

Livestock day camps strengthen youth knowledge and confidence

AT A GLANCE

A multicounty collaboration provided 224 youth with hands-on livestock education. Youth self-reported their knowledge increased by attending Livestock Day Camp.

The Situation

Youth across the state of Idaho raise 4-H animals and learn quickly that their project involves more than watering, feeding and preparing for fair. 4-H youth must make daily decisions about nutrition, animal health, biosecurity and safe animal handling. These choices have a large impact on how well the animals grow, overall animal welfare, and their safety and ability to show the animal.

Many youth learn these skills throughout their years in the University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development program. However, it can be difficult to understand how judging, feeding and handling disease prevention fit together without an opportunity to practice. Hands-on education is foundational to 4-H. Day camps offer an opportunity for practice before fair, gives youth a place to ask questions, learn why these practices matter and build confidence before applying them at home.

Our Response

To address this need, regional livestock day camps were offered in Bear Lake, Caribou, Franklin, Oneida and Power counties over the course of a week in June.



4-H youth learn animal handling skills with ducks. Photo by Sawyer Fannesbeck.

The camps reached 224 youth and used hands-on activities to teach livestock evaluation, feed identification, biosecurity and safe animal handling.

Youth learned how body structure, quality and anatomy are considered when judging livestock. Participants practiced using flight zones by herding ducks, identified feed samples before and after learning about their nutritional uses, and completed a bag activity that demonstrated how germs are spread, to understand biosecurity.

Youth were then given the opportunity to connect these activities to situations they may encounter in their own livestock projects.

Program Outcomes

Pre and post evaluations showed increases in average self-rating across all six measured areas. Depending on the questions, 176 to 181 youth provided complete pre and post responses.

Youth reported their largest gains in overall livestock knowledge, 28.1%, and biosecurity knowledge at 27.9%. Confidence in safe animal handling increased 17.9%, while confidence in livestock judging increased 14.2%. Feeding knowledge increased 10.1%, and the intention to use these skills in their 4-H projects increased 10.2%.

These immediate outcomes indicate that youth left the camps with stronger knowledge, confidence and intention to apply what they learned.

Open-ended feedback reinforced the value of hands-on learning. Several youth identified working with ducks as a favorite activity because it allowed them to practice herding at a manageable scale and observe how animals respond to handler movement.

Table 1. Self-reported gains following livestock day camps; 176 to 181 pre/post evaluations were used to calculate self-reported gains.

Day camp session	Reported gain (% change)
Overall livestock knowledge	28.1%
Judging confidence	14.2%
Safe handling confidence	17.9%
Biosecurity knowledge	27.9%
Feed identification	10.1%
Intended use in 4-H project	10.2%

The Future

Participant feedback will guide future livestock day camps. The future priorities are additional species-specific showmanship/handling, livestock feeding/nutrition, judging practice, animal health, and livestock anatomy and breeds.

Future camps will continue using hands-on activities while providing more opportunities to practice livestock skills before county fairs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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