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The Impact of Beef Cattle Projects on Youth Leadership Life Skills Development

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Abstract: Highlights of a study designed to determine the leadership life skills development (YLLSD) of youth beef cattle exhibitors and to determine if there is a relationship between YLLSD and participation in the beef project are discussed in this paper. The study was conducted using a correlational, ex post facto design. A sample of 374 individuals was randomly selected from a population of 4,229 national junior cattle exhibitors of the National Junior Angus Association. The population frame consisted of junior members ages 18 to 21. Participants' YLLSD scores ranged from 40 to 90 with a composite mean of 73.02. Significant relationships existed between YLLSD scores and shows per year, hours working with projects per week, and years of beef project exhibition.

Introduction

There is a great need in society for youth to develop leadership and life skills in order to become productive members—and future leaders—of society (van Linden & Fertman, 1998). Fox, Schroeder, and Lodl (2003) wrote that one of the most imperative issues facing the 4-H organization and other youth organizations is how they can best influence youth to become productive and useful members of society.

Youth organizations, such as 4-H and the National FFA Organization, have a history of developing life skills in young people through the participation in a variety of experiential, hands-on activities (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992; Dormody & Seevers, 1994). Rusk, Summerlot-Early, Machtimes, Talbert, and Balshweid (2003) investigated project skills and life skills development in 4-H members who were involved with beef, sheep, and swine projects. Their research indicated that 4-H members developed the life skill of responsibility from raising 4-H animal projects. Similarly, while researching the life skills gained from youth exhibiting beef, swine, sheep, and goat projects, Boleman, Cummings, and Briers (2005) found that livestock exhibitors indicated accepting responsibility, and developing self-discipline as life skills developed through the influence of exhibiting these livestock projects.

In a survey of New Jersey 4-H alumni, Ward (1996) concluded that participation in the 4-H animal science program had a positive effect on life skills development. The study found that life skills such as spirit of inquiry, decision making, ability to except responsibility, maintaining records, and public speaking were perceived to be developed by respondents who exhibited livestock. Ability to accept responsibility received the highest score by respondents.

Hammatt (2002) stated, "one purpose of the 4-H animal projects is to teach young people how to feed, fit and show their animals. The more important purpose is to provide an opportunity for personal growth and development of the young person" (p. 1). But does involvement in youth livestock projects, specifically beef projects, really enhance and contribute to leadership and life skills development? In addition, does leadership and life skills development really make a significant difference in an individuals' ability to function in society? Why do parents, young people, and agricultural education professionals spend great amounts of time, money, and resources investing in youth livestock projects? Although several studies have been conducted regarding youth leadership and life skills development in youth organizations (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992; Rusk, Martin, Talbert, & Balshweid, 2002; Silliman, 2009; Wingenbach & Kahler, 1997), very little research has been carried out dealing specifically with the impact livestock project exhibition on youth leadership life skills development (YLLSD) and even fewer with beef projects as a primary focus. To properly answer the above questions there appears to be a need for a study that would validate the exhibition of beef projects as a means of youth leadership life skills development.

Conceptual / Theoretical Framework

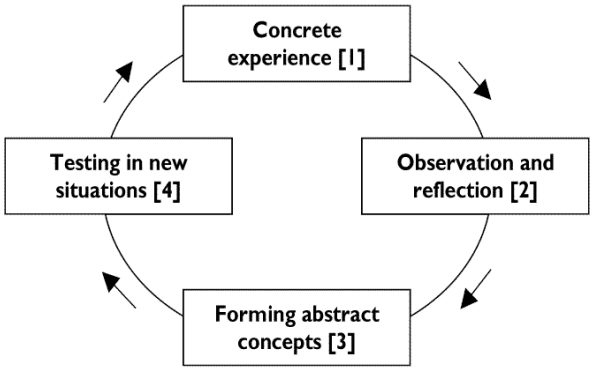
Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is one of the key theoretical bases of this study and an integral part of the programming used by the National FFA and 4-H youth organizations to promote the development of life skills (Arrington & Cheek, 1990; Boyd, et al., 1992). These organizations create opportunities for young people to investigate career options and develop essential life skills to become constructive members of society (Shurson & Lattner, 1991). Experiential activities, such as livestock husbandry and exhibition, can help develop life skills such as responsibility and setting priorities.

