



4-H Members Learn Through Livestock Program

Rebecca Konopka

4-H/Youth Development Extension Agent

Carter County Extension Service

According to the 2012 Agriculture Census, over 40% of the land in Carter County is classified as farm land. To help educate our youth on this important economic and cultural aspect of our county, the Livestock Program engages 4-H members in a variety of hands-on activities and experiences that cultivate an increased understanding and appreciation for agriculture. Projects and activities are offered in the areas of beef cattle, sheep, swine, goats, rabbits, and poultry. Over the past several years the 4-H agent has worked with certified livestock club leaders so that 4-H members have had the opportunity to participate in club meetings; clinics; Dare to Dairy; county, district, and state fair livestock shows; poultry judging; avian bowl; and tours of Smithfield Foods and a local slaughter house.

In 2018, over forty 4-H and FFA members participated in the Carter County Fair Youth Livestock Shows. The livestock auction generated over \$41,000 for these farm families to reinvest in their farming operation.

In addition to the financial benefit 4-H members also have opportunities for positive youth development in mastery, belonging, independence, and generosity. This program fosters mastery by learning about animal science and sustainable agricultural practices, belonging by interacting and connecting with adults and youth with similar interests, independence by practicing leadership skills and independent thinking, and generosity by participating in community service and citizenship activities.

A parent of one the participants had this to say after this year's County Fair: "My daughter has been showing lambs for five years. When we started we had absolutely no clue what we were doing. She's always gentled them and worked with them, but this year she walked Caleb almost two miles a day in preparation for the fair to build his muscles. It was hot and tiring but she wanted to put her all in this year. She did it and she now says it was worth it! 4-H teaches our children so many good character traits. These kids feed, water, exercise, and practice with their animals for weeks and even months."