

Contest At Ag Progress Focuses On Youth Knowledge

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ROCKSPRING (Centre Co.) —

Ag Progress has become known worldwide in the agricultural community for its experiments.

Another experiment of sorts was conducted Wednesday in a new exhibit, the junior livestock exhibition area: the Youth Skillathon and Lamb Show, a prelude to a scheduled event competition at next year's Farm Show.

About 40 youth and 32 lambs were judged in a complex competition involving what the exhibitors know about the industry, what they have learned in raising a 4-H animal, and how they present that animal to the judge during the first-ever skillathon at Ag Progress.

In part, the contest was brought to Ag Progress to expand the scope of Pennsylvania's showcase agricultural event to include more family-related activities.

But an important reason is to provide more focus on the exhibitors, to fulfill the 4-H goals of "learning by doing."

The contest was open to all 4-H and FFA members with lamb projects. The purpose: rate by a point system three separate areas, including a skillathon (which tests a youth's knowledge of lamb production), a live market show, and a showmanship event.

The winner, called the Outstanding Youth, was ranked by a formula involving 50 points on the skillathon, 35 points on the type show, and 15 points for the showmanship portion of the contest.

There were four age categories, including juniors (9-10 years of age), intermediate 1 (11-12 years of age), intermediate 2 (13 years), and seniors (15 years and older).

The overall exhibitor in each age category won a hefty \$200 savings bond. The reserve took home a \$100 savings bond. First place premiums included, for the skillathon, \$50, \$45 for second place, and \$40 for third.

The skillathon itself was the most challenging aspect of the overall contest. There were five stations, which included a management quiz, identifying equipment functions, a meats identification table, a feeds station, and a quality assurance and medicine and health table.

The prelude event, which will provide practice for participants and will help streamline the event scheduled at the 1999 Farm Show, is not completely new to Farm Show, according to Keith Bryan,

dairy and animal science instructor at Penn State.

In fact, the Shepherd's Contest at the Farm Show is expanding to incorporate the skillathon aspects, according to Bryan. In addition, the idea of a youth skillathon and lamb show may be expanded to include either swine or beef at future Ag Progress Days.

Of the three species, having a lamb contest at Ag Progress was the easiest species to deal with because of animal health concerns, pens, and overall facilities, Bryan noted.

Bryan is co-chair of the event, along with Bill Henning, Penn State meats specialist.

Said Henning, "The program was started by the state department of agriculture's Ethics Committee," he noted. It was begun to concentrate more on the educational aspects of a contest, not simply to show a purchased-for-champion lamb.

"I call it a 'holistic' approach" to the whole idea of youth contests," he said. "The whole approach is to try to put the emphasis and the rewards for other knowledge, rather than just showing in the ring."

"The focus is on the kids," Bryan said. In the past, livestock shows at Farm Show and other fairs have provided "enough opportunity to focus merely on the animals."



First and second place Outstanding Youth at the Youth Skillathon and Lamb Show with Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Samuel Hayes, front row. Front row, from left, are the first place winners, Jason Levan, David Neagley, Jill Neiman, and William Leib. Back row, from left, second place winners Jennifer Rudy, Jayson Harpster, Cathryn Levan, and Heidi Svonavek.



Contestants look over the feed samples at the skillathon at Ag Progress Days Wednesday.



Chris Biddle, 11, Blair, Lambchops 4-H Club member, examines an answer sheet for equipment during the skillathon.



Quality assurance and health was another aspect of the contest at Ag Progress.

The program makes the overall 4-H project experience "more rounded," said Bryan.

It allows kids to learn to understand a little about "what they're raising, why they're raising it, and how they're raising it," he said.

Several state fairs already have multi-species skillathons in place, including the Ohio State Fair, and state fairs in Kansas, Idaho, and California.

The skillathon provided some of the greatest challenge to the contests, especially the equipment identification and feeds tables. One question asked: What is the

protein percentage of the sample relative to alfalfa hay? Another question: What is *not* included in this sample: A. Iodine. B. Iron. C. Vitamin A. D. Lysine. E. Calcium.

On the equipment table, one tool looked like a large metal heat-sink clamp with some wires at the tip. It's an "elastrator" used to dock the lambs and put a band on their tails, according to Melanie Snyder, a Penn State senior in ag business, who assisted in the event.

Melanie, 21, is the daughter of Jack and Donna Snyder, Parkers. She works on her own 100-head Suffolk and Cheviot sheep-farm.

When asked what the equipment was that looked like a large hole puncher, Melanie had the answer: an ear punch to make room for an ear tag.

Judges for the event included type judge, Penn State Shepherd Dick Kuzemchak; Henning and Bryan, skillathon; and Samuel Hayes, state secretary of agriculture, showmanship judge.

Winners of the contest included seniors, first place, William Leib, Mechanicsburg and second, Heidi Svonavek, Rockwood.

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Debbie Rudy, 14, Halifax and Upper Dauphin 4-H Livestock Club member, at the meats judging table at Ag Progress.