

## **Marketing your 4-H and FFA LIVESTOCK ANIMAL PROJECT**

### **The 4-H Experience: Learn By Doing**

#### A Tutorial for 4-H and FFA Members and Parents

4-H members have a unique opportunity to gain many valuable life skills through their 4-H livestock projects. In addition to gaining such skills as communication, critical thinking, financial management, organization, responsibility, and leadership through their project involvement and 4-H club, the 4-H member also has the opportunity to receive a premium price for the animals that they market through the youth livestock auction sales. Many youth use the money gained from their 4-H projects to help pay for college.

Thinking like a business person is essential to being successful. From the very beginning of your project identify potential customers (buyers) to purchase the end product.

Know what your expenses are, and be able to calculate your breakeven price for the product.

Successful completion of a market livestock animal project includes recruiting buyers to bid on your animals during the junior livestock auction. You should contact buyers several months prior to the fair to allow them ample ability to plan time away from work or other activities to attend the auction and opportunity to budget for their purchase.

Contacting potential buyers early also allows you the chance to build rapport with the buyer and answer any questions they have about the auction.

#### **Who Should Send Buyers Letters?**

Every person marketing an animal through the livestock auction at the fair should send letters to potential buyers inviting them to attend the auction and encouraging them bid on your animal.

#### **When Should a Buyers Letter Be Delivered?**

Letters can be sent any time prior to the fair. Exhibitors should contact buyers to ensure that at least 2 buyers will be bidding on their animal, during the auction. Keep in mind that not every buyer you contact will place a bid on your animal so it is necessary to contact several potential buyers. You may consider sending a letter of introduction near the beginning of the project and a follow up letter closer to the fair. Some exhibitors prefer to wait until summer break when they have more available time to work on marketing.

#### **Who are potential buyers?**

Buyers can be businesses, families, individuals, relatives, grocery stores, wineries, coaches/mentors, or groups of people; be creative. You should be certain to contact people that have supported you and the auction in the past as well as people that have never attended before. Contact people your family knows (friends, neighbors, relatives, etc.), people you do business with (gas station, grocery store, dentist, insurance, bank, carwash, organizations, etc.), and with the guidance of an adult, people and businesses that you don't know. Many people and businesses are not aware of the junior livestock auctions that take place at the fair. With an invitation from you, they could become potential buyers!

Most buyers at the auction take into consideration several factors when bidding:

- did you send them a letter or invite them to the fair
- did you send a thank you to them if they bought your animal in the past
- does your family conduct business with them when possible.

#### **How to Write a Buyers Letter:**

Buyer letters should be written in business format, and addressed to the manager or specific person responsible for purchasing at the auction. The letter should be personalized; it can be handwritten or typed—never generalized (do not send letters "To Whom it may concern") or photocopied (hand sign each letter).

Letters can be mailed, but many buyers prefer to meet with you in person. If you are unable to meet in person, you may consider including a picture of you and your project animal in the letter.

#### **What to include in a Buyers Letter?**

- Introduce yourself – age, grade, name
- 4-H club
- Information about your project – lamb, pig, goat, steer. How many did you raise this year, breeds etc?
- What have you learned this year from your project
- What were challenges or things you enjoyed
- What have you worked the hardest on this year
- 4-H involvement – officers, committees, meetings, conferences, teams etc.

- School involvement – clubs, sports, leadership, awards, etc
- Plans for future 4-H involvement and projects. Are you going to raise two lambs next year? Are you going to run for office? Are you aiming for your American degree?
- Plans for future education. College, Junior College, trade schools or certificate programs? They are looking for students to support who have a long term goal.
- Leave contact information so a buyer can reach you to find out more information about the fair, you or your project
- You can include your animals fair EAR TAG #
- Try to make your letter at least 3/4ths of a page TYPED.
- Print your letters in color if possible
- **Deliver your letters at least a month before fair – don't wait until the last minute!**
- Include **pictures of you** and your animal. Pictures of you doing something with your animal (injection, clipping, showing etc) are even better.
- **PROOF READ!!** Brownie points if you ask your English teacher to proof it – hey maybe you will get extra credit?
- Save your letter on your computer for ideas for next year.
- Always include When and Where the auction takes place
- How they can register as a buyer

#### **Personal Appearance with Buyer:**

When approaching a potential buyer, you are not only marketing your animal, but also yourself and your organization. Often time's youth are nervous or scared about making this contact. Marketing your livestock project animal is a great opportunity to develop stronger communication skills and build self-confidence. Parents and club leaders can help you overcome your anxiety by practicing together before visiting with potential buyers.

Go in PERSON to deliver your letters. Some businesses receive hundreds of letters – going in person IN YOUR UNIFORM or YOUR CLUB SHIRT will make you stand out even more! Take another 4-H member or friend with you if you are not comfortable going yourself.

