

THE GOOD THINGS THAT COME FROM PARTICIPATING IN 4-H LIVESTOCK PROJECTS

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4-H Livestock Projects are popular with Tennessee youth. More than 55,000 boys and girls are enrolled in the Animal Science Projects. This is 18 percent of the total project enrollment in the Tennessee 4-H program.

What can be gained by participating in the projects? What can be learned? What are the benefits to be gained by youngsters? Much can be learned by being involved in 4-H livestock projects. Following are some benefits or “pluses” of involvement in 4-H livestock projects.

1. Participating in livestock projects and shows teaches youngsters to get along with people. Many people who lose their jobs lose them not because of lack of knowledge or technical ability, but because of inability to get along with people. In showing animals, winning or losing helps youngsters to get along with others. Boys and girls also have the opportunity to meet and interact with youngsters from outside their own community.

2. Caring for an animal teaches responsibility. If all of us adults shouldered our responsibilities, we would be doing our part to improve our communities, schools, churches, businesses and families. How does being involved in a junior livestock project teach responsibility? An animal needs to be cared for and fed, trained and worked with each day if success is to be realized. It is the youngster’s responsibility to hear the alarm clock and obey it. If nothing more than that is learned, a junior livestock project is worth the effort.

3. Junior livestock projects teach perseverance, the ability to stick with a task or follow through until it is completed. Many talented people have failed in life because of the

simple fact that they did not continue to the finish. We will fail in life many more times than we will succeed. A baby falls many times before learning to walk. It takes a lot of perseverance to teach a steer to lead, to stand, to teach and train a horse to learn a pattern. It seems like the animal may have more perseverance than the youngster in lots of situations. However, the slogan, “keep on keeping on,” will contribute to success many more times than it will to failure.

4. Junior livestock projects teach or develop initiative. Think about what is being gained or learned by a youngster that has to be constantly pushed or prodded to take care of his animal. What will be learned if “daddy” or “mama” does all the work, feeding, grooming, etc.? What will happen to this young person when he is on his own? How will this young person get along in school or later on the job?

5. Youngsters learn how to plan, organize and take care of details. All of these are required in selecting, feeding, caring for and showing an animal. Just about anyone will take care of the big things, the obvious details. But in caring for livestock, and especially throughout life, those little things, or the person who takes care of the little details or goes the extra mile, get the job done and is successful.

6. Youngsters learn to make decisions. Making decisions is the most painful thing a teenager has to do. Some adults also have the same problem. Youngsters involved in a livestock project learn how to gather information, how to analyze the facts and how to accept the consequences of these decisions. Learning comes from each decision that is made.

7. Caring for animals helps youngsters to become “goal oriented.” In feeding, caring for and showing an animal, youngsters learn their worth because they have goals. They develop self-motivation in fulfilling goals. People, both youngsters and adults, who cannot relate to past experiences or goals, tend to have problems in adapting to changes in life. Goal orientation is vital to developing mature, responsible adults.

8. Livestock projects teach youngsters to cope with stress and frustration. Closely related to youth development is the idea of becoming accustomed to the normal stress of

everyday living. The youngster who exhibits an animal in a show is under stress, but learns to cope with it by accepting and meeting situations as they arise. Youngsters also realize that they can relieve that stress by not necessarily winning first place but by meeting the challenge.

9. Youngsters learn to face reality. One of parents' and society's greatest disservices to youth has been the sheltering of our children from crises. We live in a society of "good times". We tell our children that life should not have any crises and that they should all be having a "good time". Livestock projects provide opportunities to deal with crises and disappointments.

10. Probably the most important part of junior livestock projects is family involvement. To be successful, families need to be involved. This does not mean that the whole family does the work, but it does mean that the whole family must be enthusiastic, involved and enjoy it. Provide a cheering section and a strong shoulder to lean on. The big benefit of an animal project is lost if the parents do not support their youth in their efforts.

Sometimes we tend to look at junior livestock projects from the wrong view point. It is not an animal project. It is not an animal show. It is a youth show. Do not place the emphasis on the animal, place the emphasis and value on what can be gained or learned by the boy and girl who is involved in the project.

An investment in *yoUTH* is an investment in the *fUTURE*!

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