

Episode 6: A fair to remember (Your guide to the 2020 Delaware State Fair)

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Blake Moore:

My name is Blake Moore, Natural Resources and Horticulture agent.

Dan Severson:

Hey, I'm Dan Severson, Ag agent.

Jake Jones:

I'm Jake Jones, Kent County Ag agent.

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And I'm Katie Young, Digital Content Specialist.

Blake Moore:

Welcome to Extension302.

Jake Jones:

So, hi, everyone, and welcome to another episode of the Extension302 podcast. I'm Jake Jones. And today, we are going to talk about the Delaware State Fair. Dan and Blake, do you guys want to say hello?

Dan Severson:

Hello.

Blake Moore:

Good morning.

Jake Jones:

So, joining us today is Doug Crouse, state program leader for 4-H Youth Development. Doug has been with the University of Delaware for almost 20 years and is a graduate of Delaware State University. And he serves as the treasurer on the Delaware State Fair board of directors. Thanks for joining us, Doug, and welcome back to the podcast.

Doug Crouse:

Good Morning, Jake. Thank you for having me this morning.

Dan Severson:

Mr. Crouse, I know it's July so you're on fair overload. Have you ever went to the Delaware State Fair with your family just for fun, not necessarily for work? And, if you did, where would be the first place you would take them?

Doug Crouse:

Well, yes. I have lived in this area all my life. Born and raised in the little town of Felton, moved to the city of Harrington. That's my story of life. But I like Delaware. I like where I live. And, yes. The Delaware State Fair was always on my travels, even growing up as a child and when we had our family. We live two miles from the fairgrounds, so it's just like in our backyard.

Doug Crouse:

When we went out to the fair, we have always appreciated all the exhibits that are out there and how much you can see, and learn, and just marvel at it really because there's so much great stuff going on out there. And, in addition to that, the animal barns were always something that drew our family in too. And our kids always liked seeing, and touching, and learning about the animals. So, that was the two areas that took us. I never was much of a rider on the midway. But we went out there. The kids rode, but that wasn't my thing.

Blake Moore:

So, why is the fair so important to 4-H and FFA members?

Doug Crouse:

This time period of the year, it's the accumulation of everything that's gone on this past year. It's kids, youth that have worked on their 4-H projects and they've prepared exhibits to showcase their work and showcase what they've learned and what they've learned to do. They look forward to bringing all those exhibits into the fair. Just in the 4-H building alone, we usually have close to 10,000 exhibits just in our 4-H section of the buildings. That's a lot of exhibits that were prepared by our youth. And they look forward to bringing those in and receiving judging critiques and all those ribbons.

Doug Crouse:

So, in addition to that, fair week is competition week too. Throughout the year, we have youth that learn things and then prepare for competitions in their counties. And then, based on their level of work and success in that county, they have the opportunity to come to the state fair. And that becomes a county versus county competition. So, we have all three counties that come to fair. And now, our top youth in each of these various competitions compete against each other. And it's a friendly competition, but it's bragging rights out there though. One county wants to come in and tell the other county, we're going to do better than you. But again, it's very friendly, but something even I, as a 4-Her, look forward to. And today, I still see that friendly competition.

Jake Jones:

Doug, we had you on the What is Extension episode of the podcast too. But can we go back and talk about exactly what is 4-H and some of the benefits of joining a 4-H club?

Doug Crouse:

Sure. I, fortunately, have seen many sides of 4-H. I was a 4-H member. And I had a great experience here in Delaware with my 4-H club and my 4-H leader. I always refer to her as my second mom. 4-H is the largest youth development organization in the world currently reaching over six million youth, with a goal to increase that number to ten million by 2025. And that's a large goal. But again, one thing about 4-H is that this program wants to be inclusive of everyone. And we do not hold anyone back. We try to share our program with everyone, find ways to make it possible for anyone to participate. And we do that in a variety of ways. And I think that's what I like about 4-H. 4-H is in the community. It's a strong community base with over a hundred 4-H clubs across the state of Delaware led by just adults who want and have an interest in working with youth.

