDFFA Report, 2011). For nearly thirty years, year-round use of fairgrounds has been increasing dramatically. For example, the inven-

tory of fairgrounds in California (county-owned, privately held and state-owned) includes more than 3,000 buildings on nearly 2226ha at locations throughout the state. Current market estimates of California's fairground property indicate may be as high as \$1 billion (CDFA Report, 1999).

Table 3. Fairground size, property status and fair board structure at the fairs that answered the questionnaire

County Fairs	Measure of the fairground (ha)	Ownership of the fairground	Establishment of the fair management board
Allegan	46.5	Non-profit organization	Board of directors (15 members and executive director)
Middlesex County Fair	21	Middlesex County Fair Association, Inc.	There are 9 trustees; 5 are farmers from the Agricultural Society
Yavapai	24.2	Town	Volunteer board and management
Big Horn	2.4	Big Horn County	fair board made up of 5 members
Grayson	14.1	Grayson County Fair Inc.	Board members are elected at annual meetings
Hillsdale	18,2	Hillsdale County Agricultural Society	Representation is from each township and city in the county along with three at large members
Dakota Thurston	11,7	Dakota County Agricultural Society	18 members- from 2 county elected
El Dorado	19,4	Non-profit organization	There are 11 board members, 5 appointed by the Counties Board of Supervisors, 6 voted in from the Fair Association.
Goodhue	14,1	Non-profit, shareholder corp.	15 volunteer directors elected from the community,
Del Norte	35,6	State	Government appointed board
Lake	13,7	State	The Board is appointed by the Governor
Broward	varies	Varies	All board members are voted in for a one year term
McCracken	4	McCracken County & Carson Park	Local Kiwanis Club puts on the Fair, the members chose a Fair Chairmen, then that Chairman picks a board from the remaining Kiwanis members.
Box Elder	8	Box Elder County	picked and approved by county commission
Houston	8,9	State and county	Ag society members have the opportunity to vote on the 21 directors. A three-year term with 7 positions up each year
Kiowa	24,2	County	Volunteer board of 7 people.
Chattahoochee	4	County	Officers are elected. Members of the committee are recommended to the officers.
Bolton	20.2	Bolton Fair Inc.	Non-profit organization. The board is volunteer 7 people. They "work" throughout the year on the fair, but mostly in spring/summer.

Administrative and management features of county fairs: With the increasing number of visitors and exhibitors, the added expenditure of funds for permanent equipment and prizes, the expansion of activities the management of fairs came to be a specialized business. Not only did this give rise to a group of professional fair managers but it also necessitated a system of interfair relationship. In many of the states associations of local fairs were formed, which acted as a kind of clearing house for the discussion of common problems, the formulation of policies, the adoption of common standards and rules of conduct, and the settlement of such immediate problems as the setting of nonconflicting dates and the utilization of certain popular exhibits (Neely, 1935: 108). Although there is a competition in terms of prestige between county fairs in the states, cooperation is prevalent in many areas. As a matter of fact, according

to the results of the survey, the judgment of “There is cooperation between the fairs on information / technical and organizational issues” was completely approved at the levels of “totally agree” and “agree”. However, seeing the fair as an important symbol of the state undoubtedly reveals the meaning of competition for prestige. While the rate of those who stated that they agreed with the judgment that “their fairs are an important symbol of the state” was 50%, the rate of neutral evaluation was 28% (Table 4).

Table 4. Confirmation status of the presented statement regarding the 'cooperation' between the fairs and the 'recognition of the fair as the symbol of the state'

Opinion served		Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree
There is cooperation between the fairs on information / technical and organizational issues.	Frequency	6	12	--	--	--
	Percentage	33	67	--	--	--
Our fair is one of the important symbols of the state.	Frequency	4	5	5	3	1
	Percentage	22	28	28	16	6

Fairs are organized according to fair rules and decisions of state and county commissions. Generally, agricultural societies have control over fair organization and events. Fair managements work closely with various institutions during the organization process. According to the results regarding the “which institutions and organizations are involved in the regulation and control of the fair?” question of the survey; apart from fair manager and fair board, these answers were given: Department of Food & Agriculture, Youth groups, FFA or 4H organizations (FFA and 4H organizations will be discussed in detail in the following pages), County Farm Bureau, Rotary Club, Lions Club, Governor’s Office, Enviromental and Public Health Department, Local Law Enforcement (both city and county), Mobile Police Department, Mobile Fire and Rescue. In addition to the agricultural societies/commissions, which are responsible for organizing fairs in many places, there are also national and even international associations/federations of which fairs are members. For example, the Federation of Minnesota County Fairs operates in Minnesota. Yet Minnesota Agricultural Society delegates represent all of county fairs in Minnesota. Similarly, organizations such as Association of Iowa Fairs, Pennsylvania State Association of County Fairs, Association of Fairs in Texas and Western Fairs Association covering western states operate in order to maintain the standards of county fairs and improve the welfare of fairs.

