

They were 245 strong— call them crusaders for youth livestock programs and animal agriculture. They traveled from 40 states across North America to participate in the first-ever National Youth Livestock Program Ethics Symposium. Their goal was to develop a plan of action to discourage unethical and illegal activity in youth livestock programs.

The Livestock Conservation Institute (LCI) facilitated the

desired outcomes.

The establishment of a National Livestock Show Code of Ethics received top priority from each of the working groups as they developed a framework for progress. A thorough evaluation of the existing livestock program reward systems was also recommended by participants.

The group's unified sense of urgency in eliminating

ZERO TOLERANCE for Cheating

A framework for progress was developed at the Youth Livestock Ethics Symposium last month in Las Vegas, Nev. Participants in this history-making event shared a wide spectrum of information, perspectives and experiences. They also delivered one resounding message — we can no longer tolerate unethical conduct, illegal drug use and inhumane treatment by livestock exhibitors and fitters.

BY JERILYN JOHNSON

symposium in an effort to provide a forum for building consensus to interested individuals and organizations concerned about the growing number of unethical and illegal incidences related to youth and open livestock events. LCI was joined in this effort by the American Farm Bureau Federation, American Veterinary Medical Association, Animal Industry Foundation, National FFA Organization and Cooperative Extension Service (4-H).

Following two days of presentations and discussions relating to the symposium's four areas of emphasis— self-examination, unified effort, education and enforcement— participants developed an action plan containing 78 action items and 33

unethical and illegal activity in youth livestock programs will keep the momentum of this effort progressing forward," said Jeff Goodwin, Texas Agricultural Extension Service and chair of the symposium planning committee. "With the information presented at the symposium, these individuals can return home as ambassadors for their state. I'm confident that big things will happen as a result."

Part I of our series examines the symposium's first area of emphasis — self-examination. Unified effort, education and enforcement will be explored in Part II and Part III, which will be published in the February and March issues of the *Angus Journal*.

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ZERO TOLERANCE for Cheating

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It took a drug called clenbuterol to bring livestock industry representatives, agricultural educators and state and federal government officials together for the first time, in one meeting room, for one purpose.

For all the negatives this infamous steroid-like drug has inflicted upon the livestock industry, its exposure led to at least one positive — a national symposium to examine the more deeply-rooted problem of unethical practices and conduct in youth livestock programs.

The negative publicity resulting from the clenbuterol scandal has, for the most part, subsided. All major livestock shows and state fairs testing for it and other illegal drugs reported zero violations in 1995.

The after-effects, however, can still be felt. Monfort, a major meat packer based in Colorado, announced it will no longer purchase champion market animals from the National Western Stock Show or any other fair or exhibition. Many other agribusinesses and long-time supporters of fairs and youth livestock market auctions have pulled out, as well.

Youth livestock programs are in serious jeopardy; positive action is not taken soon.

"Livestock shows and fairs are windows to the world of agriculture for the general public," says Kay Johnson of the Animal Industry Foundation. "Educational programs and videos don't mean a thing if we don't follow up with positive action and public discussion."

The symposium challenged participants to come up with some creative solutions. In the process of self-examination, the group reached a consensus on three important areas:

1. The need to stress zero tolerance of unethical practices and rule breaking;
2. The need for improving educational value of livestock projects and shows and eliminating the win-at-any-cost mentality;
3. The need for greater emphasis on exhibiting and judging the natural animal.

In the pursuit of winning and profits, have we lost the real purpose of youth livestock projects? Both 4-H and FFA organizations were started earlier this century to create a positive and educational experience for youth who want to be

involved in agriculture. Over time, more emphasis has been put on show ring competition. Recordkeeping and knowledge of animal husbandry have taken a back seat in some cases.

"Competition is a motivator for youth," says Colien Hefferan, acting administrator at USDA Cooperative Research, Education and Extension Service, Washington, D.C. "They develop life skills and learn more about themselves. But there is excess emphasis on winning today, which leads to cheating, abusive treatment and favoritism."

