

Someone asked me the question the other day, “Why does the 4-H program still teach kids to raise animals when so few people start careers in livestock these days?” Reasonable enough question, but the 4-H livestock projects aren’t only about teaching young people to raise animals. In fact, the primary purpose of the youth livestock program is to provide an opportunity for personal growth and development of a young person. Learning how to feed, fit, and show an animal is a secondary purpose.

In the process of feeding and caring for an animal, young people have the opportunity to develop many positive character traits. Therefore, another purpose of the 4-H livestock program is to provide opportunities for young people to develop good character traits. The traits learned in the youth livestock project that build character are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Just the daily task of feeding and watering alone contribute to the strengthening of at least four of the six traits listed above.

It is also important to recognize that the size of the animal does not have any effect on the value of the project for the child to develop character. So whether you only have the room and finances for a rabbit or maybe you have the resources for a larger animal, the 4-H livestock project is very worthwhile to consider if you are looking for a project to help develop character in your children.

Now here is the challenge that we seem to be facing in today’s society, even here in good “ole” Lincoln Parish. Computers, gaming systems, television all seem to have become a major part of young people’s everyday life. Seems to me that if I was concerned about young people learning good character traits that I would like to see it being done in a caring way by caring people, not by someone your child chats with on the computer, or the “shoot them up game” on the Nintendo.

Another challenge that I face in Lincoln Parish or maybe I should say a concern I have is that many parents when approached about having their children involved in a 4-H livestock project respond that they are too busy for their children to get involved. I probably shouldn’t say this because I know that those of you that have told me this are going to think that I’m talking about them, but what happens to the youth of Lincoln Parish whose parents are too busy to take time with them? What happens to the youth of Lincoln Parish who get home from school with nothing to do? What kind of trouble can the youth of Lincoln Parish get into when they have no one there to give them guidance because they have parents that are too busy to help them with becoming involved in a positive learning experience such as 4-H? Answer those three questions and see if the answers don’t concern you too.

Right now is the time to start getting ownership of livestock animals if you would like to participate in The State Fair of Louisiana. If you would like to discuss a 4-H livestock project or would like to learn more about the opportunities available, call the Lincoln Parish Extension Office at 318/251-5134.