

York 4-H Meats Judge Equally At Home

(Continued from Page A39)

couraged Burrell early in his 4-H career to become involved in meats judging. So, as a second-year 4-H member, long before he was old enough even to be on the team, Burrell began attending meats judging practices.

By 1992, he was old enough to enter his first 4-H meats judging competition in York County.

He won, besting much more veteran competitors.

For the last two years, he was first place meats judge at 4-H State Days at Penn State. And, in both 1995 and 1996, his meats and livestock judging skills helped him win the Stockmen's Contest at the Keystone International Livestock Exhibition at Harrisburg.

Named high individual overall at the Kansas City national contest, Burrell also won the meats identification portion and was second in reasons.

Meats identification included accurately identifying 30 cuts of meats and species of origin, the location of the cut in the carcass and the proper method of cooking each cut.

Entrants also had to place beef and pork carcass classes as well as a class each of hams, rounds, pork chops and rib steaks.

A total of 84 individuals and 21 teams took part in the national competition, with the York team placing ninth.

Other team members included Amy Dise, Seven Valleys, Drew Bankert, Winterstown and Mindy Albright, Glen Rock.

Coaches for the team are Joan Grim, Thomasville, Mike Bank-

ert, Winterstown and Scott Shell, Dallastown.

Extension livestock and dairy agent Tim Beck also helped with some team coaching. Frequent hosts for practice sessions were Bankert's Meats, Nell's Market and Richard Beck's meat market.

A regular Pennsylvania Farm Show competitor, Burrell is now making final preparations to exhibit his remaining Suffolk market wether in the junior show. Earlier, the wether topped its lightweight division at the York Fair.

Burrell expects to compete as well in the Shepherd's Contest, which he won in 1993. Entrants in the Shepherd's Contest take a quiz on the sheep and wool industry, identify feedstuffs and equipment, judge classes of sheep and wool, and shear and fit a sheep just off the pasture in a given amount of time.

"I like the wooly ones. When you have more wool to work with, you can do more with them," said Burrell, who thrives on such challenges to his shepherding skills.

Burrell credits his shepherding abilities to 4-H leader Carolyn Kern and her daughter, Julie, who taught him how to fit sheep and shear his animals. Now he does all his own shearing, to the delight of his dad who disliked the chore.

Show preparations actually begin the year before, when Burrell breeds his ewes for lambing early in the year.

Some of the ewes may be bred to his herd sire, "Turbo," and others crossed out to other bloodlines. While Turbo himself is not a show animal, he does sire winning lambs.

It is not unusual for the earliest lamb to arrive during Farm Show week, when the family is also traveling to and from Harrisburg.

Checking the ewes close to lambing is the last thing Burrell does before going to bed at night.

"You can pretty much tell if they're close and going to lamb soon," he said of a shepherd's need to know the animals and their behaviors.

By May, when weigh-in and tagging for 4-H projects is scheduled, Burrell must select his lambs for show use. A member of the Dover FFA, he also tags a few for vo-ag projects.

Heavier lambs are earmarked for the late summer 4-H roundup, while lighter ones are tagged for the York Fair and Farm Show.

Because his flock is a relatively small one, Burrell often separates and hand feeds each animal according to its growth and body finish in relationship to upcoming shows and sales.

"Some grow fast and can get wasty if they are overfed," he explained. A fairly-high protein ration of alfalfa pellets and barley is a favored feed, but not fattening, for animals already in good condition.

To keep them lean and muscled, Burrell's lambs also have a sort of jungle-gym exercise area outside the farm's small barn.



Just as athletes train for competition, Burrell's lambs scale a ramp to go in and out of the barn, often playing head-butting games with one another over claiming the top of the ramp.

They stand up on blocks to reach their feed trough and seem to enjoy the hurdles provided for in the lot jumping for additional exercise.

Such attention to details has paid off handsomely for Burrell, both in the lineup of awards his lambs have won and the bank account he socks his winnings into toward pre-vet college studies at Penn State.

In 1995, Burrell champion junior market Suffolk wether set a new York Fair price record of \$8 per pound. Purchaser Russell Horn Sr., gave the lamb back to Burrell. Named "Champ," the tame pet now just "hangs out" with the flock.

At last summer's 4-H, Burrell took reserve champion honors with another Suffolk wether.

His grandparents formed a buying "syndicate," B & N Enterprises, to purchase the pink ribbon winner at \$5.45 per pound.

Burrell won the York Fair's junior market lamb show again last fall, with a Suffolk ewe. Again, a price record was set when Eric Glass's Oak Ridge Farm in Maryland was the winning bidder at \$10 per pound. Glass also returned the ewe to Burrell, who plans to breed her to Turbo.

Just for diversity, Burrell began raising and showing pigs for 4-H a few years ago. While he usually gets only three, last year he went "whole hog" and acquired eight.

"That was just too many," he admitted, noting that their facilities were not large enough for eight grown pigs. "It's just fun to show pigs; lots of the same people that show sheep also show pigs."

With sheep judging the beginning of the fair, and hogs exhibited during the second half of the fair, his dad schedules vacation for the entire week to help Mike and other junior exhibitors with their show strings.

With both show and auction ring honors, plus a national meats judging title, to his name, Burrell now plans to focus on livestock judging. He has had plenty of practice in the last two years, and won the junior competition both times he has entered the Southeast Regional contest. He also won the junior division at the York County contest in 1996.

His Dover FFA advisors are encouraging Burrell to help organize an FFA meats judging team. That contest is somewhat different from the 4-H version, with no reasons given.

Instead, competitors are required to do some mixing of meat products, such as formulating hamburger blends.

Whatever he tackles, Burrell will do it with that slow, wide grin, his penchant for details and a desire to do his very best.

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