It is best to meet with buyers in person when possible, but a hand written letter can be sent in the event that you are unable to establish a meeting time. When meeting with a potential buyer it is appropriate to introduce yourself with a handshake. If the person you are marketing to knows your parents you may also include that connection in your introduction.

Some of the important talking points to highlight during your conversation include:

- Your 4-H club or FFA Chapter
- What projects you are exhibiting
- What you have learned this year in 4-H
- What are your future plans?
- The benefits of supporting 4-H and FFA members through the Livestock Auction.
- Resale and processing options available to buyers
- When and where the auctions happen
- How to register to buy an animal at the auction

Always close the sale by inviting the person to attend the auction. Marketing materials including posters and buyer pamphlets are available from the Livestock Sale Committee and 4-H office.

#### **Remember:**

**Marketing and salesmanship efforts pay off for 4-H and FFA members at the county fair livestock auctions**

The following information can be shared with your buyer to help explain the sale process.

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Buyers Information:**

### **When and where is the sale held?**

**Animal Sale:** Friday, July 29, 2011 7:00 PM. The Buyer's Social begins at 5:30 PM.

The sale will be held at the Show Barn at the Clarion County Fair. The fair is held at Redbank Valley Municipal Park, Alcola, PA, Just two miles north of New Bethlehem on Route 28.

### **What do I do when I arrive for the sale?**

Register for sale at the Buyers Social, or prior to the auction. All buyers must have a bidder number to purchase an animal. Tickets are encouraged. They are obtained from 4-H members or the Penn State Extension Office at 814-223-9028.

### **What if I can't attend the sale, but I want to purchase an animal?**

Buyers not able to attend the sale may bid on or purchase livestock by contacting a sale committee person. The chairperson will explain the options and process to the buyer. An individual on the sale committee can be designated to purchase an animal for you as your proxy. They will follow your spending criteria. You will be responsible for paying for the purchase of animals with your proxy.

### **How do I pay for my purchases?**

All buyers are encouraged to pay at the sale for their purchases by cash or check on the night of the sale. We are unable to accept credit cards. Checks are to be made out to "4-H Teen Council."

### **If I purchase an animal how do I have the animal processed or hauled from the sale?**

Trucking after the sale is handled by the purchaser, or one of the local processors. This is a terminal sale. Ownership of the animal is transferred to the buyer following the sale of the animal.

Buyers have the following options for their purchases made during the auction

- Have the animal processed at a processor of their choice. The buyer is responsible for paying the processing fees.
- The purchaser has the right to remove the animal from the fairgrounds following the sale when we process loading of the animals.
- If purchasing a whole animal is too much for an individual buyer, it is encouraged that the individual find other individuals to share the bidder number and split the meat.

### **What if the buyer wants to participate in the Jr. Livestock Sale, but is not interested in the meat or the animal?**

- The buyer may also opt to resell the animal as a donation. We suggest the 4-H development fund or the 4-H memorial scholarship fund. Both of these opportunities support all the members of the 4-H program. The sale of the original animal supports the owner of the animal (the 4-H or FFA member), reselling the animal will cause the second sale of the animal to support the fund of the donor's choice. We also often have animals that are donated to support the scholarship fund. Individuals also have the opportunity to make a donation (without having to purchase an animal) to support this fund.
- Buyers may also opt to have a processor purchase the animal from them (the buyer) for market value after the sale is complete. Several processors will offer to buy the animal back after the sale for market price. These prices will be announced prior to the beginning of the sale. The sale buyer will pay the full amount of the animal and the private transaction between the buyer and the processor will result in the processor issuing a check directly to the buyer for the fair market value of the animal. This amount will be announced at the beginning of the sale and the processors interested in purchasing animals will be announced at the same time. If a buyer would like this process clarified, please contact a member of the junior livestock committee or the extension office at 814-223-9028

**For 4-H/FFA Members (Use this for an outline to talk to buyers or create a letter)**

**My Marketing Plan**

**Animal Information:**

**Species:**

**ID:**

**Information about my animal: (what it was fed, how old is it, why is this animal a good choice to purchase?)**

**Top five reasons a buyer would want to purchase my animal:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**Buyers I will contact:**

**Contact Name**

**Address**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**Sample Letter:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a member of the Clarion County 4-H (NAME) Club and I am raising a steer this year. You probably know my parents \_\_\_\_\_.

4-H has meant a great deal to me and taught me many life skills such as

---

---

---

---

My purpose in writing to you is to ask you to support the 2013 Clarion County 4-H Jr. Livestock Sale on Friday, July 26<sup>th</sup>. Please support our sale by attending and bidding during the auction. We plan to have over 75 market animals at the sale.

I have enclosed a brochure explaining some of the details about the sale and how you can participate. You can purchase a market animal to take home for your freezer or simply support the bid on an animal that will go to the meat packer. Our county 4-H program will be including the names of the businesses that purchased market animals at our sale in future advertising.

By participating in our 4-H Jr. Livestock Sale you will be helping young people like me reach our future goals.

Thank you in advance for your interest and support.

Sincerely,