

Winning and Losing At Livestock Shows

It seems far too often we place too much emphasis on winning and losing at Jr. Fair livestock shows. Unfortunately, many times adults consider 4-H and FFA livestock projects a failure if their son or daughter does not win. If our only goal at a livestock show is to win, maybe we need to make some adjustments in our goals and in understanding the benefits our youth are gaining from livestock shows.

Ideally, 4-H and FFA livestock projects should be a family affair. If the right percentages of time and energy are spent by youngsters and parents together, these projects can help our young people learn the basic life skills and eventually help them develop into better citizens. If the percentage gets out of hand, we see a group of spoiled kids who parents are sore if they don't win, constantly criticizing the judge and trying any trick possible to win.

Very few 4-H and FFA livestock projects are economically sound. However, neither are having children, paying for band lessons, taking them to summer recreation programs, buying them bicycles and paying for other youth activities. If a parent's goal is for the child to make money, investing in a savings account is less risky than investing in a 4-H and FFA livestock project. However, if a parent's goal is to invest in the future and to help their son or daughter develop as a person, learn responsibility, set goals and gain some knowledge about livestock production, then 4-H and FFA livestock projects are good investments.

Most likely we will have livestock shows as long as there are youngsters who have parents and grandparents. However, let's keep these shows in proper perspective. They are not beef shows, swine shows and sheep shows but they are KIDS SHOWS! The animal is simply the ticket for the youngster to take part.

Through local schools, ag education departments, the UNL Extension and other educational units, we constantly hear of improved teaching tools to better equip our young people for life. As we analyze all the new and innovative ideas, many of which are quite sound and very excellent methods, we find 4-H and FFA livestock projects are one of the oldest and greatest teaching tools that we have to teach youth life skills.

Following are some life skills that Junior Fair livestock project members can gain:

1. **How to get along with people.** A large number of people in society quit or lose their jobs because they cannot get along with others. 4-H and FFA members who show livestock are around people they have never met but have similar interests. They learn to communicate with these people.
2. **Sportsmanship.** At a livestock show, there is only one Grand Champion. However, there are many winners. Most 4-H and FFA members who show livestock for any period of time usually experience the extreme high feeling of an exceptional effort and the extreme disappointment of a project that didn't turn out as well as was expected. Normally, win or lose, the competitors in the show ring (the 4-H and FFA members) can be seen after the show talking and enjoying life together.
3. **Responsibility.** Feeding and daily chores in a 4-H and FFA livestock project teach responsibility. Top feeders follow the time clock in their daily efforts. This is a good habit to start at a young age and may reap youngster's substantial benefits in a career later in their lives.

4. **Attend to details.** Most young people take care of major items in a 4-H and FFA livestock project like fencing, feeding, etc. However many times it's the little things that make a difference: keeping water tanks and feed troughs clean, working on grooming and showmanship several months before the show, keeping pens clean and close observation for sickness and disease. Paying attention to details is beneficial in almost everything we do in life.

5. **Decision making.** Decision making is never easy at any point in our lives. 4-H and FFA livestock projects require several key decisions be made: selection of project animals, selection of feeding method, care and management decisions, fitting and grooming techniques, etc.

6. **Goal setting.** For every successful 4-H and FFA livestock project, there is usually a good plan. Most details and plans for the project on selection, feeding and management of the project have been planned well in advance. Goal setting is important for everyone regardless of future endeavors.

Are Junior Fair livestock projects successful? We may hear some negative things about them but these projects are a long way ahead of whatever is in second place in helping teach our young people to adjust to life.

Next time you are at a livestock show, study the kids instead of the animals. You will notice that most classes have several winners, not just the one standing in first place.

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