

# The Role of Rules in Youth Livestock Programs

Aaron E. Fisher, Extension Specialist, Youth Livestock and Equine Programs, Department of Animal Science

The purpose of youth livestock programs is to provide real-life educational opportunities that allow youth to develop animal skills and learn about animal-related careers. More importantly, youth learn how to be responsible for something other than themselves. The youth livestock project is one part of a larger youth development program that aims to develop young people who will have a positive impact on their communities and the world.

Rules are necessary to accomplish the goals of the livestock projects successfully, and policies associated with youth livestock programs are designed to frame the learning experience. They set the parameters for the learning process and ensure that education is the focus. At the end of their projects, youth demonstrate what they have learned at animal exhibitions. These exhibitions are the culmination of the learning experience rather than the focus of the experience.

Many people compare animal shows that are part of 4-H and FFA programs with open shows and wonder why requirements for these open shows are much less strict. It is important to remember that 4-H and FFA shows like county fairs and regional and state expos are different from open shows. In addition to exhibiting animals, 4-H and FFA events showcase the youth's livestock experience.

Another common misconception is that programs like 4-H and FFA discourage competition and favor all participants winning the same ribbon. However, that is

not the case. These programs emphasize teaching life skills, which is not possible without competition. To be prepared for life, youth must know how to handle success and failure. The focus of the competition is on the process, not the prize.

Below are a few common policies and their educational purpose for livestock projects.

## Ownership Deadlines

Ownership deadlines set the parameters for the program year. This requirement teaches youth to meet deadlines and develop attention to detail. It also ensures that they have appropriate time to learn with their animals as part of the project, not just to prepare for a show. The focus is on the learning that occurs between the ownership deadline and the county, region and state shows.

## Animal Identification Requirements

Animal identification requirements teach youth that they are part of a larger livestock industry in which individual animal identification and traceability are very important. A common misconception by many families is that they are not livestock producers but are instead livestock showers who treat exhibitions more like sports. It is important to remember that if you have animals, the general public will consider you a livestock producer and your actions, good and bad, can have a significant impact on public perceptions of animal agriculture. Animal identification requirements also provide a verification system that protects

youth against allegations of exhibiting an animal that they do not own or have not owned since before the ownership deadline.

### **Exhibition Policy**

Remember, the goal of youth livestock projects is to educate youth and not to ensure that an animal is shown. The focus is on the youth, not the animal. If someone other than the animal's owner shows that animal, then it ceases to be the youth's project animal.

### **Animal Grooming**

Animal grooming rules are meant to ensure that youth learn how to care for their animals themselves, instead of someone else doing it for them. Youth need access to qualified people to assist them and to make their education a priority, including family, other youth members, 4-H and FFA leaders, and other livestock leaders. It is imperative that

these people are focused on teaching youth how to groom rather than doing it for them.

### **Livestock Drug Screening Programs**

Livestock drug screening programs exist to teach youth the importance of ensuring a safe and wholesome food supply. Youth must learn to know exactly what they are giving their animals, the role of the veterinarian in animal health programs, and how to follow withdrawal times for medications given to their animals.

The livestock industry is experiencing significant negative publicity because of animals from youth livestock programs. Will you take your responsibility to follow these policies and procedures to ensure that 4-H and FFA youth are learning to ethically raise and exhibit their animals?

You can help change this perception. Will you be part of the solution?



UTIA.TENNESSEE.EDU

Real. Life. Solutions.™