

What do 4-H judging teams do for our youth?

**By Dr. Brian Faris
Animal Science Department
North Carolina State University**

Howdy. It is certainly good to be in North Carolina serving as your new Extension 4-H Youth Livestock Specialist. I am very excited about the future of 4-H Livestock in North Carolina, and have been working hard at trying to familiarize myself with the state, counties, agents, volunteers, and a lot of the 4-Hers.

We have recently hired Ms. Anna Munday to join our team as the new Extension 4-H Livestock Technician. Many of you know Anna personally and have read her articles in *The Cattlemen's Connection*. She was also featured in an article that was written in the August issue. Her knowledge, work ethic, and personality make Anna a tremendous asset to our team striving to build our livestock programs. We are currently on a winning track. As you may or may not know, North Carolina had the 2003 National Champion Skillathon team. However, if we are not getting better and growing, we must not be doing something exactly right. Please feel free to contact us as we need input from producers, youth, agents, and any others that can offer helpful information as to how we can make this program a continual success.

Anna and I, along with other coaches, have been preparing kids, who excelled at the State 4-H Skillathon and Livestock Judging Contests, to compete at the National 4-H Skillathon and Livestock Judging Contests held at the North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, KY during the month of November. We have an outstanding group of young people competing for five spots on each team (4 members and 1 alternate). These kids are going to need some financial help to get them to the national contests. If you are interested in helping sponsor their trip, please let Anna or myself know at 919-515-7722 or 4467. If you were to ask one of these participants how important judging is to them, now and their futures, you would get a variety of outstanding answers. However, many times people outside of the "judging" realm do not understand what these teams represent. Therefore, I thought I would take a brief moment and explain the importance and exactly what 4-H judging teams do for our youth.

First of all, I understand many of you reading this article have participated on judging teams in the past and I would encourage you to look back on your experiences and think of how those experiences influenced your lives then and now. Judging teams, especially livestock judging, have experienced a decrease in participation and support over the past several years. Many people do not understand that this has a major impact on the future of our own industry and many others, as well. Youth, especially as they get older, tell their parents that they are too busy, and many parents do not encourage their children to continue to participate in these activities. Sports and other extracurricular activities seem to be winning the battle of time in our youth's lives. Please do not get the wrong idea. I was extremely involved in sports and other projects while growing up, and they had a positive impact on my life. However, I still had the "time" to devote to numerous 4-H projects and judging teams. You are probably wondering when the answer to the question is coming. Well, here is my opinion.

Judging teams offer an invaluable and irreplaceable experience to our youth. What is a livestock judging team? On the surface, it is placing classes of four cattle, sheep, pigs, and yes goats in order from best to worst. You get everything right and you get a perfect score, if not, you have to go through a complicated scoring method to calculate your score. Moral of the story...place the class correctly. However, if you look below the surface of a judging team or anything else, you find the real purpose or reason for its existence. Judging teams develop decision-making skills, the ability to defend your decisions, a work ethic, and the importance of teamwork.

Every day of our adult lives we make decisions that affect us, our careers, and most importantly...our families. How do we know the process to go through to make a good decision? You may say it is a natural instinct, but I beg to differ. I feel through judging teams we teach kids to evaluate every part of the animal and scenario before making a decision. Then, when they get out in the "real" world, they understand the importance of looking at something from every angle, taking into account the good and bad, process all of this information, and make an educated decision. Simply put, we teach kids to think on their own and make difficult decisions with confidence. I cannot think of any other activity that is as successful at teaching kids to make decisions.

We all have been around children that have been told something and you get the dreaded, continuous question of "Why?". Why this? Why that? Funny thing, we continue to get that question from our employers and family members on decisions that we made. We cannot use the same response as we did for the child... "because I said so" or "that is just the way it is". We must defend our decisions, and do so with confidence. Livestock judging teams must defend the way they place a class. Participants must learn the proper terminology, use it in the correct context, present the information verbally to a judge, and do all of this with great confidence. We defend our decisions everyday. If we do not use the right terminology in the proper context, people lose respect and confidence in our abilities to make decisions. So we teach our kids how important it is to know what they are talking about before opening their mouth. Then, we teach them how to effectively communicate their decision to someone with confidence. Kids learn the importance of speaking clearly at the proper speed with the correct tone to have the greatest impact on the listener. We all know the power of great speakers. Judging teams create and develop great speakers. When have you ever seen a great speaker with poor confidence? It doesn't happen! Kids learn they must be confident in themselves, right or wrong, in order to be an effective communicator. Judging teams build confidence.

In order to be an accomplished judging team member, you must have a strong work ethic. In order to be successful in almost any venture in life, you must have a strong work ethic. We teach kids to work hard and put forth the effort needed to succeed. Reward does not result from laziness.

Teamwork is a huge part of judging. Think of our most recent Men's Olympic Basketball team. This team was made up of superstars that have either never been taught or lack the knowledge of the power in TEAMWORK. Where did it get them? A trip back to the USA with nothing to show for their level of talent! Who won the gold medal? A TEAM. We teach kids the importance of consistency in teamwork and the power it has on the opponent. The highest scores do not win contests by themselves. Consistent, high scores win the gold medal in judging and in every aspect of life. Strong companies and business have a strong team.

Did you feel that I was repeating myself occasionally? I merely wanted to demonstrate that everything we teach in judging applies directly to life skills that are not just necessary immediately for the judging team, but are **REQUIRED** for the rest of that individual's life. Judging teams build our future leaders! Help us accomplish this goal.