

## **The Voice of our Youth**

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Howdy. I want to continue our focus on the youth of the state. Last month we looked at my opinion of the pressures our youth face to be involved in everything. I would like to continue to explore the feedback that we get back from our youth.

Immediately after the recent Cattlemen's Conference, the North Carolina Junior Beef Roundup held a meeting to plan this summer's event. I am excited that our youth have the ability to run an organization and gain some leadership experience. However, I do have one concern. Our youth were not as vocal as I would have liked. Sure, the adults need to provide guidance and support, but I felt in some ways we took over the meeting. I am not trying to condemn the youth for being quiet or the adults for voicing their opinion. After all, we as adults can be intimidating to a certain degree. Nonetheless, I want to encourage our youth to BE BOLD and offer your thoughts and ideas.

Youth have the ability to provide a tremendous voice to any topic, idea, program, etc. that they feel strongly about. Often times, it is us as adults that stand in the way of progress and great ideas because we squelch the thoughts of our youth. No, I'm not saying give all power and control to the youth of the state, but I am asking that we listen more to what they have to say. We, as adults, like to think that we know more than the kids do, and I agree that we do in most cases. However, how many times have you seen a young person do things with a computer that you as an adult never thought was possible? Now you see my point. We live in a computer/technology driven society. Kids are online and sending emails at unbelievable rates. Their communication with one another is at an all-time high. However, we as adults are not hearing them. The 4-H program is about youth, and how do we, as adults, know if we are truly succeeding in what we do if we do not listen to what the kids have to say.

I want to challenge the youth of this state to step up and let us know what you like or dislike about current programs, ideas for new programs, etc. You have the ability and resources at your fingertips to voice your opinions. If you want to see the 4-H Livestock program grow and be successful so your kids will have the same opportunities, you need to step up, accept the challenge, and BE BOLD in your efforts to be heard. If you do not take action, you will find that the organizations that are designed for you to develop your leadership skills will be run by adults and you will no longer have a voice. Anna is doing a great job with the 4-H Livestock Newsletter. How many of you kids are reading the newsletter and responding to her learning activities? Prizes of some kind will be awarded, and as participation increases I am sure the prize quality will increase. However, if you do not participate or let us know what you want to see in the newsletter, we cannot help you. If you would like to get the newsletter, go to the 4-H Livestock website [www.cals.ncsu.edu/an\\_sci/extension/animal/4hyouth/ah4h.html](http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/an_sci/extension/animal/4hyouth/ah4h.html) and click on "newsletters". We want to make this program about you all, but we can't do it if we do not hear from you.

Adults, I want to challenge you to encourage your kids to speak up when something is bothering them and let them propose their own thoughts and ideas. However, I caution you to encourage kids to voice their thoughts and not your own. As adults, we have the ability to voice our opinions in many ways, but stop and think how much we actually listen to our youth. I am not trying to make this a “Parents, listen to your kids” advertisement. Still, I want to hear from you and your kids about our 4-H programs. Yes, I have an advisory committee made up of folks across the state that help me determine what the needs of our youth are in North Carolina. I still need you to send us your thoughts directly into our state office, and encourage your kids to send their own as well. I think we will all agree that our goal is to raise our kids into strong leaders that have the ability to communicate their thoughts and ideas effectively.

We will continue to make strides to help improve our youth through our 4-H Livestock programs. Youth, I will continue to challenge you to work hard and BE BOLD.