

WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION OF FAIRS
ANNUAL CONVENTION
JANUARY 11-14, 2026
CHULA VISTA RESORT, WISCONSIN DELLS, WI
SCHEDULE AS OF 12.31.25

Registered convention attendees are invited to attend all of the events listed in the program. Your convention badge is required for these events, so be sure to wear it while attending the convention. If you have any questions about our programmed events, please be sure to ask the WAF Registration Desk. Enjoy the convention!

SUNDAY, JANUARY 11, 2026

7:00-9:00 AM BREAKFAST BUFFET
Main Floor

10:30-11:15 AM FAIREST REGISTRATION
Convention Center Lobby

12:00-3:00 PM FAIREST SCRAPBOOKS ON DISPLAY
Grand Ballroom

The Fairest of the Fairs Contestants have brought scrapbooks highlighting their local fairest reign. There will be multiple times in the program to view them and maybe borrow some ideas.

1:00-4:30 PM SESSION #1
YOU MAKE THE DIFFERENCE TOUR
Upper Dells

If you were unable to attend the YMTD Tour last spring, this is your opportunity to get caught up; or as a past attendee, absorb it all again. Join Ian Hill as he addresses the real challenges faced by local fairs, including volunteer retention and recruitment, advocacy, fundraising, and effective communication. You will explore critical leadership themes to better understand your role as event organizers and stewards of tradition, community assets and economic catalysts. Attendees from spring left feeling energized and inspired; many with concrete plans to improve their boards, deepen community partnerships, and reimagine their fair's role in local development. This tour is now active in more than 25 State and Provincial Associations.

2:00-8:00 PM CONVENTION REGISTRATION OPEN
Grand Ballroom Lobby

2:15-3:15 PM SESSION #2
FAIREST COORDINATOR NETWORKING
Grand Ballroom

This is an opportunity for coordinators to share ideas and network.

3:30-5:00 PM MEET THE CONTESTANTS
Grand Ballroom

Come and watch the Fairest of the Fairs Contestants introduce themselves and answer an impromptu fair question.

5:00-6:30 PM SESSION #3
BRIGHT IDEAS WITH DEB GEGARE
Upper Dells

Join Deb Gegare as she shares new ideas she's seen while visiting Fair Members. You'd be amazed what you can learn from each other.

**5:00-6:30 PM SESSION #4
FAIR SOFTWARE NETWORKING
Riverview South**

Bring your laptop and join fellow Fair Members as we share tips and tricks they use for generating required state reports and setting up your premium book entries. We will break apart into groups based on the programs being used.

**6:30-8:00 PM CARNIVAL NIGHT
Grand Ballroom**

This reception is sponsored by members of the carnival industry. Enjoy free food and beverages while socializing with our carnival members. In addition, a 50/50 raffle will be held with proceeds going back to WAF to help with our evening receptions.

MONDAY, JANUARY 12, 2026

**7:00-9:00 AM GRAND BUFFET BREAKFAST
Main Floor**

**7:00-9:00 AM GRAND BUFFET BREAKFAST
Upper Dells**

**8:00 AM-4:00 PM REGISTRATION DESK OPEN
Photo/Media Judging Open**

**8:00-9:30 AM CENTERPIECE DELIVERY
Grand Ballroom**

Bring your Fair's decorated centerpiece to the stage so the committee can get everything prepped for judging.

**8:00-8:30 AM SESSION #5
FIRST TIME ATTENDEE GATHERING
Riverview South**

If it's your first time attending our convention, as a Fair or Associate Member, please join us for an overview of convention. Our group loves to share and network, so give us a chance to welcome you to convention!

**8:30-9:30 AM SESSION #6
WE ARE FAMILY
Riverview South**

Back by popular demand, here is your opportunity to get to know as many fair family members as possible in a short time. We are going "speed dating". Whether you are a first time attendee or a life-long convention attendee there is something you can learn from another fair person. Come join the fun and share memories.

9:00 AM-1:00 PM Trade Show Set-up – Ballrooms A-I

**10:00 AM SPECIAL PROJECT ACTIVITIES
Grand Ballroom**

Join us for fun activities to get our convention attendees fired up for the start of convention. Bring your Fair's decorated centerpiece and vote for your favorite.

