

Dairy Cattle Judging Teaches Critical Life Skills

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ABSTRACT

Competitive dairy cattle judging at the collegiate and 4-H levels were started in 1908 and 1919, respectively, but few studies have been conducted to determine the benefits of competitive judging programs. Collegiate judging team programs have had a positive effect on participants and benefited personal character traits. Judging team participation has influenced evaluation, communication and decision-making skills, and confidence. Each year, several thousand youth from 4-H, FFA, and colleges participate in judging program activities that are taught by extension agents, vocational agriculture teachers, breed association and AI personnel, and other industry volunteers. Judging programs help youth learn critical life skills, such as critical thinking, self discipline, situation analysis, decision making, organization, verbal expression, and defense of decisions. International dairy cattle judging activities provide youth and adults with significant learning experiences regarding the globalization of animal agriculture. Academic institutions should continue to provide leadership and training programs to ensure that adequate numbers of volunteers and professional educators are trained for the future.

(**Key words:** education, judging, youth)

INTRODUCTION

Dairy cattle judging initially was conducted as a means to help identify genetically superior animals for use as the parent stock of future generations. Lush [(3); page 26] stated that Bakewell, who is considered to be the father of animal breeding, followed the principle that, "Like produces like or the likeness of some ancestor; inbreeding produces prepotency and refinement; breed the best to the best."

In 1940, E. S. Harrison (1) of Cornell University stated in his book, *Judging Dairy Cattle*, that

form is definitely associated with function among all classes of livestock. The conformation of the running horse is distinctly different from that of the draft horse as is the purpose. Likewise, the body form of dairy animals differs materially from that of beef animals. The recognition of this correlation between form and function has led to the selection of those individuals as they appeared which were best adapted to perform a specific function or purpose. Continuous selection has been the most important contributing factor to the establishment of the various classes and breeds of livestock as we know them today!

Visual appraisal of the physical traits should continue to be a part of the genetic evaluation of dairy cattle to optimize profit. Conditions for housing, feeding, breeding, disease control, and production place different stressors on dairy cattle today than on those cattle in existence 10, 20, 50, or 100 yr ago. Most would agree that genetic selection for functional type and production has been successful and continuous over the past 50 yr. The impact of evaluation for type or physical traits is apparent in the changes that have occurred in the true type model cows and bulls of the past with the current true type models. In 1943, the Purebred Dairy Cattle Association developed the Dairy Cow Unified Score Card, which was revised in 1957, 1971, 1982, and 1994 to reflect important changes in functional type traits (8). The dairy cattle score card is used by professionals to evaluate cattle in the physical type classifications program and has played an important role in educating youth on the evaluation of dairy cattle. The score card is used as a basis to evaluate the physical traits relative to economic importance and to formulate logical reasons for placing of dairy cattle at contests and shows. The evidence is compelling in support of the position that dairy cattle judging is important to continued improvement in functional type and profitability of dairy cattle.

DISCUSSION

Competitive dairy cattle judging was started in 1908 for collegiate teams (10) and in 1919 for 4-H youth (4). The national contests for team participation have grown gradually, peaking at 41 teams for the Collegiate Contest in 1979 (5) and 38 for

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TABLE 1. Profile of survey respondents.^{1,2}

Activity	(%)
Livestock	55.7
Meats	42.9
Dairy	29.5
Horses	19.2
Wool	6.1

¹47% judged on more than one type of team.

²Adapted from data of McCann and McCann (6).

4-H teams in 1978, 1987, and 1994 (4). Recently, several regional and national contests have added a division for 2-yr community and technical schools because of interest at this level.

Trimberger et al. (9) listed the following as characteristics that are desirable for good judges:

- quick and accurate powers of observation,
- reasoning power that takes into account practical considerations,
- ability to reach a definite decision based on sound judgment,
- extreme honesty and sincerity,
- steady nerves and confidence in the ability to make close independent decisions,
- ability to evaluate and rank individual animals,
- effective reasons for decisions,
- pleasant and even temperament, and
- firmness to stand by and defend the placement decision without offending others or in any way implying that one's decisions are infallible.

Although not all of these characteristics are essential for success in life, they certainly contribute positively to attainment of personal goals and career objectives.

Few studies have been conducted to evaluate the impact of competitive judging on the teaching of critical life skills. In 1992, McCann and McCann (6) reported the results of a survey of judging team alumni. A 35-question survey was distributed nationally to alumni of universities to evaluate the value of collegiate judging programs; 1291 completed surveys were returned. The University of Wisconsin (20.6%), Texas A&M (13.8%), The Pennsylvania State University (11.5%), California Polytechnic Institute (7.6%), and Illinois State University (7.5%) were the top five universities from which alumni responded; alumni from these schools totaled 61% of the responses. Seventy-one percent of the respondents graduated during or after 1970. Table 1 shows the profile of respondents to a survey that was conducted by McCann and McCann (6). For areas dealing with

personal growth, 97% of the respondents indicated that judging team experience had benefited their personal character. Development of evaluation skills logically was expected to be, and was, the highest ($P < 0.05$); the mean score was 4.18 on a five-point scale. Communication skills ranked a close second. These items were followed closely by confidence and decision-making skills, all of which were near the "highly influenced" score of 4.0. Table 2 shows that judging team respondents indicated that the activity helped them in the development of personal growth skills. The remaining 18.1% indicated that competitiveness, self-motivation, organizational skills, self-discipline, and the ability to accept criticism were important personal growth skills learned from judging programs.