Doug Crouse:

But we also have other delivery modes. We have 4-H programs in schools, in the afterschool environment. We have 4-H programs in the military. So, we're on the military base as well as working with National Guard families. We do various camps throughout the year. So, we have that overnight camp, as well as those day camps, as well as those weekend camps. And kids love that experience. It's a different type of experience. And we go into schools with various programs. We have a very large embryology program that we take into schools throughout the state.

Doug Crouse:

So, we just do 4-H in so many different ways. And, because of that, we can reach youth in so many different ways. It's all about teaching kids various knowledge about various topic matters, providing them the opportunity to develop life skills. And these are life skills that they'll learn now, but they can use throughout their life.

Doug Crouse:

We pride ourselves, in 4-H, about taking some very strong life skills in leadership, public presentation, in civic engagement. That's three of the primary areas that we work with as we work in our national mandate areas of science and technology, civic engagement, and healthy living. So, there's a lot to do in 4-H, over a hundred different project areas that kids can get involved in. And, if we don't have that project area, we'll even develop it for you or let them develop it on their own as a self determined project.

Doug Crouse:

Let them have the experience to learn, to do, because that is our motto. To make the best better by learning, and doing, and caring. It's a great organization. And we couldn't do it without our volunteers. Gives you a lot of pride to watch kids grow. They go out into the community and become productive citizens and do things. And it's just a great feeling to be part of that.

Jake Jones:

Thank you. I know all of us in Extension see these 4-H kids and can tell they're going to be the next community leaders. So, I think you guys do a great job. And you guys are always so busy too.

Doug Crouse:

We are busy. But I'll tell you, I have one of the best jobs possible. A lot of people say, oh, how could you work with those kids all the time? But there are certain people that should and certain people that

shouldn't. But I love working with kids. Our staff loves working with kids. And it's just a great ability to make those connections and teach those skills to them.

Dan Severson:

Yeah, Doug, that's another good question I'd like to ask is, just think about how many coworkers that you work with that were former 4-H people.

Doug Crouse:

It's very true. I keep telling my staff I'm getting old because now my 4-Hers have 4-Hers in our program. Was just talking to a couple of 4-Hers the other day. It just gives you such a warm feeling to watch these kids that have grown up and become who they are and doing what they're doing. And then, still instilling that learning process, as they get involved in 4-H, either as a staff member or as a volunteer in our organization. It's just a great organization to be part of. But also, it's a great feeling to watch this happen, and watch people grow, and learn, and do.

Dan Severson:

So, Doug, in our introductory question, I asked you about your summertime tradition as the fair and explain why it was so popular to you and your family and how it still continues today. So, what does the fair mean for citizens of Delaware that have... further away from agriculture?

Doug Crouse:

Yeah. I look at the fair as a gathering. There are so many people that look so forward to the fair each and every year, the ability to come to the fairgrounds, to see people that they see all the time, see people that they see sometimes, and then see people they don't see at all, except for the fair. If you walk the fairgrounds, you'll see people there standing, and talking, and catching up. You'll see people that are going through the animal barns and many of many people that don't come in contact with animals at all, except for the Delaware State Fair. So, that's an experience for them and an experience for their kids.

Doug Crouse:

You see individuals that go into the farm machinery lot and see those pieces of farmer machinery up and close, and really get to appreciate that size of that machinery and what it does out on the farm. You see all the displays that are set up at the fair. Such an ability to learn about what's offered throughout our-

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Doug Crouse:

It's such an ability to learn about what's offered throughout Art Estate and how things are done. And of course we can't forget all the exhibits that are out there. It's always great to see what other people have done with their hands and been able to produce. And I guess the final thing, and we can't forget it, it's all the food. There's all kinds of food out at the State Fair and people enjoy that too, but I look at it as a gathering place for people. People talk about the fair all year, there's so much excitement, even this year, if the fair to occur with everything else that's going on, and it would be just detrimental for a lot of people at the fair didn't take place. So they have that pride, they have that sense of community and they want to be there. They want to see people. They want to see what the fair shows them every year. And they just extremely look forward to it each and every year.

Dan Severson:

I always tell my friends and I said you live in Delaware, when you have a camper and you use it one week out of the year, it's for the Delaware State Fair.

Doug Crouse:

And a lot of people do that. That is for sure.

Jake Jones:

All right. So when is the hundred and first Delaware State Fair and what are some of the changes that we'll see?

