

Using Common Measures to Evaluate “Common” Programs

Background

Research shows that youth participating in livestock project gain valuable life skills in the following areas: accepting responsibility, setting goals, developing self-discipline, self-motivation, knowledge of livestock industry, positive self-esteem, and decision-making skills (Boleman, Cummings, and Briers, 2004). In West Virginia, youth livestock projects have some of the highest completion rates statewide.

Annually, approximately forty-five (45) youths participate in the Calhoun and Gilmer County Youth Livestock Programs. These youth are tasked with acquiring and raising a market ready, high-quality animal to exhibit and sale during the annual show. Over the course of the year, the participants increase their individual knowledge on their species, and often other species, through project completion, animal work, program workshops, and more. While the showmen are rewarded at the end of the year through their placing and sale, the program also provides opportunities for personal growth and development. As WVU Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources Director Ronnie Helmondollar shared in a 2019 article, “Blue-ribbon animals are nice, but blue-ribbon kids are the focus of our WVU Extension Service educators and show managers,” (WVUToday, 2019).

Goals & Objectives

4-H and FFA Youth have the opportunity to participate in Youth Livestock programming nationwide, and the objectives remain consistent from state-to-state and program to program. Those objectives include:

- Promote personal growth and development through participation in animal projects.
- Assist in development of life skills – including decision making and planning, which prepare them for the future.
- Build characters through positive competitive interactions. This includes allowing youth to learn more about best practices and procedures and build tolerance for the opinions of others.
- Teach youth proper animal husbandry practices and spark interest in animal science-based careers. The program aims to improve knowledge related to caring for, housing, feeding, grooming, fitting, and exhibiting animals; additionally, records allow youth to understand their animal’s well-being and ethical/safe practices for human consumption.



Note – Adapted from South Dakota State University Extension, Amanda Stade, 2021

The Calhoun/Gilmer Youth Livestock Programs

Workshops

In order to participate in each county’s Livestock Show and Sale, they are required to attend a set number of workshops hosted by WVU Extension and Calhoun/Gilmer FFA. In 2021, those workshops covered the following topics:

- A Guide to Raising a Market Livestock Project (Virtual)
- Kahoots Livestock Quiz (Virtual)
- Feeding Stuff and Understanding How to Feed your Livestock Project
- Livestock Body Parts and Structure Issues
- On Your Own Workshop – Observe another Youth Livestock Show

Showmanship/Grooming Camp

In 2021, a Livestock Showmanship and Grooming Camp was held and opened to youth in both Calhoun and Gilmer Counties. The event included various hands-on activities like:

- Skill-A-Thon Review
- Showmanship Demonstrations and Practice
- Washing Your Show Animals
- Sheering and Clipping Sheep & Goats



Using Common Measures

What is Common Measures

According to – 4-H.org, “The National 4-H Common Measures Instruments are designed to assess the impacts of 4-H programs in science, healthy living, civic engagement, college/career readiness and universal positive youth development.”

The 4-H Common Measures – Animal Science Survey (CORE) was distributed electronically to Calhoun & Gilmer youth who completed livestock projects in 2021. Twenty-Two (22) youth completed the evaluation resulting in a completion rate of 50%.

Available Common Measures Tools	
4-H Experience	Your 4-H Experience
Universal	Developmental Impacts: Personal Mindset & Social Skills
Animal Science	Life Skills/Professional Development Animal Well-Being Food Safety
Civic Engagement	Interest in Community Service & Giving Back Community Awareness
College & Career Readiness	Professionalism College Decision Making Career Decision Making
Healthy Living	Healthy Eating Habits Being Active Healthy Decision Making Food Preparation
Science	Science Interest & Thinking Science Skills & Attitudes Engineering Skills & Attitudes

100% of youth responded positively (“Yes” or “Sort of”) to questions within the Animal Well-Being Content Block (Animal Husbandry).

Youth demonstrated personal growth with high MEAN scores related to: Learned Problem Solving Skills (0.9318), Met New People (0.9773), and Learned Positive Work Ethic, and to Work Hard when it is Difficult (0.9545)

Implications of Results

- Further Development of Livestock Showmanship Camp:** Unfortunately, participation in the 2021 Camp was limited. There seems to be an interest in this topic – Showmanship/Working with the Animal. How do we make it MORE ACCESSIBLE to youth in both counties?
- Introduce Youth to More Animal Science Careers:** The lack of interest in Animal Science careers may be due to a lack of knowledge of potential employment options. This interest may increase through an introduction to the variety of Animal Science careers available
- Greater Focus on Planning and Record Keeping:** Record keeping was an area in which youth seem disconnected based on the 0.8409 MEAN being one of the lowest. This is an important piece of animal welfare/consumption quality. Therefore, this may be an ideal topic for a workshop. If combined with Planning/Goal Setting, it would logically hit two areas of ‘weakness’ in one program.