"Any cheating is wrong. It destroys the very heart of the activity. It also violates the fundamental reasons for livestock shows — to improve livestock genetics and provide an educational activity."

—Bernie Rollin, Colorado State University

Today's society is faced with an abundance of unethical behavior, and Hefferan is not surprised it has spilled over into agriculture. "Youth will accept guidance only if it's believable," Hefferan says. "We must provide positive examples and experiences, bring youth and adults together, and level the playing field."

Hefferan says that USDA is committed to helping the livestock industry solve these issues. "Unless we come up with some positive actions and solutions, USDA funding and support is at risk," she adds.

Jeff Goodwin, who has become a driving force behind and national spokesperson for the ethics movement, says there are three types of people involved in youth livestock programs:

1. Crooked, unscrupulous people - They are a small, but potentially dangerous percentage.

ETHICS SYMPOSIUM 4-STEP ACTION PLAN

Self-examination

Articulating and disseminating a system of professional ethics accepted as a consensus in youth livestock programs. Selecting, conducting and regulating youth livestock events such that the fundamental goals of both public and youth education and development are supported.

Unified Effort

Local, state and national training programs to increase

awareness of youth ethics by incorporating the unified effort of all those interested in improvement. Assimilating and distributing information from all groups involved in the showing of livestock on a local, state and national level. The adoption of award systems and standards that emphasize complete knowledge of industry and development of life skills.

Education

External communication and

education to address political entities, the media, fair boards, supporters and commodity groups. Internal communication with organizations attempting to implement successful animal science programs for youth. Educational programs to eliminate unethical behavior in junior livestock programs. Revision of high dollar reward systems or livestock auctions which encourage unethical acts. Place emphasis on recognition of efforts and accomplishments

both in and outside the show ring.

Enforcement

Advance uniform rules and procedures for competitive livestock events to benefit the development of youth and to maintain a strong future for animal agriculture in America. Promote ethics educational efforts for all youth involved in livestock showing,



2. People who cross the ethical line if it's convenient-A larger percentage, but the type who can be reformed with the right training or peer influence.
3. Ethical, do-the-right-thing people -The majority, who society seldom has to worry about.

Goodwin says that before we can make progress in livestock exhibition reform, we first have to overcome a few obstacles:

1. Taboo subject. "Many people have said in the past that this issue is too controversial or too hot to handle," Goodwin says. "I realize it is very sensitive, but in my mind, it's cut and dry —right vs. wrong."
2. People who choose to look the other way.
3. The adult ego — "99 percent of our problems are due to out-of-control egos of parents," Goodwin says.

To many young 4H and FFA members, the solution is simple: get adults out. At the 1995 4-H Congress in Memphis, Term., and in many local 4-H and FFA meetings it has been strongly recommended to give full responsibility of caring, feeding, fitting and exhibiting of livestock projects back to the 4H or FFA member. Parents and ag teachers should serve only as advisors.

Corey Rosenbusch, president of the Texas FFA Association, shared this same perspective with the audience at the Ethics

Symposium. "To truly make a difference," Rosenbusch says, "each exhibitor will have to take responsibility for his or her actions."

The Natural Animal

"Livestock shows should parallel real animal agriculture," Goodwin says. "Do we want to create an optical illusion out there in the show ring or conduct true live animal evaluation?"

Goodwin says drenching, fillers, tranquilizers and numerous other conformation-altering and enhancing practices all cross the line in the sand and need to be prohibited and strictly regulated.

He made reference to the Ann Landers column which exposed a fatal water drenching of a market hog by a young exhibitor at a Texas fair. This intentional, unethical practice created nationwide public concern and outcries of animal abuse. "The public won't tolerate inhumane practices," Goodwin says.

Randy Perry, an animal science professor and livestock judge from California State University-Fresno says judges are in the best position to enforce rules and ethics. "If an exhibitor brings in an animal with visually apparent or known illegal enhancements, or if they have unethical showing techniques, I will place them at the bottom of the class. Losing can discourage these cheaters more than anything else."