



June 5-9, 2024  
It's A Barnyard Mardi Gras  
35th District Agricultural Association



## Merced County Fair Historical Timeline

1891 – The first Merced County Fair (MCF) representing districts of Merced and Mariposa counties was held.

1929 – The first MCF “as we know it today” was held at the old Municipal Baseball Park (Applegate Park); the Merchants’ Association sponsored the Fair until 1931, featuring a rodeo and small 4-H livestock show.

1931 – The Merced County Fair moves to its current location on 11<sup>th</sup> and G streets.

1936 – Due to financial hardships, the Fair was not held this year.

1937 – Thanks to support from local businesses, the Fair resumes as the Merced-Mariposa Fair featuring a parade, a three-day horse racing program, livestock show, farm exhibits and a Hollywood Revue

1938 – MCF begins charging 25 cents for admission. Kids 12 and under were able to get in for free.

1941 – The Fairgrounds and facilities were leased by Federal government to serve as an assembly center for more than 5,000 Japanese internees who had been ordered to report for relocation. They stayed until August 1942, when most were taken by train to an internment camp in Colorado.

1942 – The Fair resumes; however, it did not include many agriculture exhibits as farmers were too busy growing food to help feed the nation. The smaller 1942 Fair consisted solely of livestock, poultry and flower displays; it was held only during daylight hours because of the wartime curfew and blackout restrictions. There would not be another Fair held until after the war.

1946 – The Merced County Fairgrounds was turned over to the 35th District Agricultural Association, part of the California Department of Food & Agriculture. That year, the Fair had a record-breaking attendance of 30,000 people.

1947 – The National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis had an operative iron lung on display at its booth at the Fair; all during the polio epidemic.

1948 – In 1948, Betty Hansen Rouff, described as a "pert 19-year-old Los Banos housewife" was selected Queen of the Fair. Her prize for winning was an all-expense paid trip to Hollywood and an appearance on the "Queen for a Day" radio program.

1949 – To ensure that all local baseball teams had an up-to-date baseball field where they could play night games, a park was constructed at 11th and G streets at a cost of \$50,000. Dedicated in 1949, the biggest impetus for the new baseball field was provided by the Merced Bears, "champions of the San Joaquin Valley," who had previously played all their home games in Atwater during the 1948 season.

1963 – The Merced College got its start at the Fairgrounds.



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1977 – The contents of the J. Emmett McNamara Memorial Museum were moved to the Old Courthouse Building.

1986 – For the first three weeks of the school year, 650 students and staff of Leontine Gracey School held classes at the Fairgrounds while their new school was finished.

2008 – Fundraising campaign for the construction of a new 33,800 sq. ft. barn for livestock exhibits began.

2016 – Construction of the 33,800 sq. ft. Hilmar Cheese Barn is completed; providing a much-needed venue for the Fair's annual livestock exhibits and many more events year-round.

2020 – The Merced County Fair announces its selection by the California Department of Food & Agriculture (CDFA) Fairs & Expositions to receive funding from the State's \$3 million of general fund monies allocated through the Budget Act of 2018, Control Section 6.10. The Merced County Fair received \$798,950 to install a new heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system in the fair's Pavilion building.

2020 – The Merced County Fair, which was to be held June 10 – 14, cancels amid COVID-19 public health concerns. However, the fair moves forward with plans to hold a virtual Jr. Livestock Auction which took place in June, plus drive-thru Fair Food Favorites events.

2022 – The Merced County Fair returned to an in-person fair after a two-year hiatus filled with carnival rides, live music, action-packed Grandstand shows, community performers, still and livestock exhibits and fair food! The community showed up in big numbers to welcome back this beloved tradition. This year, the fairgrounds also served the community in a different way –The fairgrounds also served as a staging site for the devastating Oak Fire

2023 – The fairgrounds were once again activated for emergency response, this time as an evacuation site for residents and their animals during the tragic flooding in Planada and Merced in January. Then in August, CDFA awarded a \$5 million grant to the Merced County Fair as part of its Fairgrounds Resilience Center grant program to improve the fairgrounds facilities to enhance the state's emergency preparedness capabilities, of which fairgrounds play an integral role.

Help us build the history of the Merced County Fair in more detail! Do you have tidbits of Merced County Fair history you would like to share? Stories to tell? Pictures to show us? If you do, please reach out and tell us all about it at [info@MercedCountyFair.com](mailto:info@MercedCountyFair.com).