The long history of US fairs has provided a legacy of good administrative experience to the fair administrations. Fair management specialization and institutional collaboration help American fairs to set examples of successful and good practice. The organization of American county fairs is carried out through the division of labor within the committees and boards of the fairs and cooperation with relevant institutions. The administrative structure of the fairs, the selection, appointment and number of the board members etc. may differ from district to district (Table 3). Fair boards consist of president, vice president, treasurer, secretary and various numbers of members. There is a lot of work to be done in the organization process of fairs, which is a wide-ranging event. Arrangement and management of the fairground area, contracts with vendors, advertisement and promotion works, public relations services, live-stock sales, shows management, guest services etc. are main workload. Sometimes, fair boards assign a paid and professional manager, as active work is required throughout the year for big fairs.

Fair board members and many volunteers make great efforts for the success of fair organizations. The answers regarding the open-ended question “what are the most important issues for a successful fair organization?” were evaluated by content analysis. Similarities were classified categorically and a score was assigned for each similar statement repeated in responses. Results of the evaluation show that the most repeated suggestion for the organizational success of a fair was specified as “harmony, teamwork, cooperation and communication” by fair board managers (Table 5).

Table 5. According to fair board representatives, the most important factors for organizational success in fairs and their recurrence score

Being able to work together; Collaboration; Cooperation; Team members harmony (8)	History of fair; Traditions; People committed to the mission of the fair (3)	Communication (3)	Organization Management, Knowledgeable staff (2)
Variety of vendors and Activities (2)	Good weather, no rain (2)	Openness for new opportunities while keeping with some traditions (1)	Relationships both community and politically, which relates to Money (1)
Willing volunteers are key (1)	Planning ahead (1)	Staying updated (1)	Support of government agency, A governor's Office (1)

Fairgoers and vendors at county fairs: In the United States, it estimates some 500 million guests visit carnivals, fairs and festivals each year (OABA report, 2019). Some of the county fairs (with very high visitor numbers) manage to be listed in the Top 50 rankings, which include events such as US state fairs, exhibitions, stock shows & rodeo, etc. While seven county fairs took part in the Top 50 ranking with the highest number of visitors in 2010, 2019 and 2021, there were nine county fairs in 2015 (Table 6).

The number of county fair visitors varies according to their function richness and scale. Today, there are four county fairs in the United States that attract over 1 million fairgoers. These are the Orange, Erie, Los Angeles, and San Diego county fairs. However, there are many county fairs with less than 5,000 fairgoers. For example, 1500 fairgoers were registered at each of the Van Burren and Allakae Big Four County Fairs in Iowa in 2021. The total number of fairgoers to the 18 county fairs who answered our survey was 904,700 people. In terms of number of fairgoers, the smallest scale fair is Dakota Thurston with 1000 fairgoers, while Allegan has the highest number of fairgoers (317,938).

When we look at the fairgoer numbers of the county fairs listed in the Top 50 ranking in the last 10 years in five-year periods, the damage of the pandemic period directly draws attention. In order to evaluate the change in fairgoer interest to fairs over time, we presented two separate judgments to fair board management in our survey (Table 7). The rate of respondents that answered the statement “Today, interest in the fair has decreased compared to the past” at the level of “disagree” and totally disagree was 44%. The rate of respondents who approve that the interest in the fairs has decreased compared to the past is calculated as 34%. Respondents who approved the statement “those who live in the state have a strong desire to maintain the fair” in the survey at the ‘totally agree’ and ‘agree’ levels are quite high (72%). When the assessments of these two statements are considered together, it can be concluded that the interest and loyalty of the local communities to the fairs still continues. However, the flow of visitors to some county fairs has weakened compared to the past. Undoubtedly, it should be taken into account that these responses were given under the perceptual effects of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Table 6. County fairs in the USA Top 50 list and their ranks in the list according to the selected years

