

A contemporary perspective of fairs and some trends is presented in part five. The chapter by Virginia Gobeli, "Youth, Fairs, and Experiential Learning," covers the topic that I am most interested in: youth development, incentives and competition, aspects of judging, and experiential learning. This chapter also highlights what is missing throughout the book: critical analysis of what is or is not youth development in county fairs. Fairs place far too much emphasis on competition—especially in livestock—and not enough on youth development. The reward system for most county fairs is based on "winning." Does it matter that the winning lamb or pig was purchased from a "show jockey" for much more money than the animal will ever be worth commercially? Does it matter that the 4-H'er has no knowledge of breeding or genetics? From my experience, knowledge of animal husbandry is seldom used as a criterion in judging. The same can be said about other projects. Fair committees need to continually recommit themselves to youth development. Gobeli's chapter fails to address these critical issues.

Avery's collection of essays tends to focus on an idealized image of county fairs, best captured in the beautiful posters. Her book may itself be another form of county fair promotion rather than a thoughtful analysis of the topic. Clearly this book is worth looking at, but Avery's presentation is too sterile, too institutional, and too bland. Even though 4-H has greatly enriched my family, and we all love going to and participating in our county fair, there is a lot of frustration with the primal focus on winning rather than youth development. This problem is not unique to Iowa. Avery's book would be much more important if it would have at least attempted to address that issue.

On Firm Ground, photographs by Larry Kanfer. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001. 122 pp. Photographs, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Reviewer John Deason, a documentary photographer, teaches art and English at Muscatine High School, Muscatine, Iowa. Collections of his photographs have been displayed at the Davenport Museum of Art and Kirkwood Community College. He has recently photographed "lost towns" of Iowa.

On Firm Ground is a coffee-table book of color photographs of rural scenes in the upper Midwest. Larry Kanfer, a photographer based in Champaign, Illinois, has chosen 114 images that present a nostalgic vision of farms and the natural areas surrounding them. Most of the photos are from Illinois, with 16 from Iowa and a few from Wisconsin and Minnesota. There are no people or towns in these shots. The im-

ages were photographed for their beauty: the patterns formed by nature or by row crop plantings, the way early morning light or twilight glow plays off trees, buildings, or landforms. Kanfer's visual formula is to isolate rural objects (fences, barns, tractors, hay bales, elevators, and roads) within the camera's frame using traditional rules of composition. His use of atmosphere, such as fog, dust, or clouds, enhances many shots.

Readers will not find insight into the rural Midwest's historic or current sociological and economic struggles. Kanfer writes about such issues in his introduction, but his photographs do not illustrate them. David Plowden's *A Sense of Place*, which covers the same geographic area, leaves readers with a better understanding of the people who live there. Kanfer obviously has a connection with fellow Illinois color landscape photographer Gary Irving, whose book *Beneath an Open Sky* has a more unified view of the same territory. Kanfer needed to edit some of the deep woods images for a more consistent scope. And he should have eliminated the saccharine titles beneath each image; instead, he could have listed the locations and some contextual information about the scenes. Despite these shortcomings, most of the images are a joy to contemplate. It will reward a viewer to imagine the obstacles Kanfer overcame to capture many of these idyllic scenes.

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