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Attributes of Indiana's 4-H Livestock Judging Program

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Attributes of Indiana's 4-H Livestock Judging Program

Abstract

This article describes the degree of influence Indiana's 4-H livestock judging program had on developing 10 life skills associated with workforce preparedness, profiles 185 alumni of the 4-H judging program, and documents the beneficial attributes of the judging program by listing qualitative responses from former 4-H livestock judges. The majority (>80%) of the respondents were college-educated men between the ages of 21 and 50. According to the alumni, Indiana's 4-H livestock judging program was highly influential in the development of the following skills: the ability to verbally defend a decision, livestock industry knowledge, oral communication, and decision making.

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Introduction

The Indiana 4-H livestock judging program began in April 1919 at the first 4-H Club Round-Up at Purdue University (Smith & Kirkpatrick, 1990). The livestock judging activity has been a traditional 4-H program offered to youth as an initial means of developing competencies in livestock evaluation. Throughout the development of the 4-H livestock judging program, residual benefits, such as life skills development, have enhanced the validity of maintaining the activity. Livestock judging has been associated with developing a variety of employer-preferred life skills such as communication, problem solving, and decision making (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992).

When youths learn the process of evaluation through livestock judging, these same skills can be integrated into other real life situations. McCann and McCann (1992) reported that the livestock judging activity provides youth with an opportunity to develop necessary life skills. Participation on

livestock judging teams is credited with improved critical thinking skills, enhanced self-confidence, and development of better team skills (Smith, 1989).

The purpose of the study reported here was to determine the impact of the Indiana 4-H livestock judging program on past participants' development of life skills associated with workforce preparedness. The objectives of the study were to:

- Describe the demographic characteristics of 4-H livestock judging alumni,
- Determine how the 4-H livestock judging program influenced their personal growth, and
- Measure the general impact of the 4-H livestock judging program on career preparation.

Materials and Methods

The target population for the research project was those individuals who participated in Indiana's 4-H livestock judging program between 1975 and 1995. Records from the 4-H Youth Department at Purdue University were used to collect the names of 4-H livestock judging alumni. Agricultural education instructors and Extension educators helped bring the list of names to 294 individuals.

Development of the Instrument

A survey instrument was developed to determine:

- The demographic characteristics of Indiana's 4-H livestock judging alumni,
- How the 4-H livestock judging program influenced their personal growth, and
- The general impact of the 4-H livestock judging program on career preparation.

Fifteen demographic questions were used to define and describe 4-H livestock judging alumni's:

- Age,
- Gender,
- Occupation,
- Annual income,
- Years of 4-H livestock judging experience,
- College judging experience,
- Highest college degree earned,
- Level of experience judging livestock shows,
- Level of 4-H volunteerism, and
- Their children's involvement in the 4-H livestock judging program.

A list of 10 life skills associated with workforce preparedness was identified from a larger listing in the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Life Skills (SCANS) report. Respondents were asked to rate how the 4-H livestock judging program influenced the development of the following life skills:

- Decision making,
- Ability to verbally defend a decision,
- Livestock industry knowledge,
- Oral communication,
- Organizational skills,
- Problem solving,
- Self-confidence,
- Self-discipline,
- Self-motivation, and
- Teamwork.

A five-point scale developed by McCann (1992) was used to find the degree of influence the 4-H livestock judging program had on developing these skills in each of the participants.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the survey was pilot tested by 42 coaches at the National 4-H Livestock Judging Contest in Louisville, Kentucky. Responses from the pilot test were used to refine the questionnaire. Following data collection, a Cronbach's alpha test was run to determine the reliability of the instrument. An alpha value of .92 was obtained. Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) stated reliability coefficients of .70 or higher are acceptable for research purposes.

Data Collection

Following pilot testing of the instrument, 294 alumni of the Indiana 4-H livestock judging program were mailed a copy of the survey. According to Dillman (1978), the mail survey is an effective method to reach a geographically dispersed population. Surveys were coded for follow-up with non-respondents. Two weeks after the initial mailing, non-respondents were mailed post cards as a reminder to send in their surveys. Five weeks after the initial mailing, remaining non-respondents were mailed a replacement survey. These procedures resulted in 185 out of 294 surveys being returned, for a total response rate of 63%.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 7.0 for Windows, 1998). Descriptive parameters, including frequencies, means, medians, modes, ranges,

minimum, maximum, percentages, and standard deviations were used to summarize, organize, and interpret the data.

Results

Demographics

Listed below is a summary of the demographic characteristics that describe Indiana's 4-H livestock judging alumni:

- 82% were male.
- 93% attended college.
- 56% of those attending college indicated their choice of college was affected by participation in 4-H livestock judging.
- 45% of those who attended college competed on a collegiate livestock judging team.
- 68% had served as volunteers in the 4-H program.
- 58% of the respondents (who had children) involved their children in the 4-H livestock judging program.

The following list shows the highest degree attained by the 4-H judging alumni who attended college.

- 11% earned an Associates degree.
- 53% obtained a Bachelor's degree.
- 28% received a Master's degree.

The age distribution of respondents is shown below.

- 45% were 21 to 30 years of age.
- 30% were 31 to 40 years of age.
- 18% were 41 to 50 years of age.
- 7% were over 50 years of age.

Annual incomes of 4-H judging alumni were evenly distributed as shown below.