**10:30 AM CONVENTION KICK-OFF
Grand Ballroom**

Let's get our convention underway with a few fair stories, awards, welcome from special guests and a keynote address.

Every Person Has a Fair Story Contest Winners Presentation sponsored by the Mid-West Farm Report.

Keynote Speaker Ian Hill

Ian Hill believes County fairs are not relics of the past but the foundations for the future. He sees them as sacred gathering grounds where ordinary people do extraordinary things to impact every citizen from toddler to those in the sunset of their days.

That belief drove Ian to launch *You Make THE Difference*—a national initiative already active in more than 22 states across the country in just 8 months. You Make THE Difference reignites pride in the county fair, rebuilds volunteerism, and equips the Difference Makers who keep fairs, and agricultural societies alive with the tools the times require.

12:30-1:30 PM SESSION #7
CELEBRATING AMERICA'S 250
Upper Dells

From apple pie eating to victory gardens and everything in between, this patriotic session is filled with fun heritage-filled opportunities for your Fair. Join Jill Albanese as she helps your fair prepare for celebrating America's 250.

12:30-1:30 PM SESSION #8
ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY & HOW TO USE IT
Grand Ballroom

How can we turn economic impact data into actionable information? Join Johnson Consulting, the team behind IAFE's 2024 national economic & fiscal impact study for the fairs & fairgrounds industry in the United States, as they dive into all things impact. This presentation will translate the methodology, assumptions, and terminology associated with economic & fiscal impacts into plain English and equip you with the tools you need to explain the data and use it to advocate for your fair and fairgrounds.

1:00-4:00 PM FAIREST CONTESTANT SCRAPBOOKS
ON DISPLAY – *Ballrooms A-I*

The Fairest of the Fairs Contestants have brought scrapbooks highlighting their local fairest reign. There will be multiple times in the program to view them and maybe borrow some ideas.

1:00-4:00 PM TRADE SHOW OPEN
Ballrooms A-I

Come and network with our Associate Members in the trade show. Then when you are done in the trade show, be sure to visit the Associates in Vendor Row in the condos. They are great Fair partners for us, so be sure to visit as many as you can.

4:00 PM CHEESE RECEPTION & VIEWING OF FAIREST AUCTION ITEMS
Riverview Rooms

Join us for snacks, beer and soda, including Wisconsin's favorite, cheese. Then, view the items our Fairest of the Fairs Contestants have brought to donate to our auction.

5:00 PM AUCTION
Riverview Rooms

Bid high and bid often on these amazing Fairest of the Fairs auction items. Proceeds first go back to the Fairest of the Fairs Program, and to offset convention expenses to keep your registration fees low.

7:00 PM SHOWCASE OF ENTERTAINMENT
Riverview Rooms

Enjoy tonight's entertainment from our Associate Members. We are excited to share these talented groups with you. We hope one or more of them will be invited to play your fair.
(Immediately following the auction)

- ◆ Jake Hoot
(Klein's Entertainment)
- ◆ Jason Brown
(Bobby Baker Entertainment)

- ◆ Video-Dangerous Feats of Comedy
(Artists & Attractions)
- ◆ Julia Neville Music
(Artists & Attractions)
- ◆ Video-Lumberjack Enterprise
(Lumberjack Enterprises)
- ◆ Casey Muessigmann
(Muessigmann Entertainment)
- ◆ Video-The Stars of Brew City Wrestling
(Brew City Wrestling)
- ◆ Alex Miller
(Variety Attractions)
- ◆ Sound, Lights & Video—*Sosonic*

FOLLOWING SHOWCASE

TIME TO SOCIALIZE: Take this time to visit our Associate Members on Vendor Row. You are also welcome to stay and network in the Riverview Rooms following the showcase.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 13, 2026

6:30-9:00 AM GRAND BUFFET BREAKFAST
Main Floor

7:00-9:00 AM GRAND BUFFET BREAKFAST
Upper Dells

8:00AM-4:00 PM REGISTRATION DESK OPEN
Photo/Media Judging Open

8:00-9:30 AM SESSION #9
DATCP AG UPDATE & NETWORKING
Riverview South

Join Dr. May, WI DATCP Veterinarian Program Manager for an Animal Health Update along with Bernie O'Rourke, Extension Livestock Specialist UW Madison; Jason Hausler, UW Extension; and Debbie Gegare, Fairs Coordinator, WI DATCP. As a panel they will address any animal questions regarding fairs.

