

IMPACT



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Life-Skill Development Found in 4-H Animal Judging

The Situation

The Idaho Youth Horse contests have a 33-year history of judging activities to qualify youth for national competitions. The livestock judging program in Idaho has not been as structured as the horse contests. An official state livestock judging contest to qualify youth for national contests started in 1998, and there is not an official state dairy judging contest. Even though Idaho does not have a long history of state competitions for livestock and dairy judging, many counties in Idaho have been holding county competitions for over 20 years, with one county holding an annual livestock judging contest since the 1930's. There has not been any significant research to determine if the judging activities have had an impact on the development of life skills in former Idaho livestock, horse and dairy judging participants.

Our Response

In 2003, a study was conducted to determine the impact of the Idaho 4-H Livestock and Horse Judging programs on past participants' development of beneficial life skills associated with career preparation. An evaluation tool was developed to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1991) determined important skills needed in the work place and was helpful in designing evaluation questions for this study.

The former judging participants were identified and a questionnaire was mailed. The objectives of the

study were to (1) determine the demographic characteristics of 4-H judging participants; (2) determine the influence of the 4-H Judging Program on career preparation; and (3) collect qualitative input from former participants on how the 4-H Judging Program influenced their personal growth from a retrospective standpoint.

Program Outcomes

The survey revealed that the Idaho 4-H Judging Program is a popular activity and has had an impact on the youth of Idaho for over 40 years. The median age of the participants was 20-25 years old, and 61 percent of them were female. The respondents had been involved in judging from 1959 to 2002. A question about judging experience revealed:

- 71.5% of the respondents participated in livestock judging.
- 42.4% participated in horse judging.
- 38.7% participated in dairy judging.
- 43.6% of the youth participated in two or more judging areas.

The quantitative data indicate the program is highly influential in the development of animal industry knowledge with a mean of 4.22 (on a scale of one to five, 1 equals not influential and 5 equals highly influential). The program is at least moderately influential in the development of beneficial life skills associated with workforce preparedness with a mean of 3.41 or higher for the skills identified by SCANS.

In the qualitative portion of the survey, 64.4 percent indicated that the 4-H judging program had a

positive influence on participants' personal success. Examples of the responses include:

- “Being involved in judging programs helped me to focus and utilize my decision-making and thinking skills. I am now a registered nurse where I make many focused decisions every day. Being on the judging team helped me become who I am today. I treat and take care of the world thanks to 4-H.”
- “Most of all, it helped me decide what I wanted to do for the rest of my life because now I know that I can accomplish anything that I put my mind to.”

The 4-H judging program positively influenced 63.8 percent in preparation for the workforce. For example:

- “In judging, you learn to give reasons and that teaches you to communicate and that is essential in today's world.”
- “By being involved in the 4-H livestock judging program I was able to strengthen my character tremendously. I learned much about communicating, decision-making skills, self-confidence, and dedication. The communication skills and confidence that I attained through giving oral reasons has helped me in many different areas of my life.”
- “Judging has given me lots of self-confidence and has improved my people skills.”

There were 60.5 percent of the respondents that indicated the 4-H judging program had a positive influence on their animal industry knowledge.

- “This experience gave me confidence in my ability to identify quality livestock-dairy animals. I use this ability every day because we run a dairy feedlot and quality is a big part of our business. It is becoming a more important part of agriculture. We have to recognize the animals that will grow and be profitable.”

Forty-two respondents or 27.6 percent indicated that the 4-H judging program helped them think on their feet.

- “Livestock judging gave me the ability to analyze and organize thoughts quickly and logically.”

Over 97 percent (144 out of 152) of the respondents indicated that their Idaho 4-H judging experience

had a positive influence on them while less than 3 percent (4 out of 152) said that the judging program had no influence on them. The importance of the program is summed up best by this response: “Judging has proved to me that I can be something successful in life, no matter what it is. I have learned to dream big and achieve big.”

The Future

The results of this study verify the importance of the program in Idaho. It is the recommendation of this study that judging activities continue as an important extension program because the activities have had a positive impact on past participants. Extension educators can continue to support these activities by providing an opportunity for youth to participate in judging.

For More Information

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