

The Oceana County Fair



Oceana's
HERALD-JOURNAL

Thursday, August 13, 2026



Oceana County Fair: Where Traditions Grow

For more than 150 years, the Oceana County Fair has celebrated agriculture, family and community

The Oceana County Fair doesn't begin when the gates open.

It begins with the smell of fresh straw in the livestock barns, the clatter of trailers arriving with cattle, sheep, goats, rabbits and horses, and volunteers putting the finishing touches on exhibits that have taken months to prepare. Soon, the aroma of elephant ears, popcorn and grilled onions drifts across the fairgrounds as the midway comes alive with flashing lights, laughter and the squeals of children experiencing their favorite rides.

Inside the barns and exhibit halls, judges carefully examine livestock, home-grown produce, quilts, baked goods, photography, woodworking and hundreds of other projects representing months — and often an entire year — of preparation. Nearby, the sound of harness horses on the track mingles with cheers from the grandstand as fairgoers gather for tractor pulls, demolition derbies and one of Michigan's oldest county fair traditions.

Now celebrating its 155th year, the Oceana County Fair traces its roots to 1872, when the Oceana County Agricultural Society organized the county's first

agricultural fair. While carnival rides, grandstand entertainment and favorite fair foods have become part of the tradition, the fair's heart remains the young people whose livestock, exhibits and projects showcase months of dedication and hard work.

For Kristen Bisard, fair week is about much more than ribbons.

"It's making new friends and reuniting with old friends," she said. "It's crock pots full of food for anyone hungry, and coolers of water that the kids get scolded for wasting in water fights."

The fair also has its emotional moments. "It's teary eyes when it's time to say goodbye to the animals kids have come to love," Bisard said.

Longtime 4-H member and Oceana County Fair exhibitor Lillian Wasson described fair week as the reward for months of preparation.

"My favorite part of participating at the fair is being able to show off the dedication and effort I've put into my projects," Wasson said. "From early mornings working with my animals to preparing exhibits and decorations, it all leads up to fair week."

For Sami Weesies, one of the fair's greatest rewards is watching young people discover those same experiences.

"Our kids work on their projects year-round, especially their animal projects," Weesies said. "Each animal has their own special personality, and the kids definitely form a special bond with them over the year."

While livestock remains a cornerstone of the fair, the Youth Exhibit Building also showcases paintings, photography, woodworking, sewing, baked goods, canned foods, science projects and dozens of

other exhibits created by local youth.

"There are so many different activities and opportunities available in the 4-H program," Bisard said. "There is something for everyone."

Beginning Aug. 23, another generation will add its own chapter to a tradition that has brought Oceana County families together for more than a century and a half.

For Bisard, the fair is best summed up in one sentence.

"There's nothing quite like growing up a fair kid."

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202 N Rath Ave., P.O. Box 340, Ludington, MI 49431
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(231) 873-5602 • (231) 873-4775 fax

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10 Can't-Miss Fair Traditions

From livestock shows to grandstand excitement, here are 10 experiences that make the 155th Oceana County Fair a summer tradition

1 Meet the 4-H Exhibitors

The heart of the Oceana County Fair is its youth. Watch livestock competitions, visit with exhibitors and see the dedication that goes into raising animals and completing projects throughout the year.

2 Tour the Youth & Educational Building

From photography and artwork to baking, canning, sewing, woodworking, flowers and science projects, the exhibit building showcases the creativity and talents of local youth and adult exhibitors.

3 Cheer on the Large Market Livestock Auction

One of the fair's signature traditions begins at 7 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 27, when local businesses, organizations and community members bid in support of area youth. It's more than an auction—it's a celebration of months of hard work and dedication.

4 Watch the Harness Horse Races



A longtime fair tradition, harness racing takes place at 4 p.m. Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, with free grandstand admission.

5 Catch the Grandstand Action

The grandstand features something different throughout the week, including the Bump-N-Run/Figure 8 on Wednesday at 7 p.m., the Tom Oomen Memorial West Michigan Pullers Tractor Pull on Friday at 7 p.m. and the Demolition Derby on Saturday at 6 p.m.

6 Ride the Midway

Elliott's Amusements opens the midway Tuesday at 5 p.m., followed by 2 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday and 1 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Wristband

specials are available each day.



7 Stay for the Fireworks

Following the midway's opening day, the Tuesday at dusk fireworks display is one of the week's favorite family traditions.

8 Join the Ag Olympics

Kids 19 and younger are invited to take part in the Ag Olympics at 1 p.m. Saturday in the Large Arena. The event features agriculture-themed games, fun and prizes, making it a favorite for young fairgoers.



9 Savor the Fair Food

Whether it's an elephant ear, fresh-squeezed lemonade, popcorn or another favorite fair treat, no trip to the fair is complete without sampling the food.