Doug Crouse:

Well, as we all know, we're living in some very precarious times right now with COVID, the virus, but the fair is scheduled. It's always scheduled for the last week of July. It may go into a day or two in August, but it's always that last week of July. So this year, the fair is July 23rd through August 1st. So it's coming fast and furious. It's just a couple of weeks away. The fair going to be different this year because of our current situation. As you mentioned, I am on the fair board and I have been on the fair board, this is my 31st year, and I've been part of a lot of planning for the fair, but this year we'll have to go to the top of the list as far as number of meetings that have been held, number of discussions that have been held, the number of documents that have been written, the number of guidelines that have been developed all for the chance for Delaware to continue to have their State Fair this year.

Doug Crouse:

There is a process, the fair has gone through that process. They developed a document that incorporated all kinds of social distancing and safety and how things would be done across the fairgrounds in every building and every concessionaire booth and every event right down to all the various details from spacing and layouts and everything. And that document, I will tell you, when it first was presented to the state, it was 33 pages. It's now over 70 pages, and that's just a detail that the parents put into it to make sure that they do it, they do this right, and that the state understands how we're going to be doing things this year to make this a safe environment for people to come to, but it will be different.

Doug Crouse:

And people will need to do things this year, such as wearing face masks, such as having limits in the number of people that can be in a certain building if we get to that capacity, such as a different schedule as to when animals will be there and when shows will be held. And again, a lot of changes have been made to incorporate what we needed to incorporate to have the state give us their blessing to have this event. And I got a lot of work and effort that's been done by the staff of the fair, as well as the officers and directors.

Jake Jones:

And we've heard that there's been recent changes with the 4-H entries at the fair. Can you go into that a little bit and explain what to expect there and also on the FFA side as well?

Doug Crouse:

Sure. Well out of the abundance of care and the safety of our volunteers and our members, that the University that we work for does need to take everything into consideration. There is concern about this. We've been under a restriction date since March and not having any in person 4-H programming in the state of Delaware. And this is just not Delaware, this is all States. Because of that, our current restriction date is July 31st. And when that date was implemented that takes in the State Fair dates. So immediately the thought was we can't participate in the fair. We did develop some plans for review of allowing our youth to bring their exhibits to the fair, but after review, it was just determined that it was better not to do that, but fortunately for us here in Delaware and with the Delaware State Fair and the system that they use, we have the ability to let those youth still share their project work that they've completed.

Doug Crouse:

And they'll be doing that through a virtual showcase where they'll upload photos of their exhibits, send them into the fair system that they create when they established all their exhibits initially. And for each of the various project classes that they have, they'll upload those photos. They may have to upload a video if that item is something that operates, so we have to be able to see that lamp turn on, or that electric cord be able to provide electric to something to work or anything that, again, is operational, they'll attach a 10 to 15 second video to show that. And then our judges will then go into the system, and one by one, we'll look at these entries just like they have done in person, but they'll look at the photos and look at the videos and have the ability to make comments.

Doug Crouse:

And those critiques are very important back to our youth to explain the great job that did or things that they could improve or how they can do things differently next time. And ribbons will be awarded as they were when they were in person. And even the most important process through all this too, they'll still be able to be part of the premium system. So we are doing it differently, but the kids are still going to benefit in the end, just like they would have from an in-person fair. I have been developing all the guidelines and reviewing and having everyone else review it. Again, all those are now put out and now we're going to start working with our judges to prepare them for what they're going to do for us. And it is a different type of work. It wasn't something that was in place for us just to say, "Hey, we're going to switch the button and do it." But it's worth it in the end for our youth to have that opportunity to still showcase their projects.

Doug Crouse:

We will have a TV in our building, even though we won't have exhibits there, there'll be a TV. And the system will show through a PowerPoint slide each and every exhibit that was sent into the system, and it'll just be a rotating process. So someone could stand there and watch the exhibits that way. But we're hopeful to have yet to have that same PowerPoint on our website there too. So we are going forward with the fair. It is a different fair, doing things differently, but I have had a theme all through this that some fair is better than no fair. And I'm going to stick to that. So some exhibit process is better than no exhibit process. We do not like, in Delaware 4-H, I do not like to use the word cancel. And we have canceled very, very, very few things, hardly anything. We found a way to make it work and do it differently, but still do it. So that's what we're doing with our exhibits.

