

Pilot Program To Place Focus Not So Much On Animal, But On 4-H'er

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KUTZTOWN (Berks Co.) — If Mom or Dad simply went out and purchased a fair champion animal, it's clear to some that the 4-H'er showing the animal may not learn much about how to raise a champion at home.

The same goes for fitting and grooming sheep.

"The kids don't learn too much if Mom and Dad are fitting the animal," said John Falter, 4-H agent for Berks County.

Falter, along with several 4-H leaders in Berks County and throughout the state, want to change that.

Instead of putting the emphasis on the champion animal, the focus is moving to the 4-H exhibitors, according to Darlene Weist, Berks

County Beef Club leader.

Last week during the Kutztown Fair, Weist and Falter were helping to test out a new pilot program taking place in four counties that will award the 4-H member for their efforts and not simply focus on an animal's placing.

In the past, the grand champion market animal was sold at county roundups, which emphasized the animal. Many times the knowledge the 4-H'er is supposed to have gained — one of the "learning" philosophies inherent to the program — was never attained.

Under a pilot program, instead of a 4-H'er being named grand champion at the roundups, the award will be called the "Outstanding 4-H Livestock Member," according to Weist. The award will be based on a variety of "contests"



Scorekeepers during the stockman's contest at the Kutztown Fair. From left, Lisa Reinert, Jackle Gauker, and Nicholas Strause.



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that test the 4-H'er for knowledge of the animal, the industry, how to judge for type, how the animal places in the ring, and what level of maturity is exhibited during the showmanship contests.

Importantly, a large percentage of the award will be based on the "skillathon," a livestock learning laboratory and an excellent method of involving 4-H'ers in a challenging learn-by-doing activity, according to Weist.

4-H'ers will test their knowledge at skillathon stations on top-

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The philosophy of the pilot program is at the "core" of 4-H membership: learn by doing. Here Ben Weist, 15, son of Darlene and William Weist, Leesport, performs his duties as swine ringman.



At the practice contest last week, the 4-H'ers looked at placing hogs, sheep, and beef. They also identified jars of feed, pictured here, and species of animals.



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