8:30-9:30 AM SESSION #10
TELLING YOUR FAIR'S STORY THROUGH ECONOMIC IMPACT
Grand Ballroom

You've commissioned the economic impact study. You have the data, the charts, and the final report. Now comes the fun part: turning those numbers into something people actually *understand, remember, and act on.*

Join Courtney Hines for a session that is structured as a case study that walks participants through how the Wyoming State Fair has leveraged its economic impact data into a powerful storytelling and advocacy tool. We will also have a work session portion using Wisconsin's results from the IAFE Economic Impact Study to develop real-world talking points. We'll examine how raw data can be reframed to influence funding conversations, legislative discussions, sponsorship strategy, and public perception.

Rather than focusing on methodology or statistics, this session focuses on application—what messages worked, how they were adapted for different audiences, and where common missteps can cause strong data to lose its impact. Participants will see how economic impact findings can be repurposed for elected officials, boards, sponsors, community leaders, media, and the public. The session will conclude with a guided working segment where attendees begin translating their own data into clear talking points, elevator pitches, and advocacy messages they can immediately use back home.

9:30-11:30 AM COFFEE BREAK
Grand Ballroom Lobby

10:00-11:30 AM SESSION #11
THE BASICS OF SUCCESSION PLANNING
Grand Ballroom

Join Courtney Hines in this interactive workshop for a hands-on crash course in beginning your succession planning journey. Together, we will walk through the essential steps, discuss real-world challenges, and complete a hands-on workbook to set you up for success.

We will learn how to assess skills and identify leadership potential; discover effective mentorship and training strategies; address turnover challenges and create adaptable plans; and explore how to leave a lasting impact on your organization's legacy.

10:00-11:30 AM SESSION #12
PLAYS THAT PAY: THE PROVEN FAIR SUCCESS PLAYBOOK
Upper Dells

Every fair wants to grow attendance, boost revenue, and run smoother operations — but what are the strategies that truly move the needle? In this session, Scott Hillyer, CEO of Fairs.com, will share the proven playbook developed from partnering with over 150 fairs and fairground events nationwide.

From pricing approaches and pre-sale strategies to smart payment options, marketing best practices, and gate operations, this playbook outlines the common moves that consistently separate successful fairs from the rest. Backed by data and real-world results, Scott will reveal what works, why it works, and how you can adapt these plays to fit your own fair. Attendees will leave with a clear roadmap of actionable strategies they can apply immediately to drive growth and deliver a smoother, more profitable event.

11:30AM-12:00PM ASSOCIATE MEMBER MEETING
Ballrooms A-I

All Associate Members are invited to attend a short member meeting to provide feedback on the convention.

12:00-3:00 PM TRADE SHOW – *Ballrooms A-I*

Come and network with our Associate Members in the trade show. Then when you are done in the trade show, be sure to visit the Associates in Vendor Row in the condos. They are great Fair partners for us so be sure to visit as many as you can.

12:00-3:00 PM FAIREST CONTESTANT SCRAPBOOKS
ON DISPLAY – *Ballrooms A-I*

The Fairest of the Fairs Contestants have brought scrapbooks highlighting their local fairest reign. There will be multiple times in the program to view them and maybe borrow some ideas.

12:30-4:30 PM UW EXTENSION
ONE-ON-ONE SESSIONS
Aztec

For those members that would like some time to talk to Jason Hausler and staff about UW Extensions partnership with your fair, you can sign up for one-on-one sessions. Sign up forms will be available at registration desk.

12:30-1:30 PM SESSION #13: WI DATCP FAIRS COORDINATOR UPDATE
Upper Dells

Deb Gegare, Fairs Coordinator for the WI DATCP, will give an update from the office including ATCP 160, judges, and SharePoint.