10 Make a Memory

Whether you're cheering on a young exhibitor, reconnecting with neighbors, introducing a child to the midway for the first time or simply enjoying the sights and sounds of the fairgrounds, the best tradition of all is making memories that last long after fair week ends.



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Readers' Choice

Livestock Auction: Investing in the Next Generation

For more than 50 years, the Oceana County Fair's livestock auction has rewarded hard work while investing in local youth

BY LOIS TOMASZEWSKI
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

For many young exhibitors, the Large Market Livestock Auction isn't the end of fair week. It's the finish line after months of raising, feeding and caring for an animal they lead into the sale ring.

Since 1970, the annual auction has celebrated the dedication of young exhibitors while giving local businesses, organizations and community members an opportunity to invest in the next generation. Last year, 134 exhibitors participated in Oceana County's three market auctions, generating a record \$441,474.18 in sales.

What began with market steers has grown to include market beef, swine, sheep and goats, making the auction one of the fair's signature traditions.

Event: Large Market
Livestock Auction

Date: Thursday, Aug. 27

Time: 7 p.m.

Location: Grandstand

Admission: Free

Longtime Hart buyer Gayle Forner has supported the auction since its first year.

"It was steers only," Forner recalled in an earlier interview. "As far as I am con-

cerned, it is what makes the fair great."

Longtime 4-H member and Oceana County Fair exhibitor Lillian Wasson said the auction represents the reward for months of preparation.

"My favorite part of participating at the fair is being able to show off the dedication and effort I've put into my projects," Wasson said. "From early mornings working with my animals to preparing exhibits and decorations, it all leads up to fair week."

Kristen Bisard said the auction is her favorite fair event.

"My favorite event is the 4-H Large Livestock Auction," she said. "It has been a longstanding tradition in our county. I love to see local businesses come together to support these kids."

"The kids are always dressed to impress and they're so excited about the event," Bisard said.

Interested in Buying?

Anyone can participate in the Oceana County Fair's Large Market Livestock Auction. Businesses, organizations, families and first-time buyers are welcome.

Before the auction begins, buyers register and receive a bidder number. Volunteers are available to answer questions and explain the bidding process.

After purchasing an animal, buyers have several options, including taking ownership, arranging for meat processing, reselling the animal through the market or, in some cases, donating the meat to a charitable organization.

Those interested in becoming a buyer or learning more about the auction can contact the Oceana County MSU Extension Office before fair week.

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The Oceana County Fair SC

SUNDAY, AUGUST 23, 206

NO MIDWAY

4 p.m. — Harness horse races (free grandstand admission)

6 p.m. — Work Bee at the 4-H/Youth barns

MONDAY, AUGUST 24, 2026

ENTRY DAY — NO MIDWAY

Youth entries must be submitted by 5 p.m.
Adult entries must be submitted by 7 p.m.

4 p.m. — Harness Horse Races (free grandstand admission)

*Haul-in day for all livestock except draft and light horses.
Draft and light horses may also arrive if desired.*

TUESDAY, AUGUST 25, 2026

8 a.m. — Swine showmanship, breeding and 4-H market classes (Hog/Lamb/Goat Barn)

9 a.m. — Youth and Educational Building judging (buildings closed until judging is complete)

4 p.m. — Harness horse races (free grandstand admission)

4 p.m. — Sheep showmanship, breeding and 4-H market classes, including the market goat class (Hog/Lamb/Goat Barn)

5 p.m. — Midway opens with Elliott's Amusements (\$20 wristbands)

Dusk — Fireworks by Elliott's Amusements

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26, 2026

Senior Citizen, Veteran and Handicap Day

8:30 a.m. — Beef showmanship, breeding and 4-H market classes (Large Arena)

9 a.m. — Poultry showmanship (Rabbit and Poultry Barn)

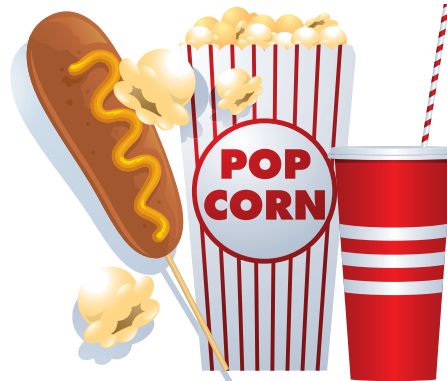
Noon to 1 p.m. — Handicap-assisted rides

2 p.m. — Midway opens with Elliott's Amusements (\$22 wristbands)

3 p.m. — Draft horse halter, ponies, mules and cross classes (Large Arena)

6:30 p.m. — Draft horse driving classes (Large Arena)

7 p.m. — Bump-N-Run/Figure 8 (Grandstand)
• Adults: \$15
• Children 12 and younger: \$5



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SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

