

CONSENT CALENDAR

March 21, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

The Committee on Ways and Means to which was referred HB 1584-FN,

AN ACT establishing a capital improvement grant program for the benefit of state fairs and agricultural fairs. Having considered the same, report the same with the following amendment, and the recommendation that the bill OUGHT TO PASS WITH AMENDMENT.

Rep. Judy Aron

FOR THE COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE REPORT

Committee:	Ways and Means
Bill Number:	HB 1584-FN
Title:	establishing a capital improvement grant program for the benefit of state fairs and agricultural fairs.
Date:	March 21, 2022
Consent Calendar:	CONSENT
Recommendation:	OUGHT TO PASS WITH AMENDMENT 2022-1156h

STATEMENT OF INTENT

This bill and its amendment create a dedicated fund and a process to provide grants to NH agricultural fairs for infrastructure projects. The committee recognizes the positive economic and educational impact that the thirteen fairs bring to NH communities. We received testimony that the fairs have received financial support in the past from the state, but the program lost funding in the late 1970's. Many of the fairs have been struggling to keep up with maintenance on their aging buildings and infrastructure. The grant created in this bill would provide funds to repair buildings on the fairgrounds and will assist in bringing the buildings up to current code requirements. The state would appropriate \$250,000 annually to this fund. The fund will be managed by the Commissioner of Agriculture and this bill has provisions for capping the fund as well as placing reporting and audit functions upon the fund.

Vote 22-0.

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FOR THE COMMITTEE

Original: House Clerk
Cc: Committee Bill File

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Ways and Means

HB 1584-FN, establishing a capital improvement grant program for the benefit of state fairs and agricultural fairs. **OUGHT TO PASS WITH AMENDMENT.**

Rep. Judy Aron for Ways and Means. This bill and its amendment create a dedicated fund and a process to provide grants to NH agricultural fairs for infrastructure projects. The committee recognizes the positive economic and educational impact that the thirteen fairs bring to NH communities. We received testimony that the fairs have received financial support in the past from the state, but the program lost funding in the late 1970's. Many of the fairs have been struggling to keep up with maintenance on their aging buildings and infrastructure. The grant created in this bill would provide funds to repair buildings on the fairgrounds and will assist in bringing the buildings up to current code requirements. The state would appropriate \$250,000 annually to this fund. The fund will be managed by the Commissioner of Agriculture and this bill has provisions for capping the fund as well as placing reporting and audit functions upon the fund. **Vote 22-0.**

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Amendment to HB 1584-FN

1 Amend the bill by replacing all after the enacting clause with the following:

2

3 1 Capital Improvement Program for State Fairs. The subdivision heading preceding RSA
4 425:19 and RSA 425:19 through RSA 425:19-f are repealed and reenacted to read as follows:

5 Capital Improvement Program for State Fairs

6 425:19 Declaration of Purpose. The general court finds that it is in the public interest to
7 advance, encourage, and protect agricultural fairs including the exhibition of livestock and
8 agricultural produce of all kinds, as well as related arts and businesses. Fair exhibitions are an
9 integral and historical part of New Hampshire that provide an opportunity to educate and promote
10 agriculture to the general public. The state further recognizes the need to support the activities of
11 local youth organizations like 4-H and Future Farmers of America that encourage agricultural
12 awareness and rural economic development.

13 425:19-a Definitions. In this subdivision:

14 I. "Commissioner" means the commissioner of the department of agriculture, markets, and
15 food.

16 II. "Department" means the New Hampshire department of agriculture, markets, and food.

17 III. "Fair" means a member in good standing of the New Hampshire Association of Fairs and
18 Expositions which is intended to promote agriculture and support rural economic development by
19 including a balanced variety of exhibits of livestock and agricultural products as well as related arts
20 and businesses, including products of farm home and educational contests, displays, and
21 demonstrations designed to train youth and to promote agricultural awareness and rural economic
22 development and living.

23 IV. "Fund" means the capital improvement program grant fund for fairs established in RSA
24 425:19-b.

25 425:19-b Capital Improvement Program Grant Fund. There is hereby established the capital
26 improvement program grant fund to be used by the department to assist fairs in the manner
27 provided by this chapter. Only the commissioner or the commissioner's designee may approve
28 applications and authorize disbursements from the fund. The fund shall be nonlapsing and
29 continually appropriated to the department for the purpose of administering this chapter. Each
30 fiscal year, the state treasurer shall transfer into the capital improvement program grant fund from
31 the state general fund the sum of \$250,000. No transfer of general funds shall be made to the capital
32 improvement program grant fund in any fiscal year in which the fund balance is at least \$1,000,000.

Amendment to HB 1584-FN
- Page 2 -

1 Fund disbursements shall comply with RSA 425:19-g and no appropriation shall be required for
2 disbursements.

3 425:19-c Capital Improvement Program; Grant Eligibility Conditions and Criteria. The
4 following conditions and criteria shall be met by a fair to be eligible for a capital improvement
5 program grant awarded by the commissioner. However, the commissioner may make exceptions to
6 the above conditions and criteria. The fair applicant shall:

7 I. Be a non-profit association located in New Hampshire that is a full member in good
8 standing with the New Hampshire Association of Fairs and Expositions.

9 II. Annually hold events that offer contests or exhibits of 4-H members and clubs, Future
10 Farmers of America members and clubs, granges, farm crops, domestic livestock competitions, or
11 home crafts.

12 III. Be managed by a board of directors who are responsible for the business affairs and
13 operational activities and policies.

14 IV. Have a board of directors who are subject to and compliant with local, state, and federal
15 laws and regulations.

16 V. Have a treasurer who has charge of the financial affairs of the corporation and ensures
17 that grant funds received from a state grant are used in accordance with the applicant's proposal as
18 approved by the department commissioner.

19 VI. Operate a minimum of 3 consecutive, 8-hour days per year.

20 VII. Submit a capital improvement project that has a minimum useful life of 20 years and
21 shall be completed within 2 years of execution of a contract to perform work authorized by the grant.

22 VIII. Contribute matching funds or in-kind services in an amount equal to 15 percent or
23 more of the value of the grant.

24 IX. Not have already completed the project for which the applicant seeks reimbursement.

25 425:19-d Capital Improvement Grant Disbursements.

26 I. The board of directors of a fair may apply to the department for grant award from the
27 capital improvement program grant fund on forms provided by the department.

28 II. The commissioner may allocate 95 percent of the capital improvement program grant
29 fund including fund interest to eligible applicant fairs, and distribute such funds according to merit
30 as measured by a merit rating to be set by the commissioner. This merit rating shall take into
31 account such factors as area and population served, youth participation, attendance, gate receipts,
32 number and type of exhibits, community support, evidence of successful achievement of desired
33 outcomes and purposes of the fair, extent of improvements made to grounds and facilities from year
34 to year, rural and farming nature of the region served by the fair, and overall condition and
35 appearance of grounds

36 III. Any disbursements made under this section shall be made only as a disbursement in
37 whole or in part for capital improvement expenses incurred by the fair.

