



The Purpose of Livestock Projects in the 4-H Program

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Overview

In many 4-H programs, significant focus is often placed on the livestock projects being raised by youth. 4-H staff, volunteers, fair boards, and parents are often bogged down by rules and disagreements on which animals are eligible for sale, minimum weights, maximum weights, length of ownership, etc. However, these discussions distract from the priority of the 4-H Positive Youth Development program - to provide youth with a high-quality educational and developmental experience. Our purpose in this document is to clarify the role that livestock projects have in 4-H and outline the unique youth experience gained through livestock. In 4-H, great pride is taken in our agricultural roots, and these educational themes provide a foundation for developing essential life skills. It is fundamental that 4-H professionals and volunteers understand that our primary goal is to raise high quality youth. Livestock are a tool of this educational process.

The 4-H Purpose, Mission, and Vision

4-H is the youth development outreach arm of the Land Grant University (LGU) Cooperative Extension System and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The program works cooperatively with USDA, LGU's, state legislatures, county governments, and other partners to address community needs and translate contemporary research into practical application for stakeholders.

The mission of 4-H is to provide educational opportunities for young people and to empower youth to reach their full potential by working and learning in partnership with caring adults. Further, 4-H provides meaningful opportunities for all youth and adults to work together to create sustainable community change. This is accomplished within three primary content areas, or mission areas – (1) civic engagement and leadership, (2) healthy living, and (3) science. These priority areas are commonly taught through

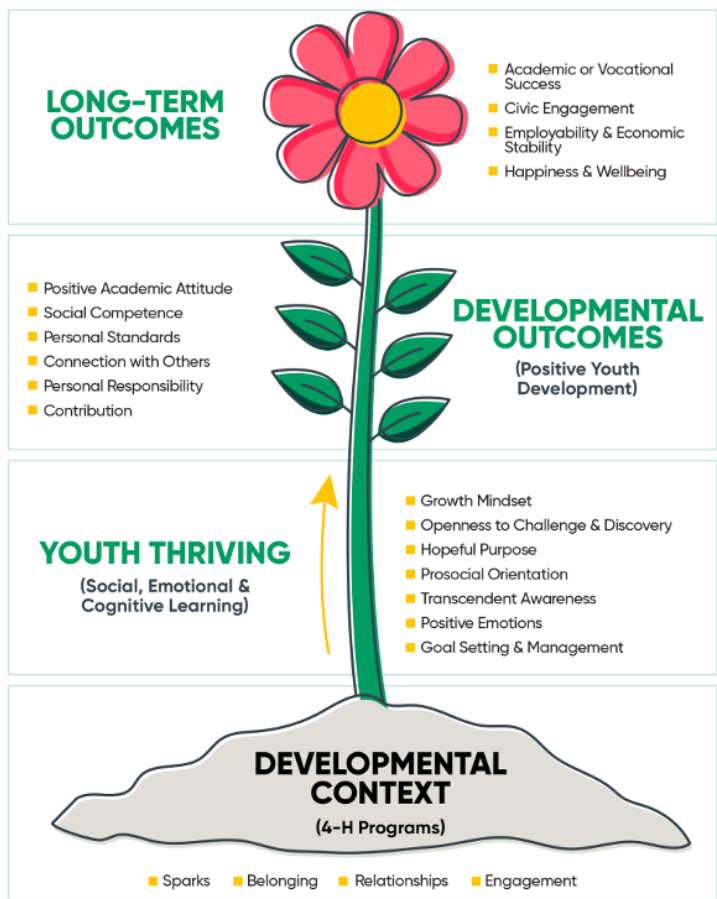


Figure 1: The 4-H Thriving Model has become the standard guiding Positive Youth Development approach for 4-H. The goal of 4-H professionals and volunteers is to guide youth through the "Thriving Trajectory," and gain the most out of 4-H throughout their lives. (Arnold, 2018)



Figure 2: The Targeting Life Skills Model is an excellent overview of the life skills 4-H professionals and volunteers aim to teach young people. (Hendricks, 1996).

agriculturally related programming, a foundational part of the Cooperative Extension mission and traditional 4-H programming.

The overall vision for the program is “A world in which youth and adults learn, grow, and work together as catalysts for positive change” (USDA/NIFA 2017).

Evidence Based Positive Youth Development

In 4-H, extensive research frames how programming is structured and implemented (Lerner & Lerner, 2013). Youth are intentionally connected with safe, caring adult mentors. Youth find their spark, and their curiosity drives the development of important life skills. These skills ultimately impact a young person’s ability to function and succeed in our society. This is an effective educational strategy and provides a solid foundation for young people to thrive and grow into happy, healthy, and successful adults.

The 4-H Thriving Model outlines the trajectory that youth take through the 4-H program (Figure 1). 4-Hers follow this path regardless of their spark. A young person can decorate cakes, grow a garden, forge a chef knife, or raise a market steer. However, the target outcomes remain the same across the wide diversity of 4-H programs – to raise thriving and engaged citizens.

Livestock in the 4-H Program

Participants in 4-H develop and refine a multitude of life skills. By raising livestock, youth build character and learn how to be responsible, confident, and caring. Hendricks’s “Targeting Life Skills” wheel (Figure 2) highlights 35 targeted skills that youth will ideally develop while learning with caring adults and participating in 4-H projects. Livestock programming exposes youth to the production industry and encourages understanding and appreciation of our food systems and informed consumerism. Throughout the year youth participate in educational opportunities including project meetings and quality assurance training to ensure that they understand how to raise a quality product for safe human consumption.

4-H Livestock shows provide youth with an opportunity to showcase their skills. This exposure to competition also builds resilience and strengthens a young person's ability to manage stress, communicate, and show positive sportsmanship to their peers. These social skills greatly benefit 4-H members throughout their lives.

Conclusion

A primary purpose of 4-H is to contribute to the personal growth of young people through a Positive Youth Development experience. Introducing youth to proper animal husbandry practices and the importance of agriculture is a key component of this educational effort. Through hands-on experiences youth are provided with an opportunity to foster life skills, cultivate personal growth, and create strong relationships with peers and mentors. 4-H helps grow young leaders who are prepared to enter, contribute to, and improve a complex and changing world.

AZ 4-H Resources

- The Purpose of the Livestock Show and Sale in the 4-H Program (Will be linked when posted on website)
- [4-H Project Essentials Livestock Fact Sheet Large Stock Vol. 1](#)
- [4-H Livestock Judging: Program Overview](#)
- [4-H Project Essentials: Livestock Feeding Glossary of Terms](#)
- [Project Essential Fact Sheets: Growing a Show Swine to Market Weight](#)
- [Project Essential Fact Sheets: Growing a Show Beef Project](#)

Further Reading and Works Cited

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