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# PERCEPTIONS OF ETHICAL PRACTICES IN YOUTH LIVESTOCK SHOWS

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## ABSTRACT

Too often youth get caught up in the "winning" and lose track of the "real values" of a 4-H and FFA livestock project. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the perceptions of 4-H and FFA youth and their parents on the ethical nature of practices used in livestock shows. The research design included a survey of a purposefully selected population of 4-H and FFA livestock exhibitors from Pennsylvania and West Virginia. The study determined the ethical perceptions of youth and parents on 23 commonly used livestock practices. A majority of the youth participants found all practices unethical with the exception of adults sharing preparation of animals with youth and paying above market value for animals. A majority of the parents that participated in the study rated all practices unethical with the exception of restrictive feeding of an animal, using mechanical equipment to teach animals to lead, adults coaching from the sidelines, adults sharing preparation of animals with youth, paying above market value for animals, and youth questioning the livestock judge.

## Introduction

4-H is the largest and most recognized youth organization consisting of more than six million young people across America learning leadership, citizenship, and life skills (National 4-H Organization, n.d.). The National FFA Organization (also known as Future Farmers of America) makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education (National FFA Organization, n.d.). As a member of a 4-H club or an FFA chapter youth have the opportunity to participate in livestock programs. "The primary purpose of the youth livestock program is to provide an opportunity for personal growth and development of the young person....young people have the opportunity to develop many positive character traits" (Hammatt, 2002, p. 2). Livestock projects are a great opportunity for youth to learn to care for another living thing. As part of a livestock project 4-H and FFA youth are expected to water, feed, clean, and exercise the animal. In addition to the basic skills of caring for the animal, youth learn courtesy and proper treatment of people and things, consistently applying rules and standards, recommended procedures for fitting and grooming an animal, and making the home, community and country a better place to live for themselves and others.

To reward the 4-H and FFA youth for their hard work with the livestock project they can show their animal at a county fair or other livestock exhibit. At the livestock show they can earn prize money if their animal places in a livestock class. This prize money should be used as a reward and not the only reason why a youth should complete a livestock project.

## Problem Statement

Too often youth get caught up in the "winning" and lose track of the "real values" of a 4-H or FFA livestock project. They see the recognition and financial rewards and lose track of the life skills activities designed to be a part of the project. Nestor (2000) identified 58 unethical practices observed by Extension Agents and high school teachers in youth livestock shows. Dever (2003) found that females observed a higher incidence of unethical behavior involving ethics and fraudulent practices, while males observed higher incidence of unethical behavior involving adult participation, alteration of animals and animal health and management practices. Scott, Woloshuk, Boone, and Taylor (2008) observed differences in the perceptions of ethical practices between gender, residence type, and participation in ethical training. Are these perceptions common in all groups of youth livestock exhibitors?

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the perceptions of 4-H and FFA youth and their parents on the ethical nature of practices used in livestock shows. The results will provide Extension Agents and FFA Advisors a better perception of what livestock exhibitors and their parents determine as an ethical or unethical practice in livestock shows. The information may be used in establishing guidelines and trainings for youth and adult volunteer leaders, fair board members, etc., for 4-H and FFA livestock programs.

## Research Design

A descriptive research design in the form of a mailed questionnaire was used to evaluate the perceptions of 4-H and FFA youth and their parents of the ethical nature of practices used in livestock shows. A purposeful sample of 213 youth was used for the study consisting of 4-H and FFA youth from Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Sixty-seven Pennsylvania Extension Educators were asked for the names of five youth who showed livestock in the 2008 show season. The names and addresses from West Virginia consisted of youth who participated in the 2008 West Virginia Livestock Round-up, a popular event for youth and adults to exhibit their livestock.

Once the youth names were received they were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. The purposeful sample was randomly divided into two groups. The groups were reviewed and siblings were moved into the same group. Group 1 was established as the "youth" group with a population of 109 youth. Group 2 was designated as the "parent" group with a population of 67 adults whose children had shown livestock in 2008. Parents of youth in Group 1 were not included in group 2. The difference between the sizes of the groups was due to parents with multiple children involved in showing livestock. A total of 43 youth responded to the survey (40%) and 32 parents completed the survey (48%).

