Building Success with Speaking Up For Animal Agriculture
Juanita Reed-Boniface, Educational Consultant,
Extension Educator 4-H Youth Development Emeritus

Building communication skills is a key cornerstone in the 4-H program. Demonstrations, public speaking, judging contests, conference judging are examples of the many ways 4-H members learn to communicate with judges, teammates and the general public. As a livestock exhibitor, 4-H members have a unique opportunity to help others—friends, relatives, teachers, other boys and girls and adults learn about farm animals. As fewer and fewer people live on farms and work with livestock, there are more and more people who do not know how animals are raised and the care they receive from their owners.

In Minnesota, Speaking Up For Animal Agriculture at the state and county fairs provides a natural setting for 4-H members to “Tell their Story” Through this activity youth not only apply communication skills but learn that their voices are important and just as strong as adults in providing a positive message about animal agriculture.

A team of peer mentors staffs the Speaking Up for Animal Agriculture Activities. These college age youth conduct two workshops addressing positive communication with consumers in the fair setting. Each county may select one or two members from each species to attend these workshops and then share the information learned with the other exhibitors. In addition mentors help 4-H members with one-on-one, individual conversations with fairgoers and serve as evaluators for the county activities.

This tip sheet will provide some suggestions for planning and presenting successful activities at the fair.

Planning and Preparation

Planning can begin anytime during the 4-H year. Many counties incorporate their planning into Lesson 7 of LQA&E. When teaching this lesson to 4-H’ers take the time to brainstorm possible topics and how they might be presented. Practice ways to answer questions politely and respond to “tough questions”

The State Fair meeting held during county fair is a good time to explain the Speaking Up for Animal Agriculture Activity to members, parents and chaperones. Review the information in the premium list including the time of presentations, key messages, and criteria for evaluation and awards. Determine which 4-H members are going to represent their specie at the workshops held at the fair on Wednesday evening.

Encourage members to work together in species groups to plan a project that will involve all of the exhibitors. A good example is an activity conducted by Crow Wing County beef exhibitors. Six different breeds were represented in the seven state fair beef exhibits. The 4-Hers used this feature of their animals to do a display on characteristics of the breed that they were showing. Each member brought a 5x7 photo of their animal with six bullet points of information about their breed. Printing for all information cards was done in the same font. When the group all got together to assemble their board the props and visual presentation was completed and well done.
When giving a speech or writing an essay, it is easiest to speak/write about something you know well. As youth plan their presentation, encourage them to focus on a topic they know rather than one that will require extensive study. “Keep It Simple” is usually a good motto. Consider using topics that members are or have given for demonstrations or have prepared for veterinary science or non-animal areas of the project.

Remember that fairgoers do not stay long at each activity, select activities that are easy to understand and do in a short time.

Games are one method to draw fairgoers to the activity. Adaptations of typical fair contests and challenges such as roulette wheels, guessing games and others involve the fairgoers in hands-on action. Small give-always—wrapped candy, pencils, and bookmarks—are popular with the public and help to draw the fairgoers to the activity. Food samples are not permitted.

Select props carefully. Be sure that posters are neat and readable.
Signs should be computer generated. Labels on tools, feedstuffs and by-products are helpful.

**Who Can Help?**

Extension educators, 4-H leaders, older members and parents are the “tried and true” helpers for any 4-H activity. Commodity groups—dairy, beef, pork, sheep, rabbits, and poultry—may provide handouts, display ideas and T-shirts.

Some counties have used auction funds to purchase locally designed t-shirts, display boards or other props that can be used from year to year.

**Giving the Presentation**

Successful presentations don’t just happen—they are the result of the hard work, careful planning and preparation. Once at the fair, members should-

- Check at the Herdsmanship Office to see that they are registered for the Speaking Up For Animal Agriculture activity.
- Confirm the time for their species activity
- Look over their tack space and determine how best to set up their activity.
- Review with teammates each person’s responsibility
- Stand up straight, be confident, smile and invite the public to learn and have fun.

**Evaluation**

Speaking Up For Animal Agriculture activities are evaluated on five criteria: These criteria along with good examples of each are given below:
1. **Participation/Teamwork—25%**—County exhibitors work as a team, establish an inviting environment and participate in activities.

Example: Matching shirts with a logo that coordinates with the theme of the activity helps to set the stage.

2. **Public Interaction—25%** - 4-H members demonstrate skills in engaging the public.

Example: Fair visitors touch, feel and ask questions about dairy goats.

Example: Good eye contact, knowledge and enthusiasm capture the attention of these three fair visitors.
3. **Props—25%** --Shows good use of props to help enhance consumer understanding and education

Example: Pre-planning and preparation results in a professional look. Color, print size and illustrations add variety.

Example: “Spin the Wheel, Answer a Question and Win a Prize”

4. **Subject Matter—25%**—Uses accurate and current subject matter relevant to the species. Members are encouraged to build their messages around the five key messages.

Example: Features the exhibitor’s family farm
Example: Animal By-products

Example: A more technical topic on dairy cow physiology

Example: A totally different topic was selected “POOP”
Recognition
Awards are presented to the three highest placing counties in each species and for the county placing highest over-all. To place over-all a county must have representation in 4 or the 7 species to qualify. The awards are announced at the Herdsmanship Awards program held on Sunday afternoon.

Telling the REAL story of 4-H and 4-H animal projects means telling OUR story: 4-H member's care for their animals, they care for the land and other resources and they care about providing safe and nutritious food and fiber for consumers. Speaking Up For Animal Agriculture Activities at the Minnesota State Fair are a simple, fun way to “TELL THE REAL STORY.”

Sources:
E-mail interviews:
Kirstin Koch Stevens County 4-H Program Coordinator
Becky Moe, Morrison County 4-H Program Coordinator
Tammy Nordick, West Otter Tail 4-H Program Coordinator

4-H - LQA&E Curriculum, Lesson 7, Speaking Up for Animal Agriculture

July 2015