New ideas for established 4-H livestock committees

**AT A GLANCE**

Opportunities for change in 4-H livestock programs can be limited by lack of new ideas. Evaluating existing programs and suggesting action items to committees promote discussion for improvement.

**The Situation**

Across Idaho, many 4-H livestock committees struggle to adapt fresh ideas about youth development, industry advancements and the relationship of both to youth enrolled in their county programs. Many are influenced by “the way we have always done it” thinking. A method to evaluate current programs and suggest change, in partnership with established committees, can bring renewed energy to the county program and allow for additional opportunity and education for youth. Project volunteers who have not been actively involved in decision-making also need to be encouraged to fully participate by improving committee inclusiveness.

**Our Response**

In response to concerns expressed in Twin Falls County about communication amongst 4-H beef families, project volunteers and the local UI Extension office, a process to collect accurate and unbiased information was developed. Regional 4-H youth development educators and the state 4-H volunteer specialist worked closely with the county 4-H program specialist and the 4-H Extension educator to create interview questions and develop a plan for collecting, analyzing and distributing the information collected.

Communication concerns are not exclusive to Twin Falls County or University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development. Because of the passion and independence of people wanting to help youth, disagreements are common. Consider youth sports and other youth organizations.

All Twin Falls certified beef project 4-H volunteers (27) and UI Extension personnel (three) were interviewed. Approximately 40 hours of interviews were completed and over 10 pages of notes were compiled to develop the proposed action items. Everyone’s comments were noted and considered in the development of the action items, which also follow and support UI Extension 4-H Youth Development Policies and Procedures and any additional Twin Falls County 4-H rules.
Questions asked and discussions held during the interviews included:

- Please share your ideas about the greatest successes and strengths of the Twin Falls 4-H beef project.
- Please share ideas that you believe may have potential to improve the Twin Falls 4-H beef project.
- Things to know as an Idaho 4-H volunteer:
  - 4-H online re-enrollment, code of conduct, position description, protecting minors, public record review, policies and procedures
- Curriculum/project requirements:
  - Twin Falls 4-H beef record book, livestock lesson plans
- Communication:
  - 4-H Online emails, Twin Falls 4-H newsletter

Program Outcomes

Based on the discussions held during the interview process, a list of thirteen action items were developed. These action items were shared with the county 4-H professionals and state staff before presenting them to the Twin Falls beef committee, which is made up of 4-H and FFA representatives from county clubs and chapters. The action items presented included:

- Show respect for everyone involved by offering thank yous and expressions of appreciation
- Establish ground rules for committee meetings to promote inclusiveness and a “safe” space
- Establish position descriptions for superintendents, committee officers and other key roles
- Hold annual meetings with committee officers and 4-H professionals for over-all program review
- Clarify committee and Extension responsibilities for selection and contact of judges
- Develop a position description and selection criteria of fair “ring stewards”
- Establish a subcommittee for county-wide beef education day as required by by-laws
- Contribute to a county over-all “rule/handbook” so everyone has the same information
- Establish a subcommittee for review of all record books every three years
- Establish a subcommittee to determine how to evaluate record books before fair
- Enforce all U of I and IRS regulations regarding collection of donations for beef awards
- Work in partnership with overall volunteer council to update by-laws
- Work in partnership with overall volunteer council to seek “professional” treasurer

It must be noted that these action items were not met positively by the current committee leadership, all who resigned from office at the meeting following the presentation. Remaining volunteers selected new committee leadership, including superintendents, and are developing position descriptions, forming working subcommittees and reviewing donation procedures. New opportunities for youth education and inclusion of new volunteers in decision making is anticipated, albeit with additional time and training with program volunteers.

The Future

Interviews and information gathering will continue with other 4-H volunteers in Twin Falls County. Sheep and goat project 4-H volunteer interviews are scheduled for November 2018. Other volunteer interviews, including swine, horse, general projects and small animals, will be held in subsequent years. Based on the information gathered for each project area, action items will be shared with the respective committees and changes suggested accordingly.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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