THURSDAY, AUGUST 27, 2026

- 9 a.m. — Dairy cattle judging, youth and open (Large Arena)
- 9 a.m. — Goat youth and open showmanship, breed and 4-H market classes (Hog/Lamb/Goat Barn)
- 10 a.m. — Rabbit youth and open showmanship, breeds and 4-H market classes (Rabbit and Poultry Barn)
- 1 p.m. — Drive a Draft (open to all) (Infield Horse Arena)
- 2 p.m. — Midway opens with Elliott's Amusements (\$22 wristbands)
- 6:45 p.m. — Presentation of the Oceana County 4-H Ambassadors (free grandstand admission)
- 7 p.m. — 4-H Market Livestock Auction featuring beef, swine, sheep and goats (free grandstand admission)

FRIDAY, AUGUST 28, 2026

- 9 a.m. — English and Western riding classes (Infield Arena)
- 1 p.m. — Midway opens with Elliott's Amusements (\$25 wristbands)
- 1 p.m. — Draft riding classes (Large Arena)
- 1:30 p.m. — Draft log pulling (Large Arena)
- 2 p.m. — Heavyweight horse pull (free grandstand admission)
- 4 p.m. — Cow trail classes and costume class (Large Arena)
- 7 p.m. — Tom Oomen Memorial West Michigan Pullers Tractor Pull
 - Adults: \$10
 - Children 12 and younger: \$5

SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 2026

- 10 a.m. — Grand Slam Showmanship (begins at the Rabbit and Poultry Barn and continues to the Large Arena)
- 10 a.m. — Horse Games (Infield Arena)
- 1 p.m. — Midway opens with Elliott's Amusements (\$25 wristbands)
- 1 p.m. — Ag Olympics (Large Arena; all children welcome)
- 5 p.m. — Small Animal and Junior Market Auction (Large Arena)
- 6 p.m. — Demolition Derby
 - Adults: \$20
 - Children 12 and younger: \$10





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Tom Oomen's legacy powers one of the fair's biggest nights

Annual tractor pull combines horsepower with a tribute to a longtime farmer, competitor and community leader

BY LOIS TOMASZEWSKI
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Fans of horsepower will have plenty to cheer about Friday when the Tom Oomen Memorial West Michigan Pullers Tractor Pull returns to the Oceana County Fair.

The 7 p.m. grandstand event has become one of the fair's marquee attractions, drawing competitors from across Michigan to test the strength of their tractors and trucks by pulling a weighted sled down a dirt track. This year's competition features seven classes, ranging from 6,200-pound Modified

Gas Trucks to 12,000-pound Field Farm Tractors.

While the event showcases powerful machines and skilled drivers, it also serves as a tribute to one of Oceana County's best-known farmers and tractor pull competitors.

Thomas "Tom" Oomen, a lifelong Hart-area resident, spent decades farming asparagus while earning a reputation throughout Michigan's pulling community. He and his family campaigned their International Harvester tractor, "The Bad Oomen," for approximately 30 years, collecting multiple state and regional championships and qualify-

ing three times for the National Farm Machinery Show Championship Tractor Pull in Louisville, Kentucky.

Outside the pulling arena, Oomen was equally well known in Michigan agriculture. He served on several state asparagus organizations, the Oceana County Farm Bureau, the Crystal Valley Fire Department and as a Crystal Township trustee, earning respect for his leadership and commitment to the community.

Following his death in January 2022, the Oceana County Fair renamed the annual tractor pull in Oomen's honor, recognizing his lasting impact on agri-

culture, the sport of tractor pulling and the fair itself.

This year's event features competition in seven classes:

- 6,500-pound Light Limited Super Stock Tractor
- 6,200-pound Modified Gas Truck
- 9,300-pound Super Farm Tractor
- 8,000-pound Hot Diesel Truck
- 8,200-pound Street Diesel Truck
- 8,200-pound Pro Street Diesel Truck
- 12,000-pound Field Farm Tractor

The tractor pull begins at 7 p.m. Friday, Aug. 28, in the grandstand. Admission is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children 12 and younger.

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Fair Tips from Fair Veterans



- Wear comfortable shoes. You'll walk more than you think.
- Visit the barns early. Animals are often being groomed and prepared for judging.
- Don't rush through the exhibit buildings. Some of the fair's best displays are indoors.
- Bring cash and a card. Not every vendor accepts electronic payment.
- Stay hydrated. August afternoons can be hot.
- Talk to a 4-H exhibitor. Most are happy to explain their projects.

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Quick Facts

- 155th Oceana County Fair
- Dates: Aug. 23-29
- Location: 1025 S. State St., Hart
- Gate admission: \$5
- Founded: 1872
- Market Livestock Auction: Thursday, Aug. 27, 7 p.m.
- Midway: Elliott's Amusements
- Website: oceanacountyfair.com

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