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## Training helps assure quality livestock in Sheridan County

### Situation:

Tracing food to its source is much easier for today's consumer, thus making producers more accountable for their products. Consumers are demanding a quality product; therefore, following quality assurance practices with livestock is important for all producers, big and small. Sheridan County 4-H believes the objective of quality assurance is important to ensure the community knows 4-H and FFA youth are taking care of the animals and the product. All youth selling livestock in Sheridan County actively participate in youth quality assurance programs.

The Sheridan County 4-H educator partnered with local FFA advisers to offer training to FFA members and 4-H youth. Classroom presentations and hands-on activities were used to teach youth about animal care, management, carcass quality, handling, medications, and records.

Nine programs were conducted reaching 55 4-H and six FFA members.

### Impacts:

The programs made a large impact on youth who participated. Evaluations and enthusiasm exhibited by participants validated impact. Many commented how they have changed their behavior but also shared their new knowledge with their families, and, as a result, family operations have been affected by the program. Many youth were better prepared to take better care of their animals through improved management and handling techniques. Two methods were used to evaluate the programs: a formal survey, and a non-formal evaluation through individual conversations with participants, leaders, and parents.

4-H youth put their new knowledge into action with their livestock projects. Not only did participants plan to use with their livestock what they learned, but also with other livestock on their ranches. Responses on the most important things learned and what they planned to use included:

- "I think the blind spot activity was really worth learning. I'll use it."
- "Feeding them [animals] at the same time."
- "[I learned the] importance of recordkeeping, importance of medications, and administration."

- “Injecting medicine during brandings.”
- “[I learned] to not hit and bruise the animals because it damages the meat.”
- “[I learned] how to treat and care for your animal so that the consumers’ product is the best.”

A beef carcass contest was reintroduced in Sheridan County. Beef carcasses that went to a local meat processor were evaluated for quality and yield grades. None of the carcasses showed evidence of improper handling or stress. There were no dark cutter carcasses, only one graded as Standard, and only one had a Yield Grade 4. This provides evidence youth in Sheridan County have put quality assurance measures into practice. When observing youth working with their animals during the Sheridan County Fair, quality assurance was evident as youth used ethical practices when managing their livestock.

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