

## Maximizing livestock project learning experiences: A discussion guide for on-Site Supervised Agricultural Education visits

### Introduction

The intracurricular nature of Agricultural Education means high quality learning opportunities should exist both in and outside of the classroom. We created a discussion guide to assist high school agriculture teachers in guiding meaningful discussions when conducting on-the-farm visits for students who own livestock as a portion of their Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) Program. The questions serve as a framework for high school agriculture teachers to use to evaluate and promote student learning and skill development in livestock projects. This guide is also important because:

- Livestock projects are labor-intensive and require adequate resources. For these reasons, livestock projects also require adequate cooperation and support from parents and guardians. This document helps the agriculture teacher ensure all family members agree on the project's goals and intended outcomes. The questions can facilitate thinking and conversation among the agriculture teacher, student, and parents/guardians about records, personal development, skill development, and future goals.
- Livestock projects have the potential to help high school students build meaningful connections with community members and launch them toward careers in agriculture (Mott et al, 2022). This document provides a framework for agriculture teachers to use to guide students toward building community connections and thinking about how their projects could relate to their future goals.
- Livestock projects involve animal lives and human emotions. Both youth and adults who raise livestock can find raising and letting go of livestock emotionally complicated and adopt coping strategies to help them adjust to both planned and unexpected losses (Mott et al, 2022; Ellis, 2014). Teachers can use this resource to guide discussion to assist students and their families to consider, anticipate, and plan for the losses and emotional tension associated with livestock projects.
- Livestock projects often require substantial financial commitment and constant care and animal monitoring. These risks, in conjunction with parent/guardian expertise, may cause SAEs to be structured where students are only asked to provide manual labor, which can be a missed learning opportunity for students. Are students merely serving as assistants (opening the gate for dad while he feeds cows) or is there intentional skill development (youth driving the tractor to feed while dad holds the gate)? This document

is designed to encourage parents/guardians (or project supervisors) to intentionally include youth in larger responsibilities, including feed management, breeding, health care, and marketing decisions.

## **Process**

We recommend that high school agriculture teachers take this document to each visit with livestock students and their parents/guardians, whether that occurs on the farm or elsewhere (See Figure 1). Each section provides questions for agriculture teachers to reflect on, build conversation around, and evaluate as they visit with students and families. It will be important for the agriculture teacher to spend time jotting down their observations and reflective notes about what happened during each visit. Additionally, they should take the time to develop a follow-up plan for the next SAE visit based on what happened during the current visit. These notes can be referred to when teachers complete follow-up visits, when students apply for SAE related awards or scholarships, and for guiding discussions with potential customers and fair judges.

## **Assessment**

We piloted this document with ten early career high school agriculture teachers in one district of the state of [STATE]. Their feedback suggests this document may be especially helpful for freshmen members just starting their livestock SAE's or members transferring into a new program. One second year teacher commented, "I have a few freshmen with livestock SAE's. This document will really help us figure out how to evaluate their project and enter their records into AET (online project record keeping system)."

Steven Covey (2004) said all great things are created twice- once in your mind and once in the physical world. A well-planned livestock entrepreneurship program can provide an opportunity for a wide range of technical and emotional skill development with careful planning. We recommend using this guide as the first plan for maximizing student benefits from a livestock SAE program. Further, intentional and thoughtful planning in this process can better prepare the business for generational transitions, provide technical and emotional skills for the student on and off the farm, and deepen relationships within a family business.

**Figure 1.**

*Discussion Guide for livestock SAE visits*

# Maximizing Livestock Project Learning Experiences

## A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SAE VISITS

01

**OBSERVATIONS**

- What knowledge/skills has the student gained since your last visit?
- To what extent is the student in charge of their own project(s)?
- What are opportunities for students to gain extended skills (backing trailer, fixing fence, cleaning waterers, doctoring sick animals)?
- Are students and parents aware of the emotional tension of selling/losing an animal they have cared for?

02

**REVIEW RECORDS/AET**

- What is the marketing plan for non-breeding/show/butcher animals?
- When/where/how are non-breeding livestock liquidated?
- What value-added or innovative opportunities could students explore to generate more income?

03

**FFA/PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- Is their project launching students into further learning and leadership development? (commodity organization youth board, public speaking, coaching teams, leading 4-H project)

04

**SKILLS INSTRUCTION**

- What skills are the students performing independently? Are they holding the gate or driving the tractor?
- Is the child developing their own partnership with their feed salesman, nutritionist, breeders, sale barn owners, fair buyers, extension specialist, etc.?
  - For non-traditional livestock students, how can you help the students develop these partnerships?

05

**GLEANING MEANING**

- How are students contributing to their community?
- How are students finding meaning, purpose, and satisfaction in their project?
- What is the plan for the livestock after the student no longer lives at home?

06

**GOALS**

- Short
  - Do both parents and students understand the final goal for their animals (show and sale, butcher for home use, return to herd)?
- Long
  - What are the student's career goals?
  - Is SAE supporting transferrable skill development toward career goals?

07

**FOLLOW UP ON NEXT SAE VISIT**

- Should be planned according to discussion on #1-6

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## References

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