

Success Stories

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

Raising animals the *Town Kids* way

Strategic partnerships in Routt County allow young people who don't live on farms or ranches the chance to raise animals for 4-H livestock projects and develop valuable life skills.

Situation

Youth who live in towns and cities seldom have the opportunity to raise an animal as part of a 4-H market livestock project, partly because they lack access to the pens, barns, and space that animals need. As a result, many aren't able to live out their talent or desire for raising livestock—whether goats, steer, sheep or swine. 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 many 4-Hers carry through life.

Extension's Response

In 2008, Routt County Extension 4-H partnered with Routt County government to form *Town Kids*. The market livestock program lets youth who don't live on farms or ranches raise animals at the Routt County Fairgrounds located in Hayden. Since *Town Kids* participants are typically new to agriculture and raising animals, Extension helped 4-Hers and their parents learn what to ask and look for when selecting a pig, goat or sheep for their project. In exchange for raising animals at the fairgrounds, *Town Kids* 4-Hers pay a \$25 refundable deposit and donate eight hours of community service to help maintain the facility.

In 2010, *Town Kids* expanded to Steamboat Springs through a partnership with a local education nonprofit, Yampatika. Steamboat Springs *Town Kids* 4-Hers raise sheep and goats at the Legacy Ranch, a city-owned property that Yampatika leases to run its summer youth camps. In exchange, 4-Hers help maintain facilities and provide educational outreach.

4-Hers raising animals at both venues fulfill all 4-H market livestock requirements including Meat Quality Assurance trainings, weigh-ins, and record keeping.



The Bottom Line

- Support from Routt County government has allowed Extension to increase 4-H participation and visibility.
- The *Town Kids* program is 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.

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Results

Town Kids demonstrates the community's commitment to youth development and highlights the value of the 4-H market livestock project. Raising an animal for show at the county fair helps 4-Hers gain knowledge and skills that help grow their confidence and leadership. For example, one of the oldest members of the *Town Kids* program took the initiative to mentor first year *Town Kids* participants. Her actions have the potential to encourage junior members to take on a similar role once they become senior members.

The success of the Routt County partnership, along with a similar program in Eagle County, influenced other 4-H programs around the state to develop livestock programs based at county fairgrounds, community 4-H barns, and nonprofit or private ranches. Extension agents have secured 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 across Colorado.

Overall, the continued expansion of affording 4-Hers the chance to raise livestock outside of the traditional 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. The result is that they learn the demands and responsibilities of raising livestock—from daily duties 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.

"It's been a really positive experience for my son to have the responsibility of taking care of his project every day at least twice a day, from picking his animals out at the beginning of the year all the way to seeing them out the door as they head off to market."

— Ed Corriveau
Parent of Hayden *Town Kids* 4-Her

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.