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Editors' Notebook

7 Lessons Youth Learn at County Fairs While Completing Projects

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By Jennifer Carrico, Senior Livestock Editor



Many lessons are learned at county fairs. Youth learn responsibility when caring for their animals. (DTN/Progressive Farmer photo by Jennifer Carrico)

REDFIELD, Iowa (DTN) -- County fair season is happening across the country. For some youth it's their "Super Bowl" and what they work for all year. For others, it's another show to get experience. For all kids, it provides a time of learning valuable skills.

County fairs today are both different and the same as they were when I was growing up, but they have always been a place to learn many life lessons.

No. 1 -- Work ethic. Whether you are showing a calf, baking cookies or exhibiting a potato you grew, each project takes a certain amount of time and commitment. Yes, a calf takes more time daily, but a potato must be planted, cared for and harvested, so each takes a level of work ethic. These projects teach kids not to give up until the job is completed, a skill to help throughout life.

No. 2 -- Resiliency. Not every 4-H or FFA member automatically knows how to be successful with a project, and everyone measures success at a different level. Each year, at our farm, we had to understand the attitude of the new calves in the barn. This led to knowing how to train, feed, and work with it daily. Some took more work than others and new techniques were learned. Resilience helps each exhibitor make changes when needed to be successful with a project even if a purple ribbon isn't won.

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No. 3 -- Communication skills. No matter what kind of project youth take to the fair, there must be communication among participants, family members, leaders or mentors. Being able to get your point across or ask the right questions can make a difference in everyday activities throughout a lifetime. Success is often attained by being able to tell someone what is going on when you are at work, playing sports or raising a family.

No. 4 -- Responsibility. Early mornings and late nights are how we live during the summer, especially when we have livestock. Most days, our animals would be fed before we ate. Caring for an animal or project provides an expectation for youth. This skill is also seen with other projects by collecting supplies and meeting deadlines. Being responsible for another living animal or plant and completing a project is a skill used every day.

No. 5 -- Politeness. Opening a door, shaking a hand, helping someone out when they need it. These skills don't just come with 4-H and FFA but are often seen with these youth. Providing a helping hand to another can get the task done more quickly. I saw this at a county fair I judged recently. One young lady came in the show ring several times to help her friends, and her polite and kind manner was noticed.

No. 6 -- Good sportsmanship. Everyone wants to win and take home the purple ribbon; but is it always the goal? I don't believe you can be a great winner until you know how to be a good loser. There is a greater appreciation for the blue ribbon when you've received a white or pink one and set the goal to do better. Watching a young person smile when exiting the ring because their goal was to get their animal shown or to complete a project is worth a lot. Win without bragging and lose without whining is always a good way to do life.

No. 7 -- Appreciation. My children have always been told to say "thank you" and show appreciation toward those who have helped achieve a goal. A judge can provide a message to the crowd prior to picking champions in a livestock show. At the show last week, I took the time to thank the show committee, the families who spent the time to be there, and then reminded the youth to do the thanking as well, especially toward those who have helped them. I was reassured the crowd heard what I said when a parent came up to me as I gathered my things and thanked me for the message. And then several exhibitors, one by one came by to shake my hand. No one should be above saying thank you, no matter the situation.

County fair is a place of learning many lessons and last Friday I saw it from the time I arrived, until I left. Rural America should be thankful in knowing these life lessons will continue to be learned for generations to come.

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