

## Column

The coronavirus continues to create problems. We were all hoping that as we got farther along in 2020 that we would start to see some return to regular activities, but with perhaps a few extra precautions.

That clearly is not the direction this pandemic continues to take. And now, just months from what should be two of our state's biggest annual agricultural and cultural celebrations, we are looking at a very different reality.

I am disappointed to cancel both the Mountain State Fair and the N.C. State Fair, but I truly believe it is the right decision at this time and given what we know. The safety of everyone involved is our first and foremost consideration. Until restrictions are eased allowing for mass gatherings, we don't have a lot of choices.

Additionally, as self-supporting entities, our fairs cannot afford to expend significant financial resources with no revenue coming in and with the chance the event might not be able to open. We have to make good business decisions to ensure the continued operation of the Western N.C. Ag Center and the State Fairgrounds. Both of these facilities mean too much to their communities as gathering places and as economic drivers.

I am proud that the junior livestock shows will go on with some modifications to increase social distancing between exhibitors and animals and reduce the mass gathering of people. Our young people represent the future and every one of them has been challenged by 2020 and have likely missed out on events and activities they were looking forward to.

I suppose you can look at it as preparing them for the real world, where flexibility and adaptability are respected and valued qualities. But most every parent wants to shield their kids from real-world disappointments for as long as they can, knowing that life inevitably will deal them a hand of hardship and heartbreak. If we can manage to preserve a few good childhood memories for these youth exhibitors of working with and showing their animals, then it is worth the everything that goes into making these shows happen.

For many of our livestock kids, the "Fair" for them happens in the showring, not on the midway. It is a culmination of lots of hard work, early mornings, late nights, hot days, dirt and sweat, stubbornness and accomplishment.

They deserve the chance to be recognized for their work and commitment.

As 2020 has shown us, there is more than enough disappointment to go around. Hopefully, the junior livestock shows for these young people will be a stand-out memory in an otherwise heartbreaking year.