

DVD helps teach youth proper lamb showmanship techniques

The Situation

Livestock projects top the list of most popular 4-H projects in Idaho and Wyoming. Showing lambs is one of the top two livestock projects based on numbers of participants. However, more and more youth taking lamb projects are not from a livestock or farming background. Parents and leaders have fewer skills necessary to teach livestock showmanship skills. Showmanship is the one area of a livestock project where youth can have the most control. Sheep showmanship is also an area that has changed in the past 10 years. These changes make the teaching of showmanship even more difficult if parents, leaders or judges have not kept up-to-date with the latest showmanship techniques. With the current economic situation, it may not be possible for families or individuals to see a national/regional livestock show and observe current showmanship in action. Many county shows and local judges hold on to more traditional showmanship techniques – not keeping with current trends.

Our Response

Research conducted in 1999 by the National 4-H Impact Design Implementation Team found that youth events need to fulfill eight different needs in order to be considered worthy youth activities. A positive showmanship experience should be one of those activities that builds youth using the following seven essential elements:

1. Have a positive relationship/experience with a caring adult such as a livestock judge.
2. Feel accepted and comfortable in the safe and inclusive environment of a livestock show.
3. Be engaged in a learning atmosphere of the show.



A scene from the DVD teaching lamb show ring skills. Photo by Joel Packham

4. Have an opportunity to master the art of showmanship.
5. See oneself as an active participant in the sheep industry.
6. Accentuate the value of being self-determined in choosing to be competitive in sheep showmanship.
7. Learn the art and value of service for others by being courteous and kind in the show ring.

A method of making the showmanship experience positive is to teach youth correct showmanship techniques and have judges understand those techniques and judge the youth on those same principles.

Extension Educators in Idaho and Wyoming decided to bring the showmanship experience to 4-H members. The goal of the educators is to teach youth by having them “attend” an actual show, allowing a more rich educational experience. Other educational

materials on showmanship come from staged productions where youth or adults experience a very limited showmanship reality. This DVD allows youth, parents, and judges to see current sheep showmanship practices within the context of a live showmanship contest. Several regional and national lamb showmanship contests were attended and videotaped. A DVD was produced using video footage from these shows demonstrating the real show-ring experience. The DVD is divided into chapters so users can look at a specific skill without watching the entire DVD. Users can also benefit from turning the sound off from the video and discussing each scene with a leader or parent. Judges at any level of experience can benefit from observing these current showmanship practices. Because the DVD is not staged, users can see both competent and less competent showmanship maneuvers in every section. Users will see some of the top showmen in the nation demonstrating the most correct and current showmanship techniques used in the industry today.

Program Outcomes

An average of 42.1% of DVD viewers felt they received new information from each of the major chapters. The chapter on how to maneuver and reposition a lamb received the highest rating of 47.6%. Viewing groups have been comprised of audiences that have some sheep showmanship experience. One 4-H leader noted how one first-year 4-H'er benefited from the use of the DVD: "All we did was show him how to brace. The rest he learned from the video – he was the clear winner of our recent pre-fair showmanship experience." Another 4-H leader shared, "Outstanding! The material shared in this video teaches in a short time, things that took me years of leading a lamb club to learn and understand." A parent stated that his children were tired of listening to him, "They gained the necessary information from the DVD that I have been trying to tell them for years. They liked seeing it from the youth in the DVD." An experienced judge viewed the DVD and stated, "I've never really liked the brace position for lamb showmanship. But after seeing the DVD, I am going to encourage youth to use these more current showmanship methods."

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