Jake Jones:

Well, that sounds great. It sounds like you guys have put a lot of work and commitment to the youth of Delaware and it's just great to see that so many good people are working towards still giving the experience to the youth of Delaware. So what is happening with livestock shows, are we still going to see some livestock shows out there since it's going to be in the open air areas in some of the barns and things like that. Are we still able to do livestock shows?

Doug Crouse:

Yeah. I will tell you gentlemen, that one of the main reasons that all this extra work, even by the fair staff and the board has been done is all about the youth and that be the ability to let those youth to show and present those animals that they've been raising for several months as they do every year. All this drive, and the ability and want to do this and the desire to get it all done. I can tell you, I've heard it many times out of people's mouth. It's all about the youth. So yes, there are livestock shows that are going on. The schedule is going to be different. Typically on a week's fair, you'll see multiple animals on the fairground at the same time with multiple shows going on at different days at different times, and this year, it is going to be a little bit different in that there'll be a set livestock coming on the grounds at set times.

Doug Crouse:

This is actually done by many fairs currently, this is how they handle their livestock and we'll have different animals on the fairgrounds at different times, those shows will be conducted. When the shows are finished and everything's awarded, those animals will actually leave the fairgrounds and go back home and a different species of animals will come onto the ground. So different schedule, not one that's uncommon to other States-

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Doug Crouse:

Different schedule, not one that's uncommon to other states, but it is different to Delaware, but one that is going to allow us to accommodate the social distance safety measures that we need to implement to make these shows happen.

Dan Severson:

Hey, Doug, along those lines, as far as still having the livestock shows there, what about livestock auction?

Doug Crouse:

The livestock auction also, we discussed in the beginning that maybe we just don't have an option this year. That's not Delaware's way. And there's a lot of people that got behind that and through this same system that I mentioned earlier, this virtual showcase system that we're using for our exhibits, that same system allows us to do a virtual auction. To all the youth currently, I think as of last Friday, are to submit photos of themselves and their animals currently, a little video of their animal on their property and the youth will still go through their livestock shows as they always did, those animals that rise to the top of their classes and get to go on to be sold in the livestock auction will still have that ability.

Doug Crouse:

The auction this year, it's going to be a little bit different in that it won't be an in person option, of course, but it will be a virtual auction and people will be able to go onto the auction, just like different people across the United States might be bidding on the same item, but they're not all located in the same area. That's the type of auction this is. So you have these animals up for sale. Anyone can go in there and place a bid. When you place your bid, if I had a bid in there, it was the highest, but now it's not, I'm going to get an email saying, "Hey, you've just been out outbid." So now I can go back in. So we're going to have that kind of activity going on for all the animals in the sale, those youth will still be able to sell their animals and hopefully reap some benefits back from that sale to cover the cost of raising those animals and still have that opportunity.

Doug Crouse:

And we have a tremendous support here in the state of various people that bid on animals or combine money to bid on animals. And so it's just great to see that we're still going to be able to have the sale and the kids are going to be able to benefit from being able to sell their animals and we'll move forward. Yeah, different process, but one that can and will work. I feel that it could be just as successful if not more successful because it's going to allow the opportunity for a lot more people to be part of this auction who sometimes can't be there on the site of the date of that single day the auction is normally held. So through this virtual format, many more individuals will have that ability to be part of this auction. So we're excited about that.

Dan Severson:

Is there anything you want to say about where people can go to get more information to register, to be a bidder at the auction?

Doug Crouse:

Well, there's a main website for the fair and I just want to make sure I say it right. It's Delaware, one word, Delaware State Fair, delawarestatefair.com. If they go to that main website, there are various pieces of information up the top about exhibitors and general information, about the 10 days of the fair, and all that website, there is information about the virtual auction and guidance that would lead anyone to be able to set up an account now to be prepared to be part of the option of if they elect to place bids and again, getting that in place ahead of time. Anyone can place a bid and be part of this auction. So again, I'm excited about seeing other people who normally wouldn't have that opportunity to have that opportunity this year to support those kids.

Dan Severson:

Doug, that's the main information page that people should go to to get up to date information.

Doug Crouse:

It is. And as we continue to talk, I'll see if I can find the actual page for the animals, but I know it's here.

