

Marketing: Writing Stock Sale Buyer Invitations and so Much More

Jim Wilson, University of Idaho
Area 4-H Youth Extension Educator

Over 7,000 youth throughout Idaho enroll in 4-H beef, sheep or swine projects. Throughout the project year extensive time is spent learning about selection, nutrition, health care, grooming and showmanship – all essential skills in becoming responsible stewards of their livestock. However, too frequently, very little time is spent on marketing and development of buyer relations.

Successful livestock producers recognize not only the importance of marketing, but that it is a continual process – not just something to do just prior to selling their animals. In fact, some aspects of marketing should be reviewed prior to the initial purchase of their project animals. Some of those questions include:

- What market options are available?
- If my preferred option “falls through”, what is my back-up plan?
- What is a **realistic** price I might receive for my animal(s)?
- What will it cost to raise my project animal(s)?
- Therefore, what can I afford to pay when buying my animal(s)?

While many youth sell project animals through auctions at their local Fair, occasionally situations arise where animals are not eligible to sell. If so, then what? Having an alternative option is extremely helpful. In addition, it is not uncommon for youth to raise a second animal of the same species, thus a marketing option needs to be determined for that animal as well.

Through 4-H market animal projects, the goal is to help youth acquire several important life skills and achieve a successful experience. For most, achieving some level of profit is a factor in measuring success. By estimating a realistic sale price and cost for raising each animal to market weight, youth can improve their profit potential by calculating what they can realistically afford to pay when initially purchasing their project animal(s).

Early in the project process, youth should also be thinking of who their potential customers might be. Some ideas include businesses that you or your parents patronize, neighbors, friends or even others within your extended family. By making initial contact with these customers early in the project process you may also discover specific personal preferences they have which can impact some of the management practices (feeds, additives, etc.) you might want to use in raising your animal(s).

Potential customers can be contacted in a variety of ways (in-person, telephone, written). If you already have a previous relation with that customer, then a telephone call or written letter may be all that is required. However, if you are looking to secure a new customer, calling them to arrange a face-to-face meeting may prove beneficial. Have a parent go with you to that meeting as they can help with making the initial introductions and possibly provide assistance (if needed) in answering questions the customer might have.

Regardless of whatever method of contact you opt to use, you should be prepared to briefly share some key points about yourself and your project with the potential customer. The outline below may help you in developing those thoughts:

- Introduce yourself
 - o *Your name, club, what project you’re taking, etc.*
- Tell briefly about your project
 - o *Talk about the animal, what you’re learning, etc.*
- Invite them to the auction/sale/event
 - o *Include the date, location, time, etc.*
- Explain how they as a buyer would benefit
 - o *Locally grown, quality product, support local youth development, etc.*
- Ask if they have any preferences about animals they might buy
- Offer to answer questions they might have
- Thank them – whether they indicate interest in buying your animal or not.

If the prospective buyer has indicated they would like periodic updates on how your project is coming along, be sure to provide those. If your contact was about purchasing your animal through the local Fair sale, then a follow-up reminder 4-6 weeks before the event is appropriate. A well written letter is often better as it provides specific details the prospective buyer can go back and review, should questions arise.

Below are two examples of prospective buyer letters. Carefully compare the content and place yourself in that potential buyer's position. If you had the choice of supporting just one of these individuals (Jason or Jeffrey), which one would you choose? Why?

July 10, 2013

Dear Mr. Jones,

My name is Jason Clover, and I want to invite you to the 2013 North Idaho Fair 4-H Stock Sale, so you can buy my pig – Pork chop.

The sale is Saturday morning. They have a Buyer Breakfast at 7:00 AM and also provide a sack lunch and pop during the sale.

I hope you can attend the sale and buy Pork Chop. I have spent a lot of money to feed him and could use your help in paying my feed bill. Thanks.

Jason Clover

July 10, 2013

Dear Mr. Jones,

My name is Jeffrey Clover. I'm a member of the Curious Kritters 4-H Club where I'm taking a market swine project. This year I've learned a lot about selection, proper nutrition and health care needed to raise a quality animal.

During the North Idaho Fair (August 21-25) many of my friends and I will exhibit our project animals and learn from the judge what we are doing well and areas we can improve upon. For those of us with market animals, this process includes the annual 4-H Stock Sale.

I would like to invite you to participate in the Stock Sale on August 24th, which starts with a Buyer's Breakfast at 7:00 AM; the actual Stock Sale begins at 8:15 AM. This is a great opportunity to support local youth and obtain high-quality meat for your freezer.

The enclosed brochure may help to answer other questions you might have; or you can call me via my parents at (208) 555-1234.

**Sincerely,
Jeffrey Clover**

{Note: from a personal safety standpoint, unless youth and families are well acquainted with the prospective buyer, care should be taken with regards to inclusion of physical mailing addresses. Also telephone contact between buyers and minors should be routed through the member's parent.}

One final reminder with regards to Buyer Invitations, they should never come across as a plea for money. Also, youth should not include what they plan to use the sale proceeds for in communications with prospective buyers – unless the buyer specifically asks. Indicating how the actual sale proceeds may be used is appropriate to include in buyer thank you notes {refer to the *Writing Buyer Thank You Notes* document}.

Best wishes in developing a successful 4-H marketing strategy, and for maintaining a high quality standard when communicating with prospective buyers. Remember, your actions reflect on the entire 4-H program.