### Instrumentation

The instrument consisted of a series of questions about common practices that take place when showing livestock. The researcher used an instrument developed by Scott, Woloshuk, Boone and Taylor (2008). There were two versions of the instrument, one for the youth exhibitor participants (group 1) and one for the parents of the youth exhibitor participants (group 2). Both instruments asked the same questions relating to the perceptions of livestock practices. The wording was changed to reflect the youth and parent roles in the process. There were a total of 23 questions related to the practices in livestock showing and 14 demographic questions. The reliability of the instrument was determined to be extensive with a Spearman-Brown coefficient of 0.21 (Robinson, Wrightsman, & Shaver, 1991). Both instruments were presented to a panel of experts to establish content and face validity.

Dillman's (2000) Tailored Design Method was used to communicate with the participants for this study to maximize the response rate. This included an initial mailing, follow-up postcard, and a complete second mailing.

### Findings

The respondents for this study consisted of 4-H and FFA members (N = 43) who exhibited livestock in the 2008 show season and parents (N = 32) of youth who exhibited livestock in the 2008 show season in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Seventeen (39.5 %) of the youth participants were male and 26 (60.5 %) of the youth participants were female. Twelve (38.7 %) of the adult participants were male and 19 (61.3 %) of the participants were female. The youth had been a member of 4-H/FFA for an average of 6.67 years (SD = 2.59). A majority of both groups (youth = 81.4%, adults = 75.0%) had participated in an ethics class. Youth reported showing market and breeding livestock at county and state level fairs.

#### Perception of the Ethical Nature of Commonly Used Livestock Practices

The respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of the ethical nature of 23 commonly used livestock practices. The 23 practices were divided into five categories which include "animal welfare issues," "unethical practices," "potential fraudulent actions," "deceptive show practices," and "inappropriate youth and adult behaviors."

The "animal welfare issues" category consisted of eight practices. A majority of the youth participants (group 1) and the parents (group 2) indicated that five of the eight practices were unethical. This included: cutting lambs' tails too close (Youth = 64.3%, Adults = 65.6%), hitting uncooperative animals (Youth = 81.0%, Adults = 75.0%), leaving lambs in trimming chutes for extended periods of time (Youth = 78.6%, Adults = 68.8%), pulling a lamb's head where its feet leave the ground (Youth = 59.5%, Adults = 53.1%), and using sedative type drugs on animals (Youth = 71.4%, Adults = 77.4%). On two practices a majority of the youth agreed the practice was unethical, however, a majority of the adults did not agree. The practices included running overweight animals (Youth = 54.8%, Adults = 50.0%) and using mechanical equipment to teach animals to lead (Youth = 57.5%, Adults = 46.9%). Less than half of the youth and adult respondents viewed restrictive feeding of an animal (Youth = 47.6%, Adults = 40.6%) as unethical.

Table 1

#### *Animal Welfare Issues Considered Unethical*

	Youth		Adults	
	N	%	N	%
Cutting lambs' tails too close	27	64.3	21	65.6
Hitting uncooperative animals	34	81.0	24	75.0
Leaving lambs in trimming chutes for extended periods of time	33	78.6	22	68.8
Pulling a lamb's head where its feet leave the ground	25	59.5	17	53.1
Using sedative type drugs on animals	30	71.4	24	77.4
Running overweight animals	23	54.8	16	50.0
Using mechanical equipment to teach animals to lead	23	57.5	15	46.9
Restrictive feeding of an animal	20	47.6	13	40.6

The "unethical practices" category consisted of five practices. A majority of the youth and adult respondents agreed that three of five items were unethical. The practices included: adults preparing animals for youth (Youth = 69.0%, Adults = 68.8%), animals cared for by someone other than the exhibitor (Youth = 85.7%, Adults = 73.3%), and grooming of animals by professionals (Youth = 52.4%, Adults = 71.9%). On one practice, adults coaching youth from the sidelines (Youth = 54.8%, Adults = 45.2%), a majority of the youth agreed the practice was unethical, however, a majority of the adults did not agree the practice was unethical. Only a small number of both groups rated adults sharing preparation of animals with the youth (Youth = 7.1%, Adults = 3.1%) as unethical.