Name of the Fair	2021	2019	2015	2010
Orange County Fair, CA	1,055,770 (7)	1,393,482 (8)	1,301,445 (8)	1,154,969 (9)
Erie County Fair, NY	981,264 (8)	1,238,456 (12)	1,172,635 (12)	1,022,154 (16)
Kern County Fair, CA	488,994 (22)	394,350 (46)	405,000 (45)	N/A
Wilson County Fair, TN	480,627 (24)	N/A	484,096 (34)	397,075 (49)
Allegan County Fair, MI	317,938 (37)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dutchess County Fair, NY	302,211 (38)	N/A	394,222 (47)	N/A
Clay County Fair, IA	277,389 (45)	N/A	N/A	N/A
San Diego County Fair, CA	N/A	1,531,199 (6)	1,503,538 (6)	1,338,500 (6)
Los Angeles County Fair, CA	N/A	1,100,000 (16)	1,276,817 (9)	1,374,673 (4)
Miami Dade County Fair, FL	N/A	552,404 (34)	653,281 (27)	504,600 (38)
Alameda County Fair, CA	N/A	454,276 (41)	444,923 (41)	418,499 (44)
Number of total visitor	3,904,193	6,664,167	7,635,957	6,210,470

Source: MCW, Top 50 fairs & carnivals, Official Attendance Ranking.

Table 7. Confirmation status of the presented statement to assess the interest in the fairs compared to the past and the local community's desire for the fairs

Opinion served		Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree
Today, interest in the fair has decreased compared to the past	Frequency	1	5	4	6	2
	Percentage	6	28	22	33	11
Those who live in the state have a strong desire to maintain the fair	Frequency	6	7	4	1	--
	Percentage	33	39	22	6	--

Vendors are one of the important components of the fair organizations together with the fairgoers. 11 county fairs (61%) out of the 18 fairs that answered the survey attract vendors from other states as well. Six fairs indicate that only sellers from their own states come to the fair. It is understood that vendors and merchants from seven different states come to the Bolton (Massachusetts) and El Dorado (Nevada) county fairs. The results reveal that the scale of some county fairs and their commercial and economic connections reach to the state level and in some cases they get to the interstate level.

Events at county fairs: The purposes and functions of U.S. county fairs are quite rich. In some fairs, many functions can be found together; sometimes the main functions of the fair may be more visible in the foreground. The declared purposes of the fairs, the program contents, the types of events, even the slogans and logos that have turned into mottos can help to understand their functions. For example, the following slogan, which emphasizes that fairs carries heritage of the local environments to the present and the future is common in many fairs: “honor your past, celebrate being present, embrace your future”, (Elberton 12, Georgia; Dunn, Wisconsin) or “preserve the past, celebrate the present, and prepare for the future” (Rosebud, Montana). The Cheyenne (Kansas) county fair, on the other hand, underlines the “grow it, sew it, show it” slogan, emphasizing the exhibition aspect of the fair that encourages agriculture and livestock.

The answers given to the open-ended question (“Could you please define fair in one word?”) which asked in order to determine the value that the fair essentially represents are shown in

Table 8. The answers reveal that the fairs are an exciting recreational and educational activity that mediates the spirit of socializing and fun togetherness, giving experience and memory. As Nelly's definition "going to fair" has been a significant recreational event in the social life of many generations of the human family (Nelly, 1935:185).

Table 7 and Table 8 show that the gathering, meeting, socializing roles and "socialization" function of district fairs are at the forefront. Indeed, one of the main functions of fairs and festivals has been their power to gather the society throughout history. As a matter of fact, the etymological origin of the word "Fair" emphasizes the gathering of people. Likewise the German *messe*, fair, is derived from the Latin *missa*, *mass* (Neely, 1935:4). Another name for traditional fairs held in contemporary Greece and Turkey is the words *panêgyris* (in Greek) and *panayir* (in Turkish). The origin of this word is panêgyris, a Greek word describing periodic markets in the Greco-Roman world in late antiquity. In many cases, in ancient sources and Greek texts, panêgyris was used for religious gatherings held periodically with festive significance (Ful, 1998: 45, 49). Similarly, it is interesting that the common term used in the sense of gathering or fair in India today is *mela* (Munjal, 2015: 363).

