

Columbia, Greene fairs awarded agricultural infrastructure grants

By Karrie Allen Columbia-Greene Media | Posted: Friday, February 3, 2017 12:30 am

It has been nearly a decade that local fairs in New York state have received critical infrastructure improvement funds.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced Monday 56 county and youth fairs across the state, including the Columbia County Fair and Greene County Youth Fair, would each receive \$89,285 to offset the cost of improvement and renovation projects, including new construction. The nearly \$5 million will be awarded through the Agricultural Fairgrounds Infrastructure Improvement Program.

To receive the funding, fairs must submit the scope of work and estimated budget for proposed projects to the state Department of Agriculture and Markets, which is administering the program, according to a press release from the governor's office. The funding can be used to build, repair, replace, acquire or install fairground buildings, facilities or equipment that are used to house or promote agriculture.

"We are extremely grateful for the opportunity to apply for funding," Greene County Agricultural Society President Alex Johnk said. "At this time, our directors are working to determine the best ways to allocate any available money.

"As one of very few fairs across the country that still offers free admission and entertainment, we rely on generous support from donors as well as the Greene County Legislature to operate," he said. "Any support we receive helps in our mission to highlight the importance of agriculture and honor local kids who keep the legacy alive. This particular grant is a huge opportunity for us and Greene County."

The Greene County Youth Fair will celebrate 63 years July 27-30 at Angelo Canna Town Park in Cairo. To find out what the fair will offer this year, visit www.thegreenecountyyouthfair.com.

The Columbia County Agricultural Society was aware that funding was possible, so it was pleased with the announcement that money would be awarded, said Nelson Alford Jr., president of the society.

"It is a never-ending list of projects" at the fairgrounds, he said, but the biggest project the society is looking at right now is replacing the poultry barn.

This project will require tearing it down and building anew, which will cost more than the funding being awarded, but will help offset the cost, Alford said. This project will happen sooner than later, but it is still in the planning stages.

Right now the society is working on replacing the gable ends of the grandstand and more fencing is in the works, he added.

The Columbia County Fair will celebrate 177 years over Labor Day weekend, Aug. 30-Sept. 4. Learn more at www.columbiafair.com.

Once projects are approved, a contract will be developed and completed through the New York State Grants Gateway, according to the press release. Projects must be finished and the funds spent by March 31, 2021. Any money remaining after this date will be divided equally among the awardees who can submit plans for additional projects.

"It would be nice if there was a second round of funding," Alford said.

"Investing in and strengthening New York's many popular county fairs will continue promoting these wonderful community events," state Sen. Kathy Marchione, R,C,I-43, who represents all of Columbia County, said in the release. "County fairs entertain, showcase and celebrate the heritage, hard work and great agricultural products from our hard-working family farmers."

"These investments will help these fairs attract more visitors, raise the profile of local vendors and businesses and help spur economic growth across New York," Cuomo said in the release.