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Eating their way through Farm Show

A reporter and a photographer wind through the complex, sampling local and regional food.

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Jamie's \$20 is down to \$17 as she stands in line for french fries at the state Farm Show.

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These days, \$20 won't fill your gas tank, but it can get you pretty far at the 2012 Pennsylvania Farm Show.

Photographer Jeremy Drey and I have spent several days covering the Farm Show in Harrisburg and all of its farm competitions, animals, exhibits and food choices.

For our latest adventure, Jeremy and I decided to see what two people could do with \$20 and a day to spend it at the Farm Show complex. Side note: This doesn't include the cost of gas to drive to Harrisburg or the \$10 parking fee. But, happily, admission is free.

We started the morning in the Exposition Hall with a vanilla and chocolate mixed milkshake for \$3.

With its rich, filling flavors, I counted the milkshake as a full breakfast (or at least my dairy fix for the day).

Already in need of a food break, we walked to the other end of the complex to work up an appetite.

Once in the Main Hall, we stopped by the french fries booth. One plate for \$3.50.

"No vinegar," Jeremy advised. We opted for ketchup.

The crispiness of those Pennsylvania potatoes gave us the energy to walk through the rows and rows of food and craft vendors also in the Main Hall.

For anyone who would like to avoid spending money while inside the Farm Show complex, I recommend following this route (though you will be extraordinarily tempted to purchase something).

I sampled hot dogs, beef jerky, mustard, four kinds of apples, teas and hot chocolates, pretzels, dips. Whatever there was to sample, you can bet we tried a piece. Everything we tasted was free.

Trying small bits of food for an hour made us hungry for a real meal. We walked back toward the food booths and purchased a beef brisket sandwich for \$5.

By this time it was roughly 3 p.m., leaving us with an hour to spend \$8.50 before catching our bus home.

Having eaten way too much, we decided to check out the butterfly house, one of the Farm Show's new exhibits. Tickets are \$2 a person.

More than 800 butterflies, from Folk's Butterfly Farm in Nescopeck, Luzerne County, fluttered about inside the large tent, which was pretty toasty.

I'll go ahead and admit this: the butterflies scared me. Monarchs and buckeyes are beautiful creatures - from afar. Up close they look like the fuzzy offspring of an alien and wasp disaster.

Purchase photos from the Farm Show

Nonetheless, I learned a lot about the amazing critters, and didn't step on a single one (It is actually a concern. Be careful if you go). And I'm sure Jeremy had a blast laughing at me.

After checking each other for hitchhiking butterflies, Jeremy and I made sure to check for any food booths that we missed, which resulted in buying a 2-pound bag of Burnt Cabins Grist Mill's whole wheat hotcake mix for \$3.75.

That left us with 75 cents.

The last purchase, and last sugar rush, of the day came from three candy sticks, each for a quarter.

And that's how we spent our \$20. I'm sure all that walking burned off the milkshake and other treats. Right?

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