

Commentary

# Are The Days Of The County Fair Numbered?

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

Now that the calendar has flipped over to August and the first day of the next school year is nearing, the county fair season is coming to a close and we start to look forward to our state fairs.

I attended several county fairs this summer, both small and large, and they all seem so different than when I was a kid in 4-H and FFA. Of course, this could be attributed simply to nostalgia or that as a child, everything seems much bigger, or that when you yourself are involved in 4-H or FFA, the fair is the year's culmination in those activities and it is a much bigger deal than when you're removed from the 4-H/FFA epicenter of the county fair.

But in other ways, some county fairs do seem much smaller. They're three days instead of five, they no longer have the carnival rides or concession stands, their grandstand events pull in a much smaller crowd. At one county fair I attended, one of the highlighted events was an airplane show. When I arrived, it was actually a remote-control airplane display. My toddler thought it was the greatest thing ever, but it wasn't a big crowd-puller. The thing is, this particular county fair was at one point a really big deal and would've had a real airplane show.

I left that county fair wondering if this was the future of the county fair in general. Are county fairs slowly fading into oblivion? Are county fairs really a vestige of days when Main Streets relied on family farming, when agriculture was more of central part of our lives? Now with the Internet and more efficient cars and just the sheer amount of entertainment found both in and out of home, is it even a good use of community dollars to put on a county fair?

For some counties, I think it'll be harder and harder to justify the cost of putting on a county fair. If the annual event becomes more and more of a money suck and fewer people are finding it worthy of their recreational time each year, fair boards will eventually run out of money. The county fair will transition into a 4-H activity and away from a community festival.

But for some communities, the county fair has become a tradition. One of the county fairs I attend each year is the Adams County Fair in Hastings, Neb., the county seat to the 4-H

program I was involved in as a youth. This was a big county fair 15 to 20 years ago when I was in 4-H, and it's an even bigger event now. The 4-H program is huge, but there is also a five-star carnival, grandstand events, and great concession stands.

So what's the difference?

For one, the county fair counts as Hastings' regular, annual city festival. There are others, but each has a very different focus, so that each pulls a different kind of crowd. There are some people that probably go to all of them, but more likely, there are many people

who only go to one or a couple but not the other. The Adams County Fairfest, held in July, has a definite agricultural feel but not so narrow to not appeal to the larger crowd, by booking big-name country music acts and the carnival. The Flatwater Festival is held in June and is a bluegrass music concert. Kood-Aid Days in August is largely a kids' activities event. The Parade of Lights, held in November, kicks off the holiday season and is meant to promote downtown businesses. The Cottonwood Festival, held in October, attracts art lovers. Hastings also has a very active Chamber of Commerce that makes promoting each of these activities to be of the highest priority. But Hastings is also a 25,000-population town.

The community with the county fair featuring the remote-control airplane show is much smaller, maybe 800 people. The county fair, held in July, is one of two annual events. In September, there is a festival that draws antique dealers far and wide, and there is a lot more community-wide effort into making it a town event, with city-wide yard sales and activities at different communities. The same sort of effort is simply not put into the county fair.

So, in a quick review, I do think that for many county fairs, they will fade away with the change in times. But for communities that want their county fair to survive, they have to think of it like they do the town festival — that it's an annual event that has the potential to promote the community and its businesses, as well as pull town residents together for a bit of fun. That it's more than a 4-H/FFA event and not just a vestige of days gone by, but can be a local money-maker if there was a bit more priority placed on not letting the county fair opportunity slip by.

## Will Robotic Weeding Help Augment – Or Even Replace – Herbicide Use For Some Producers?

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

It sounds like something out of a science-fiction movie, but it's the next chapter in crop weed control and it has the potential to eliminate or at least greatly reduce producers' reliance on herbicides: robotic weeding.

"The technology boom is revolutionizing management aspects of both crop and non-crop systems, including the use of advanced technology for targeted plant recognition and applications systems," said Steve Young, a weed ecologist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's West Central Research and Extension Center in North

**"The technology boom is revolutionizing management aspects of both crop and non-crop systems, including the use of advanced technology for targeted plant recognition and applications systems."**

STEVE YOUNG

Platte, Neb. "Growers will soon have a plant identification monitor sitting next to their yield, soil moisture and nutrient monitors in their tractor cab."

Robotic weeding is one result of a new branch of engineering science called phytotechnology, which basically means plant technology. Other examples of phytotechnology in action include facility designs that take the natural habitat into account, green roofs, or city green spaces, such as parks and landscaping. While many applications of phytotechnology involve the inclusion of plants into the ecosystem, robotic weeding is instead about eliminating weeds.

