Measuring Ethical Cognition Related to Livestock Showing Practices

Situation
Unethical activity associated with the youth livestock program has gained substantial media attention over the last few years. The unethical actions of a few pose a risk to the continued existence of this quality youth development activity.

Response
Data was collected from 918 individuals involved in youth livestock shows in six states during the first 9 months of 1997. Data was collected from 4-H and FFA members, parents, county Extension agents, and agriculture teachers in Oklahoma, Idaho, Alabama, Washington, Oregon and Ohio. The study was designed to discover if ethics educational efforts can improve the ability of those involved in the youth livestock program to discern between ethical and unethical livestock showing practices.

The experimental treatment imposed on the group was the "Line in the Sand" educational video. The basis for determining if a practice is ethical or unethical was the three "Line in the Sand" questions posed in the video:
1. Does the practice violate FDA law?
2. Does the practice fraudulently misrepresent the animal?
3. Does the practice compromise the welfare of the animal?

If any of these questions are answered yes regarding a practice, the practice is then deemed unethical.

A posttest-only control group experimental design was utilized in the study. Subjects were asked to sort a list of eight livestock showing practices as ethical or unethical.

Findings
When all participants were analyzed together, there was a highly significant difference ($P>.001$) in the control group's and the treatment group's ability to correctly sort the practices as ethical or unethical.

When the participants who had previously seen the "Line in the Sand," "The Question of Ethics," or "A Step Beyond" videos were analyzed as a treatment group against the control groups, there was a significant difference ($P>.05$) in their responses.

Summary
No claim is made that behavior was modified as a result of being exposed to the experimental treatment. It is instead offered that before a change in behavior can occur, cognition regarding the issue at hand must occur.
The bottom line result of this study is the demonstration that ethics education does work. The livestock show ethics educational program tested in the study had a definite positive impact on the ability of individuals involved in youth livestock programs to discern ethical from unethical showing practices. Also demonstrated is the fact that the manner and style of the “Line in the Sand” video educational program also offers a safe and effective method to address this very sensitive issue.