

Pilot project to develop healthy fair and petting zoo workshops in Minnesota

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Background:

Every year, ~3,200 state and county fairs in the United States attract ~150 million visitors (fairsandexpos.com). Fairs are great opportunities for people to observe animals, learn about animal agriculture, and experience the human-animal bond. However, there is potential for human illness and injury at fairs from food, water, and animals. Each year outbreaks associated with fairs are investigated by health departments. This pilot project aimed to educate people associated with county fairs about the risk of illness and how to minimize these risks.



Aims:

1. Establish relationships between county fairs, county fair veterinarians, petting zoo operators, MDH, environmental health in local public health agencies (LPH), USDA Animal Care, Minnesota Board of Animal Health (MBAH) district veterinarians, and University of Minnesota (UM) Extension (4H, FFA).
2. Distribute and explain current guidelines for minimizing disease and injury risks associated with animals in public settings. Provide handwashing and educational posters.
3. Hear concerns from county fair personnel and provide free consultation services in order to mitigate risks.

Methods:

The workshops were conducted in-person throughout greater Minnesota using a One Health concept and were co-hosted by the MDH Zoonotic Diseases Unit, MDH Environmental Health Division, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, and Minnesota Board of Animal Health. Each workshop attendee received a binder of educational materials. The workshops were designed to present information on human, animal, and environmental health with time for attendees to ask the experts questions. There was also networking time built in so attendees could learn from each other.

Findings:

Five Healthy Fairs Workshops have been conducted throughout the state of Minnesota. A total of 146 representatives from 64 different county fairs attended. The success of these workshops combined with attendee feedback has led to the development of Agritourism Workshops. A total of three Agritourism Workshops have been held, with 93 attendees representing apple orchards, pumpkin patches, and farms hosting “breakfast on the farm.” Several educational materials were developed through the workshops (see output table) and spawned the idea for additional materials that now exist. Additionally, the workshops have led to better relationships and communication between MDH and county fairs as well as the Minnesota Federation of County Fairs (MFCF). During an outbreak investigation in 2014, improved relationships allowed MDH to discover the source of an outbreak of E. coli O157 in a traveling petting zoo and stop the petting zoo from displaying at other Minnesota county fairs until appropriate interventions could be put in place. MDH is now invited to MFCF’s annual conference to provide the most up-to-date information to county fair boards. MDH was able to leverage the work done through this pilot grant to apply for the CDC/USDA/CSTE’s project development pilot grant for Influenza Education Among Youth in Agriculture. MDH secured \$50,000 of funding in FY16 and \$95,000 of funding for FY17.

Conclusions:

This pilot project has been extremely successful in helping MDH create strong relationships with other state agencies and those working in agriculture. It has led to ongoing outreach activities that have lasted beyond the pilot grant funding period and was leveraged to gain additional grant funds. The project also steered the UMASH center toward an effort focusing on agritourism. A section of UMASH webpage is now dedicated to agritourism resources including posters, handouts, checklists, and videos.