Reducing the use of chemicals, and the development of herbicide-resistant "super weeds," is one benefit. Another is making the farming system more efficient, by engineering the tractor with the ability to complete as many tasks as possible in the few passes it takes during the growing season.

Robotic weeding is essentially an environmentally friendly option in precision agriculture, says Jorge Heraud, CEO of Blue River Technology in Sunnyvale, Calif., home of the Lettuce Bot, a prototype robotic weeder for lettuce crops hopeful to eliminate the need for human weeding workforce, which is consistently linked to outbreaks in food-borne illness.

"Our culture fosters extreme innovation aimed at real-world problems," he added.

Robotic weeding currently uses different methods of weed elimination: mechanical, such as with a rotating circular



PHOTO: RITA BRHEL

hoe or an arm to pull out weeds; chemical, with micro-sprayers attached to a small robot or an existing farm implement, perhaps loaded with an herbicide or with a toxic cocktail of fertilizer that gives the weed a chemical burn but is available for crop use; and flaming, which uses blasts of fire to burn weeds to death. Each of these involves technology that allows the robotic weeder to identify the difference between a weed and the desired plant through a camera and a series of algorithms.

Robotic weeding has the potential to reduce herbicide use in not only crops but also in controlling invasive weeds in pastures and wildlife habitat management, or even weeds in home lawns, Young says. But the biggest impact for non-chemical, or targeted chemical, con-

trol would be in the agricultural industry.

An investor in Blue River Technology, Vinod Khosla of Menlo Park, Calif., says robotic weeding has the potential to not only more efficiently grow enough food and crops for a rapidly rising world population but also to reduce U.S. herbicide use by more than 250 million pounds a year.

At this point, robotic weeders are still about a decade away from being available to producers on a commercial basis, Young says. While there are many promising prototypes being developed and tested, none of them are yet fast enough to be of practical use in the field, although the first commercially available models might be sold as garden or lawn care equipment.

## SD Century Farm, Ranch App. Deadline Near

PIERRE — Families that have owned their farm or ranch for 100 or 125 years have the opportunity to be recognized at a special ceremony at the South Dakota State Fair on Aug. 29.

South Dakota Farm Bureau and the South Dakota Department of Agriculture (SDDA) would like to honor farm and ranch families that have retained ownership of at least 80 acres of the original

farmland for at least 100 years (Century Farm/Ranch) or at least 125 years (Quasiqui-centennial Farm/Ranch).

The application form is available on the SDFB site at this link: [http://www.sdfb.org/public/349/all\\_about\\_agriculture/century\\_farms/](http://www.sdfb.org/public/349/all_about_agriculture/century_farms/).

Application forms are due Tuesday, Aug. 13. The recognition ceremony is sched-

uled for 10 a.m. on Thursday, Aug. 29, at the state fairgrounds.

Century farms and ranches have been recognized at the State Fair since

1984 by the SDDA and South Dakota Farm Bureau. Since the program was started, more than 2,400 farms and ranches have been honored.



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Extended Office Hours Aug 14-15  
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### Circulation Manager

Due to a retirement after 30-plus years, the **Watertown Public Opinion** is seeking a **Circulation Manager** to oversee newspaper sales and service for both digital and print products. Ideal candidate is a motivated individual who understands the importance of good customer service, and who can handle multiple tasks in a timely manner.

Position offers salaried compensation based on experience and benefits plus year-end bonus opportunity.

Send resume and letter of interest to Christine Carter, Director of Administration, Watertown Public Opinion, PO Box 10, Watertown, SD 57201 or online to [chris.carter@thepublicopinion.com](mailto:chris.carter@thepublicopinion.com). **Position closes Aug. 31.**

**Watertown PUBLIC OPINION**

### River City Gymnastics and Cheer Presents

### The 2nd Annual Ice Cream Sunday & Fall Registration 2013

7:30-8:45 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 11

Performances Starting at 7:30 p.m. followed by Ice Cream Social and Fall Registration  
**Yankton High School Main Theatre & Commons**

Ice Cream Sunday is a layered event that will include:


- Performances from Cheer Academy Summer Session
- Gymnastics Exhibition from Summer Session
- Free Will Donations
- Ice Cream Social
- Fall Registration for all Gymnastics & Cheer Classes


Online registration available at: [www.yanktonrcgc.org](http://www.yanktonrcgc.org)




Hope to see you there!  
For more details contact Justin Olson at 605-661-4971 or [yanktonrcg@gmail.com](mailto:yanktonrcg@gmail.com)

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