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Agricultural Fairs Rescue Act Aims to Preserve These Vital Community Assets

The majority of all fairs and festivals have been cancelled and year round operations halted due to the pandemic; many won't have the financial means to operate in 2021

MERCED, CALIFORNIA, August 27, 2020 – Congressman Jimmy Panetta (D-CA-20) and Congressman Billy Long (R-MO-07) have introduced H.R 7883, the Agricultural Fairs Rescue Act, in the U.S. House of Representatives to help preserve agricultural fairs across the country and offset the devastating financial losses they have experienced due to COVID-19. The Agricultural Fairs Rescue Act will provide grant funding for agricultural fairs through state departments of agriculture to keep them functioning and preserve them for the future.

The legislation provides \$500 million in Agricultural Fair Rescue Grants to agricultural fairs, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). The AMS will provide the grant funding to states or state departments of agriculture based on the loss of attendance those fairs have experienced in 2020.

"County and local fairs are very important to agriculture and our communities all across our country. Fairs provide our producers with the opportunity to market their crops and livestock, and foster the next generation of farmers. They also are an economic engine and a gathering place for us to highlight and celebrate our communities. Like many institutions, fairs have been impacted by COVID-19, and we must provide them assistance if we are going to preserve these fairs for the future," said Congressman Panetta.

"It is rare indeed if a person doesn't have fond childhood memories of their county and state fairs. Fairs play a vital role in U.S. agribusiness by supporting thousands of jobs and giving farmers a way to promote their products. Our fairs have suffered very substantial, if not devastating, losses due to COVID-19. I am proud to work with my colleague and buddy, Congressman Jimmy Panetta, to introduce legislation that offers critical and strategic relief to a vulnerable industry in dire need of our assistance," said Congressman Long.

"With the exception of a few drive-thru food events in May to support our food vendors, the Merced Fairgrounds has been dark since March. With every month that passes that we are unable to rent out the Fairground's facilities, we lose approximately \$25,000 after deducting operating expenses," said Teresa Burrola, CEO of the Merced County Fair. "On top of our losses, Merced County is losing out on \$23 million in economic impact dollars from our annual fair and our average of 220 interim events."

"Our county Fairs play a vital economic and cultural role throughout our Valley. They provide family entertainment in addition to serving as a showcase for hardworking Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H students. Like many important traditions that generate revenue during this pandemic, fairs are struggling with a significant loss of

35th District Agricultural Association

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income from shuttered doors and canceled events. This legislation provides needed relief to keep these important community events financially afloat until a time we can once again enjoy with family and friends the valuable traditions county fairs have provided for generations,” said Congressman Jim Costa, who has just signed on as a co-sponsor of this bill.

“The agricultural fairs across the United States serve vital community purposes. Besides the social and cultural impact, fairs provide the future leaders of this country – the 4-H and FFA members – with vital leadership skills development. Additionally, the economic impact to each community is significant. In the majority of communities, the fairgrounds serves as critical infrastructure in times of need – fire camps, hurricane and tornado shelters for humans and animals – and never more evident than now with many serving as COVID-19 testing sites, temporary hospitals, quarantine shelters, food distribution sites, and temporary polling places. We thank Congressmen Panetta and Long for introducing the Agricultural Fairs Research Act and for working to preserve America’s fairs,” said Marla Calico, President & CEO, International Association of Fairs & Expositions (IAFE).

“Not only do county and local fairs serve a vital education and economic role, they provide families with high value entertainment close to home,” says Greg Chiecko, President of the Outdoor Amusement Business Association (OABA), and he continued, “Some of the funds they generate support important youth opportunities in local communities.”

According to the International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE), each year the operation of agricultural fairs results in \$4.67 billion for the U.S. economy and supports thousands of jobs. About 2,000 fairs are held in North America each year, and large fairs can admit more than a million visitors over the course of a week or two.

Fairs, like so many other industries in the U.S., have suffered tremendous financial losses as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. IAFE estimates a loss of gross revenue exceeding \$3.7 billion to fair organizations so far this year based upon the cancellation of facility events and their annual fair.

State and county fairs are a primary source for the promotion of U.S. agribusiness. They exhibit the equipment and animals associated with agriculture and animal husbandry, and livestock shows are prominent at many state fairs.

Fairs also encourage and develop the next generation of America’s food producers. Agricultural producers in rural America represent less than 1% of the U.S. population, and with the average age of a farmer being 57 years old, it is imperative to engage and encourage young people to pursue agricultural careers.

Want to help this bill advantage in support of preserving fairs throughout the nation, including the Merced County Fair? Use the link to find your representative, reach out and ask for their support on this bill:

www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative As mentioned, Congressman Costa has signed on a co-sponsor of this bill



This bill is one of two Congressional bills being proposed, both designed as grant programs to be administered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture to preserve fairs and their vital functions in communities across the nation. Last month, Representative Josh Harder (D-Stanislaus) introduced the “Protecting Fairs During Coronavirus Act” that would establish a \$5 billion federal grant program to offset fair revenue losses throughout the nation during the Coronavirus Pandemic. Representative Harder noted that in typical year fairs generate approximately \$3.5 billion in revenue and provides nearly \$200 million in tax revenue for local and state governments. His legislation is designed to provide financial support to fairs dealing with the COVID-related havoc on fair budgets. Representative Harder’s recent press release on the introduction of the *Protecting Fairs During Coronavirus Act* is [available here](#).

About The Merced County Fair:

The Merced County Fair, first founded in 1891, represents the 35th District Agricultural Association. The fair’s mission statement outlines that it “*promises to meet the needs of our community by providing a fun, safe venue to celebrate our area’s agricultural heritage, discover new technology and be entertained.*” Each June, the Merced County Fair welcomes more than 70,000 people from throughout Merced County and beyond to attend the five-day event. Members of the Board of Directors include: President, Carol Sartori-Silva; First Vice President, Kim Rogina; Vicky Banaga; Mark Erreca; Lori Gallo; Emily Haden; Flip Hassett; and Luis Lara. Teresa Burrola heads up the daily operations in her role as CEO. The 2021 Merced County Fair will run June 9 - 13. For more information about the Merced County Fair, please visit www.MercedCountyFair.com. Connect with the Fair on Facebook (@mercedfair), Twitter (@Merced_CA_Fair) and Instagram (@mercedcountyfair).