

Mission- To promote the diverse agricultural and cultural heritage of Marion County through active participation of its citizens.

Marion County Fair Board Monthly Meeting

Board of Commissioners' Board Room

September 3, 2025

Meeting Convened: 5:33 PM

I. Call to Order/Introductions

In Attendance

Board Members: Joseph Billington, Dana Castano, Amy Goulter-Allen, Shannon Gubbels, Greg Martin, Pam Zielinski

Key Volunteers: Rebecca Kauffman

Staff: Chip Bury, Community Services Economic Development Manager; Denise Clark; Kelli Weese, Community Services Department Director; Sarah Coutley, Fair Volunteer Coordinator

Guests: Jill Ingalls, Ingalls and Associates; Melanie McCabe, 4H

II. Public Comments- None

III. Approval of August 6, 2025 Meeting Summary Notes

Greg made a motion to accept the meeting summary notes; Joeseeph seconded the motion. Motion passed.

IV. Financial Report- Kelli Weese

Kelli noted that the fair board budgets conservatively and that has served the fair well especially this year as our gate receipts came in 66% of the projected figure. Those expenditure and revenue items highlighted in blue are still pending. Jill indicated that she is working with Denise on completing the blue colored items.

The armored car expense has not been identified yet. Denise said that the Treasurer's office has been asking for the fee, however they haven't gotten a response. She said some years they haven't charged us.

The figure for temp wages came in over budget due to temporary staff putting in overtime. The public official bonds also came in over budget. This could have been caused by the timing of getting new fair board members in place.

Dana motioned to accept the financial report as presented; Shannon seconded. Motion passed.

V. 4H/FFA Reports

4H Reports- Melanie

The market auction totals came in at almost 1.2 million. All auction checks for the students were sent out this week. The auction committee had a "tougher time" collecting payments this year from businesses.

The new club year begins October 1. They are in the process of identifying which clubs are continuing and which are discontinuing.

The 4H/FFA camping and stall revenue is still outstanding.

Melanie will be seeking reimbursement for ribbons and judges from the county. These should be submitted by the end of this week.

FFA Reports- No representative. Amy does not know who will be the representative at fair board meetings in the future as Tricia is taking on the district advisor position. Amy will research it.

VI. Items of Special Interest

Fair Board Retreat Date- Denise

Denise had sent out a poll asking for everyone's preferred date to hold the retreat. After discussion, it was decided to hold the retreat November 22 at the Farm Bureau Building from 8:30 AM to 1 PM. The fair board asked Denise to contact Sam Skillern about facilitating the event.

2025 Attendance Numbers- Denise

Denise provided a document that showed the compiled 2025 attendance numbers and also a comparison of gate counts over the years including totals by the individual day. Thursday was a free day this year; there were 8,489 counted by clicker count. She said in the past, the highest attendance on Thursday has been around 2,000. The preliminary attendance for the 2025 fair is approximately 26,000. However, Melanie just provided her numbers today, so this number will increase. Also, Denise usually includes Wednesday's activities on the grounds as 4H is operating, and a food vendor (the Dairy Women booth) is selling food. Denise said that including Wednesday's numbers in the total attendance was confirmed by Commissioner Carlson (former fair board member and fair treasurer) years ago.

Jill said that she had done some calculations and found that Thursday represents 53% of our total attendance, 14% is the average for Thursday. Sunday has been as low as 9%, the last seven years shows Sunday now averaging 26% which is better than Friday's attendance. The Ingalls' strategy has worked in getting more attendees on Sunday with all the Family Day activities. Thursday still needs attention as Jill said it is not "valuable" as far as attendance and revenue. She also noted that some vendors express the desire to not be there on Thursday.

Since we did not have Afton's electronic numbers for Thursday, we had to go by security doing "clicker counts." We don't have any way to verify that there wasn't any double-counting of the same people coming and going. Jill said that in looking at the number of cars that came in, and calculating 2.5 to 3 people per car, the number of attendees "line up with the clicker count." With more people attending on Thursday, we gave our vendors more reason to be there that day. Food vendor sales significantly increased for a Thursday.

Jill feels that there are three variables that affect our attendance. The first is heat; fairgoers attended on the mild day (Thursday) and didn't come back on the subsequent hot days. The second is the 4th of July event held at the fairgrounds with a full carnival happening before our event. Our fair is no longer the first time the community has access to a carnival. The third variable is the state fair charging our fairgoers for parking.

