

Youth demonstrate knowledge of animal science at statewide Livestock Skill-a-thon

AT A GLANCE

The Livestock Skill-a-thon was created to give youth the opportunity to enhance their total knowledge and comprehension of the livestock industry.

The Situation

Youth who participate in 4-H by raising and showing an animal learn a variety of skills during their project. They learn to choose feeding regimen, how to monitor weights, about clean housing facilities, breeds and reproduction, and preparing animals to enter the retail meat industry. However, these youth do not have the opportunity to show all the background knowledge they have gained during the fair show classes. Additionally, some 4-H members do not have the ability to raise an animal, but they have an interest in learning about the livestock industry. Also, the 4-H'ers get to take advantage of the opportunity to work in a team with other youth.

Our Response

The Livestock Skill-a-thon was added as a state contest in Idaho in 2012 to allow youth of any background the ability to showcase their knowledge and skills in multiple facets of the livestock industry. The teams of youth prepare and practice in several categories including livestock equipment, breeds, retail meat cuts, hay and wool judging, quality assurance, feeding, livestock performance evaluations, and carcass evaluation. The event includes seven stations designated for individual or team participation. Each year, the stations



Two youth in the junior division proudly show their results from an ear notching station.

change in order for youth to experience multiple livestock production practices. This year, stations included quality assurance, meat and carcass evaluation, feed identification, hay quality judging and breeding scenarios. Information about all four large market animal species is included so the youth can obtain a greater understanding of the livestock industry in Idaho.

Extension educators across the state assist in this program by each designing one of the stations for contest use. This year, we had 99 individuals and 24 teams participate, the largest Skill-a-thon contest in history. Equally exciting to the record high participation was that each UI Extension district was represented.

Program Outcomes

Data was collected on each of the categories represented this year at the contest. The youth and adults who attended were asked to complete a pre- and post-contest survey to determine knowledge gained through participation in the 2018 Livestock Skill-a-thon.

Pre-test evaluation results indicated that youth participants were very knowledgeable in quality assurance:

- Over 70 percent of youth were able to identify that feed quality, carcass quality, and sorting and loading animals are important in quality assurance
- 80 percent of participants indicated that breeding programs and management do play an important role in quality assurance.

Youth across the state are being given many opportunities for training in quality assurance from multiple resources. Quality assurance has been highly emphasized in recent years across Idaho, with trainings on quality assurance being taught in multiple counties along with it being included in almost every year's skill-a-thon contest. This shows that the youth are studying quality assurance practices and are retaining the knowledge they've learned.

The contest participants showed knowledge gain from the pre- to the post-test, with 28 percent more youth indicating the correct retail meat cut from a beef loin and 26 percent additional youth able to choose a con-

centrate feed among roughages.

Furthermore, youth and adult volunteers were able to indicate if they improved their decision-making skills by participating in the Livestock Skill-a-thon. The data shows that 85 percent of those surveyed agreed that they have improved their decision-making skills.

The evaluation data from the Livestock Skill-a-thon shows that the contest provides the opportunity for youth to demonstrate knowledge of the livestock industry while also garnering life-skills.

The Future

As we look to the future, we could not be more excited. With a growing number of youth and volunteers each year, we expect this contest to continue its positive impact. Next year, the contest will be more innovated by using the latest research and industry information to create new contest stations with updated material. Furthermore, our goal is to create a more inclusive contest by incorporating industry standards from across the state and promoting and marketing the contest to more Idaho youth.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- Idaho Beef Council
- Idaho Farm Bureau Women Volunteers
- She Grows Volunteers
- Idaho Pork Producers Association

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