FFA, an intra-curricular component of secondary agricultural education programs, teaches students practical skills via hands-on activities and personal experience (Arrington & Cheek, 1990). The National FFA's Motto, "Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve" (National FFA Organization, 2006, p. 2) accentuates agricultural education's commitment to experiential learning. Furthermore, direct application of learning takes place in agricultural education through Supervised Agriculture Experiences (SAE). Students participating in the SAE program are given the opportunity to use the principles learned in the classroom and apply them to real life circumstances (Cheek, Arrington, Carter, & Randell, 1994).

Several models have been developed to illustrate the cycles or stages which occur in experiential learning. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle 4-stage model has been used by numerous researchers to describe this process (See Figure 1).

Figure 1
The Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984)



Kolb (1984) proposed that effective learning possesses the characteristics of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The learner may enter at any point on the four-stage cycle, but the sequence must be followed. Kolb stated that "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 41). Healey and Jenkins (2000) found "the experiential learning theory affirms the importance of experiential activities, such as fieldwork and laboratory sessions" (p. 186).

Youth Leadership Life Skills Development

The conceptual framework of leadership life skills development was a foundational component of this study. Dormody and Seevers (1994) defined youth leadership life skills as those skills needed to become a leader as an adult. In addition, Miller (as cited in Bruce, Boyd, & Dooley, 2004) separated the leadership life skills developed by students involved in the 4-H program into seven categories which include:

a) decision making,
b) relationships,
c) learning,
d) management,
e) understanding self,
f) group processes, and
g) communication.

Using Miller's categorical breakdown of leadership life skills, Seevers, Dormody, and Clason (1995) developed the Youth Leadership Life Skills Development Scale (YLLSDS). The YLLSDS instrument consists of 30 questions with established reliability (Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.98) and validity (Seevers, et al., 1995).

Impacts of Livestock Exhibition

Anecdotal benefits of livestock exhibition were acknowledged in the past, but not until recently have attempts been made to measure these. Davis, Keith, Williams, and Fraze (2000) conducted a qualitative study that sought to validate benefits of livestock exhibition. After conducting interviews of 4-H youth exhibitors, parents, advisors, and show officials, the

researchers identified six themes that resulted from competition through the exhibition of livestock:

a) social relations,
b) character,
c) family,
d) competition,
e) new cultures and environments, and
f) finance for education.

Rusk, et al. (2003) investigated 4-H members to determine the project and life skills developed as a result of their involvement with beef, sheep, and swine projects. Results indicated youth were able to accomplish project skills in the categories of sportsmanship, safety, animal grooming, and animal selection. The study also showed that 4-H members used responsibility skills developed from raising 4-H animal projects to complete school homework. Sawer (as cited in Rusk, et al., 2003) conducted a study involving Oregon 4-H members with beef, sheep, and swine projects to identify specific key life skills developed. The life skills of responsibility, decision-making, communication, getting along with others, and leadership were reported as being developed by livestock exhibitors.

In a similar study Boleman, et al. (2005) found that livestock exhibitors indicated they developed life skills as a result of exhibiting livestock. The study used a questionnaire to survey 4-H members exhibiting beef, swine, sheep, and goats. Participants indicated that accepting responsibility, setting goals, and developing self-discipline were the top three life skills influenced by exhibiting the beef project. Those involved with the swine project reported accepting responsibility, developing self-discipline, and budding self-motivation as top life skills influenced by the project.

