4-H Livestock Day Camps: Learning by Doing

The Situation
In southeast Idaho the 4-H market animal program continues to be popular with traditional 4-H youth and parents. This popularity has spread to non-traditional families. Approximately 30 percent of new participants have no livestock project experience. The addition of inexperienced members has required the recruitment of more leaders, many of them unskilled. In addition to the limited knowledge, the parents, youth and 4-H leaders have limited time for educational meetings and activities.

Our Response
To address these issues, a group of extension educators developed livestock day camps to provide life-skill and quality livestock education in a compact time frame. The camps are held in three-hour blocks and consist of workshops, stations, activities and demonstrations. Subjects are geared to the needs of 4-H participants based on input of volunteers, parents and youth members. They include ethics, fitting, showmanship, feeds, nutrition, decision-making, public speaking, judging, record keeping, quality assurance, ultrasound, meat cuts and breeds.

The subjects are taught using teachings styles that include hands-on curricula, classroom-style lectures, and games. For example; youth: learned about feed nutrient groups and mixed feed rations using real feed; learned quality assurance by being taught about injection sites, giving injections of colored water to bananas and playing “Quality Assurance Jeopardy”; used a beanbag toss game and handled real meat cuts to learn the cuts of meat; and handled livestock equipment, learned what animal it is used on and what it was used for. There were many similar activities and teaching styles used to help the youth gain valuable project information. The youth also received credit for meeting attendance by participating in the day camp. A pre- and post-test was developed in 2000 to measure knowledge increase. In 2003 an evaluation instrument was used to measure program impact.

Goals of this program are to: 1) To help youth gain proper animal husbandry skills, 2) To help youth gain life skills of responsibility, goal setting, public speaking, decision-making, ethics and record keeping, 3) Train adult volunteers to assist 4-H youth.

Program Outcomes
Since 1997, 3,443 youth and adults have participated in 4-H Livestock Day Camps. Extension Educators in the bordering states of Wyoming and Utah became involved in 2000. Our team trained these educators and presented camps with them for two years. The Wyoming educator trained other Wyoming educators, and they continue to present livestock camps in their state. 4-H volunteers use the ideas, knowledge, and information gained at the camps to teach youth at club meetings, organize and present stations at livestock play-days, and staff stations at the day camp. Youth use the information to present 4-H demonstrations, help younger youth learn project information and older youth staff stations at day camps.

In 2000 a pre- and post-test was given to determine if participants were learning while participating at the camps. On the pre-test participants scored 33
percent on their basic 4-H livestock knowledge (Table 1). The participants scored 81 percent on the post-test indicating almost a 50 percent increase in knowledge gained due to attending the camp (Pre-test scores were significantly different from post-test scores at the alpha = .001 level).

![Graph showing pre-test and post-test scores]

**Table 1**

A survey was given to the participants in 2003 to measure skills learned, knowledge gained and attitudes. Results of the survey are:

- 89% agreed or strongly agreed that the program was interesting
- 94% agreed or strongly agreed that the information and the activities were helpful
- 93% agreed or strongly agreed that they will be better prepared for the fair
- 75% said their reason for coming to the camp was to learn and have fun

The survey also asked what skills participants had learned that they did not have before attending the camp. Survey results are:

- 63% learned how to recognize a sick animal
- 60% learned proper ethical practices
- 66% learned to identify livestock equipment and uses
- 75% learned proper quality assurance practices
- 72% learned to identify breeds of animals
- 49% learned how to prepare an animal for the fair

**The Future:** Due to the nature of the 4-H program, new members enroll each year, so the need to continue livestock project education is ongoing. 4-H participants and extension educators continue to work together to provide this worthwhile educational program to youth and adults.

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