

Success Stories

Sharing the difference CSU Extension makes in people's lives and their communities.

Who needs a farm to raise livestock?

A long-standing Eagle County partnership gives young people who don't live on farms or ranches the chance to raise livestock for 4-H projects and develop skills for life.

Situation

Youth who live in urban, suburban or even rural neighborhood communities seldom have the opportunity to raise an animal as part of a 4-H market livestock project, partly because they lack access to the barns, pens, and space that animals need. As a result, many youth aren't able to live out their talent or desire for raising livestock. While they can participate in other meaningful 4-H projects, they miss out on raising an animal and developing a unique set of skills that can carry them through life.

Extension's Response

The CSU Eagle County Extension 4-H program was the first in the state to expand livestock rearing beyond the family farm or ranch. For more than 15 years, Eagle County 4-H agents have partnered with Eagle County government to provide barn and pen space at the fairgrounds in the town of Eagle. In exchange for the chance to raise pigs, sheep, goats and poultry at the fairgrounds, 4-Hers pay a \$50 refundable deposit, sign a contract, and participate in required clean-up days.

In 2005, the fairgrounds livestock program expanded to a second county-owned venue near the town of Gypsum. As part of his Eagle Scout community project, a 4-Her built several livestock pens on the grounds formerly used by FFA members. In 2009, Eagle County funded construction of a new barn at the site and additional pens. This enables even more Eagle County 4-Hers to raise pigs, goats, sheep, and poultry in exchange for paying a refundable deposit and helping to maintain facilities. 4-Hers raising animals at both county venues fulfill all 4-H market livestock requirements such as Meat Quality Assurance trainings, weigh-ins, and record keeping.



The Bottom Line

- Support from Eagle County government has allowed Extension to increase 4-H participation and visibility.
- Eagle County Extension community barns are giving 4-H youth who possess little to no farm or ranch experience the chance to raise livestock, participate in one of 4-H's most popular projects, and build valuable life skills.

Contact Information

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Results

Participating in market livestock projects through the Eagle County partnership offers town-based 4-Hers a chance to develop character, learn skills, and expand interests. One example is the Muehlethaler family: Bryce (12), Megan (15) and Ben (18). Megan served as president of the local 4-H livestock club and says she is “excited to be developing leadership skills while learning to get along with her peers and helping out younger members who are new to 4-H.” Bryce recently participated on a livestock judging team and is considering working with livestock in college. And Ben agrees with his siblings that he would be truly disappointed if the opportunity to raise livestock at the fairgrounds were to end.

When the fairgrounds livestock program began, just four youth participated. In 2010, 40 4-H members raised 60 animals—a 33 percent increase in participation in just one year. The success of the Eagle County partnership has influenced other 4-H programs around the state to develop similar programs at fairgrounds, community 4-H barns, and non-profit and private ranches.

Extension agents brokered these opportunities by building partnerships with county government, local organizations and individuals. By 2010, 4-Hers were raising livestock in alternative venues in at least 10 county Extension programs around the state.

Overall, the expansion of raising 4-H livestock beyond the family farm and ranch highlights the value of the 4-H market livestock project. As it becomes more cost-prohibitive for young families to farm and ranch, alternative venues are essential for connecting youth to agriculture. As a result, they learn the demands and responsibilities of raising livestock, from daily chores and maintaining animal health to record keeping and making ethical decisions.

As highlighted in University of Wisconsin Extension research, middle and high school students participating in 4-H livestock projects gain more knowledge, skills and behaviors that benefit them for a lifetime than compared to their non-4-H peers.¹

¹ UW Extension. “4-H animal projects develop strong character, ethics and life skills.” October, 2006. www.uwex.edu/impacts/search/documents/120.pdf.

“I think our three kids all really enjoy doing livestock projects very much. Although it is a lot of work, each year we ask them if they want to do it again and they always say yes. The three kids have learned to work together helping out when one of them is out of town. I grew up on a farm and my husband in the city and so I am glad that my children have had the opportunity in our rural area town to raise livestock animals through 4-H.”

— Gail Muehlethaler

Parent of Eagle County 4-Hers Ben, Megan, and Bryce

Participating Counties

Adams County
Baca County
Chaffee County
Douglas County
Eagle County
Grand County
Gunnison County
Pueblo County
Rio Blanco County
Routt County

Statewide Efforts

For more than a decade, Extension 4-H agents around the state have helped town and city-dwelling 4-Hers raise exhibition animals at county fairgrounds, community 4-H barns, and nonprofit and private ranches. Agents have secured these opportunities by partnering with county government, local organizations and individuals. Learn more at www.ext.colostate.edu/impact.