Table 8. Reoccurrence score of fair board representatives' answers to a "one-word fair description"

Community/ Community gathering (5)		Group/Togetherness (2)	Family (2)	Memories (2)
Fun (2)	Learning/Educational (2)	Excitement (1)	Livestock (1)	Country (1)

The activity programs of the county fairs have similarities as well as differences. Traditional events are more distinctive at some fairs and can bring the glory to the event. It is quite obvious that the traditional entertainments, competitions, productions and products carried out in the fairs help to keep the traditional and cultural values of the local communities alive and carry them to the future. Essentially, the attention of fairgoers provides a protection that helps such events to survive. In the programs of county fairs opened with pageants, exhibitions based on rural life, agriculture and livestock, applied shows and competitions are often included. Ox pulling, milking, plowing, lumberjack competitions, fairground beauty competition, horse racing, bull riding competition, the best pig, award-winning competitions for cattle breeders, as well as exhibition of needlework and sewing work, exhibition of tractor and agricultural machinery; display of cattle, goats, sheep and poultry; horse, dog, rabbit, and pony shows; motorcycle and car races/shows are among the events that can be seen frequently at county fairs. Rodeo events are almost an inseparable part of county fairs.

The prosperous answers given for the question of "What kind of traditional events are organized under the fair program?" also helped to reveal the current status of many events identified with fairs: pig wrestling, round robin tournament (Big Horn), Wiener dog races, (McCraken), mutton busting, wheelbarrow Races (El Dorado), bull riding (El Dorado, Dakota Thurston), Blacksmiths shop, pony rides (The Bolton), horse racing (Allegan ,McCraken, Kiowa), drag racing (Grayson), demolition derby (Allegan, Big Horn, Grayson, Houston, Bolton, Godhue), monster trucks (Bolton), truck/tractor pulls (Allegan, Dakota Thurston, Godhue), home goods (Hillsdale), baking contest, talent contest (Chattahoochee), homemakers exhibit/contest (McCraken); home arts displays, craft demonstrations (Middlesex County Fair), spelling, eating contest (Broward), 4H/FFA shows , educational displays (Goodhue, Dakota Thurston, Kiowa, Houston, Browhard), beauty pageant (Grayson, Broward), boat race (Lake).

Fairs almost contain a "fair food-based" type of gastronomy festival. Since fairs are places where fairgoers spend a long time, the demand and presentation of "food and beverage" services has always been an important issue. As a matter of fact, an eating and drinking culture has

emerged over time which were traditionalized with products specific to fairs. Snacks and fast-food items such as taffy apples, cotton candy, doughnuts, nachos, tacos, various sandwiches, and barbecue items are common at U.S. fairs. However, every state has its famous examples of fair food. For example, chili at fairs in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Ohio; caramel apples at the Wisconsin fairs; Cheese fries at the state fairs of Nevada and California stand out. Seafood products are among popular products in South Carolina fairs (Gurneys web). At some fairs, fairgoers vote on their favorite foods and a “Fairgoer’s Choice for Favorite Food” is determined (Miami Dade, Florida). In addition, products such as cookies, bread, canned food, jam, pickles, syrup, lemonade, pizza, etc., which are made according to the traditional recipe are competed and sold at the county fairs. In some fairs, best recipe competitions are organized: cherry pie recipe competition (Davis, Iowa); my mom’s best recipe (Carroll, Virginia), baking contest (Clarke, Virginia; Wilson, Tennessee; Carbon, Pennsylvania).

Functions and Effects of County Fairs

The examples mentioned above under the title of fair events show that the social and cultural functions of fairs are intertwined with other functions (educational, recreational, economic, etc.). Indeed, parades, crowds, races, shows, music, competitions in exhibitions and awards, various entertainments unique to fairs related to their traditional roots have enabled the fairs to gain an authentic cultural landscape. We asked to fair representatives to rate the six options given for the question “In which direction your fair contribute to the city and society life greater?” from 1 (lowest degree) to 10 (highest degree). Table 9 shows the average scores obtained. The results reveal a high level of contribution of district fairs to socialization and keeping traditions alive. While entertainment and economic functions have high scores, the shopping function of county fairs has the lowest score.

Table 9. Average score of the answers for the question “In which direction your fair contributes to the city and society life greater?”

Ranks	Major Contribution of Fair	Average score
1	Meeting and Socializing	9,1
2	Keeping the traditions alive	9,0
3	Entertainment	8,8
4	Economic	8,1
5	Cultural	7,8
6	Shopping	5,6

The answers to another question presented on a Likert scale confirm the role of county fairs in mediating the transfer of traditional and cultural values to the future. There were no fair board representatives who responded “disagree” or “totally disagree” to the statement presented (Table 10).