Rothlisberger (2005) suggested that the junior livestock program is an avenue to develop young people's life skills. He stated:

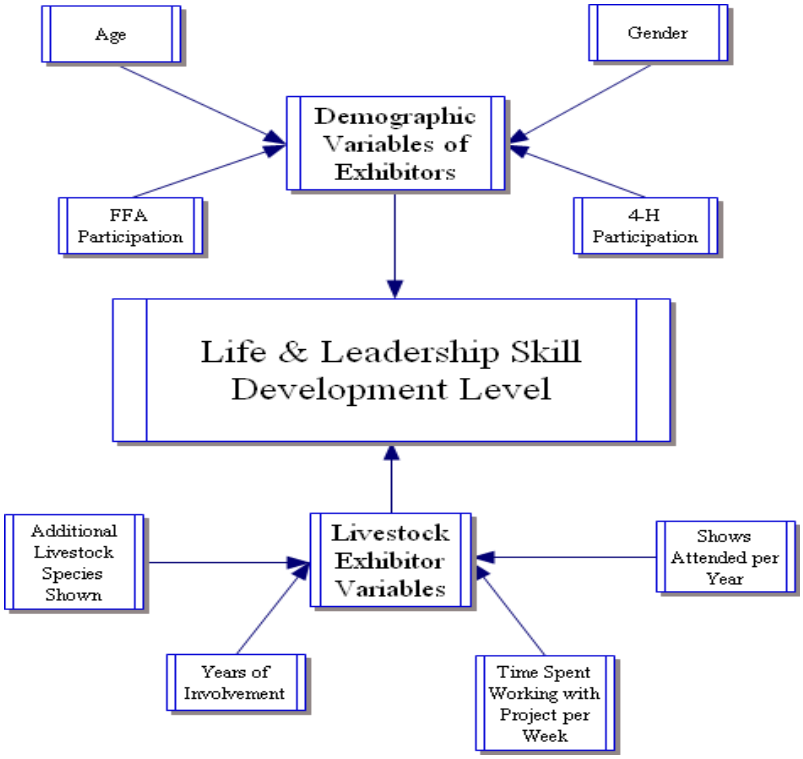
> The experience of youth owning and working with animals, being responsible for their care, health, and growth, and exhibiting them in a competitive environment is a tremendous character building process. Junior livestock projects help develop life skills such as leadership, communication, decision making, and problem solving skills. Character building, record keeping, and the development of personal responsibility are other skills youth can develop from their involvement in the broad range of programs in junior livestock. (p. 1)

Predictors and Correlates of Life and Leadership Development

Two of the primary objectives of this research study were to measure the livestock exhibition variables and exhibitor demographic variables that may influence youth leadership and life skills development. Figure 2 serves as a summative conceptual model of findings in the literature illustrating the variables which may influence youth leadership life skills development among livestock project exhibitors.

Figure 2

Conceptual Model of Factors Impacting YLLSD of Livestock Project Exhibitors (Walker, 2006)



Livestock Exhibition Variables

As the conceptual model depicts, research has reported that youth leadership and life skills development is affected by the years an exhibitor is involved with a livestock project. Sawer (as cited in Rusk et al., 2003) determined that 4-H livestock members demonstrated an evolution of development the longer they were involved in a project. Similarly, Boleman, et al. (2005) assessed the impact of exhibiting beef, swine, sheep, and goat 4-H projects on life skills development and found significant, positive relationships between years of exhibition and specified life skills.

Rusk, et al. (2003) compared the perceived levels of project skills development by Indiana 4-H livestock exhibitors who exhibited only at the county fair to those who exhibited at both the county fair and state fair. Their research revealed that participants who exhibited at both fairs had greater self-perceived livestock animal health care, animal grooming, and animal selection skills than youth that exhibited at the county fair only.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the reported study was to determine the self-perceived youth leadership life skills and level of exhibition activity of members of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA). The research objectives for this study included:

- Determine selected demographic variables of participants;
- Determine the level of self-perceived youth leadership life skills of NJAA members based on the YLLSDS instrument;

- Determine the level of livestock exhibition activity of NJAA members based on the variables of additional species shown, shows per year, years of involvement, and time spent working with beef projects; and
- Determine the correlation between the self-perceived youth leadership life skills development of NJAA members and the livestock exhibition variables of additional species shown, shows per year, years of involvement, and time spent working with beef projects.

