

4-H youth experience cattle production firsthand

AT A GLANCE

4-H youth gained industry knowledge by raising their beef project animal, attending farm tours and aiming for premium meat quality.

The Situation

According to the USDA's forecast, the U.S. cattle production industry is expected to produce about 27 billion pounds of beef throughout this year as of October 2024. Encouraging the growth of interest and knowledge among 4-H youth in the cattle industry is essential for the future of agriculture.

In a standard 4-H market beef project, youth typically raise a heifer or steer, attend educational meetings and sell their animal at the fair. The Youth Producer project enables participating 4-H members to build upon this concept and explore additional opportunities. This project also provides 4-H members with hands-on experience and insight into potential future careers and the cattle production industry as a whole.

Our Response

In fall 2023 youth purchased commercial style beef, the animals were weighed every thirty days. In addition, the youth tracked their animals weight on the market beef growth charts throughout the year.

This past spring the youth in Kootenai-Shoshone counties 4-H who participated in this project had the opportunity to attend Cow Camp at the Nancy M.



4-H youth participating in the morning feeding at the Nancy M. Cummings Research, Extension and Education Center.

Cummings Research, Extension and Education Center located in Carmen.

The research center serves as a fully functional cow-calf operation. Over a three-day period, participating youth were given the opportunity to assume the roles of ranch hands, engaging in tasks such as feeding, monitoring calves, cleaning feed bunks, administering vaccines and tagging calves, therefore gaining insight into the daily management of a ranch.

To go along with staying at the research center the youth toured Nelson Angus Ranch in Salmon, this ranch is a seedstock operation. The tour provided youth with the opportunity to gain insight into the appearance and functionality of an artificial insemination

barn, learned how to operate a hydraulic squeeze chute and observed the ranch's various cattle working facilities. Through Cow Camp youth also learned about how important genetics are in livestock production and how that corresponds with profit and growth of an operation.

Given the uniqueness of this 4-H project, the youth attended a marketing class via Zoom, taught by an Angus Association regional manager. During this class he spoke with the kids about marketing beef to consumers as a whole and then how to specifically market their own beef projects.

The youth producer project animals were butchered at the University of Idaho Vandal Brand Meats in mid-July. Later in the week after dropping off their project animal the youth presented to the buyers they invited to the buyer presentation night. At this event the youth created a presentation discussing the breed they chose, any medications their animal had received, projected yield/quality grades, and then project costs (feed, animal, housing, etc.) After each youth presented, they mingled with buyers and negotiated a selling price for their beef.

Two weeks after the presentation night, the youth visited Vandal Brand Meats and had the opportunity to view their beef carcasses. They calculated quality grade and yield grade on their carcasses. Then James Nasados with Vandal Brand Meats did a cutting demonstration on one of the youth's steers. He broke the beef carcass down into subprimals and discussed the retail cuts of meat that can come from that subprimal.

The youth concluded their project year by submitting the project record book and trifold display that showcased their project at the county fair.

Program Outcomes

The exposure the Youth Producer project has given these 4-H members to the cattle production industry was like nothing any of the youth had experienced before.

Prior to Cow Camp, none of the youth had visited a large-scale ranch before. One of the youth stated that they better understand the importance of operating efficiently within the cattle production industry and how that correlates with costs on a ranch.

After completion of this project, one of the youth members stated that the youth producer project has made them want to pursue a career in ranch management. Another one of the youth members will be attending the University of Idaho to pursue a degree in agriculture next fall.

The Future

Moving into this next year, the plan is to have two counties participating in this project. With the hope of giving more youth the opportunity to broaden their understanding of the cattle production industry.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Thank you to the Nancy M. Cummings Research, Extension and Education Center, Nelson Angus Ranch and Vandal Brand Meats for hosting the different events throughout the year.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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