

NMCGA ON THE TRAIL

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For Further Information please contact

Michelle Frost Maynard _nmcga20@gmail.com

NMCGA urges New Mexicans to attend county fairs, cheer on 4-H and FFA exhibitors, and support junior livestock sales.

MORIARTY, N.M. Long before a young livestock exhibitor steps into a county fair show ring, there have been early mornings, late nights, feed bills, setbacks, and hundreds of quiet lessons learned at the end of a halter.

As county fair season starts across New Mexico, the New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association (NMCGA) is asking communities to do more than congratulate 4-H and FFA members from a distance: attend a livestock show, visit the barns, thank the volunteers, and support a junior livestock sale.

"A ribbon is awarded in a few minutes, but earning the chance to compete takes months," said Tom Paterson, president of the New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association. "These young people learn that an animal must be fed and cared for every day, whether they are tired, busy, winning, or disappointed. That is responsibility in its most practical form."

County fairs give the public a close look at the work behind New Mexico agriculture. Exhibitors learn animal husbandry, recordkeeping, budgeting, public speaking, sportsmanship, and how to accept both success and disappointment with grace. Many will become ranchers, veterinarians, agricultural educators, business owners, and community leaders. Others may choose different careers, but they will carry those habits with them.

The work is also a family and community undertaking. Parents haul animals and equipment, agricultural science teachers and Extension agents answer late-night questions, breeders share expertise, volunteers set pens and clean barns, judges explain their decisions, and local buyers help young exhibitors turn a year's work into savings for college, a future livestock project, or a start in agriculture.

"The most meaningful way to tell a young person that agriculture matters is to show up," Paterson said. "Walk through the livestock barn. Ask an exhibitor about the animal he or she raised. Sit in the stands. Bid at the sale if you can. A community's presence tells these young people that their work—and their future—are worth investing in."

New Mexico Cattle Growers congratulate every exhibitor who has put in the work to reach the show ring and thanks the families, Extension agents, agricultural educators, FFA advisors, 4-H leaders, fair boards, judges, sponsors, buyers, and volunteers who make these opportunities possible.

“Not every exhibitor will leave with a championship buckle,” Paterson said. “But every young person who learns to care for an animal, keep a commitment, help a competitor, and return to the barn the next morning has accomplished something important. That is why county fairs matter.”

The future of New Mexico agriculture is not an abstract idea. This summer, it is leading a steer, setting a lamb’s feet, brushing a heifer, checking a water bucket, and walking into a show ring.

UPCOMING COUNTY FAIRS

Fair	2026 dates	Location
Sandoval County Fair	August 1–2	Bernalillo
Lincoln County Fair	August 4–8	Capitan
San Miguel and Mora County Fair	August 5–8	Las Vegas
Los Alamos County Fair and Rodeo	August 7–9	Los Alamos
Torrance County Fair	August 11–15	Estancia
New Mexico State Fair	September 10–20	Albuquerque
Otero County Fair	September 24–27	Alamogordo
Southern New Mexico State Fair	September 30–October 4	Las Cruces
Colfax County Fair	July 20-26	Springer
Eastern Navajo Fair	July 23-26	Crownpoint
Eddy County	July 24-25	Artesia
Chavez	July 26- August 1	Roswell
Guadalupe County	July 30 – August 2	Santa Rosa
Dona Ana County	July 31 – August 8	Las Cruces
Lea County Fair	July 31 – August 8	Lovington
De Baca County Fair	July 30 – August 1	Fort Sumner
Union County Fair	August 5 – 8	Clayton
Quay County Fair	August 6 – 8	Tucumcari
San Juan County Fair	August 7 - 16	Farmington
Curry County	August 10 -15	Clovis
Roosevelt County Fair	August 18 – 23	Portales
Catron County Fair	August 19 – 23	Reserve
Valencia County Fair	August 23 – 30	Belen
Hidalgo County Fair	August 27 – 29	Lordsburg
Socorro County Fair	September 2 – 6	Socorro
Cibola & McKinley County Fair	September 3 - 7	Prewitt
Grant County Fair	September 23 – 26	Gila
Sierra County Fair	October 6 – 11	Truth or Consequences
Luna County Fair	October 7 -11	Deming
Eastern NM State Fair	October 5 - 10	Roswell

Fair dates and schedules can change. Visitors should confirm show and junior livestock sale times with the local fair or county Extension office before traveling.