



*5 Fun-Filled, Affordable Family Days the Last Full Week of June Each Year*

**Howard County Agricultural Society**

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## *Reicks View Ag Education Center*

Faced with several deteriorating livestock buildings, the Howard County Agricultural Society (Fair Board) made the decision to invest in a new large livestock facility that would serve the Fair and its youth for years to come. The major focus of this new facility is to highlight production agriculture. So, in 2015, after several years of research and visiting other facilities, the Board approved the project. The new facility replaced five of the original fairgrounds buildings constructed in the 1920s. Construction started right after the 2015 Fair on the new 'Ag Education Center'.

The Ag Education Center is a 22,900 square foot livestock facility located on the Howard County Fairgrounds in Cresco Iowa. The Center features a state-of-the-art swine production area, a modern milking parlor, large show arena with A/V and WIFI, and ADA compliant restrooms and showers. The Center also houses dairy, sheep, goats and bottle calves projects of the area 4-H & FFA members during the yearly Mighty Howard County Fair. The swine production area, show arena and restrooms/showers are heated for use during the off-season, specifically for promoting production agriculture.

The swine production area of the Center is more than a typical fair building housing pigs during the week of the Fair. It encompasses a unique educational facility that includes the latest technology in swine production, odor control and is environmentally friendly. It includes automatic feeders and waterers, slatted floor over 4' deep pit, farrowing room, two shower-in/shower-out rooms and laundry room. Included in the swine production area is the newest odor-control devices called 'air scrubbers'. The scrubbers remove at least 87 percent of the odor as it exits the production room through the ventilation system. A central 'controller' monitors the environment and equipment in the swine production area and sends alerts to members of the Fair Board if it detects issues with the equipment. This system also tracks actual water and feed usage, temperature and equipment controls. Members of the Fair Board can log into the 'controller' at any time, either by computer or mobile device, to monitor the equipment and make changes to the systems as needed.

One of the main goals with the new swine production area was to give area youth the opportunity to show pigs at the Fair while assuming the responsibility of hands-on care of their animals and also learning about current swine production. For three months before the Fair, late March to late June, any 4-H & FFA members can raise their pigs in the swine production area of the Center. Area 4-H & FFA members sign up to be a part of this program. The pigs are provided by an area swine producer who retains ownership of the pigs. The cost for the youth to participate in the swine project is \$15 per pig. The youth keep their premiums/awards earned and their auction proceeds from the livestock ribbon held on the last day of the Fair.

The participants in the program are responsible for regular visits to the Center to take care of their animals, check feed and water and other chores as needed. To enter the facility, each participating youth have a swipe card that they use to log in and log out of the central controller of the Center. Their time in the Center is monitored and tracked to make sure each youth are doing their chores and other related requirements as a part of their participating in this swine project. The swine area is completely bio-secure area, with a focus on modern practices for the health and well-being of the animals.

And to further the educational aspect of the Center several industry experts, Iowa State University Extension and NICC (Northeast Iowa Community College) partner with the Fair Board to host educational workshops for the youth. Topics included Genetics, Future of Production Agriculture, Health & Nutrition, Marketing, Bookkeeping, Animal Welfare and Show Ring basics. A meeting with all youth is held after the Mighty Howard County Fair where an Iowa State University Extension Swine Specialist meets with the youth and their parents to review the actual costs and other facts of their swine products. In 2016, the first year of the program, 32 4-H & FFA members signed up to be a part of the program. In 2017, 37 4-H & FFA youth were enrolled in the swine project and 42 4-H & FFA youth were enrolled in the program in 2018. Quite a few of the youth live in one of the area towns, so this program gave them the opportunity to be active in production agriculture and participate in the livestock shows of the Fair.

In addition to an opportunity for the area youth, the Center is used as an educational tool for the general public. During the Fair the swine production area is cleaned and disinfected each morning and opened to the public so they could experience what a modern swine production facility is like. And since the Center was opened, the Center has hosted several tours of area organizations and school field trips. The school field trips focus on the youth learning about the basics of both swine and dairy animals. The youth are able to watch cows being milked and learn about dairy cows and where milk comes from. In addition, they get to view baby pigs and market-ready pigs and learn about what pigs eat and how they are taken care of.