Table 10. Confirmation status of the presented statement that “the fair plays an important role in transferring traditional and cultural values to the future”

Opinion served		Totally Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree
Our fair plays an important role in transferring traditional, cultural values to the future	Frequency	9	5	4	--	--
	Percentage	50	28	22	--	--

Amusement functions: Despite some changes over time, various shows and races, amusement parks and chance games have been irreplaceable tools of fair entertainment. However, the amusement concept and tools of the fairs are not independent of the socio-cultural processes of the societies. As a matter of fact in the historical process, the amusement concept and tools of the fairs have survived or been abandoned toward with the approval and objections of the society. For example, in the midway usually contained exhibits featuring human and animal oddities, frequently called the “freak shows” were seen in fairs until the 1980s (Stroup, 2019:101, 102). Another example of entertainment belonging to the past periods of fairs was “girlie shows”. Such shows were seen at fairs from the late nineteenth century until 1975. The term “girlie show or hootchy-kootchy show” referred to the exotic dancer and burlesque shows that became part of the travelling midway. Attendance falled and the heightened sensitivity of Americans forced many out of business (Stroup, 2019:103).

In the late nineteenth century that rides began to appear on the midway. Carousel were the earliest rides that appeared at fairs across the country. The first modern Carousel in the United States becoming a popular attraction by the 1890’s. Perhaps the ride most associated with fairs is the Ferris Wheel. The first Ferris Wheel was constructed by George Ferris in Chicago in 1893. Smaller examples of this appeared at fairs in the late 1890s (Stroup, 2019:105, 106). The games on the midway following World War II had changed very little since the early twentieth century. Fairgoers could still try to knock over weighted milk bottles with baseballs, shoot basketballs through a standart hoop, or squeeze the trigger of a water gun to inflate a device (Stroup, 2019:125). For fairgoers, midway rides and other amusement sections are a powerful motivator for fair visits. The number of fairgoers to the America’s fairs is quite high. Top 50 Fairs in USA drew over 41.5 million visitors in 2019 (CWH report, 2019). 500 million visitors annually participate in events such as carnivals, fairs and festivals in the USA and more than half of them participate on mobile amusement rides (OABA report, 2019).

Many types of activities in fairs combine with amusement and recreation attractions. Fairgrounds provide facilities for numerous recreation opportunities through a colorful and rich program where active or passive participation can be achieved. In connection with recreational interest, fairs draw people from outside of the county and city as a major tourism attraction. Some famous county fairs manage to attract visitors from other states and long distances. Such county fairs have national recognition on an interstate scale.

Educational functions: County fairs together with various educational institutions can be considered such environments that offer participants of all ages the opportunity to expand their experiences, through exhibitions, competitions, shows and programs. The roles of district fairs in agricultural promotion, inspiring, educational activities, etc. have provided them a form adopted by the society. The feature of the fairs that brings the crowds together also offers important opportunities for educational-informative activities. Similar to the past, special importance is given to educational activities in fair organizations today in the USA. Indeed, fairs undertake important functions in environments where agriculture and livestock activities are intense, such as informing farmers, introducing them to new methods and technol-

ogies, providing information exchange and interaction, and exhibiting their products. Such functions form the basis of some fairs.

The fairs host various events from the FFA (Future Farmers of America), FCCLA (The Family, Career and Community Leaders of America) and 4H programs. In fact, some fair examples only serve as 4H&youth fair. FFA is an American youth organization, specifically, a career and technical student organization, based on middle and high school classes that promote and support agricultural education. The FFA was founded in 1928. Today, the FFA is among the largest youth organizations in the United States, with about 735,038 members (FFA web). Like the FFA, the FCCLA is a national Career and Technical Student Organization for students in Family and Consumer Sciences education in public and private school through grade 12. Founded in 1945, FCCLA today has 175,000 active members. The work of FCCLA helps students and teachers focus on a variety of youth concerns, including parenting, family relationships, substance abuse, peer pressure, sustainability, teen violence (FCCLA web, FCCLA Annual Report, 2020-2021).

