

Swine Management News



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 Altered Champions
 Cheat Everyone

Recently I read a newspaper article and an editorial about a 4-H livestock exhibitor who altered an animal that eventually won grand champion at a state fair. Why does this incident spark such controversy?

Over the years I've heard of instances in which animals were altered to gain an advantage in the show ring. Why? Champions bring big money at an auction. If altering a project animal enables a youngster to capture the championship, what's the harm?

4-H and, for that matter, all junior livestock shows should be the epitome of fair play. The only advantage anyone should have over another entrant should be the direct result of how much time the exhibitor spends training, feeding, and exercising the project animal.

I know of cases in which animals have been altered surgically to give them the advantage in a junior show. One animal actually was subjected to a surgical procedure to remove excess fatty tissue from the neck and shoulder regions of the body, resulting in a cleaner front for the animal. What the junior exhibitor learned is that it's OK to do anything and everything to win.

Given current animal rights

the industry can't afford to have happen. Anyone who stoops to such low levels of show-ring ethics is saying that the animal doesn't matter. Winning matters. Is this what we want to teach our junior exhibitors?

Another incident I'm aware of was the dyeing of a white steer's haircoat to make it appear black. The exhibitor knew that the judge was partial to black steers and felt the only chance to win was to dye the steer black. It worked, too. But once again the wrong message was sent to junior exhibitors: All's fair if it results in a win.

These altered champions are not limited to cattle. Some of the more blatant abuses of show-ring ethics involve swine, sheep, and cattle. This is confirmed by the apparent influx of crossbred animals in purebred classes. It happens that many of the animals exhibited as registered purebreds come from mixed ancestry. I can't tell you how many spotted white breed hogs I've seen in the past several years, or how many erect-eared breeds with floppy ears. Off-color and off-types are so prevalent that it's almost impossible to determine which animals are purebred.

The situation is so bad that an honest breeder is hard-pressed to

In fact, I heard a leader of one of the breed associations in the sheep industry say they knew crossbreeding was going on and that they accepted this as a way of breed improvement! Needless to say, this has come back to haunt that particular breed; the result has been the incorporation of bad genes and a watering-down of positive traits.

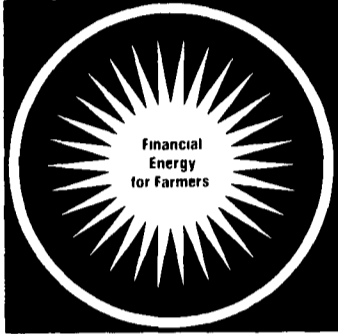
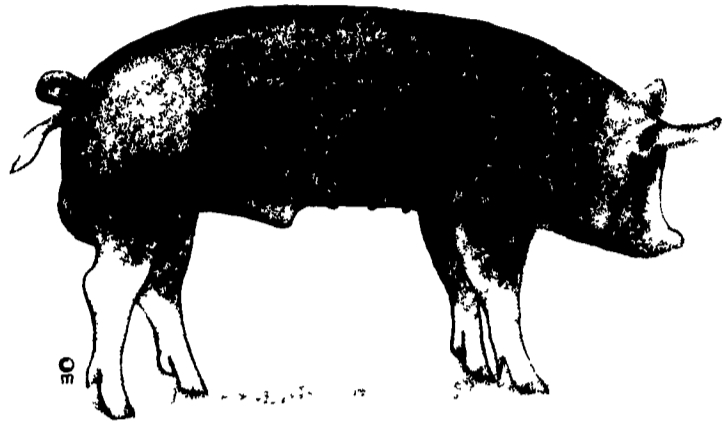
I know of a few purebred swine breeders who make it a habit to inbreed some of their newer boars to see if any off-types show up! These breeders are trying to assure their buyers that no genetic surprises will show up in the next generation.

As an industry, where are we

exhibitors that cheating is OK? Do registration papers mean anything anymore? How can we encourage honesty at the junior level if it is not fundamental to the adult level of competition?

Most cattle, sheep, and swine exhibitors are honest and ethical, and it's up to us to make sure we are sending the right message to our youth. As an industry, we cannot and will not tolerate cheaters. No championship is worth giving up self-respect.

People who bend the rules ultimately lose out. Fair play has been and always will be the primary objective of junior livestock programs. It has to be.



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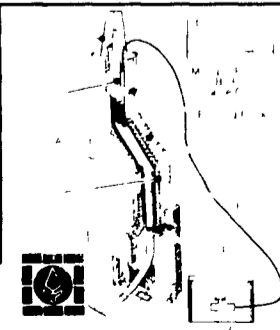
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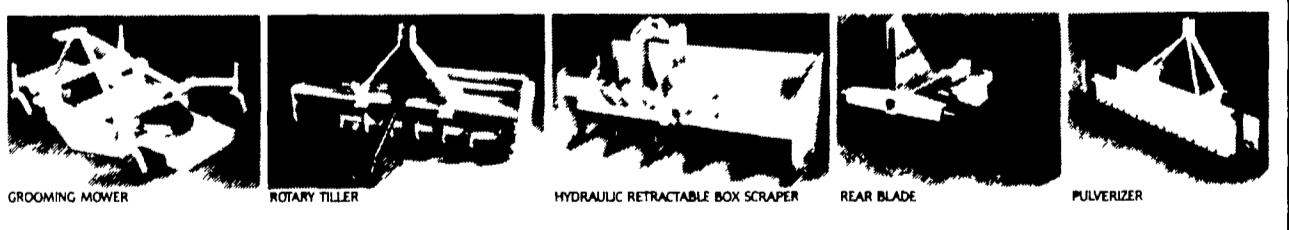


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