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## Wyoming State Fair Listening Sessions Questionnaire Report

**Overview:** The Wyoming State Fair hosted a series of listening sessions throughout the state that were designed to hear the thoughts, concerns and ideas from interested citizens from across Wyoming regarding the future of the Wyoming State Fair (WSF). There were a total of 17 listening sessions that started on September 13, 2017 and concluded in on October 11, 2017. James Goodrich, Director of the Wyoming State Fair, facilitated each and at least one member of the Wyoming State Fair Advisory Board attended each meeting. The meetings followed the same general agenda and focused on gathering as much input as possible from those in attendance. The meetings all started at 7:00 pm and went anywhere from 1.5 hours to 3 hours in length. Along with this, the audio from each meeting was recorded and attendees were asked to sign in and fill out a questionnaire. Finally, if citizens were not able to attend one of the sessions, the WSF made the questionnaire available online for them to fill out and return so their opinions could be included.

**Outreach:** It was important to get as many people as possible there so the Wyoming Department of Agriculture reached out to 4-H and FFA representatives, Fair Boards, legislators, the Wyoming Board of Agriculture, and all media outlets in each community. Outreach started with a general press release that went to statewide media announcing the sessions with a schedule. Then, as each meeting approached, a targeted release was sent to each community's 4-H agent and FFA advisor, legislators in the area, and local media outlets. Finally, we posted this information on the Wyoming State Fair Facebook Page and the Wyoming State Fair website.

**Attendance:** In all, 294 individuals signed the attendance sheets at the meetings. Along with this, there were six online responses to the questionnaire. Following is a breakdown of each session's attendance.

Lusk – 22	Wheatland – 22	Evanston – 14	Afton – 6	Rock Springs – 10
Riverton – 34	Rawlins – 11	Basin – 23	Powell – 6	Buffalo – 19
Newcastle – 12	Laramie – 15	Cheyenne – 19	Torrington – 22	Casper – 25
Sundance – 8	Gillette – 26			

**Questionnaire:** The questionnaire was developed in an attempt to solicit input, gauge interest and determine priorities of those who attended. Each person in attendance was asked to fill out a questionnaire before they left the session. Below you will find the question asked, a breakdown of answers given, and some sample responses. It's important to point out that some questions were left blank by respondents or were answered in multiple ways. We tried to reflect as accurately as possible the content of the questionnaires. If you would like to see copies of the responses, please contact Derek Grant at [derek.grant@wyo.gov](mailto:derek.grant@wyo.gov).

### Question 1:

**“Rank WSF as a priority activity for you or members of your family: High 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Low”**

For this question, we had 205 responses and 90 rated the Wyoming State Fair a “1” meaning it was a high priority activity for them. If you look into the numbers a little further, you will see that 68% of the questionnaires filled out rated the Wyoming State Fair a “high” priority.

Priority Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
# of responses	90	29	18	2	15	9	8	15	11	8

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The most common themes in the comments were focused on youth competitions, tradition, education, family, and cost/length of fair. Below you will find some sample responses from the questionnaire.

#### ***Sample responses from the 1-3 range of answers***

“It is something that’s a tradition, is looked forward to doing and we love and prepare for it all year long”

“I selected this response because State Fair is what I look up to all year long. As an exhibitor I think it is important to have this as an experience and competition”

“Family tradition, ag backed family that has participated in WSF for 20 years. A culture that allows our youth to compete with the best and develops lifelong connections with others in the industry.”

“We have been involved in the Wyoming State Fair for generations. We are involved professionally as well as personally. The state fair is the only statewide showcase for Wyoming Agriculture and is the state’s agriculture youth’s statewide “championship” if you will.”

#### ***Sample responses from the 4-7 range***

“Because it is important to the youth in the state but I have no active family participating.”

“It is important but depends on finance.”

“At one time I would have marked it high because it was one of the most important things we did as a family, but now with changes in school startup times, sports, length of required time to stay at state fair, high cost to stay, it isn’t so important or feasible to spend the time there.”

