

4-H Poultry Project

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Introduction

Due to the increased interest in animal science education for youth, Monona County Extension worked to expand its already successful swine project. A poultry broiler project was started in 2020 at the Western Research Farm, Castana, Iowa. The program is designed to reach all area youth. A grant in 2020 made it possible to remodel an existing building at the farm for use in raising broilers. The program was promoted to Monona and Crawford County youth. Specifically, it provides extensive, hands-on animal science and agricultural education to youth who would otherwise not have had the opportunity. The program reaches mostly non-rural youth, as well as racially and ethnically diverse youth as part of the Science Bound program in Crawford County. In 2020, ISU and the Western Research and Demonstration Farm housed 106 broilers on-site for educational use by 4-H members.

Youth Expectations

4-H participants in grades 4 through 12 are expected to meet several obligations as part of the project. Members and guardians sign a contract and exhibitor code of ethics. There is no fee to participate. They must sign up for chore shifts, receive their Youth Quality Care of Animals (YQCA) certification, and attend several showmanship and educational sessions. In-person workshops began in mid-June 2020. Extension staff provided six sessions a week from June to mid-July.

A final meeting was held in September to discuss profitability and distribute awards to top program participants. Youth master showmanship skills and work as a team with the research farm staff, county swine superintendents, and Extension staff.

Participants are expected to exhibit a pen-of-3 market poultry at the Monona County Fair. They are expected to follow herdsmanship guidelines, the 4-H Code of Ethics, and participate in fundraising for the project.

Education Provided

Fifteen youth participants gained between 35 to 45 hours of in-person and online education at the Western Research Farm. Virtual platforms included Iowa State 4-H 'Animal U', YQCA, and club meetings via Zoom. The ISU Poultry Farm manager, Jessica Menke, gave a thorough and detailed tour of the new facility in Ames. Youth were solely responsible for their broilers an additional two full days at the Monona County Fair. Education is led by Chris Beedle, Melissa Beermann, industry experts, and 4-H volunteers. Participants gain hands-on knowledge of biosecurity, showmanship, marketing, breeds, feed content, cuts of meat, disease, rate-of-gain, record-keeping, good production practices, and more.

Outcomes

The 4-H poultry project reaches a group of non-traditional agriculture program participants. Most participants do not live on a farm. A majority of participants are females and of lower socio-economic status. Youth who otherwise would not have had the opportunity have been successfully educated and encouraged to pursue future endeavors with animal science and local careers in agriculture.

Community outreach efforts such as the “Buy a Broiler, Donate a Broiler” provided 56 whole, processed chickens to the local food bank as well as providing local meat to families and earning funds for the 4-H club. Support for the 4-H Premium Fund, trophy sponsors, and media attention have all connected the community to Iowa State University and the agricultural industry. The project has now become a chartered 4-H club, appropriately named “The Breakfast Club” (for eggs and bacon).

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