



Southwest Virginia 4H Livestock Camp

On March 18-19, 2022, the first Southwest Virginia 4H Livestock Camp was held in Abingdon at the Southwest Virginia 4H Center. Through partnership with VCIB, VCE agents from the region successfully executed a well-rounded livestock educational program for 68 youth ages 7-18 from across the state. Attendees traveled from as far as Manassas and Fairfax to participate in the program.

Jeannette Reynolds, Center Director, explained how Livestock Camp provides a platform for introducing the next generation to concepts and opportunities to learn and build skills directly related to careers in agriculture. It also creates a positive experience allowing campers to connect with peers who have similar interests.

Campers were able to choose from a variety of hands-on classes according to their interest throughout the day. Course options and their description included:

- Meat Judging & Quality: Learn about meat quality and how to judge meats.
- Meat Retail ID: Learn how to identify retail meat cuts.
- Meat Cookery: Learn how to cook meat in several ways from smoking to jerky.
- YQCA: Training required to show at the State Fair of Virginia.
- Introduction to Fitting & Showmanship: Interested in showing livestock. Come learn the basics.
- Advance Beef Showing: Already showing beef cattle. Join this course to learn how to improve.
- Advance Sheep & Goat Showing: Already showing sheep or goats. Join this course to learn how to improve.
- Advance Pig Showing: Already showing pigs. Join this course to learn how to improve.
- Livestock Evaluation: Learn how to evaluate livestock and giving reasons as part of a livestock judging contest.
- Feeds & Nutrition: Learn about animal nutrition and key strategies for feeding livestock.
- Sheep Leg Wraps: Learn how to use a sewing machine to make your own leg wraps!
- Introduction to Stockmen's Skills: Learn the basics about livestock including identify breeds, feeds, equipment, and parts.
- Livestock Health: Learn key health principles for livestock

Fifty-two of the participants completed a post-camp survey. Those surveyed reported a 47% increase in knowledge from courses attended during camp. On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being excellent, youth rated the camp at a 4.7.



Phil Blevins, Washington County Extension Agent, shared the following insights about the importance of the Livestock camp.

“ I teach the section on meat identification. I believe that this section is important for the participants as current and future consumers. Understanding where meat cuts come from in the carcass and how they should be prepared not only will benefit them individually, but will also affect those they interact with in a positive way. A lower value cut, when prepared properly, is a satisfying eating experience.

Some of the camp participants will likely become decision makers in the agriculture industry and/or society and hopefully, these experiences will aid them in making a positive difference for the livestock industry.”

There is an interest across the Southwest District to continue the Livestock Camp program on an annual or every-other-year schedule. All those involved considered the effort to be a success with a strong demand and interest from youth.