
Expanding 4-H Horizons Livestock Leader Guides

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Abstract: What does a 4-H volunteer do when a child asks to start a project they don't know anything about? The *Expanding 4-H Horizons Swine Leader Guide* offers information and 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. The swine specific manual is the first of four being created that will eventually offer information and activities for the beef, sheep and goat projects. This series of leaders guides are being created to serve as a useful tool that can be utilized across a variety of counties and states by supplementing already existing member manuals. 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

Volunteer leaders tend to get involved in 4-H because they have knowledge to offer and a passion for helping youth – in fact, they are essential to the success of Cooperative Extension programming (Patton, 1990; 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, 2007). The 4-H volunteer feels

their experience is valuable as 4-H meets the needs of youth and communities (Arnold, 2008). Volunteers 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 their 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 receive the help they need. The member, their parents and the leader become frustrated and the 4-H year ends without anyone feeling satisfied. A new leader's curriculum, *Expanding 4-H Horizons*, has been developed and piloted by a western regional team of extension professionals in an attempt to circumvent issues related to disappointing experiences.

Purpose

So often, youth, adults and parents have the best intentions when signing up for new projects, however, without proper guidance, they have the potential of ending in disaster. The purpose of the *Expanding 4-H Horizons* curriculum is to offer research based information and activities that will assist youth livestock leaders in turning disappointing situations into successes. As an end result, it enhances the adult and youth experience with 4-H, while increasing member and volunteer retention. A leader or extension professional that has limited 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. The curriculum 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 (Science, Engineering and Technology) goals.

Program Objectives

The *Expanding 4-H Horizons* leader's guide:

- Provides adult volunteers with basic information regarding working with youth.
- Clearly defines expectations of livestock program participants, parents and leaders.
- Offers supplemental information and hands on activities that work with existing project resources enhancing a volunteer's experience.
- Enables volunteers to be more confident when teaching youth, which in turn increases volunteer satisfaction levels and long term retention rates.
- Enhances a volunteer's knowledge base, offering members a well rounded experience that emphasizes life skill learning along with the integration of 4-H SET goals.

Methods

The swine specific information in this guide 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 fair, this curriculum uses a unique holistic approach. By utilizing the entire guide, it educates from a supply chain management perspective covering topics from conception to consumption and beyond.

During the 2007-08 4-H year, the *Expanding 4-H Horizons Swine Leader Guide* was piloted in three states by eight counties. These counties varied geographically as well as representing a

diverse demographic environment. The curriculum was also utilized in several different settings including club programming, clinics and meat quality assurance classes.

A survey was created to capture the effectiveness of the curriculum across this diverse clientele. The results of this survey will be used to revise, enhance and improve the current swine leader's guide along with feedback while creating future project materials that will include beef, sheep and goat projects. Adults that utilized the materials were given an opportunity to provide feedback on specific subject matter and activities. Several commented on the usefulness of the materials – and how they could be used as primary project guidelines or as reference materials.

More specifically, the survey requested feedback on the unique attributes of the curriculum. The design team specifically focused on including a broader industry-wide perspective not typically addressed in previous junior livestock materials. A few unique areas addressed include prior project planning, marketing and merchandising and the honor and responsibility of being a protein producer as highlighted below.

Curriculum Contents

Pre-Ownership 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. The 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

Within 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 when working with youth that 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* curriculum offers leaders activities that allow for the grieving process to take place naturally and gives youth an opportunity to express themselves in creative ways.

Chapter titles include: Setting Goals/Evaluating Project, Record Keeping, Breeding vs. Market, Letting Go of a 4-H Project, Benefits Beyond the Fair, Meat Quality Assurance, the Swine Project, Selection, Nutrition, Health, Working with Your Animal, Show Preparation and Carcass Evaluation. The curriculum includes an appendix of additional resources and activity guides for each chapter.

Future Plans

The *Expanding 4-H Horizons* leader's guides are being designed to assist in the integration of volunteer education in youth advancement through 4-H projects. Volunteers across the

western United States have voiced a concern to extension personnel regarding lack of project specific knowledge and how to apply it. This guide assists in giving adults the information and activities essential to creating an environment that will increase a member's success across a variety of areas. The swine guide is the first of many that will be created to enhance youth development programming.

Future plans include national distribution. Extension professionals will have these guides available as a resource for volunteers. By educating volunteers and giving them the information to create a successful club environment, agents will be able to retain more adults to work with youth in all livestock projects.

Summary

The *Expanding 4-H Horizons Swine Leaders Guide* is the pioneer leader's livestock guide that has been developed as the beginning of a set of four that will include Beef, Sheep and Goat projects. This series of leader guides will be created to serve as a useful tool that can be utilized across a variety of counties and states by supplementing current 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 are satisfied with end results and want to continue their volunteer experience.

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