

Morning Mail

Are 4-H'ers desensitized to animals?



Advocates for ag

By TROY HADRICK

THE cable news channel CNN ran a story on its website this summer that raised the question: "Does 4-H desensitize kids to killing?"

As a former 4-H member and the parent of a first-year 4-H member, this certainly caught my attention. Over the course of my 13 years in 4-H, I spent countless hours leading, washing, combing and clipping on calves. I did everything I could to make them as comfortable and healthy as possible. So how could anyone ever believe that this somehow desensitizes kids?

According to the story, some believe that 4-H helps desensitize youngsters into having no emotional attachment to animals raised for food. A few of the critics even tried to claim that this was some grand conspiracy by the meat industry to keep them in business. Apparently forcing these kids to sell their livestock to be processed somehow turns them into greedy, uncaring people and will lead to a life of mistreating the animals in their care.

The truth of the matter is that it teaches kids about responsibility and how life works and is sustained.

We just capped off our 4-H year with a trip to Rapid City, S.D., for the Western Junior Livestock Show. It's a tremendous show, and our son was very excited to be part of it. For his first year in 4-H, he decided to show a bred heifer named Morgan. All summer and through the fall he learned



Key Points

- CNN story raised questions about the effect of 4-H on kids.
- Critics contended that kids in 4-H were desensitized to animal killing.
- Advocate claims 4-H teaches kids about how life works.

how to care for his calf. He probably put 100 miles on his bike just going back and forth to the barn to check on her. In the end his hard work paid off when he proudly

marched his well-behaved heifer into that show ring with a grin on his face.

While we were at the show, I tried to figure out how all of the hard work each one of those kids had put in that summer could somehow be a bad thing. I didn't see any desensitized kids. What I saw were hardworking, polite young people, working with their families and their fellow 4-H'ers to learn responsibility and proper livestock care.

I also couldn't help but think what a better place our world might be if every kid had a "Morgan" in their life for just one

summer. Morgan will be in our herd for the next several years, but like every cow on the ranch her time will come to an end. However, the lessons she taught our son will last forever, and for that I'm grateful.

Hadrick writes from Faulkton, S.D. He and his wife, Stacy, created a company called Advocates For Ag. Their mission is to inspire farmers and ranchers to speak up for agriculture. They do presentations about advocating for agriculture and write a blog about the topic. For more information, contact Hadrick at 605-347-9128, or visit their website, www.advocatesforag.com.

Enough already! The cheating must stop

Editor's Note: The following incident took place in Indiana, but the lesson applies everywhere.

By TOM J. BECHMAN

MANY years ago Extension officials relied on ear tags to stop cheating. It didn't take long for cheaters to get around that system. Next it was nose-printing. Some counties even employed someone trained in reading fingerprints to compare noseprints since they weren't always conclusive to the untrained eye.

Along comes a company with technology that scans an animal's eye. Every eye has its own distinctive pattern of blood vessels. Retinal scans don't lie.

All this to prevent the 1%, more or less, of overzealous people tempted to switch animals, all in hopes of 15 minutes of fame and a bigger trophy.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been invested in this equipment. Untold hours of volunteer work have gone into scanning sheep and cattle. Despite this there's strong evidence that someone yet again beat the system. The evidence is circumstantial, but as one 4-H parent/lawyer said, "Give me that much circumstantial evidence, and I'll win every time."

Apparently, an overzealous dad conned an innocent bidder trying to help kids at a



county 4-H auction into buying a calf he wanted, saying he would take the animal home to butcher. He got other people to haul it to a neighbor's house because he supposedly couldn't take it to butcher until Sunday.

Instead, overwhelming evidence indicates the calf went to the county fair next door. The person who bought the calf to butcher just happened to have a son en-

rolled in 4-H there. And the calf just happened to be slapped as grand champion.

Through some quirky circumstances, the fair board president from the first county got wind that something might be amiss in the county next door. He and a fellow board member who specializes in retinal scanning showed up not long before the 4-H sale. They explained their suspicion to the Extension educator, and

asked to settle the matter by scanning the animal's eyes. If it wasn't the same animal, they would apologize and leave. If it was, a travesty would be avoided.

Instead of instant cooperation, what they got were delaying tactics. The educator talked to the father alone. Next thing anyone knew, the calf was pulled from the sale and whisked off to a trailer. As the story goes, the trailer gate was padlocked.

Epilogue

If you're going to cheat blatantly, at least be smart about it. Pick a black calf that's tough to identify visually. The calf in question was a blue roan shorthorn. And on top of that, it had a distinctive marking on one side near its front shoulders.

Better yet, don't cheat at all. That's the point. Neither 4-H nor the livestock industry needs the public hearing these kinds of stories. Both 4-H and many livestock groups work hard to build up positive images. And 99% of the people involved do their part to uphold those images. It's time for the 1% who don't to exit stage left. The gig is up — cheating is simply not worth it. It might bring momentary glory or even net a few bucks, but think about the lesson it teaches young people. Don't you feel for the son of the father who bought his 4-H steer a few days before the show?