

Safety Workshops Bring Officials Together

By: Guest Contributor
Carrie Klumb, MPH

The Minnesota Department of Health, along with the Minnesota Board of Animal Health, recently hosted two full-day workshops aimed at those involved with putting on county fairs. The first workshop took place on June 18 in St. Cloud, Minn., and was attended by 56 people. The second workshop took place on June 20 in Rochester, Minn., and was attended by 30 people. We approached the workshops from a One Health perspective, which means we addressed environmental, human, and animal health issues related to county fairs. These workshops were made possible through pilot grant money from the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center at the University of Minnesota.

The goal of these workshops was to bring together groups of people that may not otherwise have a chance to meet, but are interested in the same end goal: to have a healthy, safe, and successful fair. We invited people from a variety of agriculture and health backgrounds, including the Minnesota regional 4H and FFA offices, officers, and directors of the Minnesota Federation of County Fairs, county fair board members and directors, private petting zoo operators, University of Minnesota Extension educators, local public health officials, and animal health officials.

We found out about the pilot grant money in March, which didn't give us much time to plan these workshops before the start of fair season. Since we were short on time, we decided to only send out electronic invitations and created a free registration page through the Minnesota Department of Health's website. The workshops were free, and a hot lunch was provided.

About half of the attendees were from the animal or human health sector, while the other half were those involved in putting on county fairs. Being able to bring together professionals from these different backgrounds to learn from one another and to start a dialogue between the groups is what truly made these workshops successful.

At the workshops, attendees were encour-

aged to sit in small groups and were given a binder full of useful handouts and copies of each presentation. The workshop format included a series of presentations, followed by a question-and-answer period, and time for small group discussion. The first presentation was delivered by an environmental health food inspector from the health department. He talked about fresh water and wastewater issues that could arise at fairs, proper food handling procedures, and who fair personnel should contact if they have an issue. Next, epidemiologists (people who keep track of diseases in the state) from the health department discussed best practices for human-animal interaction at fairs, specifically talking about petting zoos. They went over recent outbreaks that have occurred at county fairs and the consequences of those outbreaks, how to avoid having outbreaks at your fair, and who is responsible for keeping people healthy and safe while interacting with animals. The final presentation was from the Board of Animal Health and they talked about new animal identification requirements, the responsibilities of fair managers and veterinarians, and how to minimize the spread of swine influenza at fairs.

We had overwhelmingly positive feedback on our evaluation forms. Listed below are some comments we received:

- *Regarding the most valuable aspect of the workshop: "(Like) the fact that you have all the different people it takes to do the fair."*
- *"Great idea and glad it finally came together."*
- *"A yearly workshop would be beneficial."*
- *"Great thing to start with county fairs. Great refreshers."*
- *"There is always info given to the State Fair Committee and the Minnesota County Fair meeting, but this gathering is a HUGE ASSET to those who never get the info first hand or at all."*
- *"Very good day spent, well worth the time spent."*

The relationships we built through these workshops have already proven to be beneficial this fair season. This year, for example,

there have been 16 human cases of swine influenza nationwide in people who showed swine at county fairs. As a precautionary measure in Minnesota, we sent postcards to 4-H families involved in swine projects giving them a heads up about this and letting them know what symptoms to look for and to see their doctor if they got sick. We used our new county fair contacts gained through the workshops to let them know a postcard had been sent out to the families and included a copy of the postcard in the e-mail. Several people responded with follow up questions. Building these relationships allows us to communicate with our fair partners on current events in a timely manner. The workshops also gave people time to share ideas with each other and apply what they learned to their own fairs. For example, one workshop attendee contacted us after his fair took place and said that he was more aware of the potential risks and how to manage them because of the information presented at the workshop. It is for all of these reasons that we hope to continue these workshops.

We are very grateful to members of the Minnesota Federation of County Fairs, who were extremely supportive and helpful throughout this process. We are currently discussing what these workshops should look like in the future. We would love to make them a free annual event at multiple locations around the state, but are in need of a more stable source of funding. Since Minnesota county fair personnel and public health professionals found these workshops informative, other states may be interested in starting similar programs.

As an epidemiologist at the health department, I can say that I am very encouraged by the turnout this year and hopeful that we can continue to work together in the future. After all, everyone's goal is the same: to have a safe, fun, and successful fair!

Carrie Klumb is a senior epidemiologist and UMASH project coordinator with the Acute Disease Investigation and Control in the Minnesota Department of Health. She can be contacted at carrie.klumb@state.mn.us.