

Teaching 4-H youth humane and ethical husbandry practices

AT A GLANCE

4-H volunteers are supporting large clubs with multiple species. Multi-county livestock clinics provide 4-H youth with quality lessons covering humane and ethical husbandry practices.

The Situation

One purpose of the 4-H animal project is to teach young people how to feed, fit and show their animals. The more important purpose is to provide an opportunity for personal growth and development. Youth develop and strengthen character by making ethical decisions. As industry and public perception of animal production evolves, more time must be spent on teaching ethical and humane animal husbandry practices.

4-H volunteers are leading larger community clubs and often support education in multiple species project areas. The complexity of 4-H animal issues such as biosecurity, carcass quality and feed alternatives may be beyond the scope of a volunteers knowledge. The 4-H Leaders Councils in Payette, Adams and Washington counties requested additional support in teaching these subjects and finding experts to come speak to youth at animal clinics.

The Idaho 4-H youth development program requires a minimum of seven project-related learning experiences each year. The activities taught at these clinics help fulfill these requirements.

Our Response

Three neighboring county 4-H programs (Adams, Washington and Payette) have collaborated to offer livestock clinics that cover topics covering humane and ethical husbandry practices. In a typical year we



A teen models a porterhouse steak using playdough to create marbling at a meat quality activity during a workshop.

offer a clinic in Cambridge, Weiser and New Plymouth. Many of the presentations are not species specific, making them relevant for youth taking any animal project. Invited expert speakers offer a 20-30 minute presentation and/or hands-on activity. There is an opportunity for youth to ask questions of the presenters. After each presentation youth write down what they learned and how it relates to their specific project on a worksheet. The presenter reads what they wrote and initials that their summary is acceptable with the help of 4-H volunteers. Participants rotate through each station.

Each animal clinic provides a two hour program and a healthy snack. By completing the workshop, each youth finished at least three educational activities required in their animal project. The completed worksheet is then added to their 4-H records for the portfolio judge to see that the activity requirement was met.

The types of activities at the workshop are often hands-on and have included these topics:

- Ethics, sportsmanship and personal character
- Different digestive systems, reading feed labels
- Carcass quality, meat cuts, by-products
- Heat stress, disease and biosecurity

Program Outcomes

By offering these workshops to a large audience in multiple counties, 4-H youth, adult volunteers and parents were given a quality learning experience. Experts such as veterinarians, feed salesmen, Extension educators and Extension staff are only required to travel once to these rural counties. Cooperation from these counties offer more than what one county with limited faculty or staff could provide.

Between 45-87 (average of 63 youth per workshop) 4-H youth have attended each workshop and parents, chaperones, and families are encouraged to stay and participate. Forty-three percent of youth in the three counties taking a large animal project (market and breeding livestock, horse) have attended the workshops in 2014 and 2015.

Not only are these participation numbers consistent, they are also sustainable over the past three years. In addition, the comments received from volunteer leaders show the impact these clinics have.

- “The activities the kids complete help them to grow in their projects while fostering an environment of fun and teamwork. Kids come away from each event inspired with a network of new friends they can rely upon for support and encouragement. I have seen great growth in the youth who regularly participate and look forward to seeing how these kids continue to go on and impress in years to come.” – Washington County volunteer/parent
- “The county livestock clinics have been very helpful in educating our 4-H kids about various topics that we as leaders are not always able to thoroughly discuss during our meetings. What a great idea to get all 4-H kids together to learn in a positive environment where we have common goals and interests. The experts brought in have been a valuable asset to my 4-H members, my parents and to myself as a leader.” – Washington County volunteer/parent

While we have seen significant improvement in the quality of the animal and it's care, even more importantly we have observed a retained knowledge of the skills and they are able to express the changes they have made to their project during the 4-H portfolio judging. Additionally, there is indication that the adult volunteers and parents have been better prepared to teach the youth in their clubs.

The Future

These three counties are continuing to create animal clinics for the upcoming years based on the feedback and suggestions received by the participants.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

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