1:00-2:00 PM ICE CREAM BREAK IN TRADE SHOW

**2:00-4:00 PM DATCP WITH DEB GEGARE
ONE-ON-ONE SESSIONS**

Laguna

For those members that would like a little more assistance with SharePoint, you can sign up for a one-on-one session.

**1:30-3:00 PM SILENT AUCTION DONATIONS
RECEIVED**

Riverview South

Have an item for our Silent Auction? Now is the time to bring them to Riverview South so the committee can have time to organize for the silent auction. All Member Fairs and Associates are invited to bring donated items.

3:00-4:30 PM FAIREST PRELIMINARIES

Grand Ballroom

Contestants will present a 30 second Radio Advertisement and answer an impromptu question on stage in front of our convention attendees.

3:00-5:00 PM SILENT AUCTION OPEN FOR BIDS

Riverview South

View the items and, if you find an item or two you like, make a bid. Bids will be open again from 6:00-7:00 pm.

6:00-7:00 PM PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION

Riverview Rooms

Join us for a night of free soda and beer and feast on a taco bar.

6:00-7:00 PM SILENT AUCTION FINAL HOUR

Riverview Rooms

Keep bidding! The silent auction closes at 7:00 pm. Thank you for your support!

7:00 PM SHOWCASE OF ENTERTAINMENT

Riverview Rooms

Enjoy tonight's entertainment from our Associate Members. We are excited to share these talented groups with you. We hope one or more of them will be invited to play your fair.

(Immediately following the auction)

- ◆ Time Machine
(Langlade Co Fair)
- ◆ Magic of Shaun Jay
(Artists & Attractions)
- ◆ Video-The Stars of Brew City Wrestling
(Brew City Wrestling)
- ◆ Adam Calvert
(Adam Calvert Music)
- ◆ Video- Lumberjack Enterprises (Lumberjack Enterprises)
- ◆ Classic Alice
(ACA Music & Entertainment)
- ◆ Video-Dangerous Feats of Comedy
(Artists & Attractions)
- ◆ Don't Stop Me Now-Music of Queen
(ACA Music & Entertainment)
- ◆ Sound, Lights & Video—*Sosonic*

FOLLOWING SHOWCASE

TIME TO SOCIALIZE: Take this time to visit our Associate Members on Vendor Row. You are also welcome to stay and network in the Riverview Rooms following the showcase.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2026

6:30-9:00 AM GRAND BUFFET BREAKFAST
Main Buffet

7:00-9:00 AM GRAND BUFFET BREAKFAST
Upper Dells

8:00 AM-4:00 PM REGISTRATION DESK OPEN

8:30 AM ASSOCIATION BUSINESS MEETING
Grand Ballroom

All Fair and Associate Members are invited to attend our Annual Business Meeting. We'll share highlights from this past year and plans for 2026.

- Call to Order
President, Mary Check, IFMG
- America the Beautiful
Megan Salentine
- President's Report
President, Mary Check, IFMG
- Roll Call of Fairs/Financial Report
Ex Director, Jayme Buttke, CFE, IFMG
- Wisconsin State Fair Report
Shari Black, CFE, CEO/Exec Director
- WI DATCP Report of 2025 Fairs
Debbie Gegare, Fairs Coordinator
- Presentation of Legislative Champions
- Zone 4 Update, jill Albanese, CFE
- Committee Reports by Chairperson
 - Fairest of the Fairs
Tonya Dvorak &
Megan Salentine
 - Auction – Chris Engebretsen
 - Audit – Bill Marohl
 - Credentials – Liz Cook
 - Ed/Spec Projects – jill Albanese, CFE
 - Legislative – Jessica Klumpp, CFE
 - Premium – Mary Check, IMFG
 - Resolutions/Award– Denise Zirbel
 - Showcase – Jaime Kwiatkowski, CFE
 - Old Business
- New Business
- Adjournment
- Photo & Media Winners Announced
- Bob William Ag Fair Grants Winners Announced

10:30-11:30 AM SESSION #14
FAIREST COORDINATORS
Laguna

Q&A with the WAF Fairest Committee and local fairest coordinators.

