



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Danielle Griffin
O: (559) 650-3229 | C: (559) 994-3133

The Big Fresno Fair Board Selects Lauri King as New CEO to Lead California's Fourth-Largest Fair into the Future

FRESNO, CALIFORNIA, July 12, 2022 - The Big Fresno Fair (Fair) Board of Directors has unanimously promoted 22-year industry executive Lauri King to be the Fair's next and first-ever woman CEO, effective July 1, 2022. The announcement follows a national search in collaboration with the California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Fairs and Expositions Branch to name a successor to John C. Alkire, who retired as CEO in September 2020.

King first joined The Big Fresno Fair in 2003 under then-CEO Scott Anderson, and served under Alkire from 2004 until his retirement in 2020. In September 2020, King and fellow industry professional Stacy Rianda began co-leading the Fair, seeing it through the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown and transition to a drive-through event, and then navigating the Fair to a fiscally sound position with a successful in-person Fair in 2021, which safely entertained nearly 600,000 area residents. Last month, the Ventura County Fair proudly announced Rianda as its new CEO.

"Lauri is a proven leader who is well-respected by our Board, her employees and Fair partners. Her work ethic, team-first focus, agricultural background and fair industry knowledge is extraordinary," said Chuck Riojas, President of The Big Fresno Fair Board of Directors. "Most importantly, Lauri demonstrates an undeniable and contagious passion for the fair industry, our community and The Big Fresno Fair."

The Big Fresno Fair has grown to become the fourth-largest fair in California during King's 19-year tenure, encompassing 165 acres of Fairgrounds and a complex \$11 million annual budget. Over the past 15 years, the management team, including King, has been responsible for the Fair earning five Merrill Awards – the highest honor in the fair industry, recognizing fair programs that demonstrate outstanding vision, leadership and excellence. The Fair's fifth Merrill, received just this year, was for the its "Public Health and Safety Campaign" developed in partnership with the Fresno County Department of Public Health, which was fundamental to the Fair's return to an in-person event in 2021.

Supervising overall operations for the Fair, King knows every inch of the Fairgrounds. She has been instrumental in the growth and development of several key Fair programs including the expansion of interim events, enhancing the Fairgrounds' position as a multi-purpose facility. She also established the Fair's award-winning Health and Safety Program, which is now an industry-wide model used throughout the United States, and has played a vital role in expanding the Fair's educational programs, which explore new ways to connect Fresno County students to the region's rich agriculture industry.



“Lauri is a premiere example of what a leader is and should be. She’s known for her hands-on management style and passionate drive as a force of positive industry change, always striving for collaborative, innovative and mutually-beneficial solutions to programs and partnerships,” stated Sarah Cummings, President & CEO of the Western Fairs Association (WFA). “As a longstanding WFA Board member and now CEO of The Big Fresno Fair, Lauri has advanced – and will continue to advance – the fair industry, while ensuring it stays rooted in tradition.”

King’s involvement in the fair industry has been lifelong. Growing up in Templeton, California, on a ranch run by her family for five generations, she showed animals at the California Mid-State Fair. While attending California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) in San Luis Obispo, she worked at the Cal Poly Western Bonanza Livestock Show (five years) and the California Mid-State Fair (four years). She majored in Animal Science while minoring in Agriculture Communications and Agriculture Business with an emphasis in Fair Management. Upon graduating with her B.S. degree in 2003, King was recruited to join The Big Fresno Fair.

“At nine years old, showing animals at the California Mid-State Fair I fell in love with what fairs stood for – how they celebrated agriculture and the best of the community. That appreciation has multiplied in my two decades at The Big Fresno Fair, as we have evolved beyond just an annual tradition. Our Fair is an essential part of our community – a source of education, cultural celebration and positive economic impact,” said Lauri King, CEO, The Big Fresno Fair.

“A sincere thank you to the Fair Board for this opportunity and the leadership that has guided our success as an industry and community asset. I look forward to building upon our strong foundation and elevating The Big Fresno Fair for our team and the community.”

King graduated from the International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE) Institute of Fair Management in 2017 and received the IAFE Certified Fair Executive (CFE) designation in 2018. She has served on the Western Fairs Association (WFA) Board since 2015 and the California Authority of Racing Fairs Board since 2020. She is an active steward of the region with involvement in organizations such as the Fresno County Farm Bureau and FACT Farm Bureau Leadership Program, and is a graduate of the Fresno Chamber of Commerce’s Leadership Class of 24. Previously, she served on the IAFE Young Professional Board and was WFA’s Professional Development Chair. Most recently, she was appointed to the Sierra Unified School Board in 2021.

King plans to continue the tradition of strong leadership as she takes over responsibility for overseeing the annual 12-day Big Fresno Fair and year-round operations of the Fairgrounds. The 2022 Big Fresno Fair will return October 5 – 16 with live horse racing, entertainment, exhibits, carnival rides and more.

About The Big Fresno Fair:

The Big Fresno Fair, founded in 1884, is the fourth-largest fair in the state of California and represents the 21st District Agricultural Association. More than 600,000 people from throughout the state visit The Big Fresno Fair each year making it the largest annual event in the Central Valley. Members of the Board of Directors include: Chuck Riojas, President; Terry Gonsalves, Vice President; Gary Chahil, Secretary/Treasurer; Linda Mae Balakian Hunsucker; Frank Flores; Jerry Pacheco; Annalisa Perea and Lawrence Salinas. For more information about The Big Fresno Fair, please visit www.FresnoFair.com.

###