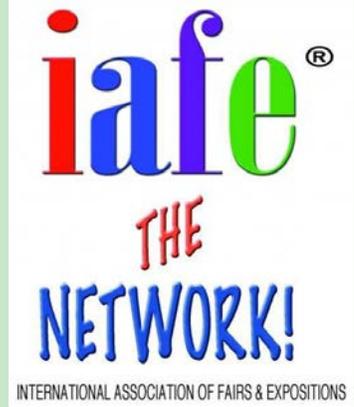




# MAAF NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER  
DECEMBER

2025  
ISSUE #6



## NEWS FROM THE IAFE

Congratulations to **Barry Norris**, Executive Director of the Maine Association of Agricultural Fairs, for **winning the IAFE State & Provincial Executive of the Year Award!**

Barry's unwavering dedication to the agricultural fair industry has strengthened fairs across Maine and beyond. Under his leadership, the MAAF experienced significant growth, particularly in revitalizing fairs after the pandemic and expanding the State Fair Conference to record participation. Barry's advocacy in the Maine Legislature has secured vital funding through the Sports Wagering Bill and the creation of the MAAF Foundation, which provides scholarships and grants to support the fair community. His leadership extends nationally through his active role with the IAFE and collaboration with Zone 1 partners, including efforts to host a future Zone conference in the Canadian Maritimes.

Join us in congratulating Barry!



## NEWS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - BARRY NORRIS

Before you read my thoughts that sum up this amazing Maine fair season, I want to share that I am very humble and honored to be receiving this recognition. I want to thank all those in my past and present who have guided me on this path.

Well, fair season has ended, and I believe that it was a great year for most of you. I will report that nationally the attendance numbers have been down, so if you were down, you are on par with the nation.

The IAFE impact study has been completed, and I'm happy to report that the MAAF Board voted to purchase each fair their own local impact study. We hope to have them sent out within the next month.

The Conference committee has the conference agenda finalized, and it is posted in this newsletter, and you can start to review and select those programs of interest. More information on the conference will be available on the [mainefairs.net](http://mainefairs.net) website under conference.

Three of our fairs submitted entries to the IAFE 2026 contest program. The IAFE Virtual Awards Show will be Thursday, November 20th beginning at 2PM Central Time. Be sure to connect to the **IAFE website** and click on convention to see if any of our fairs are winners. Good luck to all of you.

I'm saddened to report that Caleb Chessie has resigned from the MAAF Board and Shawn Bugbee from Northern Fair has been appointed to replace him. Good luck Caleb. Remember to submit your Rising Star nominations . The application is on the site. There also are two (2) director's positions to be filled for in 2026, and again the application can be found on the website.

Looking forward to seeing you all at the convention in January. Remember the convention is free to all. When you preregister on the website, you'll receive 2 refreshment tickets redeemable Friday night at the auction and dance.

We'll be sending out an update on the MAAF conference in December. Hope you all have a wonderful Thanksgiving. **Barry**



## **IAFE CONVENTION & TRADE SHOW NOVEMBER 30 - DECEMBER 4, 2025 DENVER, COLORADO**

The IAFE Convention and Trade Show is the largest gathering of the fair industry anywhere in the world. People from fairs of all sizes - from small country fairs to the largest events in the world, come together to learn, share ideas, network and visit a trade show unlike any other.

