What is the real purpose of . . .

. . .Animal Science 4-H Projects???

Animal Science Programs have long been considered as model programs for youth development and for public understanding of American Agriculture. The obvious purpose of 4-H Animal Projects is to teach youth how to care for, feed, fit, and exhibit their animals. The more important purpose is to provide youth with an opportunity for personal growth and development.

Therefore, the ultimate purpose and major goal of the 4-H Animal Science Program is to provide opportunities for youth to develop character.

The Josephson Institute of Ethics has identified “Six Pillars of Character” in its nationwide CHARACTER COUNTS! program. These six core values help to better describe and understand the value of 4-H Livestock Projects. Through practicing certain behaviors, youth develop and strengthen their character. In the following examples, character building livestock practices are identified for each Pillar of Character.

1. Trustworthiness - includes honesty, promise keeping, and loyalty.
   * provide feed and water to all animals on a daily basis
   * adhere to ownership and possession deadlines
   * adhere to all withdrawal times for feed, medication, dewormers, etc.
   * use only approved medications
   * support the decisions of fellow members, leaders, judges, and other officials
   * maintain complete and accurate records

2. Respect - includes proper treatment of and courtesy to, for, and with all people, animals, and things.
   * provide proper handling of and humane treatment of all animals
   * give proper care to all animals
   * listen to and follow the advice of parents, leaders, and advisors
   * accept the points of view of others
   * recognize that domestic animals depend on someone for their daily care

3. Responsibility - includes striving for and the proper/fair pursuit of excellence, accountability, and perseverance.
   * feed and water daily, even on difficult and busy days
   * go the extra mile—give additional time and attention to produce a high-quality project
   * adhere to deadlines for stock shows
   * never give up in the ring
   * set goals
   * take pride in the project
   * set a good example for other members

4. Fairness - includes consistently applying all rules and standards appropriately for different age groups and ability levels.
   * keep an open mind toward new ideas
   * look at and listen to both sides of an issue
   * feed only approved livestock rations
   * use only approved medications
   * accept winning and losing with the same grace and dignity
   * follow recommended conduct and behavior procedures and practices in the show ring
   * follow recommended fitting and grooming practices when preparing an animal for the show ring

5. Caring - includes promoting the well being of people. Caring necessitates action, not just feelings or empathy.
   * lend guidance to younger club members
   * feed and water animals on a daily basis
   * provide a clean barn or stall for all animals
   * always treat all animals humanely

6. Citizenship - includes making one’s home, community, and country a better place to live for 4-H Members and all other members of society.
   * accept and follow instructions
   * win and lose with grace and dignity
   * help others
   * teach younger and inexperienced members
   * be a team player
   * treat animals humanely
   * ensure all animals are safe for consumption
   * remember, having animals is not a right—it is a privilege
The opportunities for exercising and demonstrating character listed within this pamphlet are not intended to be complete, but rather to express the idea that youth livestock projects offer numerous ways for youth to build character—-which, after all, is the ultimate purpose or goal of 4-H Animal Science Projects.

Furthermore—parents, leaders, and other adults have the responsibility to ensure that all of the activities that youths participate in are designed to help them grow and build character. This list is offered to help youth and parents understand that the amount of work done by adults, diminishes the club member’s educational experiences as well as his/her opportunities for personal growth and development by a corresponding amount.

Of course, a young child may not be able to perform, unassisted, all of the tasks necessary to prepare an animal for the show ring. The concept is for parents, leaders, and other adults to insist that each youth perform all of the tasks that he/she is capable of doing.

The daily tasks of caring for an animal contribute to the strengthening of at least four of the six core values of character. The size of an animal does not have any effect or influence on the developmental value of the project. A child learns the same things and has the same opportunities to develop and exercise character with a rabbit or chicken as with a calf or horse.

4-H is part of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition that is committed to helping youth learn the six pillars of character. More than 450 cities, the US Congress, the US Department of Education, and many other organizations have come together and agreed that these character traits are needed by youth of today.

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