Amendment to HB 1584-FN
- Page 3 -

1 425:19-e Health or Safety Capital Improvements and Contract Requirements.

2 I. Subject to the availability of funds, the department may provide grant funds on a
3 competitive basis, to support capital projects that make health and safety improvements to
4 agricultural fairgrounds or fair facilities in order to benefit participants and the fair-going public.
5 The rules of such competition shall be established by the department in accordance with RSA 541-A.

6 II. The department shall develop and manage appropriate contracts with the selected
7 applicants, monitor project expenditures and grantee performance, report project and contract
8 information, and exercise due diligence, and other managerial responsibilities.

9 III. The department shall include provisions in the contracts which require that capital
10 improvements be held by the grantee for a specific period of time appropriate to the amount of the
11 grant and that facilities shall be used for the express purpose of the grant.

12 IV. The department may use the remaining 5 percent of funds from the annual general court
13 appropriation to the state fair capital improvements for expenses incurred in the administration of
14 the capital improvement grant program.

15 V. All deadlines and times required for the capital improvement grant program
16 administration and disbursement of funds to fairs shall occur at such times as the commissioner
17 may prescribe.

18 VI. If the grantee is found to be out of compliance with provisions of the contract, the
19 grantee shall repay to the state general fund the principal amount of the grant plus interest
20 calculated at the rate of interest on state of New Hampshire general obligation bonds issued most
21 closely to the date of authorization of the grant.

22 425:19-f Rulemaking. The commissioner shall adopt rules under RSA 541-A relative to the
23 administration of the capital improvement grant program under this subdivision.

24 425:19-g Report of Grants. The commissioner shall compile an annual report detailing the
25 number of disbursements from the fund, the amount of each disbursement, what entity received the
26 disbursement, and the purpose of the disbursement, and shall submit such report to the speaker of
27 the house of representatives, the president of the senate, the chairpersons of the house and senate
28 ways and means committees, the house and senate finance committees, and the house and senate
29 committees with jurisdiction over environmental and agricultural issues, by November 1 of each
30 year.

31 425:19-h Repairs. In case of partial or total destruction of the building by fire or otherwise, the
32 commissioner may make needed repairs or replacement, with the approval of the governor and
33 council, and may use the proceeds of any insurance.

34 425:19-i Records for Purpose of Audit. The commissioner of revenue administration shall adopt
35 rules, pursuant to RSA 541-A, relative to the accounting methods to be used by each fair which could
36 qualify for a distribution, if a distribution is made under this subdivision. Each such fair shall use
37 the calendar year as its fiscal year for keeping the books, records and reports of its fiscal officers.

Amendment to HB 1584-FN
- Page 4 -

1 The commissioner of revenue administration is authorized to require the production of all such
2 books, records, vouchers and other papers and documents as will enable him to make a full, accurate
3 and complete audit. All such records shall be preserved for 3 years following the date of said audit.

4 425:19-j Audit of Accounts of Agricultural Fairs.

5 I. The commissioner of revenue administration shall annually, at the cost and expense of
6 each agricultural fair receiving a distribution, audit all accounts of fairs receiving money under the
7 provisions of this subdivision, and the report of each such audit, when completed, shall be submitted
8 to the president, treasurer and clerk of each fair so audited. If, in any case, the commissioner cannot
9 guarantee that such an audit will be completed within one year after the end of a fiscal year for
10 which a fair received a distribution, he shall so advise the president or treasurer of the fair,
11 whereupon the respective fair officials may hire a certified public accountant or a public accountant
12 licensed under RSA 309-A, to conduct such an audit within one year after the close of the fair's fiscal
13 year in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and applicable state statutes.

14 II. Every audit made by the commissioner of revenue administration or an independent
15 public accountant licensed under RSA 309-A shall include a summary of findings and
16 recommendations regarding compliance with applicable statutory provisions of law, and the
17 adequacy of accounting and business procedures pursued by the fair examined. Contracts executed
18 between the agricultural fairs and the independent public accountants shall stipulate that all
19 accounts and funds of the fair are to be audited and a report of the audit is to be prepared in
20 accordance with this section. At the conclusion of the audit, the independent public accountant shall
21 submit a copy of an audit report prepared pursuant to this section directly to the commissioner of
22 agriculture, markets, and food and to the commissioner of revenue administration for review and
23 approval as to format only.

24 425:19-k Failure to Keep Records. The failure to keep the books, records and papers required by
25 this subdivision and follow such approved methods shall be considered sufficient cause for the
26 commissioner of agriculture, markets, and food to withhold the distribution of funds provided for in
27 this subdivision to the fair or fairs otherwise entitled to them until such books, records and papers
28 are made available for audit and such audit made. Any funds remaining in the hands of the
29 commissioner of agriculture, markets, and food which are not distributed because of continued
30 failure to comply with the provisions of RSA 425:19-i shall be distributed after a period of one year,
31 to the fairs which complied with the provisions of said section for the year in question.

32 2 New Subparagraph; Capital Improvement Grant Fund for Fairs. Amend RSA 6:12, I(b) by
33 inserting after subparagraph (382) the following new subparagraph:

34 (383) Moneys deposited in the capital improvement program grant fund established
35 in RSA 425:19-b.

36 3 Effective Date. This act shall take effect July 1, 2022.



2022 SESSION

Environment and Agriculture

Bill #: HB1584-FR Motion: OTP AM #: _____ Exec Session Date: 2-1-22

<u>Members</u>	<u>YEAS</u>	<u>Nays</u>	<u>NV</u>
Pearl, Howard C. Chairman	✓		
Aron, Judy F. Vice Chairman	✓		
Comtois, Barbara Clerk	✓		
Verville, Kevin G. Johnson, Dawn	✓		
Davis, Arnold G. Lang, Tim	✓		
Stapleton, Walter A. Muffett, Mike	✓		
Homola, Susan	✓		
Kennedy, Margaret Anne	✓		
Mason, James L.	✓		
Sanborn, Gail E.	✓		
Bixby, Peter W.	✓		
Sofikitis, Catherine M.			
Bouldin, Andrew J.	✓		
Dutzy, Sherry		✓	
Murray, Megan A.	✓		
Von Plinsky, Sparky		✓	
Caplan, Tony Almy, Susan	✓		
Perez, Maria		✓	
TOTAL VOTE:	14	3	

NH House Committee on Ways and Means
Public Hearing on: HB 1584



Date: March 3, 2022
LOB Room: 202-204
Time Public Hearing Called to Order: 11:00 AM
Time Public Hearing Adjourned:

Title: establishing a capital improvement grant program for the benefit of state fairs and agricultural fairs.

Sponsors: (Prime) Ladd (R), Pearl (R), Graham (R), Cordelli (R), Luneau (D), Hennessey (R),
Prentiss (D), D'Allesandro (D)

Committee Members: Reps. Major, Abrami, Bershtein, M. Griffin, Ulery, Doucette, Aron, Janigian, Nunez, Lang, Spilsbury, Tudor, Almy, Ames, Southworth, Malloy, Schamberg, Tucker, Gomarlo, Loughman, Gourgue, Hakken-Phillips and Murphy.

