

Cal Poly's Western Bonanza Junior Livestock Show Hosts First Annual Livestock Auction:
The Best in the West Livestock Auction

A Senior Project
Presented to
The Faculty of the Agricultural Education and Communication Department
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Science

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March 2018

Introduction to the Study

The purposes of livestock projects are to expose youth to the livestock industry and develop important life skills (Hodgin, 2012). Cal Poly's Western Bonanza Junior Livestock Show began as a senior project in 1985 has grown into the largest student-run jackpot show on the West Coast with four species, showing twice, in a double-show format (Western Bonanza, 2017).

Every year, more than 1,000 head of livestock and hundreds of exhibitors travel to the acclaimed Paso Robles Event Center in hopes of competing in the final drive - and ultimately, be crowned a Western Bonanza Champion. Western Bonanza has become one of the most prestigious livestock shows in the nation and families from all over the state of California and bordering states attend every year. By hosting the largest student-run junior livestock show, Cal Poly students are able to provide tremendous opportunities for the youth who attend by teaching them the responsibility and ethics of exhibiting livestock (H. Switzer, personal communication, December 12, 2017).

The show continues to be successful but needs additional funding to improve and remain financially profitable. In 2018, Western Bonanza will incorporate a livestock auction on Friday evening before the show to allow exhibitors to purchase high-end livestock and boost the economic value of Western Bonanza. The money raised by the livestock auction will help fund all aspects of the jackpot show and continue to make it the largest junior livestock show on the West Coast. The livestock being auctioned off are provided by breeders from all over the United States with hopes of bringing in large amounts of buyers to increase the overall profit of the auction (H. Switzer, personal communication, December 12, 2017).

In return, the students will gain valuable skills in learning how to properly run and operate a livestock sale (Jack, N.E., and Eversole, D.E, n.d.). Most important of all, exhibiting livestock, and being part of the leadership necessary for a successful event, helps to increase leadership capability and soft skills for all youth involved (Jack, N.E., and Eversole, D.E, n.d.).

Background

What began as a senior project in 1985, primarily as a cattle show, evolved into a five-ring show attendees and judges claim to be "The Best in the West". In addition to being a completely student-run show, Cal Poly's Western Bonanza is one of the most competitive jackpot shows in the western United States (H. Switzer, personal communication, December 12, 2017). Western Bonanza is known throughout the jackpot show circuit as providing the best staff, awards and location.

A majority of Western Bonanza supporters have been in attendance for decades. The students who host the show begin working on the event the day after the previous one ends. It is an ongoing tradition and the students involved with putting on the show strive for excellence in order to keep the prestigious tradition of Western Bonanza alive (H. Switzer, personal communication, December 12, 2017).

Methodology

The author's main goals were to assess the economic viability of Western Bonanza's The Best in the West Livestock Auction and make a logical decision on whether or not the Western Bonanza class should continue to put on an auction in future years.

After months of preparation, phone calls and organization, Western Bonanza's The Best in the West Livestock Auction was able to take place on Friday, February 16, 2018 at 7 p.m. Before this inaugural Western Bonanza event could take place, consignors had to be invited, contracts had to be returned, and auction staff had to be hired.

Official weigh-ins started mid-day on Friday, February 16th and ended at 3 p.m. After obtaining weights, the authors created a basic sale catalog in a Microsoft Excel format, that included consignor names along with animal weight, sex, identification numbers and pedigrees for all 35 animals consigned.

The preview for the sale began at 5 p.m. Friday night. During this time, buyers were able to ask each of the 14 consignors questions about their livestock (sires, breed, sex) being sold. Sheep and goats were displayed on racks to truly show the livestock's build and muscular definition. Hogs were walked within a small showing pen, which allowed buyers to see mobility, squareness and overall quality of the livestock. At 7 p.m the preview ended and the auction itself began.