Held this year from November 30-December 4, Maine is delighted to send a diverse group that represents veterans and YP fair members, grant recipients and representatives from small, medium and large fairs. This group will include: Garrett Lambert and Lilly Bagley from Skowhegan Fair, Barry & Junia Norris and Tom & Yvonne Pitzl from Union Fair, David Byras, Rayma Ashby, Amanda Ware Smith and David Smith from Litchfield Fair, Erik Fitch from Blue Hill Fair, Darcy Winslow from Waterford World's Fair, Steve Graustein, Ken Nelson, David Andrews and David Richardson from Fryeburg Fair, Dan Foster and Peter Chase from Windsor Fair, and Jeff and Mel Chadbourne, Madison Chadbourne and Devin Kerr from Harmony Free Fair. Attending this event will enable the Maine folks to attend sessions that are directly applicable to the work that they do in their fairs and also network with a variety of experts and colleagues that can't be found anywhere else. The presentations are facilitated by both industry experts and association colleagues who have faced similar challenges. At the conclusion of each day in Denver, the Maine group will gather to share the information that they have learned and to plan their activities for the coming day. While these 22 Maine fair folks have already registered and are ready to travel to Denver in less than a month, all Maine fair folks should be looking ahead to the 2026 IAFE Convention in Louisville, Kentucky held November 29 - December 3, 2026 at the Kentucky International Convention Center.

NOTE: The 2026 Zone 1 Conference for folks from Maine (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Brunswick, New Hampshire, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Pennsylvania, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Rhode Island, and Vermont) is held this coming spring in Allentown, Pennsylvania, April 9-11. Look for grant funded opportunities to attend while at the MAAF annual conference in Bangor, January 2026.

**PRELIMINARY 2026 MAAF CONFERENCE SCHEDULE  
COMING UP - JANUARY 22-25, 2026!  
BANGOR, MAINE**



*Photo of MAAF Board of Directors at 2025 MAAF Conference, Portland, Maine*

## **MAINE YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE ON THE MOVE**

The Farmers Draft Horse, Mule and Pony Club sends a newsletter several times during the year to reach out and share information, opportunities, successes, dates to remember and so much more. This organization, established in 1988, is dedicated to the promotion and preservation of draft equines. This fall, the October newsletter included reflections from Jessica Carlow, the secretary for the FDHMPC. “So proud of all the youth this year. They really have grown and improved tremendously. I overheard a few judges that commented on some of the youth and how they have gained confidence with their driving/handling skills since last year and that’s always nice to see that we’re teaching these young ones something that they can hold on to and teach their children someday.”

The Maine FFA Association is sending a very well rounded team to Indianapolis, to represent the great state of Maine. A special member of this team is Delaney McKeen. Delaney, a recent graduate of UMPI recently traveled to Oklahoma to join other candidates from across the country who were practicing for their interviews for the title of National Officer as they prepared for their selection process. A group of sponsors from across Maine have come together to make it possible for Delaney to undertake this exciting journey. Should Delaney be chosen for this title she would be the first Maine FFA member to serve in this capacity in 70 years! Good Luck Delaney!! Congratulations to Jillian McLaughlin of the Lincoln Academy FFA chapter who has moved up to the semifinals in Employability Skills!

Look for more information in the MAAF January-February newsletter as the FFA team returns to share their stories from Indianapolis!

**THESE SHOES WILL BE  
HARD TO FILL**

**GEORGE & JUDY  
GROSS  
UNION FAIR**



“You can try it but you won’t like it!” This isn’t the most enticing approach to persuade someone to take a sip of your favorite beverage - but amazingly, it worked!

Judy Gross always summered at the family cottage on Biscay Pond in Bremen. These years were her early introduction to Union Fair. While in college, Judy met George Gross, they were married and he introduced her to Moxie. His “you won't like it” line was due to the fact that this beverage was sweet as well as quite bitter in the 1950s due to the inclusion of Gentian root - which actually gives Moxie its unique flavor. Initially invented in 1876 as a concentrated medicine by Augustin

Thompson (born in Union, Maine), Moxie saw its popularity rise with the addition of carbonation. It became known as “Moxie Nerve Food” - later dropped at the request of the USFDA and soon was outselling Coca-Cola.