TESTIMONY

Rep. Howard Pearl (co-sponsor), introduced the bill

- Supports the bill
- This bill has educational aspects that are beneficial to the state.
- Almy: Shouldn't the town that benefits from the fair pay for the fair? Pearl: These fairs are beneficial to the region, not just the town.
- Almy: Instead of a grant, how about a revolving fund? Pearl: My committee focused on the policy, not the funding.

Representative Sherry Dutzy

- Opposes the bill
- Taxpayer money should not be used to support private organizations that operate the fairs.
- Taxpayer money should be used for other priorities (i.e. environmental issues, waste management, recycling, CBD labeling).
- Lang: These fairs generate a half million visitors each year. Shouldn't we encourage this? Dutzy: Funding should not come from the general fund.

Written Testimony submitted:

3/3/2022 Testimony of Rep. Sherry Dutzy, Hillsborough 30 before Ways & Means

I am here today to speak against HB1584-FN. Although I support the intent of this bill which is to modernize and improve the infrastructure of regional agricultural fairgrounds, I disagree with the idea that taxpayer dollars should be taken from the General Fund to support the private, non-profit organizations that run them.

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As a member of the Environment & Agriculture Committee since 2019, I have witnessed many good programs die due to lack of funding.

A bill to support an animal abuse fund was voted down because it would have increased dog-licensing fees by 0.50 a YEAR. It was deemed a TAX by my colleagues across the aisle.

In NH right now we have a recycling, municipal waste crisis. After decades of defunding NHDES, we have a waste management plan that hasn't been updated since 2003. We have not met recycling goals that were set for 1995. We lag all the other New England states in this area.

NHDES is funded through the same source, the General Fund, as the request for HB1584-FN. Without the necessary funds to create plans and staff for implementation and oversight in a vital area like solid waste management and recycling, how can we justify taking out \$250,000 a year for capital improvements to regional fairs that attract only a small portion of the population.

Right now, I am trying to find \$380,000 to fund a one-time set up of a testing program for CBD labeling. This bill has passed both the House and Senate but without funding it will go nowhere. Improper CBD labeling due to no oversight or testing in NH costs consumers thousands of dollars in ineffective and/or diluted products. (This last sentence was omitted due to an objection raised by Rep. Nunez) A colleague paid \$170 for a bottle to manage pain and found out that it was primarily orange juice.

With 13 regional fairs and a \$250,000 annual request, this amounts to less than \$20,000 in capital improvements per fair per year. If the economic benefit to a region hosting the fair is so great, then businesses in the area should be able to raise that amount of money for their own benefit.

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Thank You

Chairman Major recessed the hearing

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Thank You

Chairman Major recessed the hearing

March 9, 2022 - Continued hearing

Rep. Ladd

- Re-introduced the bill
- This bill promotes agriculture throughout the state
- This bill also promotes education.
- This would be a non-lapsing fund to help with capital improvements for fairgrounds.
- This bill is modeled after bills from other states.
- Capital improvements are costly, which has resulted in price increases at the gate.
- 40.6 million dollars have been spent at or near the fairgrounds.
- Abrami: The \$250,000 would be asked for each year? Ladd: Yes, but it's only matching funds.
- Aron: Why wouldn't local businesses pay for the improvements? Local businesses participate in the fairs and pay accordingly.

Commissioner Jasper, Dept of Agriculture

- Supports the bill
- The state has a history of supporting fairs which predate the civil war.
- There was a fire last week at the Rochester Fairgrounds, destroying an uninsured horse barn. That adds to the need for this bill.
- Schamberg: How many fairs are in NH? Jasper: eleven

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- Schamberg: Page 2, line 5-8: What about the exceptions? Jasper: I'm open to amendments requiring a report of expenses to be submitted to the legislature.
 - Abrami: The \$250,000 ask is during an off budget year. How can we navigate this in W&Ms. Jasper: Perhaps this bill should have gone to Finance.
 - Nunez: Is there the possibility of private-public partnerships to raise the funds? Jasper: Large corporations are not interested in agriculture.
 - Almy: Have ARPA funds been sought? Jasper: This should be a long term solution, not just a one year thing.

Robert Johnson, NH Farm Bureau

- Supports the bill
- Fairs showcase the work of our youth.
- The \$250,000 ask will be leveraged.
- Distributed an article from Business NH Magazine from August 2017 showcasing the fairs.

Bob Allen, NH Fair Assn / Hopkinton State Fair

- Supports the bill
- Maintaining fairgrounds and meeting building codes are expensive.
- Replacing bleachers will cost over a million dollars. We cannot afford that.
- Schamberg; Are fairs held in each county? Allen: Not sure
- Aron: What about ADA accessibility? Allen: We are 100% compliant.

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Mark Perry, Granite State Fair

- Supports the bill
- To maintain and build to code is very expensive.
- NH Fairs get no money from the state. The fairs are self-sustaining.
- The pool of people and businesses to sponsor the fairs are shrinking rapidly.

Neal Kurk, Granite State Taxpayers

- Opposes the bill
- This is special interest legislation. Taxpayers are being asked to subsidize a specific set of businesses. Although these fairs are largely non-profits and serve an important agricultural industry in NH, they should be self-supporting.
- A state subsidy for a dying business is not in the public interest. HB 1584 should not be passed unless it can demonstrate that the capital improvements will generate an increase in tax revenues, over their useful life, exceeding the cost to the State of the project.
- The proposed grant program will do nothing to deal with the problem facing agricultural fairs, mainly the diminishing appeal and decreased relevance.
- There are practical and Constitutional problems with this bill:
 - This bill delegates rulemaking to the commissioner. But under separation of powers, the Legislative branch cannot delegate powers to the Executive branch. That is unconstitutional. (See Page 2, lines 7 and 8 and Page 2 lines 29 through 32)
 - The Health Improvements part of the bill (Page 3, lines 3 and beyond) contain no criteria for the grants. Unless there is clear criteria, legislative authority has been delegated to the executive branch, which is not constitutional.
- Email of testimony forthcoming.

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David Lackie, North Haverhill Fair

- Supports the bill
- We do not have enough money to do the cap improvements needed.
- It's all about the kids. Any support would be appreciated.
- Fairs used to get a quarter of a percent from Rockingham Park revenue.

Adjourned 1:10 PM

House Remote Testify

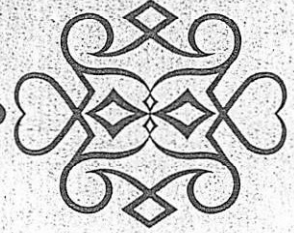
Ways and Means Committee Testify List for Bill HB1584 on 2022-03-03

Support: 0 Oppose: 0 Neutral: 0 Total to Testify: 0

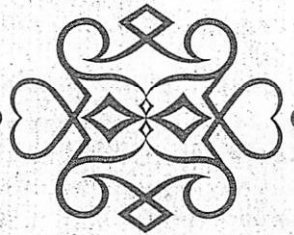
[Export to Excel](#)

<u>Name</u>	<u>City, State</u> <u>Email Address</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Representing</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Testifying</u>	<u>Non-Germane</u>	<u>Signed Up</u>
Allore, William	Bethlehem, NH Walloreiii@gmail.com	A Member of the Public	Myself	Oppose	No	No	3/2/2022 9:14 PM

WILL IT BE A



F A I R



SEASON TO REMEMBER?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆ BY SHERYL RICH-KERN ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆



Die-hard fair-goers were stunned by the recent announcement that after 142 years, the Rochester Fair is closing its gates for the 2017 season. But to many industry experts, Rochester's financial instability and slump in attendance is an indicator that

the future of fairs cannot solely rely on pumpkin contests and demolition derbies to draw crowds.