“No longer have family involved in Fair”

#### ***Sample responses from the 8-10 range\****

“Expense – lodging, availability of food. Not competitive since anyone can enter the WSF”

“This is the culmination of our kids hard work for their summer of working their livestock.”

“No livestock, no children”

“I am a 4-H educator: it is part of my job to go. Otherwise, it is too far to make a priority. I would not have known about State Fair if it wasn’t for 4-H”

*\*We believe there may have been some misunderstanding in the scale because a majority of the responses in this range were positive in nature. Here are examples of comments from this range.*

*“WSF has been a family event for at least 5 generations. It is a way to showcase the best of each county and also a learning experience.”*

*“This is the culmination of our kid’s hard work for their summer of working their livestock.”*

*“A family tradition; a place to network with ranchers that we don’t get to see throughout the year”*

*“We are long term attendees that exhibit livestock”*

*“WSF has always been a big part of our family”*

#### **Question 2**

**“Have admission, entry, or user fees determined your participation in WSF? If yes, please explain:”**

On this question, we had 188 responses and 112 (60%) of the responses were “NO,” while 50 responses (27%) were “YES.” Within the “NO” answers, the general theme was that it was reasonable for the event compared to other activities and fairs, they would attend anyway because the 4-H and FFA are a big part of their lives and the fair was a

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family event that had been attended for generations. While the general tone of the “NO” answers indicated they thought the cost was reasonable, there were several that were concerned that the cost was limiting youth participation and could impact their decision in the future. Those who answered “YES” indicated that increased fees impacted their decision to come or what they would enter, that it was hurting participation, and that it will impact their decision to come back in the future.

### **Sample responses for “NO” answers**

“No. We attend because 4-H and FFA are a big part of our lives.”

“No. However as a 4H leader I see families that are influenced by the costs. I feel that the participants shouldn't be the ones taxed the most.”

“No. Although user fee increases have been difficult to absorb”

“No not up to this point. However, based on budget cuts that have occurred and projection of increased fees necessary to make state fair “self-sufficient” as some have advocated, it would. Estimates are that our state fair expenses would go from approximately \$2,000 for the week to potential \$6,000 - that would result in us not participating.”

### **Sample responses for “YES” answers**

“We have had to stop doing the open and jackpots due to increased fees. We almost did not come this year due to the cost increase in everything. This would have been the 1<sup>st</sup> time in 30 yrs we did not come.”

“It has affected and cut our county 4-H participation and open class participation in both static and livestock exhibits”

“Yes. I go to very few of the concerts or rodeos because it has become too expensive to do them all. We are all feeling the economic crunch”

“Yes. This year with fees going up we had to cut in other areas of our life to make this happen.”

### **Question 3**

**“How do you visualize WSF as an event 5 years from now?”**

This question elicited a wide range of responses from positive to negative. On the positive side, many responded to this question by simply saying “Bigger and Better” or focusing on youth competition, larger numbers/participants, more events/vendors/entertainment, and thriving. On the negative side, many said they feared it would be non-existent, smaller, lower participation, etc. In the middle of those, there were a lot of suggestions to shorten the length of the fair to increase participation and lower costs to families, diversify the events of the fair to increase participation, and an event that has to make changes to survive.

### **Sample responses from Question 3**

“Bigger and Better”

“I would like to see it grow and thrive. I would be very disappointed to see it go away. More vendors

“Shorter. Releasing kids when they are done with shows. We are in a time where kids are involved in everything and they have stopped attending WSF to prioritize.”

“It must change or it will die. A come and go option with less days will fit today's busy families”

“Hopefully still an opportunity for kids involved in agriculture both static and livestock to have the opportunity for their state “championship” event just as other high school athletics and extracurricular activities have. Also, to continue to provide an opportunity for agriculture to showcase in Wyoming. These are the priorities. The

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entertainment, etc. should continue but the priority should be on the youth exhibits and education. Given the state fair is in Douglas thanks to the generosity of families years ago to donate the land for it, being able to draw large crowds to the area is limited.”