Methods and Procedures

This study was conducted using descriptive research and a correlational, *ex post facto* design. The variables were gender, age, species shown, shows attended per year, years of project involvement, time spent working with beef projects, and total youth leadership life skills development level. The total youth leadership life skills development level was measured by participants' scores obtained on the YLLSDS (Dormody, Seevers, & Clason, 1998). This report is part of a larger study.

The population for this study was NJAA members, ages 18-21 (N=4228). For a population of this size Salant and Dillman (1994) recommended a sample size of 357 to achieve a 95% confidence level with 5% sampling error. The confidence level and sampling error are contingent upon receiving 357 usable responses. To account for incorrect addresses and inactive members the sample size was increased by 5%, yielding a sample size of 374. A modified version of the Tailored Design Method (Dillman, 2000) was utilized. Pre-notice post cards were mailed, followed by survey packets containing the YLLSDS, demographic questionnaire, informed consent form, and a stamped, addressed return envelope. Reminder post-cards and second survey packets were mailed in subsequent weeks, providing a response rate of 27% (n=101). Because the Cattle Association only provided postal addresses for the junior members, participants were contacted through postal mailings. This may have influenced the limited number of responses. Although a true random sample was employed, due to the low response rate, extending the results of the study beyond the sample studied is cautionary. Miller and Smith (1983) stated that non-response can be controlled by comparing late respondents to early respondents to determine if they are similar. Specific variables of instruments from early respondents (n = 76) and late respondents (n = 25) were analyzed using independent sample t-tests and no significant differences for YLLSD scores (the primary dependent variable) were found between these two groups (t = .440, p>.05). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's Product Moment correlation with an alpha level of 0.05 set *a priori*.

Findings

Participants' ages ranged from 18-21, with a plurality being 18 years old (36.6%). The majority of participants in this study were male (n = 57) at 56.4%, with females (n=44) making up 43.6% of the sample. The composite mean YLLSDS score was 73.02 (SD = 13.77) with a range from 40 to 90. The overall mean score for years of involvement in the beef project was 8.31 (SD=3.11) with a range of 1-14 years (Table 1).

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Selected Variables (n=101)

Variable	***M***	***SD***	**Range**
Youth Leadership Life Skills Development Scale (YLLSDS) Score	73.02	13.77	40 – 90
Years Exhibiting Beef	8.31	3.11	1 – 14

The variable "hours per week spent working with beef project" was coded using the following categories: 1 = 1-4 hours, 2 = 5-8 hours, 3 = 9-12 hours, 4 = 13-16 hours, 5 = 17-20 hours, and 6 = more than 20 hours per week. The most popular response for participants was working 9-12 hours per week with their beef project, followed by 5-8 hours (Table 2).

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of Hours per Week Spent Working with Beef Project (n=101)

Hours per Week	***f***	**%**
1-4	13	12.9
5-8	20	19.8
9-12	28	27.7
13-16	17	16.8
17-20	15	14.9
more than 20	8	7.9
Total	101	100.0

The variable "shows attended per year" was coded using the following categories: 1=1-4 shows, 2=5-8 shows, 3=9-12 shows, 4=13-16 shows, and 5=more than 16 shows. The most common response was 1-4 shows per year (Table 3).

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of Shows attended per Year (n=101)

Shows per Year	*f*	%
1-4	48	47.5
5-8	26	25.7
9-12	14	13.9
13-16	10	9.9
more than 16	3	3.0
Total	101	100.0

When additional livestock species shown were assessed, a majority of participants stated they also exhibited swine (53.4%). Furthermore, 39.6% exhibited sheep and 31.6% also exhibited horses (Table 4).

Table 4

Percentage of Participants Who Have Exhibited Additional Livestock Species (n=101)

Species Shown	***f***	**%**
Swine	54	53.4
Sheep	40	39.6
Horse	32	31.6
Goat	22	21.7
Dairy	20	19.8

Pearson's product moment correlation coefficients were analyzed for all variables (Table 5). Davis (1971) provided a series of terms to describe correlational relationships: 0.01-0.09 represents a negligible relationship; 0.10-0.29 is a low relationship; and 0.30-.0.49 reflects a moderate relationship. Years of involvement in the beef project shows a positive, but low, relationship with total YLLSDS score (r=0.208). The correlation coefficient between hours per week spent working with the beef project and YLLSDS score yielded a correlation of r=0.309 at the p<0.01 level revealing a positive moderate relationship. A positive, moderate relationship between shows per year and total YLLSDS score was also found (r=.376).

