

5-10-2024

Offering Collegiate Livestock Judging as a Student Organization

Maryfrances Miller

New Mexico State University, franniem@nmsu.edu

Don W. Edgar

New Mexico State University, dedgar@nmsu.edu

Lyle Logemann

New Mexico State University, llogeman@nmsu.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Miller, M., Edgar, D. W., & Logemann, L. (2024). Offering Collegiate Livestock Judging as a Student Organization. *The Journal of Extension*, 61(4), Article 5. <https://doi.org/10.34068/joe.61.04.05>

This Tools of the Trade is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clermson.edu.

Offering Collegiate Livestock Judging as a Student Organization

MARYFRANCES MILLER,¹ DON W. EDGAR,¹ AND LYLE LOGEMANN¹

AUTHORS: ¹New Mexico State University

Abstract. Resource constraints have lowered the number of collegiate livestock judging teams, dropping the number of opportunities for collegiate judging, even though interest among students remains high. These opportunities can be provided for less expense through student-led extracurricular organizations. This approach increases the student initiative required, but also provides an increased opportunity for developing and demonstrating leadership skills.\

Youth development focuses on aiding young people in the development of life skills and attitudes via the acquisition of diversified knowledge; in this way, youth become contributing members of society later in life. Extension personnel regularly work with youth and are meant to become positive, impactful influences in their lives. Livestock judging contests are one way to accomplish this: they require participants to rank livestock classes based on traits such as animal health and economic merit, which supports the development of decision-making skills critical to transitioning students into professional careers. Unfortunately, resource constraints have led to the removal of livestock judging programs at numerous universities and colleges in the United States. However, many agricultural students still consider the existence of a collegiate livestock judging team as a determinant of which college or university to attend; a fielding a team can provide a way to connect to and recruit engaged and motivated students.

This article details our extracurricular approach to fielding a livestock judging team as a student organization. Providing this type of opportunity is one way to support collegiate judging programs, which continue to decline amongst institutions across the nation. The number of collegiate livestock judging teams participating in the National Collegiate Livestock Judging Contest dropped from 44 in 1981 to 31 in 2013 (Culp et al., 2016). By 2021, participation in the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) had dropped to 20 colleges. Statewide Extension specialists who are willing to serve as collegiate advisors but don't have the time to be a full-time judging coach can use the approach outlined here to field a judging team. Not only does the creation of such groups create opportunities for students, but livestock judging within the agricultural industry can generate industry engagement and provide Extension specialists with networking opportunities.

Our experience, detailed within this paper, was in the creation of a dairy judging team led and made up of students. Our approach utilized the student-led learning theory developed by Lyman (1981) and further championed by Mitra (2001); the method allows students to learn through a consensus-based experience. The approach also normalizes the concept of gradeless learning, which a growing body of research supports as a beneficial learning method (McMorran & Ragupathi, 2019; Sanders, 2021).

OBJECTIVES OF A STUDENT-LED JUDGING CLUB

Anyone who has shown livestock or judged competitively has had some experiences in which they agree with the official placement of animals within a class and others in which they disagree. The key to success in judging is to help students develop the ability to place animals consistently with their team members; when they agree with the officials, their intra-group consistency will minimize points lost from incorrect placings within classes. If the group collectively and consistently emphasize the same traits, then over time they should converge on identical—or at least similar—placing decisions. Students presented their individual rationales orally after submitting placings; then, judges expected students to discuss placings until they reached consensus. These discussions were a source of

frustration for students. Without a traditional coach, they had to develop their own collective sense of what placement was correct. This frustration is similar to that reported by many students taking part in gradeless-teaching experiments. However, the primary goal of extracurricular activities is to develop leadership skills; if this happens, it's worth the frustration. This expectation forced students to work as a group and required more certainty and preparation than would be needed to simply present prepared reasons.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENT-LED JUDGING CLUBS

SET EXPECTATIONS

Most universities require student organizations to submit chartering documents. Modify the club charter to clarify expectations. These modifications should outline the requirements for practice attendance for students to receive travel support, team selection criteria, and behavior expectations. Many contests do not allow freshmen to attend; make sure that younger students are aware of these restrictions. Opportunities such as guest speakers, fundraising help, and extra projects may help keep students interested and engaged. One impediment to participation was the perception that judging scholarships are plentiful; to the contrary, one survey of college judging programs reported that 16 of 27 colleges (59%) did not award scholarships for livestock judging (Culp, 2015).