“I would like to see a large fair bigger than Frontier Days or the Denver Fair. Lots of open class and youth class events, full carnival that opens at noon, many vendors, daily rodeos and plenty of other entertainment. It needs to emphasize all the things that make Wyoming such a great place to live and work and play. It has to offer better food, a wide variety of foods that people expect at fairs.”

“At the current rate, I see fair being non-existent. Cost continues to rise and participating becomes more difficult”

**Question 4**

**“Rank from 1 (highest) to 6 (lowest) the importance of these elements of the WSF:**

- \_\_\_ Exhibits (Livestock and Home Arts)
- \_\_\_ Entertainment (Concerts, Demo Derby, Fun Events)
- \_\_\_ Youth Competitions (Livestock and Static Exhibits)
- \_\_\_ Carnival
- \_\_\_ Rodeo
- \_\_\_ Vendors (shopping/food)”

This question helped us identify the priorities of the people who attended the listening sessions or submitted a form online. When we took all the answers, averaged them out, we found that by an overwhelming amount, the top priority was Youth Competitions with Exhibits closely following. In a distant third place on the priority scale was Vendors, which was closely followed by Entertainment. Finally, Rodeo was ranked the 5<sup>th</sup> priority and Carnival was the lowest. Please see a scoring breakdown of the priority levels below.

Priority	1	2	3	4	5	6
Activity	Youth Competition	Exhibits	Vendors	Entertainment	Rodeo	Carnival
Score	1,173	1,050	692	620	499	345

**Question 5**

“When attending WSF, do you come because of some combination of these things listed above, or because of one particular interest?”

As you might guess, with the table above showing the high priority of Youth Competition and Exhibits, most answers to this question focused on those two events. While that was a main focus, a lot of the answers talked about a combination of the events being important to their experience at the Wyoming State Fair. Along with this, several expressed that they also come to see friends, network and socialize with those from across the state.

**Question 6**

**“Do you travel to the State Fair Grounds for other activities throughout the year? If Yes, why? If No, why not?”**

This question was meant to gauge the attendees’ use of the grounds outside of the Wyoming State Fair that is held each August. For this question, we had 188 responses and of those responses, 122 said “NO” and 50 said “YES.” Of the “NO” responses, many of the comments focused on the fact that they don’t know about other events happening

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on the fairgrounds, they are not interested in going, they don't have family participating in events on the grounds, or it is too far to travel for other events. Those who responded "YES" focused on things like the 4-H Shooting Sports, 4-H Leadership Camp, Octoberfest, Horse Camps, Roping, High School Rodeo, the Wyoming Ram Sale, craft shows, meetings, weddings, funerals, and other events that happen on the grounds.

### **Question 7**

"When you or members of your family participate in events other than WSF throughout the year (regardless of location), how many days do you set aside per event? Circle all that apply: 1-2    3-4    5-6    7 or more"

On this question, we were attempting to find out how much time attendees usually spend traveling or away from home for events other than the Wyoming State Fair. This will help us better understand travel habits of our fair participants and possibly adjust if necessary. We found that most people plan trips in the 3-4 day (92 responses) and 1-2 day (74 responses) range outside of the Wyoming State Fair. Less plan trips in the 5 to 6 day (38 responses) range and very few plan trips that are 7 or more days (29 responses). On this question, some respondents elaborated a little more on the type of trips they take and they included things like 4-H events, family vacations, sports, and rodeos.

### **Final Information**

This report is meant to be a summary of the questionnaires we had returned to the Wyoming State Fair. If you would like to see the questionnaires or a transcribed document with all of the responses, please contact Derek Grant at [derek.grant@wyo.gov](mailto:derek.grant@wyo.gov)

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