Table 5

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients between Selected Exhibition Activities and Summated YLLSDS Scores (n=101)

Number of:	***R***	**Sig.(2-tailed)**
Years of Involvement in Beef Project	0.208*	0.041
Hours per Week spent with Beef Project	0.309*	0.002
Shows per Year	0.376*	0.000

Discussion and Recommendations

The first objective of this study was to determine the level of self-perceived youth leadership life skills of NJAA members based on the YLLSDS instrument. All participants scored 40 and above (M = 73.02) for the possible range of 0-90 on the YLLSDS. In similar studies, Wingenbach and Kahler (1997) reported an overall YLLSDS mean score of 62.65 for Iowa FFA members, while Dormody and Seevers (1994) reported YLLSDS scores of Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico FFA members having a mean of 64.2. According to Dormody, et al. (1998), "scale values from 0 and 30 might be considered no to slight leadership life skills development, from 31 to 60 moderate development, and from 61 to 90 high development" (p. 2).

The second and third objectives of this study were to determine the level of livestock exhibition activity of NJAA members based on the variables of additional species shown, shows per year, years of involvement, time spent working with beef projects, and the relationship between these exhibition variables and the YLLSDS scores. There was a low, but positive, relationship between years of involvement in the beef project and youth leadership life skills development

(r=.208). This relationship is consistent with the findings of Boleman, et al. (2005) who found low, positive relationships for life skills and years of exhibiting livestock. This relationship suggests that the longer youth participate in the beef project, the more life skills they are likely to develop (Boleman et al, 2005).

When analyzing the relationship between hours per week spent working with the beef project and youth leadership life skills development, a moderate, positive correlation was found. This relationship may be attributed to greater appreciation and responsibility developed as a result of more time spent with the project, or the relationship could be credited to the possibility that responsible youth spend more time working with their beef project. In either case, hours per week dedicated with working with the beef project seems to be associated with greater leadership and life skills development.

Similarly, there was a moderate, positive, relationship between shows attended per year and youth leadership life skills development. This relationship could be the function of all the additional experiences to which youth exhibitors are exposed when participating in livestock shows, or the development may be attributed to the preparation and responsibility required to attend numerous shows each year. Regardless, it seems that the more livestock shows a youth attends, the more leadership and life skills are acquired.

Conclusions

The following conclusions and recommendations were made based on the findings of this study:

- The youth leadership life skills development level of the sample studied was high, which may indicate that youth leadership life skills are developed through participation in NJAA and other livestock exhibition activities. Additional research should be conducted to determine the specific impact of livestock youth activities on youth leadership life skills development (i.e. Does livestock exhibition enhance critical thinking, communication, or decision making?).
- In this study, a positive, low relationship existed between years of exhibiting a beef project and youth leadership life skills development. This relationship should be encouraging to youth who have been involved in their projects, to event organizers who contributed time, and to sponsors who have contributed an array of resources.
- The relationship between shows attended per year and youth leadership life skills development was positive and moderate. Supplemental studies should be conducted to investigate if underlying activities, such as preparing for the shows, influence YLLSDS scores. Again, these findings support the activities of youth livestock exhibitors.
- The number of years involved with the beef project, the number of hours per week spent with the beef project, and the number of shows per year all had a positive relationship with YLLSDS. However, it is unknown if this positive relationship was a result of involvement with the beef project or if other factors influenced the YLLSDS score. This line of research should continue in order to more accurately predict the YLLSD as a result of livestock exhibition.

Recommendations

- Future research should be conducted to determine which elements of youth leadership life skills are most influenced by livestock exhibition.

- Additional research is needed to determine if participation in the beef project promotes youth leadership life skills or if students with a predisposition for youth leadership life skills are drawn to the beef project.

