

Livestock Shows Bring Out the Best in Us

Livestock show season is upon us and, over the past couple of weeks, Oconee County 4-H and FFA members have been participating in numerous shows across North Georgia. They have represented our county extremely well in these livestock shows. In a few days, they will travel to Perry, GA to participate in the Georgia National Fair. This is one of the highlights of the show season where they can exhibit their projects on a grand scale, and where people from all over the state can see that agriculture is going strong and has bright future ahead. A lot of people think that it's all about the animals, fair rides, food and excitement of being at a fair. However, to me it's a great opportunity to see our young people on display, and not just the animals.

In this week's article, I am a big believer in livestock projects and what they are able to accomplish in molding our young people into positive, hardworking young men and women. On September 24, 2011, the Clarke-Oconee County Cattlemen's Association held its annual Livestock Show at Heritage Park in Watkinsville, GA. It was great opportunity to see hardworking local kids in action. Hats off to all of our exhibitors and their families who participated in this year's show. It was fantastic. Thank you to all of our sponsors who made the livestock show possible and knowing it's all about the young people who need our support.

The real lessons learned was me being a parent and county agent at the same time and watching my son, a six-year-old 4-H'er, exhibit his market lamb. Questions abound in my mind. Will he practice what I have preached, or will it go in one ear and out the other? As Camden entered the show ring, desperately holding on to his ornery lamb and trying his best to get him set up straight in the right place, I saw a focused young man giving it his all in spite of the animal not cooperating. At one point the lamb knocked him down. Some parents probably would have said, "Oh no!" It had to be my son with the ornery lamb or words would have mumbled under their breath: How could you let the lamb, knock you down? Those thoughts never cross my mind. I wanted to see how Camden would handle the situation.

As the Lamb knocked him down, I watched my son get back up and get a hold of the lamb again and continue showing. As the judge talked about the class he talked about how Camden had a hard time with his lamb but he saw his determination and noticed that he would not give up. He remembered all of the encouragement and pointers he received from other exhibitors and parents from the previous show. As he exited the show ring, he asked me how I did. I replied, "You did just fine." I was happy that Camden didn't let the lamb win but that it was he who won by getting back up and continuing on. A valuable lesson was learned by Camden at such a young age that winning is great, but the adversity you face and how well will you handle it determines the final outcome.

Livestock projects are great teaching tools for families. You don't have to live on a farm to have a livestock project. Just be willing to go that extra mile in pouring all of your time, energy, effort and determination into making the project a success. I can honestly say that the Livestock Project helped my father and me form an unbreakable bond, just as it is doing right now for me and my son. If you would like more information on how to become involved in the 4-H or FFA livestock project, please don't hesitate to give me a call at (706) 769-3946 or stop by the office at 23 Water Street, Watkinsville, GA 30677.

