

Leadership Opportunities in the 4-H Livestock Program

It is important for today's youth to gain experience in leadership, whether it is within 4-H, in school, or at work. Learning about yourself and how to work well with others are important ways to develop leadership skills. The livestock program area offers many ways for you to get leadership experience that will benefit you and the people around you both now and in the future.

As you grow in knowledge and practical experience in your 4-H livestock project, seek out leadership opportunities in your local and county clubs.

Leadership is more than holding a title as an officer – leadership includes presenting lessons you've learned to younger 4-H'ers or other youth with less livestock experience. For example, you could take your show cattle to a meeting and demonstrate the proper way to show a heifer. During the mock livestock show, you can give tips and suggestions to help attendees learn how to show successfully.

Within your local 4-H livestock club, there are probably members who do not know how to care for, groom, and exhibit their livestock project properly. Seek out a younger or less experienced member to mentor and work with him or her on a regular basis. The less experienced members will feel empowered and come to understand the work and skills necessary to present their animals to the best of their ability in the show ring.

If you would like to help lead club meetings, 4-H offers you plenty of opportunities to serve as an elected officer. These office positions include president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, reporter, historian, song leader and recre-

ation leader. The 4-H Officer's Handbook (MSUES Publication 990) provides in-depth expectations and characteristics of a good officer as part of a leadership team to develop a quality club. If you thrive in leadership situations and want to seek further opportunities, you can use these livestock and club leadership experiences to seek district and state 4-H leadership opportunities as a council officer or state leadership team member.

There are also other leadership opportunities for youth involved in 4-H livestock projects. For example, many livestock breed associations have quality junior programs at the state, regional and national level that give you opportunities to build upon your experiences. If you are interested in beef cattle, Angus, Simmental, Brahman and Hereford breed associations offer junior memberships to youth. The memberships will give you leadership opportunities and the chance to network with other youth leaders across the United States.

Other livestock programs, including the National Swine Registry, United Suffolk Sheep Association, and Mississippi Club Goat Association, also offer junior memberships to youth. By becoming a leader in these junior livestock associations, you can participate in national conferences, regional and national breed shows and be eligible for certain scholarships. To learn how to get involved in these leadership opportunities, visit web sites of breed associations of interest.

Many breed associations offer leadership training for members. For example, the American Quarter Horse Youth Association provides hands-on leadership



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training for its elected directors and officers. Annual seminar series and workshops teach youth how to advocate for the equine industry when they return home. Expectations of leaders in AQHYA are high, as the association gives their leaders the resources to deliver lessons and activities in schools and local horse clubs. Similar leadership positions and conferences are available through the American Junior Paint Horse Association and other equine organizations.

Mississippi Cattlemen's Association and Mississippi Farm Bureau offer summer internships to young Mississippians. Interns learn firsthand how those organizations advocate for livestock and animal agriculture. They are given assignments in which they are challenged to learn more about livestock production and deliver programs to youth and adults. Interns have the chance to network and build relationships with contacts they may not have encountered

otherwise, thereby enabling them to become better leaders in their local 4-H club.

Successful leaders influence and support others in a positive manner for a shared goal. You can join a committee, small group, or team striving to make something happen. Being a leader can be as simple or as complicated as you make it. You can lead a small group on a project to raise money for club travel to a state or regional conference, or you can lead your local 4-H club as president.

The leadership skills you develop in 4-H will help you complete group projects at school and on the job, and colleges seek out students who are strong leaders. Ask your 4-H Extension agent and adult leaders how to get involved in 4-H and livestock association leadership positions at the local, state, regional and national level so you can become a leader for tomorrow.



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