Jill said that the total food sales calculated out to \$15.72 per person last year; this year it was \$12.78. She feels that with a free fair, she thought that number would have gone up. The economy is impacting this.

It was asked how the state fair's 4th of July event went this year. Jill responded that the food and carnival did well. The state fair brought in more and bigger rides. (The carnival provider "leverages this into state fair.") This impacts us. There are a lot of events in the area on the 4th of July that take revenue from us.

Sarah said she looked into the weather impact, specifically the high temperatures on our fair dates in the past years. There are past fair's that had hotter days than this year's fair. Last year's fair was hotter than this year.

It was suggested to bring to the retreat data that includes by day numbers (percentage of the totals) and include the historical high temperatures on those days.

Jill responded that people get "heat fatigue" from experiencing hot days for days on end. The heat index is causing people not to attend outdoor events such as ours.

Jill would like to have an October discussion, not waiting until the retreat, to plan for a 4-day or 3-day fair and consider admission costs.

State fair had a lot of discounted days; however, they had low attendance days also.

State fair had a problem with commercial vendors leaving the event due to limited traffic in the new location they were placed. Also, there was a significant increase in the number of food vendors.

Melanie said that we need to have contingency plans in place for future fairs as the state fair's 4th of July event occurs the same week as our event. She said to be especially mindful of the year 2028 when the 4th of July falls on a Tuesday. This affects 4H's timelines as far as set-up and the grounds availability.

Jill noted that working with Kevin Ziebart, of the state fair, went well this year. She said we were able to get things in place early since we are located on the opposite side of the property from where the 4th of July event is held.

It was asked about the possibility of moving our fair date. Answer- it is not feasible. There are variables such as the scheduling with the breeders of the market animals and also all of the logistics with programing. Also, the animal judges are scheduled for other events. Our participants take part in the St. Paul Rodeo right before our event. Throughout the state all of the county fairs are strategically scheduled. Vendors schedule their season based on the timing of when other fairs are held as they travel from fair to fair.

It was suggested that we are going to have to come up with something that differentiates us from the other events. This will be discussed at the retreat.

Entertainment:

Jill said that the big-name entertainment routing in the Pacific Northwest has already started. Country acts are going fast. Pat (Source Management) recommends hiring a band called "Radio Ready." They cost \$12,000 to have them for multiple days. They are a "club band" out of CA that plays covers from the 90's to today. Jill has worked with them before and they are great to work with. They were at Washington County

and Lebanon Strawberry Festival this year. She suggests that we have a big-name act for just Saturday night.

Greg made a motion to hire *Radio Ready* for possibly Thursday, Friday, and Sunday. Pam seconded the motion. Dana's preference is to have them on multiple days. Motion passed. Jill said that the agreement would be for four days or four major performances. Jill doesn't know what that will look like as she hasn't started to negotiate the performances yet with them.

Denise reminded folks that in the past she had done an analysis on the amount of money spent on a big-name act and the correlation to increased food vendor sales. The results were it didn't matter how much was spent on the act, the food vendor sales remained relatively the same. The results concur with Jill's position that a big-name act doesn't necessarily draw crowds. She has said that bringing a known artist in is just a "gift to the community." Jill said you should not assume any return on investment with a big-name act. However, she did say that bringing someone in like "Diamond Rio," a totally recognized group that has super fans, might make a difference.

Jill said that Pat suggests spending \$50-70,000 for a country artist this year. She said that Pat will be as conservative as possible and lean toward the \$50,000 range. Greg made the motion to approve spending \$50-70,000 on a big-name act; Amy seconded. Motion passed.

Those that want to be on the Entertainment Committee are Amy, Joe, and Shannon.

It was asked if the state fair will be charging us \$5 or \$10 per car for parking. Answer- we don't know; in the past we've been grandfathered in at the \$5 fee. Shannon asked that we get a confirmation on the parking fee by next month's meeting. Jill said she will try.

Rebecca asked about a free fair model to off-set parking costs. Could we recoup the gate revenue by attendance, sponsor fees, and percentage of food vendor sales? Jill answered "yes, at some point, that it takes a few years to recoup." Washington county is a model of free gate with no big-name entertainment offered. They do have other challenges but are a very successful fair. Crook County, in Prineville, is a much smaller fair that went to a free gate nine years ago. Their parking is also free. Pat Woods, our entertainment buyer, was the fair manager that turned Crook County into a free fair.

