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April 17, 2018

Farming 4-H Kids

4-H came later for us than most families that we have gotten to know, but it has presented many great benefits to us in our efforts to provide learning opportunities as well as reinforcing that wonderful American past time of rewarding hard work. We enrolled the kids in a local 4-H Club, the Lonesome Valley Wranglers out in Dewey when the kids were 10 and 12 years old. Lots of meetings due to lots of interests that the kids have had, but as we progress (just having completed our second year) there are many encouraging learning opportunities to run these kids through that begins a great foundation to get them started in the dynamics of working with and learning from others both locally and state wide.

The animal projects have been great not only for the kids, but the critters are great entertainment which is an important component of learning about work and should be a part of work! The occasional health issues with the animals can be a bit emotional, but succeeding at animal husbandry in those crises moments is a thrill not only for us the parents, but what a confidence booster it results in for kids. Year 1 is Dad leading the way trimming hooves and horns. Year 2 is the oldest (our daughter) calling Dad at work telling him that the goat sheared her horn off and was bleating and bleeding all over, but that she cauterized the wound and put coagulating agent and antiseptic on the wound, did she do everything right? From the Dad's perspective, COOL! WAY TO GO KIDDO! The kids just soak up so much and then when the crises hits, they just turn into these little first responder hero's all on their own! That's a pretty neat feeling to have as a parent. They aren't just talk, they act and do. I think the 4-H motto is To Learn By Doing...what more can be said!

Education is important in our household and academic excellence is encouraged. 4-H ties into our value system in many ways. 4-H meetings bring more education, parliamentary procedure, leadership opportunities and public speaking endeavors to them where the purpose is to get them out front practicing for the real world and actively giving them a chance to share and teach what they are learning with their peers. The experience has enhanced their learning abilities in these ways and more, especially when we go through those times of conflicting or overbooked schedules and they have to learn (with some help at first) how to prioritize education, animal husbandry, practices, rehearsals, hobby time and their club meetings or show schedules.

We didn't push the kids for success, but we did encourage them with their goals. Year 1 in 4-H came and went and it was overwhelming at times. There are all the crises points that I'm sure (or at least hoping) that all of us as parents go through...almost or indeed missing registration deadlines, meetings, important events...(those really dang it moments). Then there are those moments where the kids did something pretty great to

help out one of their club members where you find yourself grinning inside as you can see the progress and the confidence in your children as they move beyond the scared, shy little one to getting out in front to help a friend learn something that they recently just caught onto themselves. As a parent you're getting to see and participate in your child's growth as an individual instead of just leaving it up to the state or private school where you only get to 'catch up' with them at the end of the day. It's a very satisfying process to observe and coach and its enjoyable to watch the other kids outside our little family too as they progress and help teach from their experiences too.

By year 2 we were pleasantly surprised that the kids wanted to try leadership roles in their club as they aspired to run for office...and failed. Failing is also an area that stimulates growth. There's the emotional set back, but then it builds into this quiet resolve that we have seen over and over as they fail at a show or a competition. The part I really get wrapped up in as the Dad is that quiet resolve that they get..."Next time", they say, "I'm going to do better". That's a fantastic moment to observe when the mind of the child gets there, acknowledging the results, seeing what success looks like as it surpassed them, and then mustering the inner strength to model after that missed opportunity with, you guessed it, more hard work as they aspire to achieve that next time around! Starting year 3 both kids wanted to try leadership roles in their club again and succeeded. It's more work, but more work is the key to more progress and more growth. Sure have to hand out the appreciation to their club leaders giving them their knowledge and encouraging them in their opportunities.

Another huge beneficial aspect of the 4-H program is that these youth are required to learn and keep their own project record books that includes financial record keeping. Not only expenses and hopeful profits yielded from their farming endeavors when they sell their harvest at auction, but they are learning functional business modeling and record keeping of what worked to get them to success as well as what they need to improve on for improved success in the future. They have to set goals that they want or need to accomplish all in accordance with a timeline that pertains to their project. These are fantastic short form journals that will be an excellent written record to show to a prospective employer or scholarship application that will surely gives these maturing 4-Hers a leg up when they find themselves in a competitive entry program.

There are health and safety guideline classes that the Department of Agricultural insist these kids learn and pass since the projects that they are engaged in are typically for household consumption. The kids also learn to keep track of inventory items for their projects that they hopefully use again and again for their next projects, all part of standard grown up business models that they are gleaning now as youth. This part alone if reinforced for these kids to learn from now will be useful modeling for them for their future and success in their adult lives. These kids that can grow up with a 4-H Club are benefiting not only from learning to record and use their financial model balance sheets and profit/loss statements, but are also learning their value and pleasure in and around the benefits of hard work and the pride of their own self respect and value of self.

Looking forward to meeting you and welcoming you and your family into 4-H!