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All is Fair in Agriculture and Rural Living

Fairs and markets have a long standing tradition of bringing people usually separated by distance together for a common cause. Agricultural fairs also share in this tradition of bringing people together since before Canada was even a nation. Agricultural fairs are traditionally organized by county specific agricultural societies, and the first one was formed in 1765 in Nova Scotia. Agricultural societies are created with the mandate of improving agricultural methods and promoting agriculture and the rural lifestyle. Along with their farming practices, English and French colonizers also brought with them the tradition of agricultural societies. In 1792 the Agricultural Society of Upper Canada was formed at Niagara on the Lake, making it the first of many agricultural societies that would be formed in Ontario.

Agricultural societies truly began emerging in Ontario during the 1830s when a law was put into place that would subsidize district agricultural societies. Durham began to see the formation of agricultural societies in the mid-1800s, with one of our oldest continuous societies being the Sunderland Agricultural Society, which had its first fair in 1851. Throughout the years, Durham Region hosted numerous societies and fairs, many of which are still active today. Over the years, some communities have retired their societies and fairs including: Pickering, Oshawa, Bowmanville, Newcastle and Cannington. The reasons for retiring the local societies and fairs could vary from place to place however, those that still remain are in relatively central locations throughout the Region, so that everyone in Durham can enjoy them.

As the fall season quickly approaches, and with just a few weeks until the Blackstock Fair, many people's minds are turning to the upcoming fall fairs. Today's fairs provide an opportunity for community members to come together and share in their collective agricultural triumphs. Competitions are a standard activity at most fairs where everything from livestock, to crops or prepared food, to arts and crafts can be entered and judged in the hopes of winning a prize. Most of the competitions are all in good fun, acting as a way to get involved with your community, while other competitions have higher stakes. The Fair Ambassador would be an example of a higher stakes competition at almost all fairs. Young men and women compete for the title of fair ambassador and the opportunity to represent his or her community locally. An ambassador can then go on to compete for the title of Canadian National Exhibition Ambassador of the Fairs at the CNE in August, and represent all of Ontario's agricultural fairs.

Agricultural fairs have long since served as a fun way to say farewell to the summer season and usher in the fall season. They provide visitors and locals with a myriad of ways to both celebrate agriculture and take part in some friendly competitions. Fairs have long since been a tradition in Durham Region and all of Ontario, so the next time you're admiring a 4-H member's calf in Beaverton or watching a tractor pull in Orono, try to think of the years of history that have brought us the fairs of today.

If you are interested in learning more about Durham Region's agricultural heritage, visit www.durhamfarmconnections.ca/media.

Upcoming Durham Region Fall Fairs:

- ✓ Blackstock Fair, August 25th – 26th
- ✓ Port Perry Far, September 2nd – 4th
- ✓ Orono Fair, September 7th – 10th
- ✓ Uxbridge Fall Fair, September 8th – 10th
- ✓ Sunderland Fall Fair, September 12th – 13th
- ✓ Beaverton Fall Fair, September 15th – 17th

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