- 9% earn \$25,000 or less.
- 19% earn between \$25,001 and \$35,000.
- 20% earn between \$35,001 and \$45,000.
- 20% earn between \$45,001 and \$55,000.
- 8% earn between \$55,001 and \$65,000.
- 8% earn between \$65,001 and \$75,000.
- 16% earn more than \$75,000.

Occupations of respondents are categorized below.

- 17% are doing Extension work.
- 16% work in Agribusiness.
- 14% are involved in animal production.
- 8% are Agricultural Education Instructors.
- 3% are involved in crop production.
- 3% work for the government.

After combining categories, it was determined that 58% of respondents work in some segment of the agricultural industry.

Of the respondents, 53% have judged a livestock show. The list below shows the level of judging experience of these individuals.

- 53% have judged on the county level.
- 24% have judged a state show.
- 16% have judged a regional show.
- 10% have been invited to judge a national show.
- 3% have had the honor of judging on the international level.

Judging alumni were asked to indicate their level of coaching experience. Their responses are categorized below.

- 41% had coached a 4-H team.
- 26% had trained an FFA team.
- 2% had coached at the junior college level.
- 4% had senior college coaching experience.
- 17% had coached other judging teams.

Life Skills Development

Alumni of the 4-H judging program were asked to rate the influence of the judging program on the development of 10 life skills using the following five point scale: 1 = not influential at all, 2 =

mildly influential, 3 = moderately influential, 4 = highly influential, 5 = almost essential to the ultimate development of this attribute. Table 1 shows the alumni responses. According to the alumni, Indiana's 4-H livestock judging program was highly influential in the development of the following skills:

- The ability to verbally defend a decision,
- Livestock industry knowledge,
- Oral communication, and
- Decision making.

Table 1.

Distribution of Former Participants' Ratings of the Influence the Indiana 4-H Livestock Judging Program Had on Developing Life Skills Associated with Workforce Preparedness

Life Skill	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Frequency of Responses*				
				1	2	3	4	5
Verbally Defend a Decision	185	4.20	0.81	2	6	16	90	70
Industry Knowledge	185	4.15	0.86	2	6	26	80	71
Oral Communication	185	4.07	0.81	2	6	25	97	55
Decision Making	185	4.04	0.80	3	6	20	108	48
Self-Confidence	185	3.93	0.80	3	8	25	97	55
Problem Solving	185	3.68	0.90	6	11	44	99	25
Teamwork	185	3.56	0.97	5	22	49	83	26
Self-Motivation	185	3.46	1.00	10	16	61	75	23
Self-Discipline	185	3.45	0.98	9	18	61	76	21
Organizational Skills	185	3.35	0.95	8	20	75	64	18

*Scale: 1 = not influential at all, 2 = mildly influential, 3 = moderately influential, 4 = highly influential, 5 = almost essential to the ultimate development of this attribute.

Qualitative Responses

Former participants in the Indiana 4-H livestock judging program were asked to describe how the judging program influenced their personal growth in an open-ended question. Over 75% indicated the program influenced their personal lives in a positive manner. "The Indiana livestock judging program was the single most important experience of my life. I know I wouldn't be where I am today without it." Another respondent stated: "The 4-H livestock program helped develop skills that I will carry with me the rest of my life. It has opened doors and introduced me to people in the livestock industry."

Of the respondents, 77% indicated the Indiana 4-H livestock judging program had a positive influence in preparing them for the workforce. "It helped my communication skills, which are essential in the day to day running of my operation. It became the foundation of other skills I needed in life." "Livestock judging was easily the best experience that prepared me for a career." "The livestock judging program helped facilitate my ability to make decisions efficiently and to verbally defend those decisions." "Livestock judging has impacted my personal growth by giving me more confidence in my communication skills. I praise the Lord for this, as He called me to preach and teach the Bible, which is deserving of the purest articulation."

Of the judging alumni, 23% valued the personal contacts and friendships they gained from the program. "My involvement in 4-H and collegiate judging activities created lifelong contacts within the pork industry." "The greatest influence in my opinion was the opportunity to have contact with

some of the most influential people in the livestock industry."

Of the respondents, 9% cited livestock knowledge as a benefit from the judging program. "The program helped me to have better judgment and make wise decisions to improve my cow/calf operation." "As a purebred swine producer, being able to evaluate hogs is extremely important to my success.

Of the judging alumni who responded, 7% said the Indiana 4-H livestock judging program was influential in helping them achieve academic success. "The 4-H livestock judging program kept me in school and helped me in my current occupation." "Being on the judging team helped me become more responsible. I had to get my school work done in order to stay on the team."

Conclusions

The Indiana 4-H livestock judging program has had a positive impact on the lives of its participants. From making personal contacts to developing necessary life skills, the judging program holds special value to its alumni in a variety of ways. These individuals become life-long learners as a result of their participation. Judging livestock is a beneficial educational tool used to prepare youth for the workforce, regardless of their chosen careers. Former participants have learned to become team players, which is essential to their success and efficiency in the workplace.

Efforts have been made to not only maintain the standard of excellence of Indiana's judging program, but to also improve its quality. Performance data is now being provided on many of the breeding animal classes, which allows contestants an opportunity to evaluate the genotype as well as the phenotype of the animals. Contestants are asked to deliver oral reasons on six of the classes at the state contest, which further emphasizes development of their oral communication skills. These changes will help insure the relevance of the program for many years to come.

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