Sponsorship Commission Fees-Jill

After last month's meeting, the Ingalls met with the county and with Shannon. The Ingalls had requested they receive 22% of all commissions whether they have a cost to them or not. The county said they'd recommend a compromise of 18% of the commissions with a cost to them and 22% of those without associated costs.

Ingalls are now proposing receiving a sponsorship commission of 22% on the net profit with an additional 10% commission on any costs associated with a sponsorship. Their proposal includes defining what the cost would be ahead of time. She said that since there is a cost of sponsorship line item in the fair budget, they would be constrained to that budgeted amount. If costs were projected to go above the budget, for example another sponsored picnic comes in, than that must come before the fair board for approval to increase that line item.

The question was raised as to would there be an incentive to increase the costs associated in order to get a greater commission amount. Answer- the costs would be kept in check as the Ingalls would get a greater margin on the net (22%) than on the costs associated amount which would only be 10%. Jill said this is also controlled by the very specific contract held with the sponsor as to what will be provided to them.

Chip responded that the goal would be to “incentivize” the Ingalls to bring in more sponsors, while not allowing the costs to go up too much; maintaining costs so the fair makes a profit.

The sponsor of a company picnic brings in more people and those people spend money on the grounds. This makes for more value of the sponsorship in addition to the cash value.

It was asked if the picnics brought in the projected number of attendees this year. Answer- No, DSP's numbers were down, and Premier Trucking attendees were down 50% from what was expected.

Denise noted that she works closely with the Ingalls on sponsorship. She receives the sponsorship agreement from the Ingalls then invoices the sponsor. Per the Ingalls, if additional costs come in, she will send a second invoice. She maintains a spreadsheet that tracks who has paid, and when, and any costs associated with a sponsorship. She believes the Ingalls are very transparent in how they operate; she trusts them. The purpose of capturing this process in writing is because it is a change to how the Ingall's sponsorship commission has been figured in the past. Also, we want to have a process in place for any new sponsorship coordinators that work with the fair in the future.

Jill said that there is an art to negotiating sponsorships. She expressed that she is “fearful” that the fair board is trying to understand this because “It’s a lot of “smoke and mirrors.” There are sponsorship coordinators that do pyramid sponsorship structures such as, “You are a gold, platinum, or silver sponsor. And for this dollar amount you get this....” The Ingalls work with each individual sponsor to see what they want and then meet their needs.

It was said that this is all very confusing to the layman.

Shannon said she'd like time for everyone “to digest this” and also have the county review the proposal. This needs to be incorporated in the Ingalls' contract; she is looking to the county for guidance.

Kelli noted that this will be a change to the contract. We need to include new definitions and language. We also need to make sure it doesn't increase the cost of the contract's threshold.

Amy said we need to ensure we are following the public contracting rules.

Shannon wants this to be understandable. She suggests that there be another interim meeting followed by a proposal being brought back to the October fair board meeting.

VII. Strategic Plan Items- September

1.1.1 *Select a marketing/sponsorship coord. as needed-* Not needed

2.1.8 *Submit sign/banner application to City of Salem (9/15 applications accepted)* Denise will make this happen on September 15.

4.4.6 *Hold Public Competitions' Superintendents' post fair review.* This meeting was not held. Rebecca and Sarah will be meeting soon.

5.1.2 *Identify and submit OFA and OFEA award nominations.* Jill encouraged the fair board to submit nominations to these organizations. Shannon asked that the submission link be sent out to all the fair board members.

The OFA Convention is October 16-18 at the Washington County fairgrounds in Hillsboro. Denise said if anyone wants to go, to let her know and she will register them. Greg responded that he wants to attend.

5.1.7 *Board members complete annual "Board Self Evaluation Questionnaire" tool if necessary.*

Shannon said it isn't needed this year. (Dana and Greg indicated that they would like to see it. Denise will send to them.)

VIII. Other

- Sarah emailed the fair board members a link to the OFA award nomination forms that she found on-line.
- Greg said that he contacted the Salem Police Department to see if they wanted to provide the color guard next year for the opening ceremony. (The Department of Corrections has done it in the past.) Also, the County Sherrif Hunter will be the speaker at next year's fair.
- Greg said that there is no information about the 2026 fair on the marioncountyfair.fun website. Jill thought it had been updated; she will check with her staff.
- Now that the City of Salem is charging for downtown parking, it was asked if there is any money to reimburse meeting participants. Answer- the county will not be able to reimburse people; any reimbursement funds would need to come out of the fair fund.

IX. Meeting Adjourned: 7:08 PM