

Del Norte County Fair postponed due to COVID-19 pandemic

May 22, 2020



On Thursday, the 41st District Agricultural Association Board of Directors announced with "deepest regrets" the postponement of the 2020 Del Norte County Fair.

In a press release, fair officials said after consulting with state agencies, local sponsors, entertainment providers, volunteers and regional vendors, it became clear that the coronavirus crisis, at it currently stands, will not allow for a successful 2020 Fair, which was scheduled for Aug. 6-9.

Gov. Gavin Newsom's plan to reopen the state has four levels. Mass gatherings, such as fairs, are in the last tier and is not expected to be approved for months. A recent letter from Karen Ross, secretary of the California Department of Food Agriculture, stressed that point.

As of 9 a.m. today, Del Norte County has 20 confirmed COVID-19 cases according to the county Public Health Branch. Out of 713 tests administered, 652 have tested negative, 37 results are pending and four people have recovered.

Even if approved, safety regulations at the fair would limit grandstand seating to about 25 percent of normal. It would also require a small army of employees to take temperatures of visitors, to disinfect and to shepherd

customers around safely.

Another issue is whether the fair would attract a sufficient amount of spectators with the specter of COVID-19 transmission still possible.

Kim Floyd, the fairgrounds' chief executive officer, has been monitoring the situation closely, not only the governor's plans, but all aspects of fair operations.

"The board also kept in mind the need to keep our community safe," said Floyd.

Floyd noted the dramatic loss of sponsorship money. Many regional vendors have been shutting down their operations for the year. And with no guarantee the Fair could really happen, it has been impossible to book entertainment acts for 2020.

"Our hearts are breaking," said John Pritchett, fair board president. "We waited absolutely as long as we could before making the decision. We were hoping against hope some positive news would arrive, but in the end, we really had no real choice for the long-term health of the community, the fair and the fairgrounds."

"If something changes dramatically in the next few weeks, the board will, of course, re-examine the decision," Pritchett said.

The postponement is the latest in a string of cancelations across the state and the nation, including Humboldt, Coos, Douglas, Siskiyou and Curry counties. Some California fairs report they may never be able to reopen.

That is not the case in Del Norte.

"Thanks to the wisdom of voters and the Del Norte Recreation and Parks District board, our fair will survive," said Pritchett, referring to funding provided via a slight increase in sales tax in 2014 and the creation of the district board. "We'll be back."

The fair board said it would work with organizers of the annual Junior Livestock Auction to make sure that some form of this important event continues.

The board is hopeful that a mini-fair might be possible in the spring of 2021, along with the annual county fair in the first weekend in August of next year.

In the meantime, Pritchett said work will continue on a wide range of maintenance projects and improvements to the facilities.