The foundations of the 4-H organization began in 1902; the motivation behind the idea of practical and “hands-on” learning was the desire to link public school education to country life. This movement provided a revitalization of livestock and domestic arts competition and was considered a reaction to the growing bawdiness of fairs at that time (Koopmann, 2021). By 1924 it adopted the familiar green, four leaf clover emblem with a white H on each leaf standing for head, heart, hands, and health (Stroup, 2019:158). The 4-H program is a volunteer-based organization that offers hands-on learning for young people. Today, the 4H network consists of 500,000 volunteers and 3,500 4-H professionals.

Open class and 4H project events and competitions are held at the fairs, which are presented to the attention of the fairgoers on a wide variety of topics. Such events mainly focus on agricultural and traditional occupations, but also provide information on current issues and hobby activities. Examples of such events at county fairs are: Agricultural mechanics, Animal Science (livestock, horses and poultry), pomiculture, cooking, food preserving, art&crafts, crocheting, woodworking, knitting, quilting, crops, forestry, horticulture, gardening, pet care, wildlife, geology, entomology, photography, energy management.

Fairs make significant contributions to the educational life of the districts by providing student scholarships every year. Providing educational scholarships is a customary practice for many fairs. For example, Miami Dade Fair provided \$586,720 scholarships in 2019. Since 1952, the total amount of scholarships has been 11 million dollars.

Economic functions: It has long been known that festivals and tourism have a mutually beneficial history (Smith and Forest, 2006:133). Fairs, always associated with tourism, help produce strong economic effects. The overall pattern of tourism development in the developed world over the last 50 years intersects with festivity, carnival and performance rituals around the world in general at numerous points. Festivals, whether as moments of “traditional” social celebration or as structured and highly organized events, are drawn into the vast stock of “goods” tourists desire (Picard and Robinson, 2006: 2). Zeppel and Hall (1992) explain how: “Festivals, carnivals, and community fairs add vitality to a destination and increase touristic appeal...Visitors attend festivals primarily because of special interest in the product, event, heritage, or tradition being celebrated” (Zeppel and Hall, 1992: 69).

In the past couple of decades, festival and event tourism has been one of the fastest growing sections of the world leisure industry (Getz, 1991; Nicholson and Pearce, 2001 cited by Li and Patrick, 2006:239). The neighborhood of the county fairs with agricultural festivals, exhibitions, shows and recreational activities gives them an economic aspect through tourism. Spe-

cial events based on the exhibition and show of the values and products of rural life that creating the cultural landscape today also provide a flow of attendees from wide circles. In addition to the local population's commitment to such events, the urban population has always been increasingly interested in such events. Agricultural tourism is increasingly finding a competitive niche as emergent urban populations seek out rustic and historic experiences vastly different from their own (Mitchell, 2006:1298). County fairs are organizations that sometimes host authentic experiences by several activities reflecting the cultural characteristics of the communities such as traditional practices and products, rituals, competitions and cuisines. County fairs also have clear ties with cultural and cultural heritage tourism, event tourism, special interest tourism, ethnic tourism, and gastronomic tourism since they have strong traditional, cultural and authentic aspects. County fairs hold great potential to identify candidates for geographical indication registration as places where traditional manufacturing and products are presented. For this reason, examining traditional fairs from cultural aspects can help registration and promotion of cultural heritage values as well as to discover new candidate products for geographical indication.

Although the shopping function of the county fairs is not a prominent function, the various expenditures of the fairgoers have stimulating effects on the local economies. In 2002, almost 33 million attendees visited California's fairgrounds. This is roughly the same as California's population of nearly 35 million. Attendees at California's 78 fairs and additional interim events in 2002 spent about \$963 million. Attendee spending on commercial exhibitor merchandise totaled \$406 million, which generated \$32 million in state and local taxes. The overall economic impact of fairs and interim events has reached \$2.55 billion. State and local governments collected an estimated \$136 million in tax revenues from fair-related activities (CDFA Report, 2003).

Entrance fees for fairs, stand rents, rents or partnerships from amusement rides companies, advertising, concerts, shows and camping area revenues have an important place in providing the necessary budget for the fair organization. The tariffs of the entrance fees collected from the visitors at the fairs are different for each fair. Some are free for all (The Rogers, Oklahoma; Houston, Minnesota; Dakota Thurston, Nebraska; Big Horn, Wyoming). It can be determined that daily ticket prices for the 2021 season vary between \$3-12.

