



# ARIZONA 4-H LIVESTOCK JUDGING: PROGRAM OVERVIEW



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
Cooperative Extension



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Arizona 4-H Livestock Judging: Program Overview

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4-H Livestock judging is a great program opportunity where youth can strengthen their decision-making abilities, grow communication skills, and develop sound critical thinking and articulate reasoning. Youth that excel in livestock judging cultivate an ethic of research, practice, and work hard to communicate clearly and concisely to judges and peers. Livestock judging is a competitive event centered around the visual evaluation of an animal's physical traits and at times performance data. The goal is to compare and contrast four animals in a class against each other as well as the "ideal" animal.

The livestock judging program is also a great way for youth to round out other 4-H skills. Learning to recognize positive or negative characteristics in livestock enables 4-Hers to select more competitive animals for market projects, and more effectively manage a market project to be the best it can be. This document is a very basic overview of the Livestock Judging program, and by no means a complete resource. If you are interested in learning more, be sure to check out the resources linked below, and talk to your county 4-H staff about opportunities to participate!

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## BASICS OF A LIVESTOCK JUDGING PROGRAM

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### Evaluation

- Youth will learn the industry guidelines to rank the four animals in a class from best to worst.
- Youth evaluate Market and Breeding Classes, each of these categories look at different qualities of each animal to determine overall quality and desirability. A few details are bulleted below on important elements of each.
  - Market - Market classes focus on livestock from a meat production perspective. Characteristics such as muscle, finish, growth, structural correctness, and balance are very important in the potential of livestock to grow in a healthy and productive way that guarantees quality market products.
  - Breeding - Understanding reproductive characteristics is essential in the livestock industry. Youth evaluating breeding animals will focus on traits related to functionality, structural correctness, body volume, maturity, sex characteristics, and muscle. Livestock judging events can also have performance data for livestock that youth need to include in their evaluations.

### Questions/Oral Reasons

- Youth will learn how to defend their placing of the class.
- Youth are given the opportunity to either answer questions or give a set of oral reasons regarding a specific class.
- Questions: Typically for younger or new members as it allows youth an opportunity to develop their evaluation skills and gain confidence

before presenting oral reasons. Questions will teach youth terminology and the ability to compare. Questions can be related to species judging priorities or any aspect of the class.

- Oral Reasons: Youth will describe their placing of a class in the format of a top, middle, and bottom pair. Each pair will be a comparison of two animals discussing each animal through grants and criticisms. Youth will present their reasons verbally to another person while ideally speaking clearly and confidently.

## Questions/Oral Reasons

- Teams consist of up to four members. The contestants compete as individuals, but the three top individuals' scores will be used to determine the team score.
- Individuals can compete as Juniors or Seniors, determined by their age as of January 1st.
- It is important to check with each contests' guidelines regarding age division and team rules.

## Contests:

- Typical youth contest will consist of 8-10 classes with a mixture of market and breeding classes.
- Each class will consist of four animals that will be numbered one through four, from left to right if haltered or on a stanchion.
- Participants are given 12-15 minutes to evaluate each class.
- After placing each class contestants will either answer questions or give oral reasons on certain classes.
- Attire for judging contests varies for each event. For most local and regional contests jeans, a button-down shirt, and closed toed shoes are appropriate. For state or national contests nice jeans or slacks, a button down shirt or blouse, a blazer, and closed toed shoes are appropriate.
- Arizona 4-H Livestock Judging Events
  - Arizona State Fair - <https://azstatefair.com/>
  - Arizona National Livestock Show (Qualifier for WNR and NAILE) - <https://www.anls.org/>
- National 4-H Livestock Judging Events.
  - Western National Roundup (WNR-Denver, Colorado) - <https://co4h.colostate.edu/national-western-roundup/>
  - North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE-Louisville, Kentucky) - <https://livestockexpo.org/>

## Livestock Judging Key Terminology:

- Balance: An animal's overall eye appeal determined by proportionality of body mass while maintaining structural integrity.

- **Body Volume:** The amount of space available in an animal's body cavity determined by body width (spring of rib), body depth, and body length.
- **Conformation:** Refers to the appearance of a live animal, or the composition of a carcass. Distribution of muscle, fat, and skeletal structure as it relates to industry standards.
- **Carcass:** Bone, muscle, and fat remaining after the slaughter and cleaning of an animal. A carcass has had the hide, internal organs (viscera), and head removed to enable efficient processing.
- **Expected Progeny Differences (EPD's):** Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) tells us the expected performance of offspring and measures the genetic value of an animal. EPDs measure growth and maternal characteristics as well as carcass characteristics.
- **Finish:** the quantity and location of fat on an animal. Finish very closely relates to meat quality and quantity, so properly finished animals generally evaluate better than "Thin Finished" livestock.
- **Functionality:** A breeding animals combination of ideal structural correctness, balance, body volume, and frame size.
- **Growth:** An animal's ability to expand measured by the skeletal width, rib design, volume, and frame size.
- **Market Livestock:** An animal or animals intended for slaughter and market products.
- **Performance Data:** Performance data is used to showcase the animals actual performance (such as growth), genetic predictors (such as EPDs), or a combination of both.
- **Reasons:** Verbal justifications for placing animals in a particular hierarchy. Judges will grade reasons on eye contact, completeness, organization, accuracy, and other knowledge and communication elements.
- **Sex Characteristics:** An animal's practical reproductive health, femininity, masculinity, and reproductive ability, e.g. testicular or udder development, maternal bone structure, massiveness, strength, etc.
- **Structural Correctness:** An animal's soundness and flexibility while on the move. Determined by their ideal leg and joint structure.

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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- 4-H Livestock Judging Manual (Kansas 4-H) - <https://4-h.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Meat-Judging.pdf>
- South Dakota State University Livestock Judging Manual <https://counties.agrilife.org/trinity/files/2011/06/LivestockJudgingMan.pdf>

- 4-H Livestock Judging Manual (Pennsylvania 4-H) - [https://afs.ca.uky.edu/files/pennsylvania\\_4-h\\_livestock\\_judging\\_manual.pdf](https://afs.ca.uky.edu/files/pennsylvania_4-h_livestock_judging_manual.pdf)
- Practice judging classes - <https://www.livestockjudging.com/>
- Terms List - <https://www.livestockjudging.com/terminology/livestockjudgingterminology.aspx>



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Delivered by University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Arizona 4-H empowers young people across the state with the skills they need to lead for a lifetime. Youth collaborate with caring adult mentors to lead hands-on projects in areas like science, health, agriculture and citizenship. Mentors provide a positive environment where youth learn by doing.

Arizona 4-H serves more than 100,000 youth and is delivered in every county—through in-school and after-school programs, school and community clubs and 4-H camps.

Learn more at [extension.arizona.edu/4H](https://extension.arizona.edu/4H)

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