4-H Market Livestock Evaluation System used successfully

The Situation
Standards for judging livestock may vary from judge to judge, from county to county, or state to state. Overzealous individuals may encourage unrealistic and manipulated animal appearance to gain an advantage in the show ring that is inconsistent with industry standards and good animal husbandry practices. Such fads and practices undermine the purpose of the 4-H livestock programs to educate young people in the proper care, management and feeding of project animals. Industry standards are ignored, product quality assurance is compromised, and desired youth developmental life skills such as integrity, fair play and sportsmanship are sacrificed. For positive learning to take place, goals need to be stated, rules established, teaching accomplished, requirements achieved, and the project properly evaluated.

Our Response
University of Idaho faculty developed the 4-H Market Livestock Evaluation System with input from industry representatives, researchers, packers, consumers, 4-H leaders, parents and youth. The desired outcome is to produce an animal that yields a meat product that meets industry standards by being high quality, tender, safe and nutritious. The animal must be fed properly in a minimal stress environment where it gains rapidly and efficiently. A beef animal should achieve a quality grade of choice and a yield grade of 1, 2 or 3. A score card was developed to guide the judge in evaluating the project animal according to Lean Yield, Quality Grade, Average Daily Gain (ADG) as well as the traditional body conformation emphasized in the show ring.

Program Outcomes
Each animal is evaluated on an individual basis. The scores are tallied and the animals arranged in numerical order. The judge then compares the animals and adjusts their placing. After reasons are given, the score card is added to the project record book so the 4-H’er has a recorded evaluation on his animal.

Figures 1 & 2 are the picture and score card for steer #581. This steer had the top carcass at the Adams County Fair and graded choice+ with a yield grade of 2.282.

Observed advantages and disadvantages of the 4-H Market Livestock Evaluation System are stated below.

Advantages
1. The member has stated objectives for his animal to achieve.
2. The animal is evaluated according to the stated objectives.

3. The judge is guided by the score card in his evaluation of the animal.

4. The animal is evaluated on an individual basis using his performance information and comparing him to the ideal animal.

5. The evaluation is more objective than the traditional judging.

6. Politics are eliminated.

7. The stressful, manipulated animal appearance practices gain no advantage and often lower the animal’s evaluation score.

8. The 4-H’er receives a written evaluation of his animal.

9. Integrity, fair play and sportsmanship are promoted.

Disadvantages

1. The 4-H Market Livestock Evaluation System is controversial.

2. It takes some of the theatre and excitement out of the show.

3. People in the audience have a difficult time anticipating the animal placing because they do not have all the information.

The Future

The 4-H Market Livestock Evaluation System has been in use in Adams County for over twenty-five years. It gives a more complete evaluation of the project. This evaluation system is highly successful and the plan is to continue its use.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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