Impacts of COVID 19 Pandemic on Fairs

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 (coronavirus disease) pandemic has heavily disrupted world tourism, which gained momentum until a few years before the Second World War. The year 2020, marked by the announcement of the first confirmed cases, has been recorded as the year with the highest number of cases and deaths as well. Not being restricted to curfews and lockdowns, transportation mobility was limited in many countries in general; various venues and events where mass activities are organized for people to gather halted their operations. The COVID-19 pandemic has also deeply affected the economy and national-scale tourism activities associated with fairs, as it caused the cancellation of outdoor events such as fairs where crowds gather.

In the past, there were times when fairs were not held in the USA due to wars, economic depression, and epidemics. Many fairs around the U.S. went on hiatus between 1860-1870 because of the Civil War (Koopmann,2021). The Minnesota State Fair was not opened in 1861 and 1862 due to the Civil War and the U.S.-Dakota War (Minnesota State Fair web). During the First World War, the Texas Fair was canceled in 1918 and Fair Park was turned into a temporary army camp. The Kern County Fair (California) was not held for two years during the

Depression of the 1930s (Kern County Fair website). Many fairs were not opened during the Second World War years. Neshoba County Fair (Mississippi) was not held during World War II, but it was reopened in 1946 (Neshoba County Fair web).

The cancellation of fairs due to epidemics was first seen due to the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic. For example, South Carolina state fairs were not opened in 1918 owing to the Influenza epidemic (Stroup, 2019:38). Because of the polio epidemic in 1946, many other fairs such as the Minnesota State Fair were canceled (Startribune, 2016). But the damage of the COVID 19 pandemic on fairs has been great. Indeed, the Skowgehan State Fair which had continued uninterrupted since 1818 even through the Great Depression and the two World War, was not opened during the COVID 19 pandemic. The Covid 19 pandemic has deeply shaken organizations such as fairs, especially by causing the cancellation of event organizations where crowds gather. It caused the cancellation of many fairs in 2020 and 2021, negatively affecting fairs organizations and the commercial and economic components associated with fairs. Fair cancellations were mostly experienced in 2020. Decisions about whether to open fairs differed from state to state and county to county. For example, of the 18 fairs that responded to the survey, the Broward County Fair was not held twice during the COVID 19 period. Allegan, Del Norte, Big Horn, Dakota Thurston, Box Elder, Kiowa fairs continued to open with limited events and precautions. The remaining 11 fairs were not opened in 2020. Thus, we can determine that two-thirds (66.6%) of the fairs that answered the survey were not opened during the COVID pandemic period.

During the COVID 19 pandemic, county fair administrations started to reopen in 2021 by taking the necessary precautions on the fairgrounds in cooperation with district and state public health departments. The stations opened on the fairgrounds during the pandemic period also provided COVID-19 testing and vaccination services (Clay, Florida; Kern, California; Wayne, Pennsylvania; Benton, Oregon county fairs, etc.). A promotional campaign for vaccination was held at the Pine County Fair in Minnesota; A \$100 gift card was given to vaccinated citizens. There have been more than 16,000 applications for this promotion (MPR News, 6 August 2021).

After the periods when fairs are canceled due to mandatory conditions, fairs usually open enthusiastically with high visitor interest. Undoubtedly, the loyalty of ambitious fairgoers to the fairs has an effect on this optimism. There are similar examples in history; despite canceling the 1918 Fair because of the influenza epidemic, the end of World War I brought and renewed optimistic outlook for the society (Stroup, 2019:38). Indeed, fair board representatives reveal the optimistic expectation that fairgoers interest to the fairs will be higher after the pandemic period for the question "In your opinion, how will people's interest be after the COVID 19 pandemic period?". While 15 fairs answered this question "their interest will increase", two fairs answered "nothing will change (no change); only one fair gave the answer "their interest will decrease".

The various negative effects of the compelling and restrictive atmosphere of the pandemic period on people affected the fairs with another indirect problem. As a matter of fact, it is reported that cases of violence increased in fair environments during this period. South Nancy Smith (General Manager of South Carolina State Fair) explains this situation and the measures taken as follows: "One of the most critical things we learned from our other fairs was, unfortunately, the increase in violence at fairs where there had never been such previously. I believe this to be the critical area facing our fairs now. The SC State Fair took many measures to ensure we would have as safe a fair as we possibly could. We introduced new and updated metal detector technology, instituted a clear bag policy, added more lights, cameras and worked even more closely with our local law enforcement" (Herrick, 2022).