The Center has a video surveillance system that offers on-line viewing of the activities of the Center, such as watching livestock shows, youth doing their chores and working with their animals. This system also provides a higher level of security for the Center. The video system can be logged into on computer and mobile device (phone or tablet). Coming in the near future will be an upgrade of internet service to the area which will allow the public to log into the video system on their computers to watch the activity in the Center, such as livestock shows. In addition to the video cameras the swine production area has windows along one outside wall so people can look inside to see what is taking place in the swine production area.

The Center also features a modern dairy parlor, giving the dairy exhibitors an up-to-date milking system for their Fair entries in the dairy department. The parlor is designed for easy viewing by fairgoers so the milking process can be viewed during the Fair. Videos relating to the dairy industry are played on a big screen monitor mounted on the outside of the milking parlor, giving fairgoers the opportunity to learn about the dairy industry. An area is set aside in the dairy housing area of the Center for the birthing of dairy calves. During the Mighty Howard County Fair, several cows give birth, thus giving fairgoers an opportunity to be part of this birthing process. Birthing activity in the Center will be expanded in the future, with chicken and duck hatching added to the Center activities.

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A new show arena is centrally located in the Center where all livestock shows are held during the Fair. The arena is insulated and heated for use during the off season. The arena has a media projector and large screen that is used for educational sessions, promotional videos and presentations. It is also used during the Fair to replay the births of several dairy calves that were born in the Center during the Fair and replays the various livestock shows held during the Fair.

The overall operation and supervision of the Center is handled by a committee of the Howard County Fair Board. Assisting in the educational component of the Center both Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC) and Iowa State University Extension share their resources and expertise with the Fair Board.

More information and photos of the Ag Education Center can be found on the Fair's Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/MHCFair](http://www.facebook.com/MHCFair). A photo album on the page highlights the construction activity of the Center. Also on the page are many posts sharing the experiences of the public and youth during the time the youth were working with their animals and during the Fair week.



View of the east side of the Ag Education Center showing the swine production area. Next to the swine area is the show arena (taller part of the Center), with the main entry, dairy/sheep/goat housing areas and restrooms at the other end of the Center.



Youth in the swine project are pictured doing their 'chores' and working with their pigs as a part of their commitment to the project.



Dan Lane, Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC), is pictured presenting an educational session to the youth in the swine project and their parents on swine confirmation, show ring basics and selection of pigs for a fair project. Dan also hosts another workshop with the youth.



Jeff Knott (left in photo) with Ideal Animal Nutrition in Tracy Minnesota makes the 3 hour drive to Cresco to share his knowledge in feed and nutrition with the youth involved in the swine project. Jeff is also a renowned swine judge, so part of his time with the youth he shares his judging experiences and helped the youth understand what a judge is looking for in swine shows.



One of the school trips the Ag Education Center hosts each year is the youth in Kindergarten to 3rd grade from Notre Dame Catholic School in Cresco, Holy Trinity School in Protivin and Howard Winneshiek Schools (Crestwood) in Cresco.

Dubbed 'Kids, Pigs & Parlor' over 350 youth plus teachers tour the Center over 2 days each year. In dairy area they watch cows being milked and learn where milk comes from and how it ends up on their supper table, how dairy cows are taken care of, what they eat and other facts of dairy cows.

In the swine area they learn about what pigs eat and how they grow, get to see 'mama sow' and hold her baby pigs (5 days old) and experience how pigs are raised in a modern production facility.

The Center also hosts the Howard County 4-H Farm Safety Day in September each year, which includes 4<sup>th</sup> grade students from Notre Dame Catholic School in Cresco, Riceville Elementary School and Howard Winneshiek Schools (Crestwood) in Cresco. Part of the Farm Safety Day included interaction with dairy and swine, much in the same way as the 'Kids, Pigs & Parlor' field trip.

To request a tour of the Ag Education Center contact Tom Barnes, Fair Secretary, at 563-547-4996 or e-mail [tbarnes@mhcfair.com](mailto:tbarnes@mhcfair.com). Go to [www.facebook.com/MHCFair](http://www.facebook.com/MHCFair) for more photos and posts on the Ag Education Center.