

Sanders County Fair Board  
Meeting Minutes  
September 10, 2025  
Fair Pavilion, 30 River Rd, Plains MT

Called to order at 6:09 pm by Randy Woods

Present: Randy Woods, Brian Crain, Jim Newman, Rick Sanders, Kristy Sheehan

Also Present: Ed Moreth, Wendy Carr, Michelle McGuigan, Dan Rowan, Lisa Kinser

Approval of Minutes from the August 13, 2025 Meeting: Motion to approve the minutes made by Jim Newman, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Brian Crain – Motion Passed

**NON-AGENDA:** Randy Woods called for public comments on Non-agenda items - None

**OLD BUSINESS:** None

**NEW BUSINESS:** Randy Woods started with a letter from Taylor Salmi with the Hope for Harlee Foundation Burger Booth. The letter read as follows:

September 9, 2025

Dear Sanders County Fair Board Members,

On behalf of Hope for Harlee Foundation, I write to express concern about changes in the fair's food vendor environment and to urge the Board to reaffirm policies that support local organizations and nonprofits. Although we immensely appreciate the opportunity we have been given to run the hamburger booth, if more and more food vendors/trucks continue to come in offering the same products it will become an unsustainable fundraiser for the foundation, which would be heartbreaking for us!

For years, county fairs have been an essential community venue where nonprofits raise funds and engage with neighbors. Hope for Harlee relies on the fair to support our programs; this year, however, our ability to do so was severely compromised. We experienced a reduction in sales of more than 50% compared with previous years. Had 100% of our product not been donated we would have lost approximately \$6,000. We believe this drop was driven in large part by the proliferation of food trucks and multiple booths selling the same items—there were six other booths selling burgers at this year's fair. When we began participating in 2021, there was a firm emphasis on avoiding duplicate food offerings among vendors; that principle appears to have eroded.

While lower attendance and economic pressures may have contributed, however, according to the newspaper article this was not a factor; the changing vendor mix is clearly spreading customers thinner and displacing nonprofits. Historically, nonprofits made up the majority of food vendors; this year there are only three nonprofit booths remaining. That trend undermines the fair's role as a community-centered event and diminishes a reliable fundraising platform for local causes. The fair has in recent years disregarded the no compete that used to exist to protect everyone's business at the fair which I think would be the easiest and most appropriate solution.

We respectfully request the Board consider one or more of the following actions:

- Reestablish and enforce guidelines that limit duplication of menu items among food vendors
- Cap the number of commercial food trucks and prioritize space for nonprofit and community-run booths
- Reserve a meaningful percentage of food-vendor slots for nonprofits to ensure community benefit and engagement
- Reduce the cost for nonprofit organizations from 20% of gross to a lower percentage or a flat fee compared to for profit food vendors

Hope for Harlee Foundation would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns and possible solutions with the Board in person. We want the Sanders County Fair to thrive as a place where communities support nonprofits and nonprofits can successfully engage the public. I do appreciate all the volunteer hours that all of you put in and that goes into putting on such an incredible fair for all of us to enjoy, I am just hoping

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me at 406-529-8947 or [hope4harlee@gmail.com](mailto:hope4harlee@gmail.com) to arrange a meeting.

Taylor Salmi, President & Harlee's Mom  
Hope for Harlee Foundation

The board did say that the numbers were down this year from last year in every booth, not just this booth. Kristy said that she looked up how many food vendors had burgers on their menu and there were four of them, but they were not their main course. Kristy stated that she will be stricter on what people have, but we cannot only have one booth that serves burgers. As for bringing in more of the nonprofit booths and community run booths, we have tried that in the past and it never worked because they could not find anyone to help at them so they would not come back the following year. Kristy said that she is willing to open it up to more of the nonprofits to come in and use the booths if they would like to. Michelle McGuigan stated that she had a commercial vendor booth and her numbers were down from last year. She stated that she thinks that it is the economy and that people were not spending the money this year. Taylor had asked in her letter if the board would consider lowering the percentage for the nonprofit groups. Brian Crain asked Kristy to contact other fairs to see what they charge their food vendors and if it is any different for their nonprofit groups.

Michelle McGuigan wanted to let the board know that she received feedback from contestants about the hospitality tent food and the \$100 Tough Enough to Wear Pink Payout on Friday nights. They both are very appreciated by the contestants. Michelle asked if she could have an extra hand down at the gates, especially if the wind is blowing, because many times it is required of her to let go of one gate to open the other one, then it is hard to get back hold of the other gate quickly. Michelle also asked if we could try to get more Rodeo Queens in so that we are able to run sponsorship flags. Kristy stated that it could easily be done with one queen, but she was not given the chance from the stock contractor. Michelle asked if the fair could invest in a couple of flagpoles so we can put our big sponsor flags on them so we are ready to go for when we need them.

Dan Rowan spoke and asked how the water system was during the fair. Kristy let him know that she has been having trouble with the water system all summer with pipes breaking. During the Wednesday that the vendors were setting up the water had to be shut off to repair 2 broken pipes. Dan asked if the fairgrounds could look into replacing the bridge walk from the main side grandstands over to the North Bleachers. It had to be repaired before the rodeo on Thursday and is unsafe to be used. Dan also asked if we could put dirt over the areas where the tree trunks are sticking up out of the ground, especially in the beer garden area.

