

**M**any leaders and members of the agriculture community gained their first formal training and experiences with animals while involved in youth activities. These lessons and experiences create enthusiasm which remains throughout life and affect one's continued interest in the education and training of youth. Emphasis has been on overcoming the criticism of

junior programs. The shows and sales which usually culminate a year's investment by youth, adults and donors must be given more attention. All parties must be cognizant of the absolute necessity of improving and conducting programs based on honest and ethical foundations.

Animal care and handling guidelines have been developed recently for every livestock species, and fitting and showmanship guidelines

compounds are fed or injected there may be condemnation of the meat and other products obtained from the animal. No loss to the producer or to the reputation of the industry could be more devastating.



#### **Different Attitudes Of the Public Toward Animal Use**

Animal activism for many years have criticized junior

products available to the public, about the methods used in handling, caring for and feeding of farm animals, and in the technological advances that have been made in producing higher-quality, safer products more efficiently.



#### **Public Support of Junior Activities**

For those who support junior activities through purchasing livestock in sales after the shows, this is not the time to decrease or withhold support. In fact, even more financial support should be available to provide training and educational materials or to support competition in which awards are based on total project activity rather than just the show or sale endpoint.

The bottom line should be the educational and training programs for youth and the memorable experiences gained through interactions with animals. We must base these programs on a foundation of ethics and honesty, and continue to give our youth of today and tomorrow the same opportunities to develop a strong moral basis for their future.



#### **Public Perceptions of Animal Products**

We are fortunate that neither the isolated abuse of animals nor the infrequent illegal use of compounds has affected which animal products the public will purchase. Newspapers, magazines and other media have, surprisingly, not attempted to associate these rare abuses with the animal derived products that most of the public uses every day. Since the abuses observed in junior shows are perpetrated by a few individuals and are

# ALL GLITTER AND NO GLORY?

*Junior livestock show and sale ethics involve youth, adults and the general public.*



*by Lowell L. Wilson and Brenda L. Coe, Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences*

animal activists or those in agriculture who may not agree with the concept of livestock exhibitions, especially events involving youth.

In the past few years there have been several incidences of unethical behavior and practices discovered in junior livestock shows. Adult supervisors associated with either youth training and education programs, or show and sale management and parents must recognize the imperfections of the system – and take bold steps to assure a high level of ethics and honesty in every aspect of

are continually revised. These efforts need to be connected and applied. The year-round educational value of youth programs must be emphasized and perhaps the “glitter” aspect of the final shows and sales de-emphasized. Business principles and business ethics should be high priority education objectives of our youth programs.

As an example, some of the abuse which an extremely small number of adults and juniors inflict upon show animals minimize or totally eliminate the value of the animal. When illegal

livestock activities because they feel the adult agriculture segment teaches juniors to misuse, abuse, manipulate and profit from animals. Unfortunately there are many people who know little or nothing about farm animal production methods. Less than 2 percent of the public are involved in production agriculture, and just a slightly greater percent of the public has even a cursory knowledge about farming.

Anyone has the right to ask about animal production methods, the use of animals, and the safety and wholesomeness of animal

not representative of the vast majority of youth project or commercially produced animal-derived products, this association should not be made. However, with the tendency for the media to report sensational and controversial information and often misinformation the animal industries have been fortunate.



### **Being a Good Exhibitor**

Junior exhibitors need to be aware that they have a long-standing tradition to follow in terms of integrity guarantees and ethics in presenting animals for show or sale. Livestock purchase or sale agreements are often made through just verbal agreement "sealed with a handshake." Although not the best basis for a business transaction, it shows the integrity that is expected and exists throughout agriculture. Integrity and ethics are expected when we make purchases and customers have the right to expect the same.

In animals used for breeding, the birth dates, breeding soundness guarantees, performance or production histories, and other traits that reflect an animal's value are expected to be honestly stated by the seller. Any known imperfections that are not apparent to the observer or to the purchaser should also be stated. This kind of traditional farming ethic must be instilled in youth involved with junior livestock activities, and also in those who advise, teach, and supervise youth. This includes parents, club leaders and those who sell project animals to youth.



### **Simple Economics of Proper Animal Care and Treatment**

Practically all of the guidelines for care, handling, nutrition and facilities that lead to proper animal care and use have been shown to improve the economics of production. Distress to the animal can decrease rate of gain, feed efficiency and even result in a lower-quality carcass. One of the most important aspects of the educational phase of junior animal projects is to teach proper animal care and management and respect for animals including the use of practices that result in high-quality carcasses and consumer products without bruises, off-color lean, blemishes from injection sites, or chemical residues.

If residues are detected through random sampling by the Food Safety and Inspection Service, the carcass is condemned with the total loss of the carcass value. A more important consideration is the use of drugs which are illegal for use in any food-producing animal. These types of non-ethical, careless, and selfish actions permanently damage the credibility of the livestock producer and the industry reputation for proper animal care and production of safe/wholesome animal-derived products. These actions are totally unacceptable in youth livestock programs as well.



### **Fitting and Showing Guides**

There are many guides available for fitting and showing of livestock – from rabbits to sheep to beef cattle to horses. Naturally, the knowledge and skills associated with the presentation of animals to the judge, the public, and to

prospective buyers is important and must continue to be emphasized. This is an important part of good animal care, handling, responsibility, and sales/showmanship. However, adherence to ethical production and marketing practices must be given more attention.

The following practices are not to be condoned in any situation:

- Feeding or use of illegal compounds;
- Feeding or use of extra-label compounds without a prior examination of the animal and a written prescription by a veterinarian;
- Not providing acceptable levels of feed, water, bedding and housing to animals at all times, including the time just prior to shows and sales;
- Abuse, misuse or inhumane manipulation of animals;
- Injection of any fluids or air to change the shape of an animal or misrepresent its natural characteristics (e.g., muscling in meat animals, dairy cow udders);
- Disregarding purchase and/or possession dates required for junior livestock projects or individual show animals;
- Use of professional fitters where prohibited;
- Overlooking educational and skill development, or placing too much emphasis on awards (either money or trophies and ribbons);
- Unsportsmanlike conductor abusive behavior while exhibiting animals;
- Adult leaders not scheduling periodic farm visits throughout the project season to observe and advise on the nutrition and care of project animals.



### **Educational and Training Materials**

A wide variety of educational, training, and skill development materials are available to junior livestock club members, parents, advisors, Extension agents, and club leaders. Historically these materials have dealt mostly with fitting and showing skills and to a lesser extent with proper nutrition and handling.

Within the past two years, because of the discovery of unethical feeding, fitting, and showing practices by youth and adults involved in club work, a number of visual aids and written materials about the ethics of junior livestock activities have been developed. Several states require juniors to complete educational materials pertaining to ethics as an initial step in their program.

The skills involved in selecting, caring for, fitting and showing animals are a necessary part of the educational process. But everything possible must be done to concentrate on all goals of junior livestock programs. This includes teaching animal husbandry, business aspects of animal production, ethical values, and professionalism.

So many people have gained important life skills and benefited from junior programs based on animals. We can ill-afford a weakening or discontinuation of these opportunities.

**The Angus Journal editorial department is seeking your opinion and solutions for eliminating cheaters and drug abusers in junior and open livestock shows. Please write or fax to:**

Editor, Angus Journal  
3201 Frederick Blvd.  
St. Joseph, MO 64506  
Fax (816) 233-6575