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Stirling Fair highlight of agricultural year

Farming still area's lifeblood

By Bill Hunt
 Staff Writer

There is something gratifying about working the land.

The hard work and long hours that go with that way of life show on the tanned, weather-worn skin and taut muscles of most farmers.

That lifestyle is the blood line of Stirling. The village is home to the regional office of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food — an indication of the soil's importance here.

"It's great agricultural land," says local dairy farmer Garry Thompson, president of the Stirling Agricultural Society.

The community's relationship with the land is show-cased in the Agricultural Society's annual fair. Organizing this event is the society's main function.

Members are not all farmers, one is a barber, another is in the retail business. But their fortunes lie with the village.

Today many communities have abandoned the agricultural side of fairs for the more dramatic spectacles made possible with expensive machinery and bright lights. But Stirling's existence has always centred on farm life and the village has maintained its allegiance to that, although its automobile competitions and amusement rides ensure it doesn't lag behind the times.

The fair gives local residents and their livestock a chance to put their best foot (or hoof) forward. Competitions run the gamut of beasts from horses to ponies, cattle, goats, sheep and poultry. There are light and heavy horse drawing contests as well as pony drawing competitions and ponyraces. The latter includes a games division that includes such things as an award



Our Town photo by Bill Hunt

Local dairy farmer Garry Thompson, is president of the Stirling Agricultural Society.

for "the best costume for a person on a horse," explains Thompson.

Judges decide on the best made cheese, honey products and culinary dishes such as pies, bread, cookies and cakes. Locally made crafts are also judged and prizes awarded. Other exhibits include photography, quilting, home canning, seeds, flowers, public school displays and an arts and hobbies section. The latter covers such arts as painting, wood carving, jewelry making and more.

The biggest crowd pleasers are the automotive competitions.

On Friday night they have the Hell Drivers, on Saturday night spectators try to avoid the mud pies hurled their way by the mud drag racing cars and on Sunday night the demolition derby wages automobile war.

Country music (naturally) is also a feature of the fair. This year the band Billy the Kid and the Wild West Show will have people kicking up their heels throughout the three day event. There will also be John Homeniuk's amusement rides, which Th-

ompson believes will be quite impressive.

Thompson is the third generation to work his 218-acre Brad-Lee Farm, north-east of Stirling, off Moira Road. It is possible his great-grandfather also earned his living off the same soil, although Thompson can't be sure of that. Inheriting the family farm is common in this field of work. Thompson's son, Bradley, also works on the farm and will likely continue doing so after his father retires.

Although dairy farming is most prevalent, beef and cash crops such as wheat, oats, barley and corn are also raised here. There are even a few hog farms, says Thompson.

Stirling Agricultural Society is as representative of the village as the covered bridge that greets visitors entering it. This year the fair begins the evening of Aug. 13 and runs through Aug. 15. and everyone's invited

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