

# 4-H Livestock Skillathon Program

## Background Information:

The Tennessee 4-H Livestock Skillathon begin as part of the livestock Premier Exhibitor program. The “Premier Exhibitor” program was implemented to emphasize project learning by the youth and less emphasis on the animal. In 1996, the Premier Exhibitor program was implemented with the Tennessee Junior Sheep Expo. “Premier Exhibitor” was determined by combining exhibitors’ scores in skillathon, showmanship and animal placing. However, the first Tennessee skillathon was conducted at the 1996 State 4-H Market Hog Show. Currently, approximately 1000 youth participate in county, regional and state beef, sheep and swine skillathons. In 2007, Tennessee started participating in the National 4-H Livestock Skillathon Contest. Below are some questions that are asked regarding the Tennessee 4-H Livestock Skillathon educational activity.

## Frequently Asked Questions:

1. **What is the livestock skillathon?** Skillathon is an educational delivery method where a facilitator conducts a “learning station” where youth can gain knowledge or demonstrate their knowledge and skills learned by doing livestock project work. In some skillathons, a computer is used to present educational materials and activities. Tennessee livestock skillathon contests usually consists of five stations worth 20 points each for a total of 100 points.
2. **Why should a 4-Her participate in the skillathon?** Skillathons enhance learning through “hands-on” activities and enhance project skills. Skillathons should be more than a test! Skillathons enhance critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills. Skillathons provide youth the opportunity to achieve project goals, build self-confidence and self-esteem and earn recognition.
3. **I thought the skillathon was another contest. How do you use the skillathon in the county program?** Skillathon activities provide fun, game-like, interactive, hands-on learning activities. Age appropriate educational activities can be designed that can be taught by teen or volunteer leaders. In addition, skillathons provide an opportunity for learning disability youth to excel.
4. **What is going to be on the skillathon?** Generally, there will be learning stations dealing with breeds, quality assurance, health, management, showmanship, feed/nutrition, selection/judging, product evaluation (i.e. meat, carcass, wool) and equipment. However, other topics may be included.
5. **How do I prepare youth for the skillathon?** Skillathon learning activities can be incorporated into project group meetings, club meetings, project events or 4-Hers can individually prepare for the skillathon. Skillathon participation and performance can be part of the project recognition program.

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6. **What are some resources I can use to train youth for the skillathon?**

If I had to say we had a “textbook”, it would be the Ohio Resource for that specie (ex. Beef Resource Handbook). You can find these at

<http://estore.osu-extension.org/catalog.cfm?CatPos=157> . Each county has been given a beef, goat, sheep and swine resource handbook. Also, the Ohio eStore has the learning kits and CD’s that are somewhat interactive. Older 4-H project manuals, 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System (4-H CCS) materials and various websites can be useful too.

7. **Do you have to show to participate in the skillathon?** The skillathon is open to everyone.

This is an excellent way for youth to participate in a livestock project activity without owning an animal.

8. **How long does the skillathon take? Do I have to complete it or can I come back?** Typically,

it takes about 30 minutes to complete the five stations. However, due to several youth coming at one time, the skillathon may take longer. Although it is best to complete the skillathon, we do allow participants to leave and return.

9. **How do you prevent cheating at the skillathon?** Many questions are random draw of

similar possibilities; same question but different answers.

10. **How is one selected to assist with the skillathon?** Skillathon activities are conducted

largely by volunteers and agents. Each station has a guide sheet to assist facilitators in conducting the skillathon station. Many parents assist between their childrens’ shows.

11. **How do you get to be on the Tennessee Livestock Skillathon team?** The top two

individuals in the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> grade division for each of the beef, sheep and swine skillathons qualify for the Tennessee 4-H Livestock Skillathon team. These six individuals practice with two coaches and represent Tennessee at the National 4-H Livestock Skillathon Contest. Although four individuals are selected by their coaches to compete, all six individuals attend the national contest.

12. **How are the coaches selected for the Tennessee Livestock Skillathon team?** The coaches

are selected by a committee in conjunction with the regional program director and regional 4-H specialist. 4-H Agents are selected as recognition for outstanding youth livestock programming.