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Pre-Fair livestock interview improve 4-H record keeping

A new, pre-fair interview process for livestock projects motivates Weld County 4-Hers to complete their record books and develop valuable public speaking skills.

Issue

Record keeping is a required and integral task of every 4-H project, from shooting sports and leathercraft to model rocketry and raising livestock. Record books help 4-Hers set personal and project goals, log expenses and activities, and tell a story about their experience.

4-Hers who raise livestock for exhibition assume a great deal of responsibility, especially since these animals eventually enter the food supply. 4-Hers must keep careful record of all activities and data related to their animal's health and nutrition in addition to tracking expenses, comparing market versus fair prices and generating financial summaries. As a result, maintaining an up-to-date livestock record book takes motivation and diligence. However, 4-Hers often wait until the last minute to complete their records and some don't fully understand how to keep records. In Weld County, this tendency to cut corners and general confusion became a concern.

Extension's Response

In 2008, Weld County Extension 4-H agent Keith Maxey created a Pre-Fair interview process to increase project accountability among 4-Hers raising livestock. Pre-Fair interviews give 4-Hers a chance to learn how well they keep records in over a dozen required categories. Interviews also help 4-Hers talk through any record keeping responsibilities they don't understand.

One-on-one interviews take place in early summer, before fair season begins. They are required for all Weld County 4-Hers raising livestock for market or breeding and who plan to exhibit at county fair. In 2010, a volunteer group of 4-H leaders, parents, fair board members and Extension agents conducted 465 interviews, using a score sheet that evaluates record books. To improve future record keeping, volunteers review the score sheet with 4-Hers so they are clear about what improvements, if any, are needed.

The overall record book is considered 'incomplete' if four or more categories are not up-to-date. In 2010, only 10 record books received this rating. To ease 4-Hers into this new project requirement, first year record books were allowed up to seven incomplete categories.

4-Hers whose records were rated 'incomplete' have until before the Weld County Fair to bring their records up to date. At the conclusion of their livestock project, 4-Hers submit their record book for final judging. Any 4-Her whose final submission is rated 'incomplete' cannot show at the next year's fair unless they go to a training on livestock record books.



The Bottom Line

- Pre-Fair interviews are improving the quality and completeness of 4-H Livestock record books in Weld County.
- Pre-Fair interviews provide 4-Hers the chance to share information about their project in a non-competitive environment that helps 4-Hers develop public speaking skills.

Impact

In just three years the pre-fair interview process has significantly increased the quality of livestock record keeping, as well as the success of 4-Hers. Not only are more 4-Hers coming to Pre-Fair interviews with records that are up-to-date, their records are more thorough. This suggests that 4-Hers now see a greater obligation and responsibility to the goals of their project and the welfare of their animal.

According to Maxey, success can be measured by looking at the final ratings of 4-H record books. In 2008, 18 record books were judged incomplete (volunteer judges used a point scale and rated records incomplete when they tallied 50 percent or less of the possible total). In contrast, in 2010 only 5 record books were judged incomplete. This is significant because in 2009 the standard was raised. Now record books are judged incomplete if points are less than 70 percent of the possible total.

Colleen Bartman, a volunteer interviewer, says the interview process engages 4-Hers in the 'learn by doing' aspect of 4-H. Since 4-Hers have time to revise record books using interview advice and feedback, they can produce and submit a better finished product that gets results. Bartman says the biggest advantage for 4-Hers is that they learn how to participate in an interview and are given the opportunity to ask questions about the parts of the book they don't understand. They also get to talk about their projects and show what they know.

Brechen Santeramo, also a volunteer interviewer, agrees. "I think interviews have given 4-Hers tools to present themselves better, learn more about quality and correct record keeping, and have given them confidence on completing their records on time," Santeramo says.

"As a parent, I love the idea of the interview. It motivates the kids to keep up with their records (the least favorite part of any project) rather than wait until the last minute. I think it helps them to become more organized, more careful and instills the idea that you can't fake your way through your records. More than that, I think it helps introduce pride to the whole process."

– Colleen Bartmann
Pre-Fair Interview volunteer

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