However, it's not as if fairs will evanesce from modern culture with the likes of horse races and medicine shows. In fact, according to Marla Calico, president of the International Fairs and Expositions, many state fairs are seeing a boom in attendance

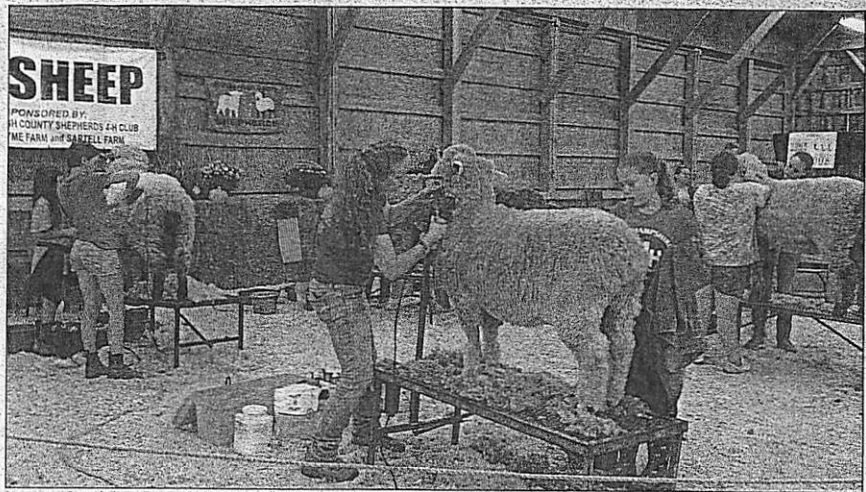
much like the resurgence in farmers markets. People want to know how their food travels from the farm to their plate, says Calico. She says organizers who capitalize on the locavore movement, educate younger audiences and provide programming that reflects community trends will thrive.

Fairs across the country are trying to court a younger audience. According to an

October 2015 report from Governing.com, California's state fair hosted the first U.S. National Drone Racing Championships in 2015; the D.C. State Fair in Washington D.C., which legalized the cultivation of marijuana, held a Best Bud competition; and the New Mexico State Fair worked with a local craft brewer to create an official New Mexico State Fair beer. Other fairs are bringing in food trucks to expand beyond traditional fair food.

Millennials may not be as invested in farm traditions as previous generations, but they do appreciate off-the-beaten-track adventures to experience local culture, says Ben Amsden, who directs the Center for Rural Partnerships at Plymouth State University. If fairs can tap into that yearning, perhaps they can reel in a new audience. That balance between tradition and offering something new to draw the next generation of attendees is a challenge the state's various fairs are trying to figure out.

It's difficult to pin down the health of NH's fairs, as it has been years since their financial impact has been studied. The last full report was issued in 2002 by the Institute for NH Studies at Plymouth State University, which showed fair visitors, exhibitors and operators spent an estimated \$40.6 million at or near the fair grounds during the fairs, including \$400,000 in direct purchases from farmers. A FY2011 report on the "Impact of Agriculture on NH's Economy," prepared for the NH Department of Agriculture by the Institute for NH Studies at Plym-



COURTESY OF THE HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY AGRICULTURAL FAIR

Sheep shearing at the Hillsborough County Agricultural Fair in New Boston.

outh State University, stated spending from fairs had dropped to \$37.1 million.

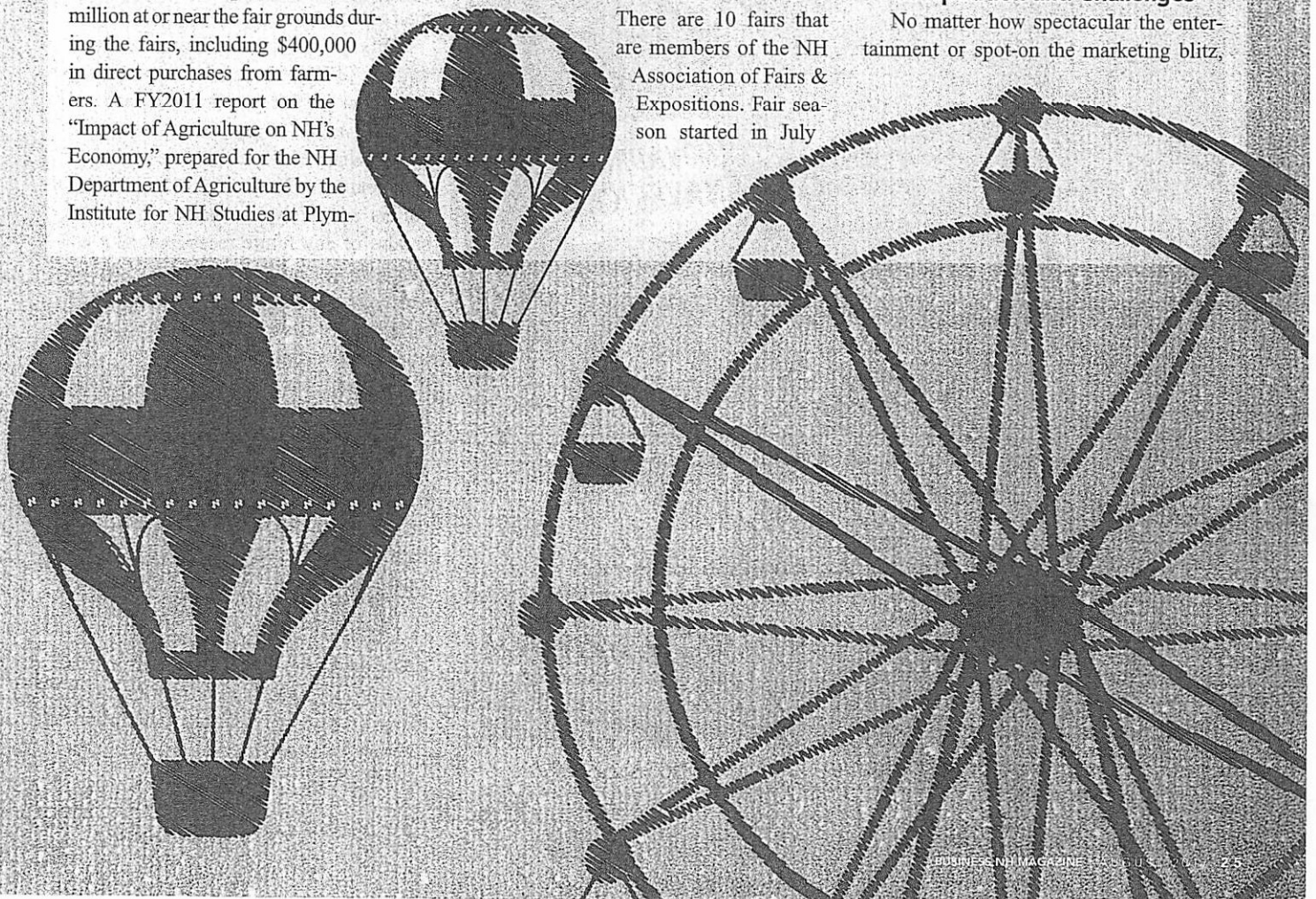
That report stated agricultural fairs in NH generated 907 jobs, \$27.4 million in household income and \$7.1 million in state and local government receipts. Neither the NH Department of Agriculture nor the NH Division of Travel and Tourism could provide updated information about NH's fairs. Despite NH's long agricultural history, the state hasn't provided any financial assistance for fairs since the 1970s.