The National Anthem was sung by Nipomo High School freshman, Lilly Brummitt. Todd Ventura, auctioneer and owner of Poor Richard's Press Printing Company, was The Best in the West's official auctioneer. Poor Richard's Press sponsored the event, providing signage and hats. Hats were given to each of the 14 consignors who took a chance and entered their animals into the auction. Tatum Holdener announced the lots and the ring men were Dr. J. Scott Vernon, Ethan Ventura and Jim Settle. Livestock were shown on top of an auction block, which faced a large crowd, consisting of 87 buyers and many spectators, sitting in both chairs and the grandstands.

After all livestock crossed the block, numbers were tallied, and percentages were calculated. The Best in the West Livestock Auction brought in over \$30,000 with over a \$1,000 average on 32 animals sold. One hog was scratched, meaning there was no buyer, from the sale and one hog and one lamb were bought back by their consignors. Therefore, only 32 of the 35 animals were economically evaluated. Western Bonanza received 6% of these proceeds, which totaled over \$2,000. The authors decided to charge the 6% commission rate based off of other online sale platforms such as showpig.com and breedersworld.com.

As an incentive, buyers of these animals were able to show in a futurity show, free of charge, on Saturday and Sunday. This futurity show gave the livestock evaluators the opportunity to determine who bought the most show-ready animal. First place received \$100, second received \$50 and third received \$20. Buyers were also able to enter into Show A for free and Show B for \$35 if they wished to compete in the true Western Bonanza experience. With the economic data collected, the authors analyzed the viability of a second Best in the West Livestock Auction.

Results

The authors found that the economic viability of future Best in the West Livestock Auctions was superb. The average price per head of \$1,000 was not only higher than expected, but a tremendous feat to attain. Youth buyers will be taking the livestock purchased to various county fairs along with other jackpot shows.

Feedback from the auctioneer, buyers and guests in attendance proved the The Best in the West Livestock Auction will have a successful future. Some of these suggestions include earlier advertisement of auction animals and a larger number of head to pick from. Ultimately, The Best in the West Livestock Auction was a success, which outdid expectations. The authors were proud to take part in this inaugural sale and look forward to hearing about its future successes.

Recommendations and Conclusion

After thorough evaluation of the livestock auction, the authors were provided feedback from breeders, spectators and volunteers from the event. Spectators said they would have liked to see more photos of the livestock before the actual sale. Additional marketing would have been beneficial to promote the event, such as a sale program or advertisements of the animals. To do this, Western Bonanza personnel could be sure to obtain consignor information along with pictures, which would be included in a printed sale program.

The auction worked in cohesion with the VIP Sponsor Tent that provided food and beverages for all sponsors of Western Bonanza. Overall, The Best in the West Livestock Auction received praise from many individuals who attended, buyers and consignors. The authors hope that the auction will continue to stay an annual event hosted on Friday evening of Western Bonanza weekend and continue to grow larger to help benefit the program and the youth.

The authors recommend that future Best in the West Livestock Auction charge consignors an entry fee of \$75 per head to assure that they will attend the auction with the number of animals that they said they would bring. The authors recommend that the entry fee be used as a holding place for the consignors. Ultimately, the consignors will get this \$75 entry fee returned to them at the conclusion of the auction. The reason the authors recommend charging an entry fee to consignors is to ensure that they will attend the auction with the number of head they originally said they would bring.

For the first Best in the West Livestock Auction, it became somewhat frustrating and confusing when consignors either backed out or decided to bring less animals to the auction the day of the event. The addition of an entry fee will hopefully help prevent this issue from occurring again. When asking the breeders of Generation X Farms whether they would consign animals if an entry fee were charged, the authors found that consignors would be more than willing to pay an entry fee to enter animals into The Best in the West Livestock Auction, knowing their money would be reimbursed.

The authors considered the addition of cattle within the auction but recommend that the auction remain a three-species sale (goats, pigs and sheep). The reason the authors do not recommend cattle is because they are a large animal species and the timeline of the expected growth rate of the animal would not assure a proper weight for the targeted fairs that the buyers would be exhibiting at. Additionally, timing for local fairs does not bode well for the time of The Best in the West Livestock Auction along with the growth period that cattle require.

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