Livestock Judging Clinics

The Situation
“Livestock Judging is a source of youth development for beneficial life skills such as communication, decision-making, problem-solving, self-motivation, teamwork and organization.” (Nash, S.A. & Sant, L.L., 2005) The Gem/Boise County Extension Office has held a Livestock Judging Contest during the county fair for the last 20 plus years. The contest has consisted of four animal breeding classes and four market animal classes, with one class being used for oral reasons.

All 4-H members enter the Livestock Judging Contest in hopes of attaining a top score that would qualify them to compete at the Eastern Idaho State Fair, the University of Idaho Ag Days Judging Contest, and for a chance to compete at the Denver Stock Show.

While this contest has been conducted for many years, there has been a decline in the number of youth interested in participating as well as a decline in individual contestant scores. The Gem/Boise County 4-H Extension Educator appointed a Livestock Judging Superintendent four years ago to help remedy this situation, but participation continued to decline.

Our Response
With the declining participation rates in the Livestock Judging Contest, the Gem/Boise County 4-H Extension Office decided that something needed to be done in order to encourage more area youth to become active in this experience.

In evaluating contest scores, we found that the majority of 4-H members do not have the necessary skills to evaluate livestock effectively or to give oral reasons. Three livestock judging clinics were planned and conducted on the last Friday in April, May and June to educate the youth about the different aspects of livestock judging and what to look for in different species. Each of the three clinics, called “Friday Fun Nights: Livestock Judging Clinics,” emphasized different livestock species. In April, the clinic was geared toward horse judging and cattle judging. The May clinic focused on market sheep and market swine, and in June the clinic focused on dairy goats and market goats. The clinics were designed to educate youth on how to evaluate each livestock species, as well as how to give professional oral reasons.

Gem/Boise County Livestock Judging Contest 2008
The goals and objectives were explained at the beginning of each judging clinic. Hands-on techniques were taught by using different types of shoes, a variety of hay types and unusual shaped crackers to teach about judging basics. Youth were given a scenario to determine the best way to qualitatively rank each of the objects based on the specific scenario given, for example youth were asked to rank 4 shoe types that would be best used to hike with and then devise a set of oral reasons to explain how the shoe served its purpose.

Program Outcomes

The average participation per clinic was 35 youth from Gem/Boise, Payette, Valley, and Ada Counties. Clinic participants were given a pre- and post-test to determine their knowledge of livestock judging and life skills gained by attending the clinic. The first question asked in the pre- and post-test was for each youth to list one life skill they can gain from participating in livestock judging. Responses included public speaking skills and communicating with their peers. Other knowledge learned from the trainings included selecting quality animals, knowing parts of the animal, gaining college scholarships, and being a professional judge in the future for income. Other questions asked youth to list important areas to look for when judging each specific species. Responses to those questions included muscling, structure and balance, straightness, and conformation. Youth were also asked to determine what a top pair placing is, a middle pair placing, and a bottom pair placing in a four animal judging class, as well as naming good practices to use when giving oral reasons. Overall youth increased their knowledge of livestock judging by 43% according to pre- and post-test scores.

As a result of the judging clinics, the Gem/Boise County Livestock Judging Contest increased participation by 14 youth members in 2008 compared to the 2007 livestock judging contest. The average individual contestant judging score for senior age division (13 to 19 years old) increased six points from 206 to 212 (out of a possible 400 points). The average individual contestant judging score for the junior age division (8 to 12 years old) increased eight points from 196 to 204.

Three positive outcomes can be attributed to the livestock judging clinics: 1) increased participation at the county livestock judging contest, 2) increased individual contestant scores, and 3) life skills youth gained in communication, problem-solving, and decision-making to enhance and enrich their lives.

For More Information

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