George was quite taken with Moxie (having been an avid MAD magazine reader back in the day) and its unique history - so much so that he began attending the Moxie Festival. He was a founding member of the New England Moxie Congress and learned that somewhere in New England there was a huge Moxie Bottle House. Built in 1906 by the Moxie promotion department to make a splash at the New England Food Fair, it stood 32 feet tall by 10 feet in diameter. After its initial appearance, the bottle house traveled around New England ultimately landing at Pine Island Pond in New Hampshire. In 1999 George approached Union Fair to acquire and build a special showplace for the bottle. By 2001 donations exceeding \$12,000 were received that allowed the Moxie bottle to be purchased and the Moxie Wing (now known as the Moxie Museum) to be built adjacent to the Matthews Museum on the fairgrounds. Many local people were involved in this project - Bob Oxtan (Camden) prepared the site, N.C.Hunt Lumber (Damariscotta/Jefferson) donated discounted materials that made it easier for the post and beam building to be constructed. By 2009 the Moxie Wing was officially completed and opened to the public. Previously, on May 10, 2005, Moxie was designated as the official state soft drink of Maine.

Not folks to be content to sit around when things needed to be done, here is a partial list of what George and Judy have been up to for the past 20+ years:

2010 George was elected as a trustee of Union Fair (Judy followed shortly)

2010 George became the person to oversee the Union Fair sponsorship program - which included a multitude of bright banners throughout the fairgrounds thanking both longtime and brand new sponsors.

2011 George and Judy began to enhance the bicycle give away program - prior to this the fair had given away one boy’s bike and one girl’s bike each year. These bikes were displayed hanging from the rafters in the Exhibition Hall. Current count over the past 15 years: Over 400 bikes have been sponsored and given to boys and girls . Three drawings are made on three separate days with bikes for girls and boys in each of three age groups. Donations come from individuals and businesses throughout the Union Fair regional area of Lincoln, Knox and Waldo counties.

In 2012 George and Judy were asked to coordinate the Union Fair Poster contest and have done so since then.

Judy was also asked to assume the coordination of the Blueberry Acres building where many blueberry themed crafters and vendors display their wares. On Blueberry Day, Judy oversees the baking and distribution of close to 1000 small blueberry pies prepared by Fair volunteers and given away to fair attendees at NO COST. Credit here also goes to Irene Maxcy for her assistance in running the Blueberry pie contests each year. Plus, fan favorites are the youth and adult blueberry pie eating contests - they often draw quite a crowd!

What else has George done since he arrived at the fairgrounds? Hmmm - purchased many many gallons of blue paint and painted ( while being supervised by Barry Monahan and Sherwood Hilt among others) anything that was available - *blueberry blue*. He developed guidelines for pay-to-park on the infield

during demolition derby and mud run events which helps to alleviate parking congestion.

What else has Judy done since she arrived? She wrote requesting two grants from the State of Maine dealing with wood identification and preservation for the Bottle House. The representative from the state came to the fairgrounds twice explaining what needed to be done and helped people mix up formulas to apply to the bottle.

When asked to comment on the significance of the resources, time and energy that George and Judy have donated to the fair, the comments included: "They both have gone above and beyond to make sure that Union Fair is the best possible. They have given of their time and resources and serve as unique role models for the new volunteers." "George and Judy seem to be always willing to help any of us with any projects - no matter the weather, the time - they even bring snacks for the volunteer kitchen!" "Union Fair is so fortunate to have them - and by the way, did you know that in the off-season, they drive over here from Vermont in order to attend meetings and help with special projects?"

For sure, These Shoes Will Be Hard To Fill !



## REMINDERS & DEADLINES

2025 Ag Education Challenge - October 31. Yes this date has come and gone. However, the MAAF website had a few hiccups this summer and if you need another week or two - FMI: contact Junia.

IAFE Announces the 2025 Virtual Awards Show on November 20. Thursday at 2:00 PM Central streaming across all IAFE social media platforms. **IAFE Facebook**.

Rising Star - January 1. The deadline for this form to be received is January 1. Please make sure that you have a current Rising Star application form. Available on the **MAAF website**.

Maine Ag Trade Show - January 13, 14 and 15. Augusta Civic Center. Come and enjoy the "Maine Stage" event as MAAF introduces folks to our 2026 Ag Education Theme. In 2025 we focused on Youth in Agriculture and introduced four amazing Maine youth who were very involved in agriculture on so many levels.

