

Testimony for Ag Committee Hearing

Bill Prowant, representing Ohio Ride Safety Advisory Council and the Greater Ohio Showmen's Assoc.

May 20, 2020

Good morning,

On behalf of the Greater Ohio Showmen's Association, I come to you today propelled by the energy and anxiety of hundreds of Ohio small businesses. I represent the amusement ride operators, the game operators, straight sales and the mobile fair food vendors.

Our objective today is to make you aware of the key factors that make it a necessity to not only open the revenue stream of Ohio's fairs, but to educate you on the organizations that can and will be affected by a Junior Fair Only Fair or tragically no fair at all.

The Greater Ohio Showmen's Association, (GOSA) is comprised of multi-generational, family owned and operated businesses. These men and women, who make their living as farmers do, but instead of heading to the fields the GOSA members hit Ohio's county fairgrounds. The time for planting is NOW.

Just imagine, the farmer spends money prior to planting season. He has to get his machinery in good repair and perform maintenance on the equipment. He has to order the seed and the fertilizer. As well as pay insurance, order fuel, hire workers, pay taxes. Typically, he has sons or daughters who are also relying on the farm for income and are also involved in the planning and execution of the tasks required prior to planting season. Many weeks of preparation and investment are spent before the first seed is sown into the ground.

Now consider the Showmen. Whether his equipment is several amusement rides, games or food concession trailers there has been maintenance and training done to keep up with mandates and regular repairs for safety. He must order inventory like extra parts, uniforms, stock for food and game trailers. Deposits are sent, insurance forms filed and food licenses are paid for as well as the utilities that need to be paid on the facilities where all this equipment is stored and repaired. Let me digress a moment on the employee portion of the struggle. Unlike the farmer, whose crops are not transient, our workforce must be willing to travel from fair to fair on a weekly basis. This is a huge hurdle and one that is not tackled by any other industry. Our multi-generational business is operated by moms and dads and their sons and daughters and often their grandchildren and so on. While this is awesome, it adds stress on the financial side when our business is oppressed by COVID 19 shutdowns. As I mentioned earlier, WE, the Showmen are the revenue stream for Ohio's fairs. We have already submitted thousands of dollars to our county fairs in the winter as good faith deposits for our fair in that county. We have already secured ads on paper and on the radio promoting the local county fair. We have purchased roofs for the cattle barn, we have put restrooms on fairgrounds. We buy the ribbons, the trophies and we buy the cow that died before it even got to the fair. We, the Showmen did that. We the Showmen will do it again, but the fairs have to open... wide open!

The GOSA represents 25 amusement ride companies, and approximately 200 fair food and game companies. We travel all over the state of Ohio and bring fun and entertainment safely to all ages, as we have for generations.

The revenue generated by these 3 branches of the Greater Ohio Showmen's Association (GOSA) is paramount to the continued livelihood of the Ohio County Fair. Our industry pays the fair board either a percentage of our gross or a price per foot (\$15-\$55) for the locations our equipment occupies. We also pay the fair for water, sewer, camping, advertising. We pay the fair to park our truck/car. We pay admission for our employees to come to work. We are often the winter storage customer that rents out entire show barns to store our equipment in over the winter months. We are in a tight partnership with Ohio's fair managers. We need them and they need us.

I would like to introduce JR Woods, owner of Durant Amusements. His company has been a tradition at many fairs for over 50 years. He is a fourth generation showmen and will enlighten you on the affects of COVID 19 on the ride operator and what has to be done for patron safety.

Personally, my company, Prowant Specialty Company, participates in 13 of Ohio's county fairs and The Ohio State Fair. For my family, the fair business is our only business. Like many of my counterparts, this is our only income. This is not a hobby, nor a "side hustle". This business is our livelihood and it is also the livelihood of Ohio fairs. These 13 Ohio fairs make up 50% of our total income for the year. We have already invested over \$30,000 in fair deposits for 2020. We will continue to encumber monthly expenses because our business operates all year, despite its seasonal income. As JR mentioned, the startup expenses are huge for any branch of the GOSA and it takes a full season to absorb and overcome them before you start emerge into the black. Like any outdoor business, the weather is already an obstacle to tackle, so the added stress of COVID 19 makes this season seem extra difficult.

As summer approaches and people adjust to the new normal we have to try. Our grandparents didn't give up in times of struggle and we won't either. We need to be the light at the end of the tunnel. Fairs are the culmination of so much good! It's where our 10 year old son found his confidence showing his first lamb. It's where your daughter won that purple teddy bear or brought home her prized gold fish. It might be the place you had a first date. It's the place to showcase yourself! Whether it's the hog show, the horseshow, the cake display or the fancy flower display it's all at the fair. You can even meet and greet your State Representative there! Fairs are the pride of each and every county in the State of Ohio.

The devastating effects of losing an entire year in this industry will mean many of these business owners will not be able to recover. The fairs they support will never recover financially which could very well mean the end to county fairs as we have known for generations. The fair is the celebration, a rite of passage all of us in this room have experienced on some level. The generations of families who have worked countless hours providing entertainment and food to thousands of fairgoers need to have a voice to speak for them so they survive. Ohio entrepreneurs can make this happen because their very way of life depend on it...we have been doing it for generations.