Conclusion

Several features of American county fairs intersect with examples of fairs throughout history. Agricultural and livestock exhibits, educational work, and amusement are the core of US county fairs. The USA is one of the countries where county fairs are most common in the world, and such fairs have a distribution throughout the country. In the USA, we have determined the current number of events with the official name “county fair” as 1607. We estimate that this number exceeds 2000 with examples of other types of fairs. The history of the emergence and spread of county fairs in the United States is similar to the history of agricultural exhibitions and fairs in England. In the USA, the golden age of county fairs began with the increase in the organization of agricultural societies in the middle of the 19th century, especially in states and counties.

Geographical factors also play an important role in the prevalence and distribution of county fairs in the USA. The needs in the regions of the USA, which have been represented all along by agriculture and livestock activities on large lands, have led to the birth of a unique fair model. Geographically, the states in the Midwest region of the USA and the southern neighbor states of this geographical region show densities in the distribution of fairs. In the historical process, the fairs spread from the eastern shores to the interior, and became widespread in the areas of large river basins characterized by wheat, corn agriculture and livestock.

The fair whatever type furnishes the occasion for overcoming isolation. It is customary to think of the scattered rural farmsteads in America as making the isolation of the rural dweller inevitable, and its undoubtedly true that rural social life in America lacks something of the solidarity of the European village community. The comparative geographic isolation necessitates a compensating social organization (Neely, 1935:220). In the USA, which has very different characteristics from the rural settlement organization in Europe, county fairs have played an important role in providing social meeting and cultural cohesion. In the United States, county fairs did not gain great commercial importance as places of exchange. However, in their functions, commercial aspects, exhibition, traces of the harvest festival can be seen, as well as combining the amusement and recreation attractions, which have been characterized by fairs throughout history.

Fairs are essentially the product of a discovery based on needs. Since the emergence of fairs in the USA, the main purpose has generally been to inform the public about agriculture. In addition to this, traditional amusements, eating and drinking traditions, sportive and recreational competitions and activities also bring a recreational aspect to the county fairs. Today, fair managements make great efforts to keep the social and cultural heritage values and traditions alive and also to raise social awareness in American county fairs.

Even though the fairs have undergone great changes in the historical process, it has always been a common direction to respond to the socialization and entertainment needs of societies under the same name today. American county fairs, while responding to the meeting, socializing and amusement needs of the society, also mediate the maintenance of their common culture and traditions. In this respect, county fairs have ‘connective’ functions for the society; the presented practices for transferring cultural and traditional values to new generations also show their temporal ‘conveying’ mission. Commercial aspects of fairs related to agriculture and livestock together with recreational and tourism connections are also very important in terms of economy. District fairs serve a wide variety of recreational interests of the settlements they serve.

Educational activities and exhibits have long been an important component of American county fairs. In particular, FFA, FCCLA and 4H events have historically integrated programs

with county fairs in most places. While the county fairs disseminate information to various segments of the society about the productions and products in rural life, they also help to broaden the social, cultural and technological horizons of the farmers.

The long-lasting fair organizations of the USA have gained great managerial experience over the years. Fair organizations are held with the cooperation of various institutions and stakeholders. Therefore, 'collective and harmonious work' is one of the most important issues that fair managements attach importance to. While the organization processes are carried out entirely by volunteers in small-scale county fairs, paid professional managers may be responsible for all works as managers in large-scale fairs.

The COVID 19 Pandemic had an adverse effect on the fair industry resulting in the cancellation of most events in 2020. During this period, some fairs were not opened, some of them were partially served by limiting the types of activities and taking measures against COVID 19. Even if the fairs were opened, the number of attendees sharply decreased. But the pandemic period has also provided many instructive experiences for the fairs. Cooperation with health boards, acceptance of fairgoers according to certain rules (mask, vaccine or test certificate requirement, etc.), activities shifted from closed halls to open areas, sanitizing stations on the fairground, etc., helped to maintain fair-type activities during the pandemic period.

Fairs, which represent one of the oldest activity types in the history of humanity, have revealed examples in various forms in different geographies and have experienced changes throughout history. Undoubtedly, fairs as a social institution will continue on its way with alterations. There may be fairs that disappeared in this process, there may also be examples of fairs that lost some of their current functions or changed their prominent functions. The increase in social, cultural and technological changes day by day will test the adaptability of fairs to changing conditions in the near future. Despite everything, American county fairs continue to survive and journey into the future with loyal fairgoers and volunteers, accompanied by the energy of local, social and cultural diversity.

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