

A tough cut for county fairs

Organizers worry over Doyle's plan to stop subsidizing exhibitor prizes

By **SCOTT WILLIAMS**

swilliams@journalsentinel.com

For county fair competitors across the state, producing the prettiest goat or tastiest apple pie might no longer yield a cash prize.

In his plan to close a \$3.2 billion state budget deficit, Gov. Jim Doyle wants to eliminate more than \$500,000 for county fairs to reward top exhibitors.

The prizes are sometimes as small as \$1, but fair organizers said that is incentive enough, especially for children who often spend months grooming their favorite livestock or planning other entries.

"It's their one time to shine in their county," said Sandy Lang, manager of the Washington County Fair.

Many county fair organizers are scrambling to raise money so cash prizes can be

doled out this summer, even without state aid.

Maybe too much emphasis is put on the cash rewards, but that is a small price to pay for keeping youngsters occupied in a wholesome summertime diversion, organizers said.

Taylor County Fair Manager Kathy Jo-chimsen said she views the fair as a way to prevent young people from getting into trouble.

"A little incentive goes a long way," Jo-chimsen said. "Half the kids would say, 'I'm not going to do it if I don't get something out of it.'"

Last year, the state allocated \$555,700 among all 76 county and district fairs in Wisconsin.

State Agriculture Secretary Rod Nilsen-tuen said, however, that kids and other competitors might have to accept that exhibiting livestock or other projects at a county fair is about fun and education — not money.

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