

# Committee Survey Of Member, Parental Concerns To Assay State Youth Dairy Show Program

(Continued from Page A1)

system, what benefits parents see from showing. It covers a lot of different areas."

There are two survey forms, one for parents and one for the youth.

There are 38 questions for the parents (one parental response per family or individual, if one child), and 36 questions for youth.

Some of the questions ask for basic information, such as name, breed shown, number of animals, number of shows, etc. A couple of questions allow for short written responses.

Most of the questions, however, are multiple-choice, designed to be used for program evaluation.

The results of the survey are to be compiled and tabulated. The find-

ings are to be reported to the state Junior Dairy Show Advisory Committee during its meeting in October.

Members of the committee are elected representatives from each show district.

The state youth dairy program is offered and organized cooperatively by Penn State University's College of Agricultural Sciences Extension and Outreach (which includes 4-H, an Extension-run program), and FFA. Those with FFA are essentially its local club organization leaders, primarily high school vocational agriculture and agricultural sciences instructors.

Because of the changing nature of the dairy industry, the changing

nature of people's lives and schedules, there have been some changes to the program implemented over the past decade.

For a number of years now, the state dairy show, held annually at the state Farm Show Building Complex in Harrisburg in conjunction with the Pennsylvania All-American Dairy Show, has combined 4-H and FFA members in competition. (This year, the state show is to be held Sept. 21.)

Previously, the 4-H and FFA state shows were separate.

As the number of dairy-focused members in each of the two youth organizations has declined over the years, and the difference in competitive advantage of FFA members over 4-H disappeared,

the state show eliminated membership distinctions.

Three years ago, the district shows were likewise combined.

Additionally, participation in a district show was opened up to any FFA or 4-H member in the state. Previously the district shows were restricted to 4-H and FFA members in the counties included in the district region.

The opening up of the district shows was done for several reasons.

Among them was the fact that some of the FFA-only shows were poorly attended, but would require as much support and organizational effort as a well-attended 4-H show at the same place.

It was also done because of

scheduling conflicts for exhibitors, such as having to work a summer job for college, having to start college, being on the road showing at county fairs and breed organization competitions, involvement in sports programs, and in some cases, going on family vacations.

Despite the diminishing number of youth directly involved with raising dairy cattle, following the decline of the number of family dairy farm operations, the state youth dairy show has continued to grow.

"I think (the changes made to date) had many positive effects," Olver said.

He said that, from the standpoint of exhibitors, the changes allow them a great amount of flexibility in attending a district show.

For example, they can register an animal for a particular show early in the season, but if the animal should become ill close to that show, they can drop the animal out of that show, get the animal's health regained, and still attend a district show to qualify for the state show.

The changes have also eliminated some of the poorly attended shows, and evened out participation among all district shows, Olver said.

For local 4-H and FFA organizers it has added some work, however.

Different counties have different prerequisites, and 4-H and FFA leaders in those counties with strict restrictions have to ensure that their youth fulfill the state requirement for showing — that each member be "in good standing."

"So, if (the youth) don't follow all the county rules, they are not a member in good standing," Olver said.

That means the local leaders must keep track of the youth from their area, no matter where the youth end up attending a district show.

In order to qualify an animal to show at a district and state show, the animal must receive a "blue" ribbon from a judge.

The judge's awarding of a blue ribbon indicates that the animal is of sufficient quality so as to be competitive at a higher level.

Some counties also have additional prerequisite restrictions on its youth's qualifications to participate in the state show, such as having to attend the county 4-H roundup, local show, or attend a certain percentage of club meetings.

Some have suggested that the growth in participation at the state show — which means more blue ribbons being awarded at county and district levels — is due to the increase in quality of dairy animals available to youth, through breed organization improvement and artificial insemination.

Others have suggested that more youth are involved because there are more family farms depending on the sale of breeding stock in addition to milk, and the honors bestowed animals at any and all shows can be used in the promotion of a breeding line of cattle.

Whatever the reason, the state show last year saw 1,100 animals entered (representing six breeds), and more than 800 exhibited.

That makes it one of the largest state dairy youth shows in the nation.

Olver said this week that it appears, even with several district shows to go, that this year's state show may well exceed last year's. It may well be the nation's largest youth dairy showing.

For those suspicious of surveys, it is not being done in any attempt to curb participation at the state show or to provide statistical support to forward a personal agenda.

Rather, it is only being done to gauge the level of satisfaction and comfort the existing program and system offers youth exhibitors and their parents.

Olver said other states have different systems for establishing pre-qualifications for state shows — ranging from going directly from the county level to the state level without a district show, or each county being assigned a particular quota it can send to the state.

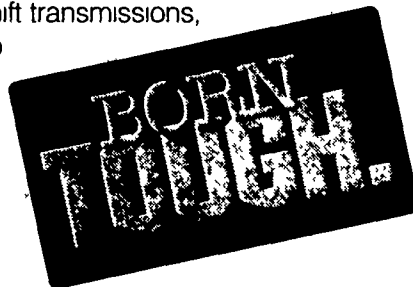
He said that the advisory committee is committed to the district system.

"We've had good response to the survey," Olver said. "It's been very gratifying that parents and exhibitors have taken the time to fill them out."

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