Table 2

*Animal Preparation Practices Considered Unethical*

	Youth		Adults	
	N	%	N	%
Adults preparing animals for youth	29	69.0	22	68.8
Animals cared for by someone other than the exhibitor	36	85.7	22	73.3
Grooming of animals by professionals	22	52.4	23	71.9
Adults coaching youth from the sidelines	23	54.8	14	45.2
Adults sharing preparation of animals with the youth	3	7.1	1	3.1

The category of “potential fraudulent actions” consisted of two practices. Both the youth and adult groups agreed that substituting an animal without notifying the show committee (Youth = 90.5%, Adults = 93.8%) was unethical. Less than a majority of the youth and adult groups rated paying above market value for animals (Youth = 23.8%, Adults = 19.4%) as unethical.

Table 3

*Potential Fraudulent Actions Considered Unethical*

	Youth		Adults	
	N	%	N	%
Substituting an animal without notifying the show committee	38	90.5	30	93.8
Paying above market value for animals	10	23.8	6	19.4

The “deceptive show practices” category consisted of five practices. A majority of the youth and adult respondents agreed that all five practices were unethical. The five practices included: encouraging an animal to drink a great deal of water (Youth = 57.1%, Adults = 53.1%), injection of fluids under an animal’s skin (Youth = 76.2%, Adults = 90.3%), pumping air under an animal’s skin (Youth = 95.2%, Adults = 100%), use of non-grooming products on an animal (Youth = 66.7%, Adults = 65.6%), and giving fluids (other than water) to an animal (Youth = 66.7%, Adults = 75.0%).

Table 4

*Deceptive Show Practices Considered Unethical*

	Youth		Adults	
	N	%	N	%
Encouraging an animal to drink a great deal of water	24	57.1	17	53.1
Injection of fluids under an animal's skin	32	76.2	28	90.3
Pumping air under an animal's skin	40	95.2	31	100.0
Use of non-grooming products on an animal	28	66.7	21	65.6
Giving fluids (other than water) to an animal	28	66.7	24	75.0

There were three practices in the “inappropriate youth and adult behaviors” category. A majority of the youth and adult respondents agreed that two of three practices were unethical. The practices included: adults questioning the livestock judge (Youth = 57.1%, Adults = 62.5%) and talking to the judge(s) before a show (Youth = 63.4%, Adults = 56.3%). On youth questioning the livestock judge (Youth = 51.2%, Adults = 37.5%), a majority of the youth agreed the practice was unethical, however, a majority of the adults did not agree the practice was unethical.

Table 5

*Inappropriate Youth and Adult Behaviors Considered Unethical*

	Youth		Adults	
	N	%	N	%
Adults questioning the livestock judge	24	57.1	20	62.5

Talking to the judge(s) before a show	26	63.4	18	56.3
Youth questioning the livestock judge	21	51.2	12	37.5

### Conclusions

A majority of the youth participants found all practices unethical with the exception of adults sharing preparation of animals with youth and paying above market value for animals. A majority of the parents that participated in the study rated all practices unethical with the exception of restrictive feeding of an animal, using mechanical equipment to teach animals to lead, adults coaching from the sidelines, adults sharing preparation of animals with youth, paying above market value for animals, and youth questioning the livestock judge.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Extension and agricultural educators should try to understand why youth and/or adults rated specific practices as ethical. This includes the philosophy behind their responses.

Ethics training courses should be offered frequently through the show season so youth and adults are made aware of unethical practices.

Develop an ethics training course specific for adults to better explain the purpose of livestock projects and the parents' role in them.

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