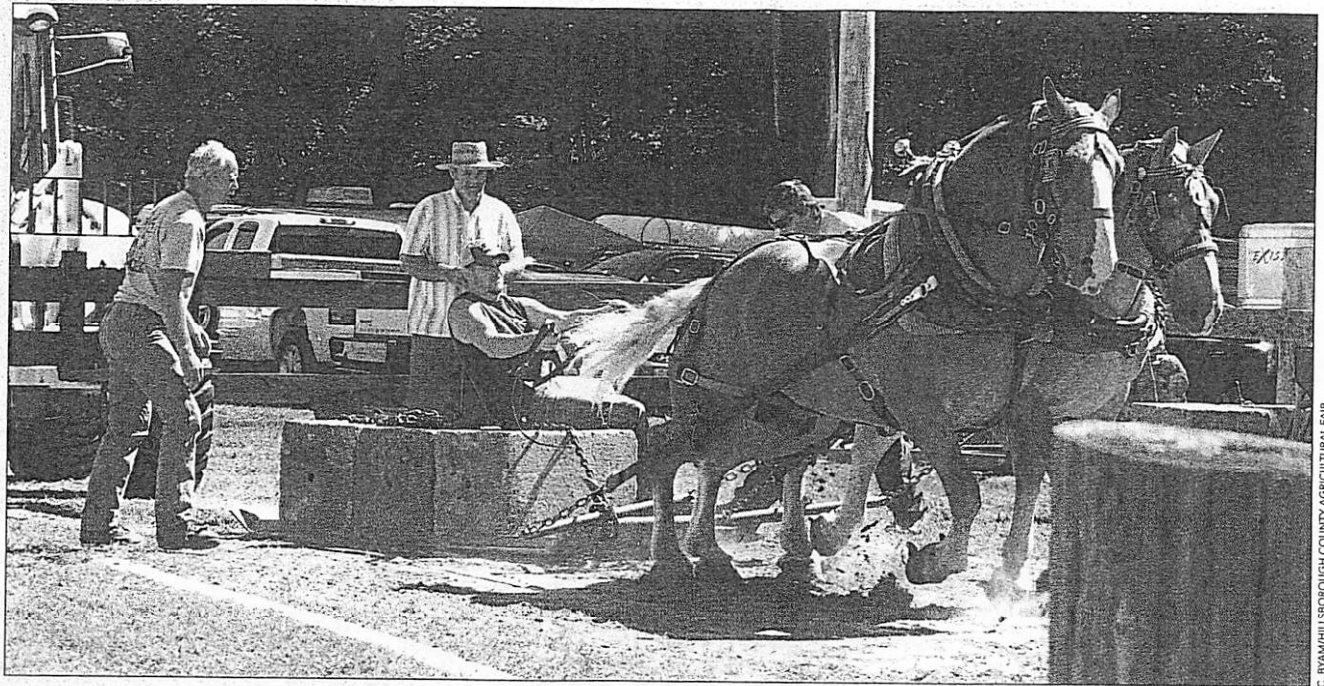
There are 10 fairs that are members of the NH Association of Fairs & Expositions. Fair season started in July

with the Stratham Fair, which markets tradition to draw an audience with the tagline, "Experience a piece of the past...in the present." The fair, which marked its 50th year of operation, offers traditional attractions, including entertainment, 4-H activities and midway rides, and attracts about 20,000 attendees annually. The fair season will stretch into October when the Sandwich Fair will close out the season.

Competition and Challenges

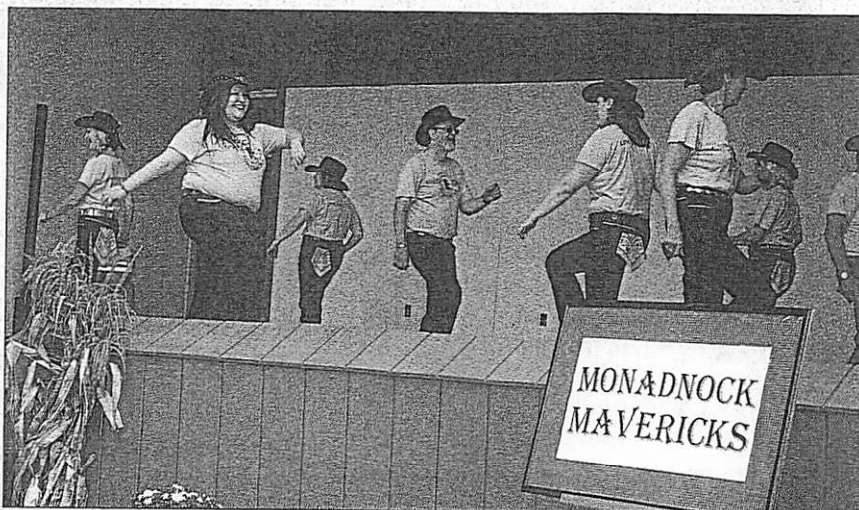
No matter how spectacular the entertainment or spot-on the marketing blitz,





C. BYAN/HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY AGRICULTURAL FAIR

Activities at the Hillsborough County Agricultural Fair include horse pull, top, and on-stage entertainment, below.



COURTESY OF THE HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY AGRICULTURAL FAIR

events jammed into only a few days can't fight the ultimate obstacle: Mother Nature. A pounding rainstorm or insufferable heat wave dampens fair proceeds for any one year, and the only rescue for such a calamity is the hope for better weather the following year.

Fairs also compete with other summer fanfare. In NH, weekenders have plenty to see and do, from music jamborees and arts festivals to living history museums, amusement parks and the state's beaches and mountains. Large fairs with sufficient coffers are likely to weather the vicissitudes of any future recessions. But attempts to sustain their charm and significance are at odds with a public equipped with a daily drumbeat of online games, movies and social media.

The living room is also a rival for these agricultural fairs. Unlike the era where neighbors congregated outdoors to exchange recipes and local scuttlebutt, people now reach out on social media.