Jim Newman asked if anyone has heard any feedback about the Demo Derby. Kristy said that she had complaints about them not being organized and people saying that it was not worth watching. Other board members said the opposite, that they heard good feedback about it. The only problem they said they had was that no one could hear the announcer on what was going on. There were 38 cars total in the demo derby and the board thought that it was well received with it being the first year of having the new promoter.

Randy Woods submitted a list of things that he thought needs to be done or be repaired in the future.

- \* Water in livestock pens down fence on south side and sprinklers inside pens
- \* Power RV pedestal behind west bleachers, outlets on outside of secretary office each a different circuit
- \* West bleacher maintenance
- \* bucking chute maintenance
- \* Concrete slab to put tent over possibly add permanent cover
- \* Hospitality tent organization
- \* Fence off exit road from rodeo/demo parking so 4-h/others cannot park there
- \* New bleaches above chutes
- \* IT on-call contract for week of fair and test before we need it

- \* No generator on food trucks advise them what they need plug-in
- \* Light towers south field and overflow across road
- \* More lighting at main gate loading area
- \* Hood repair in island noodle stand missing parts
- \* Sewer cover broken needs repair properly for cowboy shower
- \* Security contract change hours
- \* Carnival contract garbage and toilet
- \* How to manual for fair
- \* Main courses duplicated food
- \* Sound system in arena

Kristy added that the South Bleachers need repaired and painted. She also stated that the deck on the bucking chute seating area would need to have some broken boards replaced in it. There has been a request for the announcers stand be put in the middle of the seating area and made bigger so that it is more comfortable for everyone to work out of. Kristy said that this will take time for this list to be done because we do not have it in the budget to do all of the repairs needed on the grounds.

Brian added that we needed to have the rough stock riders without trailer's park somewhere other than where the horse trailers park. The cars are just taking up to much area and taking parking away from the horse trailers. He also said that we need to put a walk through gate where you go from the 4-H area to the back parking area to keep vendors from driving through it. Rick said that he would also like a walk through gate on the fence where the Demo Derby cars park leading to a walk through gate where the cars come in at on Sunday. Kristy also said that she would like a walk through gate at the main entrance gate so we can lock the drive through gates so people stop driving on the grounds.

**DR Leaf Machine:** Kristy asked if the fair could purchase a DR Leaf machine for the mower that Derek uses. Dan Rowan said that they would also like one for the Court House. He submitted a print out of what they would like and would be willing to go in on it with the fairgrounds if the board was interested in it. Kristy agreed to going in with the Court House on the machine if we could work out the shuttle back and fourth of it. A motion made to approve the purchase of a DR Leaf Lawn Vacuum by Jim Newman, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Brian Crain – Motion Passed

**4-H Report:** Wendy Carr said that the 4-H sale was one of the biggest that they have had even with less steers available. Wendy would like to have the PA system in the Crow's Nest looked at because it was not working during the 4-H Shows. She asked if the 4-H could have a designated area on the Thursday of fair to put their trail course up. The area this year was not big enough with the semi-trailers for the concert parked where they were. Kristy said that she would have to look into a different parking situation for the trailers if Joel wanted to do the concerts again in the future. Wendy had asked Kristy if she could ask the vendors to stay out of the 4-H side on Wednesday of the fair because it is too congested with trailers in unloading the animals. Kristy let her know that she will work on a map for the vendors letting them know where they need to park and what gate to come into to unload their products. Kristy will do the same with the Food Vendors so that they know where they can drive and what time they need to be done stocking in the mornings.

Wendy brought up the dog situation on the grounds and asked what our policy is to having dogs on the ground during the fair. Kristy said that there are no dogs allowed on the grounds except for service dogs. Wendy was concerned about the service dogs even being in the barns and around the animals. There was a couple of incidents at the fair this year with service dogs, so both sides are going to be looking into the law that we have to abide by with service dogs.

**Fair Managers Report:** Kristy supplied the board with the Security Report from the fair. It looks like it was helpful to have them here. She did say that she is going to be changing the contract to have Security come in a lot earlier in the day. The board said that they heard of complaints about no law enforcement being on the grounds, but that is out of the fairs hands if they do not show up voluntarily. The Sheriff's office stated to the fair that they would only be on the grounds if called.

Kristy reported on the sponsorships that she received in for the rodeo this year. We had a total of \$64,889.15 in sponsorships, which is \$10,000 more than last year. Kristy had businesses come in the week before fair wanting to sponsor the rodeo, which is good.

Kristy gave the Income and Expense report of the fair to the board. The Rodeo made #15,240.80 and had great attendance every night of the rodeo. The Demolition Derby was another sold out crowd and made \$53,500. The Food and Commercial Vendors brought in \$76,531.95; the Parking brought in \$36,114.15; and the carnival presale ticket brought in \$21,802.40. The fair lost money in the open class area and in the parade area of the fair. Kristy is still waiting for a bill to come in and a couple of food vendor payments to come in before she can finalize the report, but as of right now the fair has made \$136,295.86.

**CLAIMS:** Jim Newman asked if all of the claims were in the 2025 Income and Expense report. Kristy said that they were and all of the numbers are current. Motion to approve Claims made by Brian Crain, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Rick Sanders – Motion Passed

**FINANCIALS:** Kristy stated that the financial report was in the negative because not all of the deposits from the fair were showing on the report. The report will be current on the September Financial Report at the meeting in October. Motion to approve financials made by Brian Crain, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Jim Newman – Motion Passed

**ADJOURNMENT:** Motion to adjourn made by Brian Crain, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Rick Sanders – Motion Passed

**8:07 pm adjourn**