

OUTSTANDING IN THEIR FIELDS

They're not exactly fairs, but these events are almost as big a deal to other folks as they are for farmers.

International Plowing Match

Despite the name, this annual agricultural contest and exhibition is a Canadian creation that takes place in Ontario. There's fierce competition in a wide range of classes that require straight, neat plowing. There are horses and both antique and modern tractors pulling different kinds of plows. Just as big an attraction is the Tent City, which is a bit like a fall fair with exhibits but no midway. It's just what it sounds like — a vast array of tents arranged along “streets” created just for the event on someone's farm. There's also lots of entertainment. The premier of Ontario always turns up, along with plenty of other politicians. There's a tradition that these political visitors try plowing themselves. A plowing match near Toronto in 1846 is probably the first one in Canada. The International Plowing Match & Rural Expo started in 1913 but was not held during the First or Second World War, so the 2024 plowing match will be the 105th.



IPM FACTS

Length: 5 days

Size: more than 1,000 acres (405 hectares)

Number of visitors: 80,000+



Horse-drawn plowing at the 1987 IPM in Meaford, Ont.

Ontario Plowmen's Association photo by Don Hearn



Bull riding competition at the Calgary Stampede, 2017.



Florence (Flores) La Due, Calgary Stampede, 1912.



Calgary Stampede

Calgary held its first fair in 1886 and hosted the Dominion Exhibition in 1908. But it was in 1912 that the city's most famous attraction was born. The Calgary Stampede is also known as The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth, and might just be the most famous rodeo in the world. The idea came from an American couple who were both champion trick ropers, Guy Weadick and Florence (or Flores) La Due, shown above right. The money came from four Calgary businessmen who agreed the city was ready for something big. Although the first Stampede was a gigantic hit, the next didn't happen until 1919, after the First World War. The Stampede combines rodeo events like cattle roping, bull riding and chuckwagon races with a celebration of ranching and Western farm life. There are millions of dollars in prizes. Like the plowing match, you can see political leaders from all levels of government at the Stampede, whether they're flipping pancakes at a traditional breakfast or riding in the huge parade. When the Stampede turned 100 in 2012, the federal government named it a national historic event.

Special shows for specific types of livestock, from dairy cattle to goats, usually take place in the spring and summer. In the winter, shows big and small focus more on the business of farming. Events like Lloydminster, Sask.'s Agri-Visions or Expo-Champs in Saint-Hyacinthe, Que., above, are trade shows more than entertainment.

SHOW YOUR STUFF!

Farm kids and teenagers were responsible for getting animals ready to show at the fair. Young people still show dairy and beef calves, and all kinds of other livestock. It can be hard work training a calf to be comfortable being led around on a halter, not to mention handling a brightly lit show ring with crowds of people watching. Animals that place first or are named grand champions sell for a lot of money. And as with the other kinds of competitions at the fair, there are lots of cash prizes to be won.

Kids aren't just visitors to the fair — they're exhibitors. Why not give it a try?

In many Canadian communities, the time leading up to the fair is full of excitement. Kids train calves to show at 4H competitions. They work on crafts or colouring, take photographs and bake cookies. They build birdhouses and weave bracelets, make dioramas and posters and paper bag puppets. If you live in a smaller town or in the country, you've probably visited the area for kids — it might be called something like junior arts or children's classes. If you live in a bigger city, next time you go to a fair, have a look at the cool things other kids your age are doing. And if you have a fair nearby, start thinking about what you might enter next year. Whether it's a marshmallow spider or the ugliest carrot, there's a category (and maybe even a ribbon) for you.



In Saskatchewan, farm youth could go to camps run by the local agricultural society. They competed for scholarships from the bigger fairs and a gold watch at the smaller ones. More than 50,000 kids went to these camps between 1915 and 1978.



From things you build to things you bake, there are lots of ways to enter the fair!

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN ENTERING SOMETHING IN YOUR LOCAL FAIR, YOU CAN PICK UP A LIST OF CLASSES AT THE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY OFFICE OR SEARCH FOR ONE ONLINE, IF THAT'S OKAY WITH YOUR PARENTS.