

Keeping The Show Circuit In Perspective

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NEWARK, Del. — Every summer I have the opportunity to serve as a judge for several livestock shows on Delmarva and in surrounding areas.

Prior to my arrival at the county fairgrounds, hogs are washed, brushed and trained to drive by a lot of enthusiastic young 4-H and FFA exhibitors. Hours are devoted to raising that one animal that will be named champion of the show.

The champion is then offered for sale at a livestock auction and usually fetches a handsome sum far in excess of the going market price.

Parents and supporters of such sales are always trying to find buyers willing to spend record amounts of money for an animal that for all intents and purposes is worth the market price. Why are these sales popular and why do we put so much emphasis on one judge's opinion? These are questions that deserve some thought.

Livestock projects provide a youngster with the opportunity to raise an animal to market weight. Along the way, he or she should learn some of the finer points of feeding, health and general management of the livestock species being raised.

In addition, some general costs of production should be kept to determine the profitability of the project. These records keep everything in perspective and let the youngster know how they're doing in the hog business. But then, along comes the champion hog with its high price tag.

While it's true that selling a champion hog at a fair provides a youngster with money for college or further livestock endeavors, the experience doesn't paint a realistic picture.

How many times do we in the industry get to sell a hog for two, three, five or 10 dollars a pound or more? You know the answer is never. While we like to see a youngster receive a good price for a champion, it's up to us as leaders of 4-H, FFA and other youth groups to keep the experience in perspective.

One of the biggest disappointments I've had over the past few years regarding livestock projects is a direct result of high-selling champion animals. As the price per pound increases, so does

the amount of money a youngster will spend for the project animal. It's not uncommon at all for kids to spend a hundred dollars or more for an outstanding feeder pig. This in turn makes it next to impossible for the exhibitor to break even unless they win the championship.

Believe me, there have been a lot of disappointed kids when a judge's final verdict comes in. Remember that there is only one champion, and at larger shows several youngsters may have paid big bucks for their project animals.

Who profits from all of this? You can't totally fault the producer,

who finds out that all of a sudden his pigs can demand a higher price. However, it's important to realize that spending a lot of money for an outstanding feeder pig does not ensure a champion.

Then there's the judge. A judge is only one person giving one opinion. What if the judge at your particular fair doesn't like your pig? The judge doesn't care how much you paid for your hog, only what it looks like on show day.

The point I'm trying to make is that winning a championship at a fair is a nice thing to have happen to you, however, learning about livestock is the real reason to

become involved in a livestock project.

I'm one of the fortunate individuals who became interested in livestock through 4-H projects. It doesn't matter how much you spend on an animal if the main objective is learning about livestock and the livestock industry. Learning is a main objective of 4-H and FFA, and as project leaders it's our responsibility to ensure that the youth involved are aware of the realistic objectives of raising livestock.

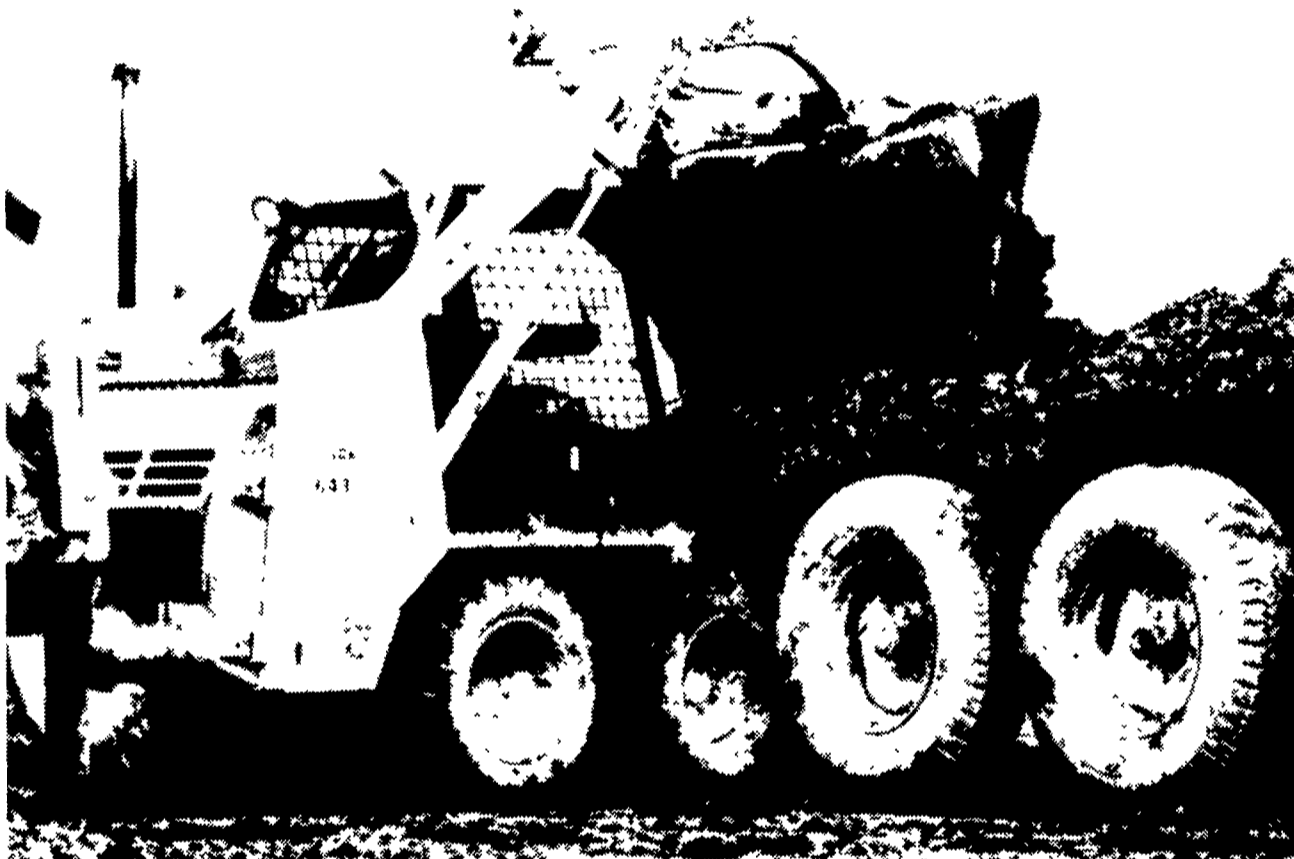
I'm not trying to say that champion sales should be discontinued, but rather that the youngsters involved in raising

animals keep a realistic perspective on their projects.

Hog producers can help by making a few good feeder pigs available for project animals at a fair market price. Invite a youngster to view the pigs and provide adequate information about them with regard to their potential growth rate and efficiency. Better yet, become involved as a project leader for a 4-H club or FFA chapter and share some of your knowledge about the hog industry.

Working together we can ensure that knowledge remains the number one objective of our junior livestock projects and shows.

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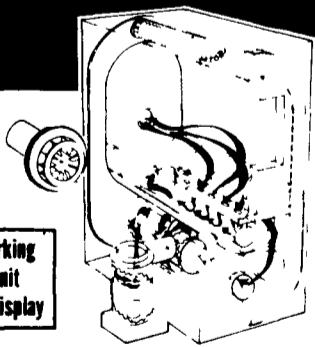
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