

Bird flu ban: County fairs get creative

How do 4-H, FFA youth show their poultry when there's no poultry to show?

By Gary Brock

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COLUMBUS - County 4-H programs across Ohio scrambled to develop suitable poultry show plans in the days following the June 2 announcement by the Ohio Department of Agriculture that all live poultry shows in the state were banned because of the threat of Avian bird flu decimating the state's poultry stock.

In some cases, county 4-H programs had just a few weeks to decide what they would do before their county fairs were scheduled to be held.

Within days of the announced ban, state 4-H officials worked with the ODA, the State Fair Managers Association and county 4-H Junior Fair Board directors and Extension agents to quickly develop recommended alternatives for the thousands of kids who were planning to show and compete for county and state fair poultry honors, and receive money from poultry championship sales that were now threatened by the ban.

The result so far?

A wide range of solutions, with many similar plans but some differences, *Rural Life Today* has found in surveying the state.

Darke County, for example, decided to give youth poultry exhibitors three choices of showing at the fair: one in which they raise a bird to receive a premium, one in which they raise a bird to receive a premium and sell it at auction, and lastly an option for receiving a premium for a general project where the junior fair exhibitor does not raise a bird.

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fairs.

Archer said all the county fair groups and 4-H organizations have pulled together well. “Within a few days of the announcement, and hearing all the things that were being planned as alternatives, I thought that the status of the educational value of 4-H and poultry has been elevated for the youth because of the ban,” he said.

“That’s especially true at the fairs, where you normally think first about competition. All of the 4-H committees, fair boards and volunteers put their heads together to look at what kind of programs could they do to give a great experience for the youth this year,” he said.

Archer said that at the first fair already held, Paulding County June 8-13, he was told by the fair director there that the activities in poultry went so well they are considering adding the events for all the species shown at the fair. “It has made people creative,” he said. He pointed out that about 8,000 Ohio youth have, among their fair competition showings, a poultry entry and perhaps 2,500 youth who had only poultry entered in a fair.

“I think it has gone very well, and I expect that it

will continue to go well the rest of this season. I have seen that the state that the Ohio Poultry Association is preparing some display materials to distribute to county fairs across the state,” he said.

“The biggest disappointment is for those who will not be able to actually have their bird at the county or state fair. The most disappointment is for those who would be showing their bird for the last time this year,” he pointed out. But he said he hopes that the educational alternatives will be sufficient this year for the youth.

Around the state, county fair boards and 4-H Extension educators have made a number of decisions on how their poultry shows and competitions will be held.

Laura Norris, Shelby County 4-H youth development educator, said, “We’re going to try to make it as realistic as possible,” Norris said about the fair’s poultry projects. “We’re going to run the show the same as normal, just not sure how we’re going to do classes yet.” Norris said judges were being contacted to let them know of the changes and they are happy to comply with the new guidelines.

In Greene County,

“This year you’re going to have to have knowledge behind it, not just bringing in the best bird,” said Mark Everman, director of the poultry barn for the Greene County Agricultural Society. “It’s more of what you know about poultry as a whole.” He said posters (40 percent), skill-a-thons (30 percent) and book checks (30 percent) will make up scores that will determine champion exhibitor. Project sales will continue as normal.

Anne Robinette, poultry key leader in Madison County, said that while the birds stay home, the 4-H children who chose poultry for their projects will present their projects on paper rather than in a cage. “It’s up to them to create it,” Robinette said. It should contain three to five photos of the bird, an explanation of the species and the knowledge the child has gained from raising that bird written in paragraph form.

Justin Holbrook, Clinton County Junior Fair Board Committee member, said participants must complete a number of requirements in order to participate in the market sale at the end of the fair. “We’ve encouraged all of them to continue to raise their projects ... get it to a marketable size and



Fayette County 4-H youth Riley Evans was photographed at last year’s county fair cleaning his poultry cages with several of his birds in the background. There will not be scenes like this at any of Ohio’s County fairs this year.

Gary Brock photo

age and harvest it according to how they normally would — they’re just not going to be bringing it to the fair,” he said. “The poultry building will be different, in that it’s just not going to be as lively as it has been,” Holbrook concluded. “But with the events, the educational posters, there is still going to be some energy there.”

And the sales?

Don Black, Miami County Agriculture Society senior fair board member and poultry committee member, said 4-H exhibitors who planned on taking poultry projects to the fair will still be eligible for the junior fair livestock auction, have special events and

shows to participate in at the fair.

“When it comes times for the chickens to sell, the kid will go in the ring even though they don’t have a chicken with them, and whatever the buyer wants to give them for completing a project, even though they weren’t allowed to bring the animal to the fair, will still be rewarded that way,” Black said. “It’s the best we can do. We are making the best of a bad situation. I think the decision the department of agriculture made is a good one because we do need to prevent the spread of disease, but it’s awfully hard on the kids.”

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