

Director's Letter to 4-H Families: Looking Forward

Available February 22, 2021

Dear SD4-H Families,

Positive youth development teaches us that youth appreciate meaningful experiences, but they also need the ability to *look forward to them*. The act of looking forward builds enthusiasm and motivation while strengthening mental health. To that end, we know that many of our 4-H youth are looking for a 'best guess' of what the next several months will look like in South Dakota 4-H. Though COVID-19 is ever evolving and there are no guarantees, here is our best forecast as of today.

Near-term (best guess: now through early May)

- As an SDSU subordinate, SD4-H follows SDSU COVID-19 safety standards. We anticipate SDSU remaining at safety level 'orange' throughout the near-term period (see <https://www.sdstate.edu/jacksrback/covid-19-safety-levels> for general details). For the next few months, we will continue leaning heavily on virtual platforms and gather in-person (with appropriate modifications) when the event type requires it.
 - Common indoor safety requirements include face coverings, physical distancing, regular handwashing, and staying home when symptomatic.
- All in-person national 4-H events are cancelled. Some virtual replacement events (e.g., National 4-H Conference) are emerging.
- Many tribal and school partners are closed to 4-H programming at this time. Where available, our professionals are adapting to serve these audiences virtually (e.g., Adopt-a-cow).
- Depending on county facility and volunteer constraints, the Shooting Sports program is currently operating under a low density model. Plans continue toward offering State Spring Shoot in late April with appropriate modifications.
- Behind-the-scenes your 4-H professionals are contributing to some exciting 'get ahead' type work, including a new teen financial management program, career exploration series, and civic education curriculum. This important work will pay dividends for many years to come.

Mid-term (best guess: early May through mid-August)

- We are *moderately* optimistic SDSU will see enough vaccine uptake (and other factors) to migrate to the safety level 'yellow' stage later this spring. As a result, we are far along in our planning for in-person, lower density overnight events such as Teen Leadership Conference and summer camps.
- As of today, some in-person national 4-H events remain on the docket (e.g., Shooting Sports Natl. Championship, Natl. Land and Range) while others have been virtualized (e.g., Citizenship Washington Focus) or cancelled.

- At the county level, SD4-H professionals are planning for a covid sensitive summer slate, which aligns with SDSU's likely move to the 'yellow' safety level. For counties who were virtual only last summer, this summer will feel more open as in-person events will exist with appropriate modifications. For counties whose events were mostly in-person last summer, this summer will feel mildly more open (especially with crowds). Many counties will continue offering a virtual option for the 4-H components that were well received virtually last summer.
- We encourage wise purchasing of 4-H project animals for the 2021 season. There are no guarantees that we will be 'fully normal,' so the number of animals you purchase should be conservative. This is another good year to focus on project depth rather than breadth (that goes for display projects too!).

Far-term (best guess: mid-August+)

- We are *cautiously* optimistic SDSU will migrate toward safety level 'green' by this time. Because most events occurring in the late summer or early fall require significant pre-planning, those events are being planned with a 'yellow' level mindset just in case. So, presume that you will still see a few, appropriate safety modifications at far-term events like State Fair.
- We anticipate State Fair events will occur in-person for all youth age groups. As mentioned earlier, please focus on project depth this year—bring your best! Some virtual opportunities may continue in topic areas that were held successfully using virtual platforms last year.
 - We currently plan to *increase* State Fair participation limits to the following levels: up to 4 exhibits per event (e.g., 4 display projects, 4 sheep); 12 total exhibits per person in the 4-H division
- At the county level, we anticipate in-person tribal and school partnerships re-start in most locations once the new school year begins.
- Assuming other states ramp up their vaccination protocols in line with the early successes here in South Dakota, we anticipate in-person national 4-H events resume. The first prominent 'test case' to watch will be National 4-H Congress in late November (SD4-H does not currently participate which makes it a nice test).

In closing

The 4-H spirit of making the best better is an incredible thing to behold! Thank you for embracing a 'can do' attitude regardless of whether the plans listed above come to pass. In the meantime, please continue caring for yourselves and your communities. We are not quite out of the woods yet and it will take all of us doing our part in the months to come.

Looking forward,

Tim Tanner

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Director, South Dakota 4-H Program

p.s.—if, like me, you are excited to look beyond the pandemic era, please participate in one of our upcoming Vision 2025 listening sessions (March 2 or 11). Find out more at:

<https://extension.sdstate.edu/event/sd-4-h-statewide-listening-sessions>