10:30-11:30 AM SESSION #15

ROOTED IN TRADITION. GROWING THE FUTURE. The Enduring Relevance of Fairs in Today's Marketplace

Grand Ballroom

Agricultural fairs matter... arguably today more than ever. Join Ray Allison, Chief Operating Officer for the Indiana State Fairgrounds & Event Center, for this interactive presentation that will highlight the significance and impact of fairs globally over the last 200 years. We'll look at the history and traditions we all hold so dear and explore how and why they still matter today. We'll also discuss how fairs are evolving to meet ever changing customer demand, while staying true to their agricultural roots.

10:30-11:30 AM SESSION #16

NON-AG NETWORKING

Riverview North & South

Let's network about Fair Operations, Fair Beautification and Fun Free Fair Events. We will break the room into sections, so you can network with the topic that best fits your needs.

Beautification beyond the petals, make your Fairgrounds come alive with innovative seating areas, selfie spots and even sponsor signage. So many low cost ways to get your community involved and improve your operations for your Fairgoers. Come share your wealth of knowledge as we all reap the bounty.

Get ready for a sparkling "**Free for All!**" Share your brilliant ideas of the free gems that you offer at your fair. We will be mining for activities and entertainment that are priceless! Collect as many ideas as you can and shine on!

Fairs just don't happen, there are so many behind the scene activities that make your fair run smoothly.

Fair Operations aren't the most glamorous, but often some of the most important. Chat with others about everything from renting golf carts to garbage removal, and most importantly, clean bathrooms.

11:30 AM-1:30 PM REFRESHMENT BREAK

Grand Lobby

Cookies

11:45 AM-1:15 PM SESSION #17

MARKET SALES

Riverview

Let's talk everything market sales from the importance of MOU's to know whose job is whose; authority chain of command; what sells; and what policies you have in place for exhibitors.

11:45 AM-1:15 PM SESSION #18

SOCIAL MEDIA STORYTELLING

Grand Ballroom

Join Kelsey Henderson as she helps you take your fair's social media to the next level! We'll cover the best free tools for planning and posting, walk through the art of making graphics in Canva, and dedicate time to some fun brainstorming methods. Walk away with immediate skills, fresh ideas, and a powerful new perspective on how to promote your fair and connect with your community!

1:30-2:30 PM DISTRICT MEETINGS

District 1 – *Grand Ballroom*

Dale Christiansen & Rhonda Klement

District 2—*Riverview North*

Jackie Kumm & Linda Degner

District 3—*Riverview South*

Liz Cook & Angie Hornby

District 4—*Upper Dells*

Mary Check & Eileen Walsh-Grzenia

2:45-4:30 PM FAIREST SCRAPBOOKS ON DISPLAY

Grand Ballroom

The Fairest of the Fairs Contestants have brought scrapbooks highlighting their local fairest reign.

4:30-8:30 PM AWARDS BANQUET & FAIREST OF THE

FAIRS FINALS

Ballrooms A-I

Join us as we wrap up the 2026 convention. We are excited to recognize award winners and select the 2026 WI Fairest of the Fairs. Separate banquet ticket is required.

AFTER BANQUET CELEBRATE & CONGRATULATE SOCIAL

Grand Ballroom

Come and introduce yourself to the 2026 Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs and congratulate our award winners. Join us for refreshments as we conclude our convention.

**Please mark your calendars for our next convention ,
January 10-13, 2027
Chula Vista Resort**

WAF COMMITTEE MEETINGS SCHEDULE

Committee meetings are open to those appointed to serve on the committee by WAF Board.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 11, 2026

- 9:00 AM Board Meeting**
Executive Board Room

- 9:00 AM Fairest Committee Meeting**
Sierra Vista

- 11:00 AM Special Projects Committee Meeting**
Grand Ballroom

- 8:30 PM Credentials Committee Meeting**
Grand Ballroom

MONDAY, JANUARY 12, 2026

- 1:45 PM Showcase Committee Meeting**
Riverview North

- 2:30 PM Auction Committee Meeting**
Riverview South

- 2:30 PM Resolutions & Awards Committee Mtg**
Aztec

- 2:30 PM Premiums Committee Mtg**
Upper Dells

TUESDAY, JANUARY 13, 2026

- 12:00 PM Legislative Committee Meeting**
Laguna