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Educating Limited Acreage Producers Using Web-Based Technology

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Expanding 4-H Horizons

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Abstract: What does a 4-H volunteer do when a child asks to start a project he or she doesn't know anything about? The Expanding 4-H Horizons Swine Leaders' Guide offers information and ready-to-go activities that can be used by anyone in a club or clinic setting. A team of western regional Extension professionals have created and piloted a user-friendly tool that can be utilized by 4-H leaders and state/county Extension staff. With this curriculum, adults will be able to conduct highly effective activities that emphasize project skills, life skill learning, the experiential learning model and 4-H SET.

Introduction

Volunteers are essential to the success of Extension programming (Steele, 1994). With current organizational climates, where professionals are asked to do more with less, the contribution of volunteers within the 4-H program is continuing to become more and more vital (Sinasky & Bruce, 2007). Volunteer leaders tend to get involved in 4-H because they have knowledge to offer and a passion for helping youth.

For example, a leader may have an interest in, and general knowledge about, the beef project. The next year, one of the youth in his or her club wants to enroll in the swine project, and the leader allows it but does not have the knowledge to assist the member. Without clear guidance from an adult with a general understanding of the project, the member does not get the help he or she needs. The member, their parents, and the leader become frustrated, and the 4-H year ends without anyone feeling satisfied.

A new leaders' curriculum, *Expanding 4-H Horizons Swine Leaders' Guide* has been developed for livestock leaders and piloted by a western regional team of Extension professionals in an attempt to circumvent issues related to disappointing experiences (Lamm, Cecil, Kaysen, Wilson, & Hart, 2007).

Methods

So often, youth, adults and parents have the best intentions when signing up for new projects; however, without proper guidance, the projects have the potential of ending in disaster. In a volunteer satisfaction study done by Penn State University in 2007, volunteers identified that, as a whole, educators do not find ways to change the status quo, find ways to improve the Extension organization, or look for ways to create learning opportunities (Sinasky & Bruce, 2007). The goal of the *Expanding 4-H Horizons Swine Leaders' curriculum* is to offer research-based information and activities that will assist in turning disappointing situations into successes (Lamm et al., 2007). As an end result, the guide enhances the adult and youth experience with 4-H, while increasing member and volunteer retention.

A leader who has no prior experience with the subject matter chosen can open the guide, gain knowledge, and then conduct club meetings or clinics by choosing one of the ready-to-go activities that focus on project and life skill learning. It has been designed to supplement any state's livestock member manuals. As a result, the volunteer will gain knowledge, and the member will receive direct instruction with correct research-based information, enhancing their life skills and promoting 4-H SET goals.

The swine-specific information in the manual is based on industry standards and uses current management practices as a base of knowledge, applying it to a junior livestock project. While many manuals start with the purchase of a market livestock project and progress through the fair, this curriculum uses a unique holistic approach. By utilizing the entire manual, it educates from a supply chain management perspective, covering topics from conception to consumption and beyond. A few unique areas addressed include prior project planning, marketing and merchandising, and the honor and responsibility of being a protein producer as described below.

Prior Project Planning

The curriculum starts by emphasizing goal setting prior to purchasing livestock. This includes evaluating space, facilities, budget, time commitments, human resource availability, and choosing a long- versus short-term project. Members are encouraged to evaluate the pros and cons of market versus breeding enterprises.

Marketing and Merchandising

After being involved in junior livestock projects for several years, leaders understand that marketing and merchandising livestock projects are essential to financial success. This curriculum emphasizes the value of learning and administering these skills at the beginning of the project. By addressing this issue early on, youth gain a skill that is essential to any successful business venture.

The Honor and Responsibility of Being a Protein Producer

In this curriculum, it is emphasized that the end result of a livestock project is a meat product designed for human consumption. When selling an animal it is imperative that a leader focus on the importance of the cycle of life in working with youth who carry livestock projects. Through observations, the most difficult part of raising livestock for youth is letting go of their project at the end of the year. The Expanding 4-H Horizons Swine Leaders' curriculum offers leaders activities that allow for the grieving process to take place naturally and give youth an opportunity to express themselves in creative ways.

Summary

The Expanding 4-H Horizons Swine Leaders' Guide is the pioneer leaders' livestock guide that has been developed as the beginning of a set of four that will include Beef, Sheep, and Goat projects (Lamm et al., 2007). This series of leaders' guides will be created to serve as a useful tool that can be utilized across a variety of counties and states by supplementing already existing member manuals.

The curriculum is designed to empower volunteer leaders by supplying knowledge and interactive activities that should increase their confidence levels when leading livestock projects. The further intent is to enhance youth experiences while allowing for volunteer success. Not only are members more successful with projects, but leaders also are satisfied with end results and want to continue their volunteer experience. Agents can access a complementary copy of the Expanding 4-H Horizons Swine Leaders' Guide curriculum by contacting the Colorado State University 4-H office at <<http://www.colorado4h.org/>>.

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