



.....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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Anyone that knows me. knows that I love it when young people step up on behalf of agriculture. I am so proud of the Webster County 4-H Junior Leaders. This week they pulled off two amazing events. Their enthusiasm, teamwork and penchant for having fun while they work is simply amazing to me. On Wednesday they sponsored, set up and ran a very successful livestock judging clinic and contest. There were over 50 youth involved in the team and individual competition in evaluating livestock and placing them through critical thinking and reasoning. Setting up for this contest led right into the second event of the week that we just concluded – the South Central Nebraska Livestock Exposition. It too showed the resiliency of these young people in putting forth another great event. There were beef, sheep and goats from all across the region that sampled some cool weather, a little rain, and certainly some great looking stock!

In this edition I have decided to touch a little on something that is dear to my heart – livestock evaluation. I have always felt that livestock judging is one of the most educational endeavors that we do with young people. I was so fortunate as an ag teacher/FFA advisor and now as an Extension Educator to get to work with some of the best judging “eyes” in the country over the last 43 plus years. I think that likely you can find several area citizens who remember some of those judging trips. It is wonderful to see the young people continuing that tradition. There is nothing more special on the face of this earth than our children, and isn’t it our responsibility to guide and educate them in their decision making?

Their road map to the future may have nothing to do with livestock, but aren’t we obligated to build them a strong foundation from which they can make sound choices? Livestock judging in my mind enhances decision making capabilities and provides the opportunity to defend those decisions through oral reasons which, if you really think about it, provides the framework for public speaking skills and thus leadership skills. It actually builds a lot of good life skills for the kids. I find that this activity goes a long ways towards building character, integrity, and honesty. The other positive aspect is that the kids get the opportunity to network with other individuals and producers who share similar interests. I think that one of the best livestock judges and trainers I have met is Harlan Ritchie from Michigan State, who made a statement that I think speaks strongly towards how I feel. “Judging instills confidence in those people who may be timid and humbles those who tend to be conceited.” I can speak towards both ends of that statement. It has a tendency to temper a person.

Unfortunately I have found that livestock judging has experienced a decrease in participation and support over the past several years. Many people do not understand that this has a major impact on the future of our livestock industry and many others, as well. Youth, especially as they get older, tell their parents that they are too busy, and many parents as well as FFA advisors and 4-H Leaders do not encourage these young people to participate in these activities. It seems to me that sports and other extracurricular activities seem to be winning the battle of time in our youth’s lives. Please do not get the wrong idea. I was extremely involved in sports and other projects while growing up, and they too had a positive impact on my life. However, I still took the “time” to devote to numerous 4-H and FFA projects and judging teams. Now as I look back even though sports were important to me, I made a career out of the 4-H & FFA activities. It pays the bills!

Raising and showing livestock and learning how to judge livestock offers an invaluable and irreplaceable experience to our youth. On the surface it seems pretty simple. Livestock judging is basically placing classes of four animals to be compared to each other and placed from best on down. If you look at the real purpose or reason for its existence, it is the ability of people involved in the livestock industry to develop decision-making skills, the ability to defend their decisions, a work ethic, and understand the importance of teamwork – just like team sports! We hear all the time that we need to develop critical thinking in our youth. BINGO – we have it with these programs! Every day of our adult lives we make decisions that affect us, our careers, and most importantly...our families. These young people learn how to make good decisions? Through judging, our young people need to know the parts of the animal, terminology, the money cuts, the good traits and bad traits of animals all that are exhibited in animals - in order to make a decision and to make those decisions consistently. Those consistent decisions are really based on critical thinking and then backing it up!

When these kids get out in in the “real” world, they understand the importance of looking at something from every angle, taking into account the good and bad, find the animal that brings together the “most of the best” that an animal can exhibit. They must process all of this information, and make an educated decision. Simply put, livestock judging teaches kids to think on their own and make difficult decisions with confidence. I cannot think of any other activity that is as successful at teaching kids to make decisions, defend those decisions, and do so with confidence. These young judges must defend the way they place a class. We defend our decisions every day. Kids learn the importance of speaking clearly at the proper speed with the correct tone to have the greatest impact on the listener. We all know the power of great speakers. Judging creates and develops great speakers. When have you ever seen a great speaker with poor confidence? It just doesn’t happen! Judging builds confidence. Confidence builds strong citizen skills. These skills are the traits of our great leaders. I consider myself fortunate to have the opportunity to have a small part in the development of these leaders. As we approach the county and state fair season think of all that goes into the process and be as proud as I am of our kids! Job very well done!!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer which may or ay not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email to: dlienemann2@unl.edu or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>