This news doesn't bode well for rural regions where town ledgers record more deaths than births. And with the closing of the 142-year-old Rochester Fair for at least this season, area urbanites and suburbanites have lost an opportunity to witness first hand sheep shearing, oxen at work or other vestiges of the state's farming heritage—that which is quintessentially NH.



COURTESY OF CHICK EMBROIDERY

Lillian and Bob Chick of Chick Embroidery at the Rochester Fair.

Homegrown vendors like Chick Embroidery are another casualty of the fair closing. Bob Chick and his mother Lillian, both of Rochester, depend on the fair to sell their embroidered hats and tee shirts. The fair is part of the town's culture, they say, as they reminisce about the logos they designed for the sulky driver shirts in the heyday of horse racing, which ended in 2007.

"The fair produced a good portion of our sales," says Bob Chick, who is seeking new venues to display his handicrafts.

The Rochester Agricultural and Mechanical Association board of directors made what some perceived as a blasphemous strike against the state's rural legacy when it announced the Rochester Fair would not open for 2017. While Norm Vetter, the board's president, did not return calls requesting an interview, it was an uncomfortable decision for the board, according to media reports. However, the fair had stumbled in the red for at least a decade and owed just under \$350,000 in addition to a \$392,000 mortgage.

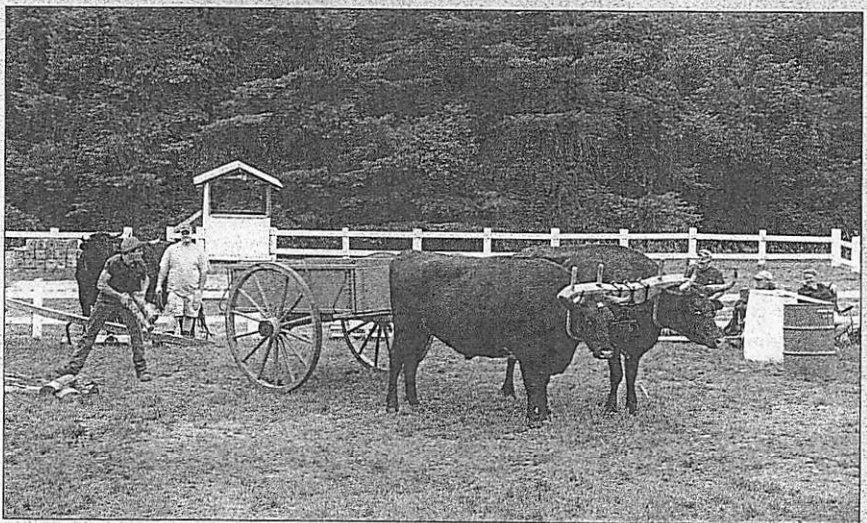
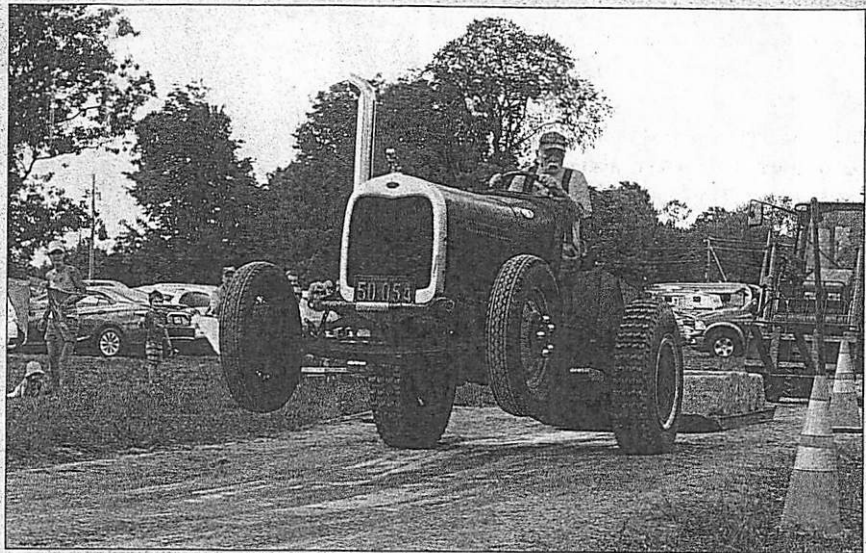
Mark Perry, who managed the Rochester Fair since 2001, says, "if you look at fairs in general through the eyes of dollars and cents, you'd never hold one anywhere." He says the fairs create a community event that succeeds in generating more goodwill than business profits. The Rochester Fair board of directors wanted both. In June, Vetter told *Foster's Daily Democrat* that the board terminated Perry because of the way he managed funds.

At a Rochester fair stakeholders meeting in July, grievances were aired about the handling of the fair and consensus was reached to subdivide and sell a portion of the fairgrounds to pay down debt, according to a *Foster's* report. That plan still has to be defined and then approved by stockholders and the state.

Still Big Draws

The bigger fairs, like those in Hopkinton and Deerfield with a century-old history, receive more than 65,000 visitors and sweep in enough cash to claim a small profit. Three years ago the Hopkinton Fair in Contoocook Village delayed its opening from a Thursday to Friday to compress its Labor Day weekend festivities into four days rather than five.

Attendance remained around 70,000 at the Hopkinton Fair, says board member



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE BELKNAP COUNTY 4-H FAIR

Top: A competitor in the Belknap County Fair's "doodle bug" tractor pulling competition. Middle: Competitors modify and decorate their tractors for the fair's riding tractor competition. Bottom: Ox pulling at the fair.

and treasurer Bob Allen, safeguarding the bottom line. Between 100 and 125 employees man the ticket booths, pick up garbage and other custodial tasks while a similarly-sized roster of volunteers also pitches in.

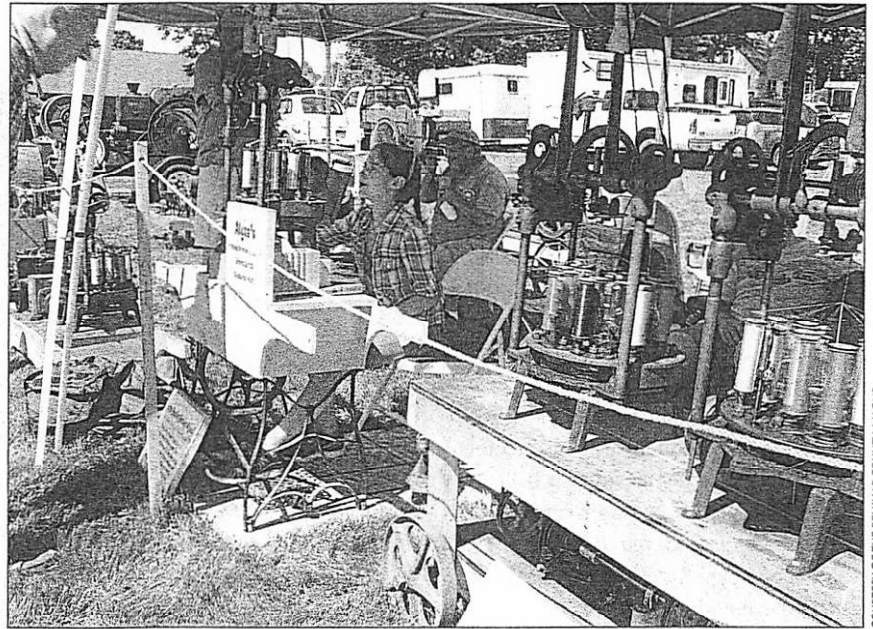
Whereas Hopkinton and Deerfield maintain paid staff, fairs in Hillsboro, Cornish and Belmont are all-volunteer. Janell George is the treasurer for the Hillsboro fair, which peaks at around 8,000 visitors. Situated in the backyard of NH's largest city, Janell says the three-day fair's \$60,000 budget competes against events with larger advertising budgets. The costs to maintain electrical and plumbing codes, permits for tents and insurance expenses are always on the rise. And just one rainy weekend can spell disaster. "If your vendors don't have good attendance, they won't come back," she says. And that's a large slice of a fair's income.

