

4-H Swine Project

RFR-A2067

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Introduction

Due to the decreased number of pork producers in Monona County, youth have had fewer opportunities to learn about or exhibit swine. In 2010, there was one pig exhibited at the Monona County Fair. A special swine project was started by Monona County Extension and is now in partnership with the ISU Western Research Farm. The program is designed to reach all area youth. A grant in 2020 made it possible to expand the program to reach racially and ethnically diverse youth as part of the Science Bound program in Crawford County. It provides extensive, hands-on animal science and agricultural education to youth who would otherwise not have the opportunity. The program has grown dramatically since its origin. In 2020, ISU and the Western Research Farm housed 120 pigs 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 pay a nominal fee of \$30 each. 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 were delayed due to COVID-19. 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 sort and weigh pigs, track rate-of-gain, master showmanship skills and work as a team with research farm staff, county swine superintendents, and Extension staff.

Participants exhibit up to three pigs at Monona County Fair. They are expected to follow herdsmanship guidelines, the 4-H Code of Ethics, and participate in project fundraising.

Education Provided

Twenty-six youth participants gained between 35 to 65 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. Youth were solely responsible for their swine an additional two full days at the Monona County Fair. Education is led by Dave Stender, ISU swine specialist, Chris Beedle and 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 swine 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 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 4-H Premium Fund, swine bonus auction, and media attention have all connected the community to Iowa State University and the agricultural industry. The project now has become a chartered 4-H club, appropriately named “The Breakfast Club” (for eggs and bacon).

Acknowledgements

The project is supported by grant funding. Special thanks to grant providers, local donors, volunteers, and industry experts.