In 2026 we are introducing The Wonderful World of Poultry. Yes, poultry. Chickens, pigeons, ducks, turkeys and more. This theme has unlimited opportunities for each fair - from incubators and brooders to cooking with eggs/chicken to raising your home flock. Fairgoers of all ages are

drawn to the poultry displays in Maine fairs. Now let's incorporate the education piece.

GOALS - Get Out And Learn Something: the new reimbursable grant created by and funded by Maine fair vendors who are supporting the hard work and innovation that they have noticed on fairgrounds across the state. FMI: Contact **Junia** or Andrew Jura (Union Fair).



## MADISON CHADBOURNE FROM THE YOUNG PROFESSIONALS BOARD

As we move into 2026, the Maine Association of Agricultural Fairs Young Professionals are looking forward to continued growth, collaboration, and opportunities to strengthen connections across our state's fairs. Three members of the group will be attending the IAFE Convention in Denver this December to gain new ideas, build relationships, and bring valuable insight back to Maine. The Young Professionals plan to share what they learn at the January MAAF Convention and discuss ways to apply those takeaways to support fair improvement, innovation, and engagement throughout the coming year.

If you're interested in the MAAF's Young Professionals group - or know of someone who would be - please text or call me at 207-343-1002, email [madison.w.chadbourne@gmail.com](mailto:madison.w.chadbourne@gmail.com) for more details. Be sure to mark your calendar for the January MAAF Conference session (1/23/2026 - 1/25/2026) - your chance to help shape the future of agricultural fair ! Let's grow the future together !

## MAINE FFA ASSOCIATION NEWS

*Congratulations!*  
*Employability Skills*

**Jillian McLaughlin**  
**of the Lincoln Academy**  
**FFA chapter is a**  
**semi finalist!**



The logo features a stylized sun and wheat stalks above the word "EMPOWER" in a blue box, with "80TH NATIONAL FFA CONVENTION & EXPO" and "FFA" written below it.



Your 2025-2026 State reporter is moving forward to the semifinals! Congratulations to Jilly McLaughlin on advancing to round 2! **Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Maine State Grange Maine Department of Education Maine CTE**



*This exceptional group of young individuals participated in Employment Skills this morning. It was a pleasure to interact with them! Congratulations to Jilly McLaughlin for advancing to the top 8 and proceeding to the networking round! #maineffa #NationalFFA #livingtoserve*

## **KAYLA JONES, MAINE DCAF**

### **STRONG SEASON & ECONOMIC IMPACT HIGHLIGHT 2025 MAINE AGRICULTURAL FAIRS**

The 2025 Maine Agricultural Fair Season proved to be a success, marked by strong attendance and vibrant community engagement across the state. Despite a few fairs facing weather-related challenges, the overall season reflected the continued importance of agricultural fairs to Maine's culture and economy.

Looking ahead, fair dates for the 2026–2029 seasons were established in April, and preparations are already underway to ensure a smooth and efficient licensing process for the coming years.

As many of you are aware, in 2025, the International Association of Fairs and Expositions partnered with Johnson Consulting to study the economic and social impact of fairs, revealing their significant role in supporting communities nationwide and regionally.

Key findings from the study that I found both exciting and interesting:

29% of the U.S. population attends a fair each year—more than the combined attendance of Major League Baseball and the NFL.

65% of the U.S. population attends an event at a fairground annually, surpassing attendance across all other sports combined.

In the New England region, which includes Maine, the average annual economic impact of fairground events for fewer than 25,000 visitors is \$5.8 million. Notably, 76% (19 of 25) of Maine's fairs reported an economic impact below this threshold in 2024.

These findings underscore the vital role agricultural fairs play in supporting local economies, fostering community connections, and celebrating Maine's agricultural heritage. Thank you for another outstanding fair season. I look forward to working with you as we enter our first four-year licensing cycle.

Kayla A. Jones  
Agricultural Promotional Coordinator  
Agricultural Resource Development Division  
Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

## LIBRARY OF PAST E-NEWSLETTERS

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