Competing events also subtract from the pool of available volunteers. Wayne Gray, president of the Cornish Fair, says only a decade ago he could get a dozen people to show up for grounds projects. "Now I'm lucky if I can get three," he says. "The younger generation doesn't like to volunteer their time as much as the older ones." (Half of the fair's board of 20 directors is over the age of 65.)

In Hopkinton, the fair association owns around 60 acres and loans its grounds to charities like 4-H and Lions clubs, and sometimes rents the property for a nominal fee. But it's the revenue from those three pivotal days—when the leaves turn golden and vendors peddle midway tickets and trinkets—that determine the budget for the other 362 days.

The demands of upkeep for facilities puts pressure on that budget, says Allen. Recently, the association had to bury its electrical cables to comply with newer safety codes, costing upwards of \$50,000. "We're not rich," says Allen, "But we make enough to keep up the grounds and buildings." Allen says draft-pulling contests, where oxen pull concrete weights up to 12,000 pounds to claim ribbons in 10 classes of weight, along with the demolition derbies, always draw an audience.

However, it's not enough to offer the traditional kaleidoscope of activities. Beyond the Tilt-a-whirl and Super Slide, the fried dough and cotton candy, families want a different type of showstopper. And Allen



COURTESY OF THE BELKNAP COUNTY 4-H FAIR

A vendor sells handmade bracelets and necklaces made from the Belnap County Fair's 16- and 8-spool braiding machines.

says nowadays they'll travel 100 miles or more to get it. This year, the fair association booked the nationally known Recycled Percussion, which played at the Super Bowl and in Las Vegas. The four-man rock group, which received its first break at its 1994

the midway to change the perception of fairs as money pits. "We want a family of four with \$100 in their pockets to walk out with a couple dollars," he says. "And after 30 minutes, they shouldn't wander around looking for something to do."

About two years ago, Leighton introduced a display of 16-bobbin braiding machines from the 1930s, which intertwine textile fibers to form fishing lines or clotheslines. "They're a mechanical ballet to watch," he says. He also brought in a tractor show with sponsors and is seeking artisans to set up booths for the fair. He says while offering new attractions brings in more people, "change is hard."

It's unclear whether fairs like the one at Belnap can inspire nostalgia for a bygone era when agriculture fed much of the country's commerce. Society has evolved, says Amsden of Plymouth State University. People no longer live where they work or near extended family members. More than a hundred years ago, the rural fair was the summer event when families and neighbors convened. Now it's not the only game in town. Fairs need a new hook. If organizers can give their agricultural fairs a distinctive sense of place, says Amsden, they just might stand a chance. And perhaps the younger generation, fraught with digital distractions, will find solace in the authenticity of local craftsmen, farm handlers and carry barkers on a hot summer day. ■

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**2017
FAIR SEASON**

Cheshire Fair: Aug. 3-6

Belnap County 4-H Fair:
Aug. 12-13

Cornish Fair: Aug. 18-20

Lancaster Fair: Aug. 31-Sept. 4

Hopkinton State Fair: Sept. 1-4

**Hillsborough County
Agricultural Fair:** Sept. 8-10

Deerfield Fair: Sept. 28-Oct. 1

Sandwich Fair: Oct. 7-9

(The Stratham Fair and North Haverhill Fair were both held in late July.)

Source: NH Association of
Fairs & Expositions

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high school talent show in Goffstown, will hand out drumsticks and pots and pans for an interactive audience experience.

In his second year as president of the Belnap County 4-H Fair in Belmont, Earl Leighton says he wants to double the typical 4,000 attendees. Leighton eliminated

Subject: In Support of HB 1584 establishing a capital improvement grant program for the benefit of state fairs and agricultural fairs

From: Daniel Richardson <daniel6_22@comcast.net>

Date: 3/3/2022, 5:16 PM

To: HouseWaysAndMeansCommittee@leg.state.nh.us

CC: Tom Lanzara <tomlanzara@gmail.com>, Rick Ladd <rick.ladd@leg.state.nh.us>, Howard Pearl <Howard.Pearl@leg.state.nh.us>, John Graham <graham4rep@hotmail.com>, Glenn Cordelli <glenn.cordelli@leg.state.nh.us>, Erin Hennessey <Erin.Hennessey@leg.state.nh.us>, David Luneau <dluneauNH@gmail.com>, Suzanne Prentiss <Suzanne.Prentiss@leg.state.nh.us>, Lou D'Allesandro <Lou.Dallesandro@leg.state.nh.us>

Ref: Mar 09, 2022 Hearing

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE -

I write in support of HB 1584. The state of NH commerce in agriculture and animal husbandry is prime beneficiary of this bill. The state gets a bargain capital investment with minimum useful life of 20 years.

Matching funds or in-kind services in an amount equal to 15 percent or more of the value of the grant is a high bar for a non-profit to meet for performing and managing capital improvements to promote NH agriculture and support rural economic development. Note that many proposals will involve substantial amount of lumber which presently comes at a high cost.

The "15 percent" is a default thresh-holding value which can be found cited 45 times throughout NH-RSAs in a multitude of contexts. It is a sufficient catalyzing lure for attracting desirable project proposals. Agriculture non-profits have smart and motivated people willing to commit to finishing the project.

Please find favor in HB 1584 to recommend OTP.

Daniel Richardson, Nashua

HB 1584

I am here today to speak against HB1584-FN. Although I support the intent of this bill which is to modernize and improve the infrastructure of regional agricultural fairgrounds, I disagree with the idea that taxpayer dollars should be taken from the General Fund to support the private, non-profit organizations that run them.

As a member of the Environment & Agriculture Committee since 2019, I have witnessed many good programs die due to lack of funding.

A bill to support an animal abuse fund was voted down because it would have increased dog-licensing fees by 0.50 a YEAR. It was deemed a TAX by my colleagues across the aisle.

In NH right now we have a recycling, municipal waste crisis. After decades of defunding NHDES, we have a waste management plan that hasn't been updated since 2003. We have not met recycling goals that were set for 1995. We lag all the other New England states in this area.