Jake Jones:

I saw there is a change in the ticket's schedule, I guess. Can you talk a little more about the price of tickets this year?

Doug Crouse:

Well again, because of the current situation, because of current family situations and all that, the Fair Board did look at this and they want people to be able to come to the fair and feel comfortable to come to the fair. There has been a three-tiered structure developed this year to be implemented just for the 2020 fair, where during the morning hours, 8:00 AM, when the fair opens up, until 11:00 AM, for the first three hours, if you enter the fairgrounds anytime during those three hours, it's free, there is no cost at all. As we go forward in the day from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM, for those additional five hours in the mid part of the day, it's half price. So again, people could still come up through that time and only pay half the price that they typically would have paid because it's always full price from the time that they're open.

Doug Crouse:

So this year, half price from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM. And then as of 4:00 PM, we go into our regular price. That high half price this year, adults will pay \$4.50, children will pay \$2 from 11:00 to 4:00 PM. And then at 4:00 PM, we go back to our regular pricing and the amendments price has not changed, it still will be \$9 for adults and this year \$4 for youth. I have to appreciate and I hope everyone else appreciates that Gatling back effect and allowing families to actually come to the fair this year for several hours and get in free and then even for additional hours at half price. And I think that would just be a help to a lot of outlets.

Dan Severson:

Free is always good.

Doug Crouse:

And we're also hopeful through this that we're encouraging people to come at different times of the day than they might have chosen to do in the past. Sometimes on a good year with the good weather and all, we can really have some robust numbers of people on the grounds. Intentionally, we are hoping that we can control those numbers and have more people coming in the morning hours, some coming in the afternoon hours and then the remainder to come in the late hours. So pricing structure helps there certainly to guide people to do that and it also helps family just be to be able to afford the cost and everything.

Jake Jones:

Doug, I was watching the video about the fair information that was released a week or two ago, some of the rules for face mask where they're recommended, if you're able to social distance required in any buildings and also recommended in the barns. Social distancing is in effect. And is there any change to any of those regulations at this point?

Doug Crouse:

No. Basically, when you come on the fairgrounds, it will be a general rule, if you get on the shuttle, come up to the main gate, you'll need to be wearing a face mask because you're in close proximity to people on the shuttles, to the rider shuttle, you have to have a face mask. Come through the gate and aligned there, you have to have a face mask. Once you get inside the gate and you're an outside area there, the rule is if you social distance, you don't have to wear a face mask in an outside environment. Many people will continue to wear that face mask just from my travels everywhere I'm going. A lot of people just do that, others will not. But once you elect to go into a building and face mask requirement is back

on again. So going into a building where there's close proximity to people and square footage is limited, face mask are definitely required in any enclosed building.

Doug Crouse:

The livestock buildings will, even though they're open, they're covered by roofs, but they're open on the sides, the livestock buildings will be referenced and referred to as a closed building. So again, because a lot of people come into them and can be very close to each other face masks will also be required in the livestock buildings. Again, these are important things to do to make, not just you safe, but everyone safe. And to make people that are coming to the fair feel comfortable to be able to come to the fair. So the rules are in place. We will make every effort to enforce those rules and make sure that everyone understands the rules. And again, it's all for the safety of everyone, not just yourself, but for everyone. And again, I think everyone will do their best to comply and it always happens you get to go to the building, I forgot to put that face mask on, but there'll be people there to help remind people. Again, it's just for the safety of everybody during this time and it's allowing us to get approval to have the fair to have these rules in place.

Jake Jones:

And I imagine it's B-Y-O-F-M, correct? Bring your own face mask.

Doug Crouse:

Yes. Great way to put it. But yes it is. However, there will be some venue there to purchase a face mask. If, for some reason, someone would just show up to the fair and forget to bring their own or something should happen to the one they thought they brought, there will be those opportunities also. That way, people just don't have to turn around and go back home. But yes, bring your own, bring your own face mask. You might even have some face mask competitions out in the fairgrounds every now and then, so make it fun. If you have to do this and we have to do it for good reason, we certainly can make it fun.

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Doug Crouse:

We have to do this and we have to do it for a good reason. We certainly can make it fun too.

Jake Jones:

Right. And then I imagine there's also going to be hand sanitizer stations around.

