I love going to all of the NH Fairs to give out the Commissioner's Award for the Best Promotion of Agriculture at each of them. Whenever possible, I go on a Saturday or a Sunday, as that is when I can be sure that the 4-H members will be there. While the awards don't always go to a 4-H Club, they do win more often than not. Of course, I could designate someone else in the department to give out the award at various fairs. However, I have found that not only do the recipients appreciate having the Commissioner present the award, but the people running the fairs do as well.

Putting on a fair takes a great deal of commitment on the part of a few people, who are usually volunteers. Having the Commissioner stop by and talk to them about the issues they are facing is important to them. It also gives me a better perspective of what their needs are as well. To me, keeping our fairs going strong is important for the future of agriculture in NH. Without them, children and young adults will lose a critical part of the network with other future farmers that the fairs develop.

After being shut down for a year and then another year of restrictions and hesitancy, I am pleased to report that most of our fairs had a banner year. People were back in record numbers in many cases, and they were willing to spend money, which is a crucial part in bringing vendors back every year. With few exceptions the number of animals at the fairs were also up. I saw fewer empty stalls overall than I had seen pre-pandemic. I have to say that I was concerned about what two years of almost total shut-down would do to membership numbers in 4-H and the FFA, but they seem to be bouncing back nicely.

The one casualty of the pandemic may have been the Stratham Fair, but I think that its demise was inevitable. One of their important parking lots was turned into an athletic field and from what I am told, the organizers were aging out with not enough young blood filling the gaps. Personally, I always thought that the fair was too early in the year and the temperature always seemed too high for me to really enjoy being there. My understanding is that a version of the fair will continue as a limited event for the townspeople.

For eight weekends from July 30 through October 8th you could find me wandering around the fair grounds at our ten fairs. Obviously, the math doesn't work out perfectly, so on two of those weekends I attended two fairs. While I enjoyed them all, it does make for a lot of driving. Between the fairs and a Governor and Council meeting on Mt. Washington I put just over 1000 miles on my truck in 8 days.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the Big-E in Springfield, Massachusetts. The department is in charge of the NH Building on the Fairgrounds. I attended NH Day. The 17-day fair set another attendance record this year, with around 1.7 million people coming through the gates. The vendors in our building always benefit from the huge numbers; I am told that some of them do well over half their yearly sales at the Big-E.

I want to thank everyone who is part of keeping our fairs strong and vibrant and I look forward to doing whatever I can to make sure that all of our NH agricultural fairs receive whatever support the department can provide.

Shawn N. Jasper-Commissioner