Participation in judging programs has benefits that go beyond personal growth: team skills, interpersonal relationships, critical thinking skills, self-discipline, situation analysis, decision-making skills, organizational skills, verbal expression, and defense of decisions (2, 6). Other benefits include travel beyond home, county, state, and nation. Heisner (2) stated that, in addition to decision-making and communication skills learned from dairy judging, the friendships proved valuable and helpful throughout the years. Nondairy farm youth learn about the importance and magnitude of the dairy industry, and many of them continue their involvement in dairy cattle judging programs as volunteers.

Orchard (7), in an interview with three former winners of the National Collegiate Contest (in 1942, 1963, and 1988), found that judging team participation developed self-confidence, self-control, patience, communication skills, and teamwork. These skills provided the confidence necessary to help these individuals win the contest and to establish successful careers in the dairy industry.

It is difficult to estimate the number of youth that annually participate in dairy cattle judging programs through 4-H, FFA, breed field days, county fairs, collegiate judging courses, and other events. Wanner et al. (10) stated that more than 6000 students have

TABLE 2. How a judging team helped respondents.^{1,2}

Characteristic	(%)
Communication skills	34.8
Confidence	17.3
Animal evaluation skills	16.6
Decision making skills	13.2

¹47% judged on more than one type of team.

²Adapted from data of McCann and McCann (6).

participated in the national collegiate contest. Placing a value on judging programs and measuring the impact are difficult. Heisner (2), in a recent article in *Hoard's Dairyman*, provided strong support for the value of dairy cattle judging teams based on a survey of dairy cattle judging team members at the University of Illinois from 1928 to 1991. The time since survey respondents participated with a judging team ranged from 1 to 64 yr. Respondents all agreed that their dairy judging team experience was valuable and had a positive impact on their lives. Heisner (2) indicated that, during his undergraduate career, the "hard" science classes of nutrition, genetics, and reproductive physiology appeared to be providing much more useful information. Heisner (2) further stated that "within five years of graduation, I had discarded most of my college books and class notes. However, the lessons taught through dairy cattle judging experience remained." Duane Acker, President Emeritus of Kansas State University, in an address at the Animal Science Centennial of Iowa State University, stated that he thought that "the impact of judging team training on people—college students, 4-H, or FFA members—has been positive and unlimited" (1996, personal communication).

Acker further issued challenges to judging coaches and alumni. For judging coaches, he said, "...most importantly, you are teachers, developers of young men and women. Keep building them." He issued a second challenge: "Stay on the cutting edge of those quantitative disciplines that complement judging skills and skill development." For alumni, he said, "Each of us, as professionals, must fully use our observation, decision-making, and communication skills for our own enterprises and also to seek and achieve continued improvement in our industry's products and our animal population" (1996, personal communication).

Competitive judging programs may be considered to be expensive. The programs require many long hours of work by faculty and volunteers. These competitive events consist of four-person teams, but these four-person teams represent only the tip of the iceberg. Each year several thousand youth participate in local workouts, area events, field days, and contests. These youth are taught and trained by extension agents, vocational agriculture teachers, dairy farmers, staff of the AI industry and breed associations, other industry volunteers, and homemakers who were former judging team members; individuals in this diverse group make willing volunteers and are successful in training youth to be judges of dairy cattle. The time and money that is donated to support dairy

cattle judging programs is immeasurable but large. When all of these resources are considered, the investment per youth contact is not negligible. As Acker said about these youth, "Their observation skills have been developed. Their decision-making skills have been improved. Perhaps as important, their confidence in these skills has grown" (1996, personal communication).

Finally, as we enter the 21st century, globalization of US animal agriculture must not be ignored. The impact that the genetic material from US dairy cattle is having in other countries is profound. Competitive judging also has an international component. Additional benefits for youth and adults who participate in these international events are many and varied.

Each year, the winning national 4-H and FFA dairy and livestock judging teams from the US have the opportunity to participate in international competition at the Royal Highland Show in Edinburgh, Scotland. The youth and volunteer leaders who are fortunate to be part of this activity gain many valuable experiences and have the opportunity to observe agricultural practices, programs, and activities in other countries. They can also witness the impact that US agriculture can have in these countries.

The team members who participate in the international competition must work together within their community and state to raise funds for the financial support of the international trip. Following the activity at the Royal Highland Show, the teams then travel to London and throughout the continent where they have the opportunity to see farming in countries including Holland, Belgium, Germany, France, and Switzerland. The youth and leaders have an opportunity to stay with host families in one of these countries to experience farming in a different culture.

This international activity provides memorable experiences for the youth. While on this trip, the young people serve as great ambassadors for the dairy and livestock industry in the US. In international agricultural programs and activities, the judging program and activities continue to develop the important skills and character necessary for strong leadership in global agriculture during the 21st century.

CONCLUSIONS

How will we provide dairy education for tomorrow's youth? Competitive dairy cattle judging teams likely will continue to be a part of providing education about the dairy industry and training of critical life skills for tomorrow's youth. Despite the continued decline in the number of dairy farms, participation remains strong in 4-H, FFA, and collegiate dairy cattle judging at field days, fairs, and regional and national shows. As public funding pressure increases, it will become

imperative that more volunteers become involved with the teaching of youth about all facets of the dairy industry. The global dairy industry of the 21st century will require well-trained people who possess skills learned in competitive judging programs, including pedigree and physical trait evaluation. Judging team programs must remain a viable part of dairy youth education programs to provide trained individuals for the 21st century. Academic institutions should continue to provide leadership and training programs to ensure that adequate numbers of volunteer and professional educators are trained for the future.

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