



Local 4-H youth spend months raising animals to show at the County Fair. Photo by Tim Borland

## SBALT REPORT

# Rodeo and Fair traditions adapt

By Julie Morris

Pandemics don't happen often, but when they do, long-held traditions change. For the first time since WWII, the San Benito County Saddle Horse Show and Rodeo and County Fair were cancelled this year due to concerns over the spread of COVID-19. The Salinas Valley Fair, which is normally attended by many south San Benito County residents, was also cancelled. The Saddle Horse Show and Rodeo and San Benito County Fair are held at Bolado Park Event Center just south of Hollister. Both events usually draw thousands of people eager to celebrate San Benito County's unique agricultural heritage.

"The San Benito County Saddle Horse Show and Rodeo began in 1929 as a weekend of fun and challenge for hard-working cowboys and ranch hands. Organized by a group of local businessmen, community leaders and prominent ranchers, the rodeo has operated every year for generations except for four years during World War II," according to its website. Held the last weekend in June, the rodeo celebrates the unique "vaquero" style of cowboying in San Benito County and is a place where local ranchers showcase their horsemanship.

Every October, the San Benito County Fair is one of 78 fairs across California celebrating local counties' agriculture. In recent years, attendance has been strong as Hollister grows and more people learn about the area's rich agricultural history. "Fairs are unique, community institutions which maintain their local flavor and identity," according to the California Department of Food & Agriculture.

At Bolado Park, the Fair hosts a large carnival with rides, rock climbing, food, live music and farm equipment on display. Popular events include truck pulls, the 4-H

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youth livestock auction and horse show. For many in the farming and ranching community, the Fair provides an opportunity to showcase projects and hobbies such as quilting, pies and raising animals.

"We are hopeful that this event will return in its usual form next year," says 33rd District Agricultural Association President, Paul Rovella, "Right now our board and staff are working hard to offer a modified, but still meaningful Fair experience this October." Offerings will include a Virtual Market Livestock Show and Sale, so that youth who have been raising animals all year can still show and sell their animals. The Salinas Valley Online Junior Livestock Auction raised over \$1 Million to support 4-H and FFA (Future Farmers of America) ag education projects raised in San Luis Obispo, Monterey,

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The San Benito County Saddle Horse Show and Rodeo began in 1929. Photo: Karminder Brown

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Santa Cruz and San Benito counties.

In July, Bolado Park hosted a successful, first-ever drive-thru Fair Food event in support of the fairgrounds and vendors who have been hit hard by the pandemic, and another drive-thru Fair Food event took place in August.

"We have started putting together a plan for a drive-through and virtual fair experience that will showcase our sponsors and local businesses in creative ways. We also plan to have an opportunity to show your art, crafts, photos and quilts on our virtual media pages," CEO and Fair Manager Dara Tobias wrote in a June letter to the community. "You just may be able to dunk tank your favorite local politician from your sunroof! Please save the original October 1st - 4th dates and stay tuned for more information."

As always, the 2020 Fair will rely heavily

on volunteers. For more information on how to help keep traditions alive, visit [www.sanbenitocountyfair.com](http://www.sanbenitocountyfair.com) and follow San Benito County Fair on Facebook.

The mission of the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust (SBALT) is to conserve lands that sustain productive agriculture, preserve open space and maintain the rural character of the county. Learn more at [www.sanbenitolandtrust.com](http://www.sanbenitolandtrust.com).



The County Fair teaches children about agriculture. Photo by Karminder Brown