

# impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

## 4-H participation beyond club activities prepares Idaho youth with life skills

### AT A GLANCE

4-H animal science state contests provide Idaho youth with an opportunity for them to be ready for life by developing leadership and workforce skills.

### The Situation

Employers across the United States increasingly report that young people entering the workforce lack essential employability skills such as communication, teamwork, problem solving and professionalism. While technical knowledge is important, employers consistently report that human skills or soft skills are critical to workplace success. These include work ethics, communication, teamwork, critical thinking, leadership and decision-making. Youth that participate in activities beyond the 4-H club program do develop these skills.

### Our Response

The University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development program prioritizes high-quality experiential learning opportunities through state animal science contests for youth participating in judging, skill-a-thon, quiz bowl and public speaking. In 2025 over 350 4-H'ers participated in dairy, horse, livestock and skill-a-thon contests. These contests are intentionally designed to extend learning beyond the organized club experience and allow youth to apply knowledge, practice decision-making, and develop communication skills in real-world settings. To increase access and participation, contests are hosted in various locations



4-H youth participating at the state livestock judging contest in Blackfoot. Photo by Cindy Kinder.

across Idaho from January through September. The UI Extension 4-H program works collaboratively with county and district partners to rotate hosting responsibilities. This approach distributes travel demands more equitably across the state while also allowing youth to focus their learning and preparation at appropriate times throughout the year. Counties and districts submit qualifying teams and individuals to compete at the state level. Contests are organized and delivered with the support of trained volunteers, industry professionals and subject-matter experts which provide youth with meaningful learning experiences and exposure to professionals working in agriculture and animal science fields. UI Extension's 4-H program participated in the Western Region 4-H survey, which measures the life skills youth attributed to

participation in 4-H events. This evaluation demonstrates how contest participation contributes to youth development outcomes of leadership, teamwork and communication.

### Program Outcomes

From Idaho's 4-H state animal contests, 41 youth qualified to participate in national contests. The national contests include Eastern National 4-H Horse Roundup and National 4-H Livestock Contest in Louisville, Kentucky, Western 4-H Roundup in Denver, Colorado, All American Quarter Horse in Columbus, Ohio and The World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin.

In 2025, over 350 4-H'ers participated in Idaho state contests and 41 youth qualified and competed at six national contests.

Idaho's youth were highly competitive at these national events and demonstrated the strength of the state's 4-H animal science programs. Notable results included:

- Top individual in placings at the National Dairy Judging Contest
- 6th Overall team in horse judging at the Eastern National 4-H Horse Roundup
- 7th overall team and 16th individual at the National 4-H Livestock Skill-a-thon
- 4th overall team in livestock quiz bowl at the Western 4-H Roundup
- 13th overall team in livestock judging at the Western 4-H Roundup

These results highlight the depth of knowledge, preparation and skill development gained through participation in 4-H contests. Idaho's youth not only demonstrate technical expertise in animal science but also apply critical thinking, decision-making and communication skills developed through the 4-H program.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Survey results further demonstrate the life-skill development youth gain through participation in 4-H events. Youth reported that these experiences helped them understand the importance of a strong work ethic (88%), goal setting (86%), problem-solving skills (80%) and working as part of a team (92%). Participants also indicated they developed leadership skills (92%) and learned the importance of their ability to make responsible choices (81%). Additionally, 66% of youth reported that their participation helped them explore potential career options.

Youth also shared the following:

- "I've gained confidence, learned to make quick and thoughtful decisions and improved my communication skills. I learned life lessons like using past mistakes as a motivation to become better."
- "When I think about how 4-H has shaped my life, I realize that it has helped me become who I am today and who I hope to become."
- "These contests pushed me to sharpen my decision-making, stay confident under pressure and clearly explain my reasons, which are skills that will benefit me in any career I choose."

### The Future

University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development is working to establish a state meat judging contest at the new meat lab facility at University of Idaho. We are partnering with 4-H volunteers and reaching out to potential sponsors to provide financial support for the state contests as well as travel to national events.

### Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

UI Extension educators: Carmen Willmore in Bingham County; Sawyer Fannesbeck in Oneida County. Eastern Idaho State Fair, Solid Rock Ranch, Jerome County Fairgrounds, Gooding County Fairgrounds.