



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Cattle, Curds & Cream Puffs

By State Representative Don Vruwink

County 4-H fairs and state fairs are a rite of summer. The Central Wisconsin State Fair in Marshfield remains a memorable part of my childhood. The first round barn was constructed there in 1915, and the fair still bills itself as home to The World's Largest Round Barn. My Uncle Edward and his wife Shirley headed Snyder 4-H Club for 50 years and led the effort to raise money to construct the round barn.

This summer my wife Beth and I attended the Rock County Fair and the Wisconsin State Fair. The first Wisconsin State Fair was held in Janesville in 1851, sponsored by the Wisconsin Agricultural Society. The attendance was estimated to be 10,000. This year's State Fair attendance was 1.1 million over the 11-day run. That was the highest attendance on record except for 1948, which was the 100-year anniversary of Wisconsin's statehood. The 1948 fair ran for 23 days.

From 1851 to 1885, different cities took turns hosting the State Fair, with Madison and Milwaukee each hosting it five times until a permanent home was founded in West Allis in 1892.

The State Fair has been cancelled only five times: three years during the Civil War; in 1893 when the World's Columbian Expedition was held in Chicago; and in 1945 by the request of the U.S. Office of War Transportation.

At the State Fair, 30 stages feature a range of entertainment, including country music, rock, pop, R&B, nostalgia, comedy, and interactive shows for children. Over the years, other attractions have been added such as demolition derbies, races, and firefighter competitions, along with the numerous businesses promoting their products.

More than 800 food options are offered at the State Fair, many of them deep-fried and on a stick. A brownie waffle stick is a brownie with white chocolate chips inside deep-fried waffle batter. Elvis-on-a-Stick is a peanut butter cup deep-fried in banana batter. Or try "deep-fried milk,"

cubes of deep-fried pudding served with a creamy dip. If only I had brought my deep-fried antacids.

The cream puff is the most popular treat, with around 400,000 sold each year. My wife Beth and I contributed to that number.

On September 30, 1859, before he was elected president, Abraham Lincoln spoke at the State Fair in Milwaukee. He said: “Agricultural fairs are becoming an institution of the country; they are useful in more ways than one; they bring us together and thereby make us better acquainted, and better friends than we otherwise would be.”

Lincoln’s words ring true today. Our county fairs and State Fair are institutions, a place where young people bring their animals and projects and become better acquaintances and friends. It is where hard work is rewarded.

Beth and I attended the 2019 Governor’s Blue Ribbon Livestock Auction this year. The auction brought in \$255,850, which goes to programs to support junior exhibitors. Milton’s own Bob Johnson is one of the auctioneers.

I represent parts of four counties that host fairs. The Rock County, Jefferson County, and Dane County wrapped up their runs for the year. There is still time to take in the Walworth County Fair, which runs Aug. 28 to Sept. 2.

I thank all of the sponsors and organizers who make these fairs happen. Whatever reason you go, be it the food, music, animals, or the shopping, your attendance keeps the institution going, just like the fair in Marshfield with the round barn.

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State Rep. Don Vruwink represents parts of Rock, Walworth, Jefferson, and Dane counties. These include the communities of Whitewater, Milton, Edgerton, Footville, the Town of Janesville, part of the Village of Oregon, and surrounding townships. He can be reached at 608-266-3790, Rep.Vruwink@legis.wisconsin.gov, and P.O. Box 8953, Madison WI 53708.