NHDES is funded through the same source, the General Fund, as the request for HB1584-FN. Without the necessary funds to create plans and staff for implementation and oversight in a vital area like solid waste management and recycling, how can we justify taking out \$250,000 a year for capital improvements to regional fairs that attract only a small portion of the population.

Right now, I am trying to find \$380,000 to fund a one-time set up of a testing program for CBD labeling. This bill has passed both the House and Senate but without funding it will go nowhere. Improper CBD labeling due to no oversight or testing in NH costs consumers thousands of dollars in ineffective and/or diluted products. ~~My friend~~ paid \$170 for a bottle to manage pain and found out that it was primarily orange juice. *a colleague*

With 13 regional fairs and a \$250,000 annual request, this amounts to less than \$20,000 in capital improvements per fair per year. If the economic benefit to a region hosting the fair is so great, then businesses in the area should be able to raise that amount of money for their own benefit.

Thank You

HB 1584-FN - AS INTRODUCED

2022 SESSION

22-2510

08/05

HOUSE BILL ***1584-FN***

AN ACT establishing a capital improvement grant program for the benefit of state fairs and agricultural fairs.

SPONSORS: Rep. Ladd, Graf. 4; Rep. Pearl, Merr. 26; Rep. Graham, Hills. 7; Rep. Cordelli, Carr. 4; Rep. Luneau, Merr. 10; Sen. Hennessey, Dist 1; Sen. Prentiss, Dist 5; Sen. D'Allesandro, Dist 20

COMMITTEE: Environment and Agriculture

ANALYSIS

This bill establishes a capital improvement grant program and fund for the benefit of state and agricultural fairs.

Explanation: Matter added to current law appears in ***bold italics***.
Matter removed from current law appears ~~[in brackets and struckthrough.]~~
Matter which is either (a) all new or (b) repealed and reenacted appears in regular type.

1 of administering this chapter. Each fiscal year, the state treasurer shall transfer into the capital
2 improvement grant program from the state general fund the sum of \$250,000. The fund shall be
3 subject to allotment procedures under this chapter, but no appropriation shall be required for
4 expenditures.

5 426-B:4 Capital Improvement Program Grant Eligibility Conditions and Criteria. The following
6 conditions and criteria shall be met by a fair to be eligible for a capital improvement program grant
7 allocation awarded by the commissioner. However, the commissioner may make exceptions to the
8 above conditions and criteria. The fair applicant shall:

9 I. Be a non-profit association located in New Hampshire that is a full member in good
10 standing with the New Hampshire Association of Fairs and Expositions.

11 II. Annually hold events that offer contests or exhibits of 4-H members and clubs, granges,
12 farm crops, domestic livestock competitions, or homecrafts.

13 III. Be managed by a board of directors who are responsible for the business affairs and
14 operational activities and policies.

15 IV. Have a board of directors who are subject to and compliant with local, state, and federal
16 laws and regulations.

17 V. Have a treasurer who has charge of the financial affairs of the corporation and ensures
18 that grant funds received from a state grant are used in accordance with the applicant's proposal as
19 approved by the department commissioner.

20 VI. Operate a minimum of 3 consecutive, 8-hour days per year.

21 VII. Submit a capital improvement project that has a minimum useful life of 20 years and
22 shall be completed within 2 years of execution of a contract to perform work authorized by the grant.

23 VIII. Contribute matching funds or in-kind services in an amount equal to 15 percent or
24 more of the value of the grant.

25 IX. Not have already completed the project for which the applicant seeks reimbursement.

26 426-B:5 Allocations Made.

27 I. The board of directors of a fair may apply to the department for grant award from the
28 capital improvement grant program fund on forms provided by the department.

29 II. The commissioner may allocate 95 percent of the capital improvement program fund
30 including fund interest to eligible applicant fairs, and distribute such funds according to merit as
31 measured by a merit rating to be set by the commissioner. This merit rating shall take into account
32 such factors as area and population served, youth participation, attendance, gate receipts, number
33 and type of exhibits, community support, evidence of successful achievement of desired outcomes and
34 purposes of the fair, extent of improvements made to grounds and facilities from year to year, rural
35 and farming nature of the region served by the fair, and overall condition and appearance of grounds
36 and facilities.

1 III. Any state allocations made under this section shall be made only as an allocation in
2 whole or in part for capital improvement expenses incurred by the fair.

3 426-B:6 Health or Safety Capital Improvements and Contract Requirements.

4 I. Subject to the availability of funds, the department may provide grant funds on a
5 competitive basis, to support capital projects that make health and safety improvements to
6 agricultural fairgrounds or fair facilities in order to benefit participants and the fair-going public.
7 The rules of such competition shall be set by the department in accordance with RSA 541-A.

8 II. The department shall develop and manage appropriate contracts with the selected
9 applicants, monitor project expenditures and grantee performance, report project and contract
10 information, and exercise due diligence and other managerial responsibilities.

11 III. The department shall include provisions in the contracts which require that capital
12 improvements be held by the grantee for a specific period of time appropriate to the amount of the
13 grant and that facilities must be used for the express purpose of the grant.

14 IV. The department may use the remaining 5 percent of funds from the annual general court
15 appropriation to the state fair capital improvement program for expenses incurred in the
16 administration of the capital improvement program.

17 V. All deadlines and times required for program administration and allocation of funds to
18 fairs shall occur at such times as the commissioner may prescribe.

19 VI. If the grantee is found to be out of compliance with provisions of the contract, the
20 grantee shall repay to the state general fund the principal amount of the grant plus interest
21 calculated at the rate of interest on state of New Hampshire general obligation bonds issued most
22 closely to the date of authorization of the grant.

23 426-B:7 Rulemaking. The commissioner shall adopt rules under RSA 541-A relative to the
24 administration of the capital improvement grant program for fairs.

25 2 New Subparagraph; Capital Improvement Grant Fund For Fairs. Amend RSA 6:12, I(b) by
26 inserting after subparagraph (382) the following new subparagraph:

27 (383) Moneys deposited in the capital improvement grant fund for fairs established
28 in RSA 426-B:3.

29 3 Effective Date. This act shall take effect July 1, 2022.

**HB 1584-FN- FISCAL NOTE
AS INTRODUCED**

AN ACT establishing a capital improvement grant program for the benefit of state fairs and agricultural fairs.

FISCAL IMPACT: State County Local None

STATE:	Estimated Increase / (Decrease)			
	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Appropriation	\$0	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000
Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Expenditures	\$0	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000
Funding Source:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> General <input type="checkbox"/> Education <input type="checkbox"/> Highway <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other - Capital Improvement Grant Program Fund			

METHODOLOGY:

This bill establishes a capital improvement grant program and fund for the benefit of state and agricultural fairs.

The Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food indicates there are currently 13 members of the NH Fairs Association. If the funds were distributed evenly, a minimum of \$18,270 per year would be available to each fair if all fairs submit applications. However, it is likely that the funding will be conducted on a competitive basis. The Department assumes the program can be operated by an existing position on a part-time basis. The Department assumes the appropriations will be spent each year.

AGENCIES CONTACTED:

Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food