Meat quality camps help youth understand eating quality of livestock products

AT A GLANCE
Understanding the importance of meat and eating quality of livestock products allows youth to prepare for their 4-H projects to enter the food chain.

The Situation
For many, once fair has ended and youth have said goodbye to their livestock project animals, that’s the end of the 4-H year. But the animal ultimately ends up becoming someone’s dinner. To help youth learn that their livestock project will eventually become part of the food supply, they need to understand meat quality grading and palatability. Additionally, they should understand how they can influence the eating quality of their livestock project for a consumer.

Our Response
To provide youth with a proper understanding of how meat quality grading is determined and what influences palatability — i.e. the eating experience, day camps were organized for youth raising beef, swine, sheep and goats. Information was presented to youth regarding how each species is graded. Beef has the most in-depth grading process followed by pork quality grading. The youth were introduced to the difference in the grading of sheep and goat compared to beef and pork. They were taught how the grading process of meat is done to help consumers determine what to expect for eating quality of the product. Youth were introduced to what palatability is as well as how it is influenced by meat characteristics. Other components of meat grading discussed included maturity of the animal at slaughter as well as grade classifications within each species. Additionally they were taught what can be done to influence meat quality from a production standpoint such as genetics, breed and nutrition. At the conclusion of the day camp youth were able to taste meat samples to experience quality grade differences. For beef, youth sampled select, choice, prime and above prime. For the pork camp, youth tasted conventional pork and heritage hog meat. For lamb, youth were able to sample grass finished lamb and grain finished. Unfortunately, there was not an option to sample goat meat.
Program Outcomes

Prior to the delivery of the day camp information, a pre-quiz was administered to determine what participants already understood about meat quality and eating quality. Following the delivering of information and the actual eating experience, the quiz was re-administered to determine gain in knowledge on meat and eating quality.

- Youth had the greatest improvement in score when asked what characteristic does not affect palatability.
- Youth greatly improved their understanding of what the best USDA grade for each species is.
- Most youth agreed or strongly agreed that following the day camp they better understood why carcass quality is important.

The Future

In 2017 many of the youth that participated in the meat camps also participated in livestock quality assurance trainings. They participated to better understand what quality assurance is and why it’s so important to the livestock industry and consumers. This year, to stay in the theme of producing a quality product for consumers, the meat day camps have helped continue the educational experience of quality livestock production. Potential programs for future years will include: farm and ranch tours for the youth to see firsthand how the livestock and food supply chain begins as well as touring livestock harvesting facilities — to better understand the additional steps following the sale of their livestock project animals.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

This program was improved with the opportunity for youth to sample various grades of meat within species. We would like to thank the Idaho Beef Council for sponsoring the cost of the beef products and the two Bingham County farmers that donated the lamb product.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Beef N=24</th>
<th>Swine N=30</th>
<th>Sheep/Goat N=30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is used to determine maturity?</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is marbling the first type of fat that is deposited?</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What characteristic does not affect palatability?</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What plays a large role in the flavor of meat?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the best USDA grade?</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of improvements on questions from pre- to post-test.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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