SECURE FUNDING

Many FFA and 4-H students want to continue judging in college, making this a valuable recruiting tool worth seed money. In a study on funding and expenditures of four-year collegiate livestock judging programs, Kulp et al. (2016) surveyed personnel from 29 collegiate participants in the 2012 and/or 2013 NAILE judging contest. Salaries and travel were the highest expenditures; nine respondents reported salaries between \$10,000-\$24,999, and eight reported salary expenditures between \$25,000-49,999. Ten colleges reported spending between \$10,000—\$24,999 on travel, and eight reported travel expenditures between \$25,000—49,999. The student-led approach represents notable savings on salaries, but sufficient travel support is both critical and costly.

PRACTICE

There are a significant number of high-quality internet resources for livestock judging. The Virginia Tech Dairy Cattle Judging YouTube channel is well developed for those competing specifically in dairy judging (VirginiaTechDairyCattleJudging, n.d.). Lifestockjudging.com offers a subscription service for access to their resources (*The Resource for Competitive Teams*, n.d.). Program coordinators should balance the financial prudence of video-based practice with the need for in-person practice. In-person practices, especially those hosted by farms, create networking opportunities and are a non-negotiable in preparing students for competition.

DEVELOP PLACING CONSISTENCY

Students developed placing consistency by working together to set official placings for each practice class and assigning cuts—deductions based on incorrect evaluations—to the placings of each group of animals. Students entered their name, class, and placings and cuts in an online survey from their phone for each class using a printed QR code. See Calvert & Peckman (2022) for additional information. The app allowed users to periodically download, analyze, and share student placings.

DISCUSS REASONING

Encourage students to move beyond simply “delivering” reasons. Allocate distinct blocks of time for delivering reasons, but also allow time for the group to discuss the animals in the class. During the discussion time, require students to use correct terminology and reasons to argue their perspective until the group reaches a consensus ranking. In our experience, students who had not judged prior to college were more open to discussing their reasons. Experienced students were conditioned to present their reasons as a speech and less willing to adjust placings or reasons based on the observations of their peers—even when they agreed about animal attributes.

CONSIDER NICHE CONTESTS

The livestock category has the most contests, and thus, there are more opportunities to compete. However, fewer colleges field specialty judging competitions, like those for meat and dairy. The number of four-year colleges participating in dairy judging in NAILE dropped from 18 in 2018 to 16 in 2019—and just 20 in 2021. The

Livestock Judging Student Clubs

2019 Southwestern Exposition & Livestock Show Intercollegiate Meat Judging contest had only eight participant groups from 4-year universities.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the benefits of forming a student organization is the ability to seek funding beyond the agricultural college. Organizing as a student club may allow students to access established student activity funds or university appropriations for extracurricular activities. Potentially, students who form student organizations and/or serve as officers might be more attractive to employers than those who participate solely as contestants (leaving all the details and fundraising to staff or faculty).

One of the primary motivations for forming a club-based judging team was to provide students with the opportunity to judge collegiately without waiting for funding to appear or be appropriated. Even through advances in genomics and ultrasound technology make visual appraisals of animals less essential, the pedagogical values of judging contests justify participation. The critical thinking necessary for analysis of the animals or products, along with the oral communication skills necessary for defending the choice, are valuable skills in the workforce (Culp, 2015)

REFERENCES

- Calvert, M., & Peckman, T. (2022). Thinking outside the box of evaluation platforms: Adapting Qualtrics for virtual 4-H judging competitions. *Journal of Extension*, 60(1). www.doi.org/10.34068/joe.60.01.15
- Culp, K. C. (2015). *Factors associated with sustainability of collegiate livestock judging programs at four year universities*. [Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University]. OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertation Center. http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1429086449
- Culp, K., Birkenholz, R. J., King, J. E., & Straquadine, G. S. (2016). Current and anticipated funding sources and expenses for four-year collegiate livestock judging programs. *The NACTA Journal*, 60(4), 412-416.
- The resource for competitive teams*. (n.d.). Livestockjudging.com. <https://www.livestockjudging.com/>
- McMorran, C., & Ragupathi, K. (2019). The promise and pitfalls of gradeless learning: Responses to an alternative approach to grading. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(7), 925-938. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1619073>
- Sanders, E. (2021). *Gradeless learning: The effect of eliminating traditional grading practices on student engagement and learning*. [Master's thesis, Minnesota State University Moorhead]. RED: a Repository of Digital Collections. <https://red.mnstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1560&context=thesis>
- VirginiaTechDairyCattleJudging. (n.d.). Virginia Tech Dairy Cattle Judging [YouTube channel]. YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/@VirginiaTechDairyCattleJudging>