Doug Crouse:

We always had a lot of them, anyhow, especially around the livestock buildings. We have a lot more this year. And there'll be ample around the fairgrounds for everyone to use and have available to them, and we will be encouraging. And then we always have what we referred to as the clean team on the grounds trying to keep the grounds as neat and clean as possible. And they'll be doing a lot more wiping down and cleaning on a periodic, planned basis throughout the program. So that's also part of that plan.

Dan Severson:

So we already touched on the Delaware state of emergency and how it was extended. I don't know how to really say this, but there's always a possibility that something's going to change again. When it does,

you and your volunteers are ready to still keep the 4-H youth and FFA youth on their correct path by seeing what we can do for them?

Doug Crouse:

Of course. We will continue to do everything possible. And I didn't mention the FFA earlier. I'm just going to quickly do that. FFA still will be in their building with their exhibits this year. They too, like 4-H, did cancel all their competitions on the grounds for the week, but they are continuing with their exhibits. So I did want to mention that so the FFA still will be in the 4-H FFA building. Yeah, this is a very fluid situation with any event, but even with the fair.

Doug Crouse:

So with all this planning, anything can happen right up to the day of the fair, or even during the fair. We have a very open, continual dialogue and meeting with the Department Of Health at the fairgrounds. Our staff do. As well as with the governor's office. Plans have been shared, reviewed, updated. There's again an exchange of ideas to implement things that make everyone comfortable. And as you know, we're currently in phase two in our state, and the Delaware state fair plan was approved based on phase two. If we remain in phase two, then our plan remains in place and we're allowed to move forward with the fair. But past that, everything that we're planning to do, whether it's phase two or phase three, we will continue to do, and it will not alleviate anything that we already have in the plans, if that makes sense.

Doug Crouse:

I'm thinking very positive. I know everyone's thinking very positive on the fair board and the staff that we're going to have a fair this year. We've done a lot of work to make it a successful fair and a safe fair for everyone that's coming.

Jake Jones:

Thank you for joining us today, Doug. I know, like you just said, a lot of work has gone in behind the scenes to keep the fair going in 2020. It sounds like you guys have a pretty detailed plan and I'm glad we got some clarity on it today. And is there any take home messages that you want to give the listeners before we wrap up the call?

Doug Crouse:

I guess I would just share two things. This fair is very important for our youth. It's very important for our fair board to have. We want people to feel comfortable to come to the fair, but if they don't feel comfortable, we understand that they won't come. And that's okay. That's okay in this current time. And there are some individuals that need to make that decision for their health reasons or for other reasons. But I am very excited about the fair. I'm very excited about our youth to have the opportunity to still show their animals.

Doug Crouse:

I'm even getting excited about the virtual showcase of exhibits, even though I would have preferred to have them in person. But just the opportunity for our youth to be able to showcase, still receive judging on them and still be part of the premium system is huge, is huge. So, we got to be positive through this. I hope we never have to talk about this type of fair again. But I'm glad that we are talking about it versus

doing the opposite thing, which that would be canceling it, canceling it altogether. So back to my theme. Some fair is better than no fair, and I'm looking forward to this some fair this year.

Jake Jones:

Right. Well, thank you very much. Dan and Blake, do you guys have anything else to say?

Doug Crouse:

It's a great organization and great kids out there and they're doing great things. So, anything we can do to help that process, we'll put that effort out there to do it. So I look forward to it. Look forward to seeing you all out to the fair.

Jake Jones:

Absolutely. And I want to thank you too, Doug, for joining us this morning. It's obvious that everybody involved in the fair this year has been deliberate in making it a safe exhibit and event for people to come to. It's something we need right now. A lot of us have been either working from home or spending a lot more time at home, and being able to get out and safely interact with people and see the exhibits and all the hard work that's been going in, I think it's great. And I think as long as everybody that attends is respectful to each other and respects the rules in place, I think we'll have a good time and I think it'll be a benefit to everyone to have this. And I thank you guys for all your work regarding that.

Doug Crouse:

Appreciate that. And I totally agree with everything you just said, Blake.

Jake Jones:

Thank you.

Doug Crouse:

All right. I appreciate you guys.

Speaker 1:

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Speaker 1:

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