The findings from this study should be encouraging to professionals, practitioners, volunteers, and others who are directly or indirectly involved in youth beef cattle exhibiting. Youth who participated in beef cattle exhibiting scored high on the leadership life skill assessment; and the more time devoted to the beef project, the more likely youth were to develop leadership life skills. By participating in these activities, youth were developing habits and skills they may use to become successful adults. One may conclude the "investment" made by youth to raise and exhibit beef cattle, and the "investment" made by adults to assist youth in this endeavor, is worthwhile and has significant potential to "pay dividends" for youth and society as the youth enter, and progress through, adulthood.

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Appendix A:
Leadership Impacts of Exhibiting Beef Cattle Questionnaire

YOUTH LEADERSHIP LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SCALE

What leadership skills have you improved because of your **BEEF PROJECT** involvement? Please answer each item by circling the number that you feel represents your gain for each skill. Please answer every question.

As a result of my **BEEF PROJECT** experiences I:

	No Gain	**Slight Gain**	**Moderate Gain**	**A Lot of Gain**	**Only for Coding**
	0	1	2	3	
1. Can determine needs	0	1	2	3	
2. Have a positive self-concept	0	1	2	3	
3. Can express feelings	0	1	2	3	
4. Can set goals	0	1	2	3	
5. Can be honest with others	0	1	2	3	
6. Can use information to solve problems	0	1	2	3	
7. Can delegate responsibility	0	1	2	3	
8. Can set priorities	0	1	2	3	
9. Am sensitive to others	0	1	2	3	
10. Am open-minded	0	1	2	3	
11. Consider the needs of others	0	1	2	3	
12. Show a responsible attitude	0	1	2	3	
13. Have a friendly personality	0	1	2	3	
14. Consider input from all group members	0	1	2	3	
15. Can listen effectively	0	1	2	3	
16. Can select alternatives	0	1	2	3	
17. Recognize the worth of others	0	1	2	3	
18. Created an atmosphere of acceptance	0	1	2	3	
19. Can consider alternatives	0	1	2	3	
20. Respect others	0	1	2	3	
21. Can solve problems	0	1	2	3	
22. Can handle mistakes	0	1	2	3	
23. Can be tactful	0	1	2	3	
24. Can be flexible	0	1	2	3	
25. Get along with others	0	1	2	3	
26. Can clarify my values	0	1	2	3	
27. Use rational thinking	0	1	2	3	
28. Am open to change	0	1	2	3	
29. Have good manners	0	1	2	3	
30. Trust other people	0	1	2	3	
				Grand Total	

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Please place the most appropriate response in the blank.

1. How old are you? _____

2. What is your gender? ____ Male ____ Female

3. How many years have you exhibited a beef project? _____

4. How many shows do you estimate you participated in *each year* while exhibiting a beef project? Please check only one.

____ 1 - 4 shows per year
____ 5 - 8 shows per year
____ 9 - 12 shows per year
____ 13 - 16 shows per year
____ 17 - 20 shows per year
____ More than 20 shows per year

5. How many hours did you spend working with your beef project(s) *per week*? Please check only one.

____ 1 - 4 hours per week
____ 5 - 8 hours per week
____ 9 - 12 hours per week
____ 13 - 16 hours per week
____ 17 - 20 hours per week
____ More than hours per week

6. How long have you been in FFA? _____

7. How long have you been in 4-H? _____

8. For each of the following individuals, rate the *level of influence* each individual has had on your decision to exhibit a beef project. Place an 'x' in the most appropriate box.

Individual	Not Influential at all	Mildly Influential	Moderately Influential	Highly Influential	Essential
Parents					
4-H Agent					
Agriculture Teacher					
Friends					
Siblings					
Other					

9. For each of the following, a) first place an 'x' by all species that you have exhibited and b) then rate the *level of influence* that you perceive each species has had on your development of life skills. Place an 'x' in the most appropriate box.

Livestock Project Species	Not Influential at all	Mildly Influential	Moderately Influential	Highly Influential	Essential
Beef					
Dairy					
Swine					
Sheep					
Goat					
Horse					

Thanks so much for your time!!!!!

Please place this questionnaire in the enclosed envelope and mail.