

NACAA Search for Excellence in 4-H and Youth Programming

Georgia 4-H Northeast & Southeast District Virtual 4-H Poultry Judging Contest

Carole Knight – UGA Extension Madison County CEC/ANR Agent

Susannah Lanier – UGA Extension Bulloch County 4-H Agent

Educational Objectives

Georgia is the nation's number one poultry state, producing more than 31 million pounds of chicken and seven million table eggs every day, according to the Georgia Poultry Federation. Broilers and eggs are Georgia's two largest agricultural commodities, making up nearly 40 percent of the state's ag production value. Poultry production is the biggest agricultural driver in Madison County, located in northeast Georgia. To teach youth about such an important industry in our county and state, 4-H poultry judging is offered to our youth. Poultry judging is an evaluation event in which students learn and understand standards used in poultry and egg production and marketing, and to apply the standards in a realistic decision-making situation. Participants compare their opinion of an animal against the ideal as specified by industry experts, and learn organizational skills as they compose their thoughts into a cohesive set of reasons justifying their decisions. The skills of decision making, critical thinking, and problem solving are acquired throughout the process.

In the state of Georgia, the COVID-19 pandemic halted all in-person youth development, in-school, and afterschool programs in mid-March 2020. Most 4-H programs work with students for competitive events in afterschool programming and research shows that participation in afterschool programming is associated with better work habits, improved academic success and gains in self-efficacy (Auger, A., Pierce, K.M., and Vandell, D.L., 2013). During the pandemic quarantine it was vitally important for youth to have a way to stay connected with their 4-H programs and peers. 4-H programming is driven by the essential elements of belonging, independence, generosity and mastery. To continue to provide these essential elements to our youth during a global crisis, 4-H programming had to adapt its delivery method to continue to meet the needs of youth in a positive way.

Amidst the pandemic quarantine, many county 4-H programs were preparing for district-level poultry judging contests, which were cancelled leaving county programs across the state without an option to compete at the district-level. This cancellation resulted in Cloverleaf and Junior 4-H'ers (grades 4-8) having no official contest planned for the year. With poultry judging being one of the largest competitive events in the state with 671 youth participants at the district-level in 2019, it was clear that an alternative option was needed for 2020. Therefore, 4-H programs across the state adapted their poultry judging practice and preparation delivery methods to include the use of digital technologies such as Google Classroom and Zoom in an effort to remain connected with youth. By integrating all elements of the poultry judging contest into the virtual format of this event, 4-H'ers were able to continue learning and using the skill set and knowledge that is built in poultry judging. Students not only gained technical

skills related to the poultry and egg industry but also used skills in communication, decision-making and time management all while navigating virtual learning platforms.

Program Activities / Teaching Methods

In April 2020, conversations began about hosting an alternative district-level poultry judging contest. These conversations led to the formation of a cross-district effort to develop a contest for 4-H'ers in both the Northeast and Southeast districts of Georgia 4-H. Through collaborative efforts, Carole Knight, Madison County Ag Agent, and Susannah Lanier, Bulloch County 4-H Agent, created a virtual poultry judging contest open to Northeast and Southeast district counties that included all aspects of the Georgia 4-H Poultry Judging contest to include the following:

- Live Birds
- Ready to Cook
- Knowledge Test
- Broken Out Eggs
- Exterior Quality
- Candling
- Parts Identification
- Oral Reasons

The goal in planning was for the virtual event to mimic an in-person event as much as possible thus being a live, timed event with all classes included. Competition organizers consulted with Heather Shultz, Georgia 4-H Livestock Program Specialist and Steve Walker, Georgia 4-H IT Associate Director to develop logistical and programmatic plans. Counties in Northeast and Southeast district were invited to register in advance of the June event. Knight and Lanier created classes using video and photo images to be shown via Zoom to participants during the contest time. The completed competition was critiqued by Dr. Casey Ritz, University of Georgia Poultry Extension Specialist, in advance of the competition. With this being the first competition of its kind in the state, team coaches attended an orientation meeting prior to the event to view the format and better understand procedures. Competition organizers also selected 4-H professionals from the two districts to serve as oral reasons judges.

On June 9, 2020, 47 youth from 10 counties competed in the first ever live virtual poultry judging contest through Georgia 4-H. Of that total, 24 participants were in grades 4-8 meaning this was their only opportunity to compete this year. Four 4-H professionals and volunteer coaches also participated in the event as oral reasons takers.

Impact /Evaluation

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many Georgia 4-H professionals and volunteer coaches were unversed in integrating virtual learning platforms into 4-H programming. Through the COVID-19 quarantine, 4-H professionals harnessed their creativity and the 4-H "learn by doing" mantra to create innovative ways of providing programming to youth. With the use of various virtual learning platforms including Zoom, Google Classroom, Kahoot and others, 4-H Poultry Judging teams were able to carry on their program goals. Traditionally, 4-H Poultry Judging is a very hands-on program, so creating ways to simulate that in a virtual world was a challenge. Virtual contest organizers used innovative strategies to create the contest content including

videography skills that factor in external elements such as lighting, glare, etc. and providing enough visual information to bridge the gap for a hands-on event.

At the conclusion of the virtual event, 13 participants completed a Qualtrics survey. These 4-H'ers reported the following:

- 77% were either extremely or somewhat satisfied with the difficulty of the classes.
- 77% were either extremely or somewhat satisfied with the virtual format of the contest.
- 85% were either extremely or somewhat satisfied with the oral reasons format of the contest.

Based on feedback from participants, the contest maintained its competitive integrity and gave 4-H'ers the opportunity to exhibit their skill sets in a competitive format. Skills that 4-H'ers identified developing through Poultry Judging not only include knowledge about chickens and eggs but also how to compare and contrast, analyze, critically think and communicate. The impact of this event is best seen from the perspective of youth that participated. One 4-H'er said "virtual options should continue to be provided for those that can't go to the live contest" and another was very thankful "for giving Junior 4-H'ers an opportunity to compete."

Jakyn Tyson, Emanuel County 4-H Agent said, "I can't thank you enough for taking on something as time and labor intensive as this competition seems to be. If you two hadn't stepped up to be willing to do this, I know my 4-H'ers wouldn't have been able to get this experience...I feel like this experience is priceless in helping to prepare them for the state contest in a few weeks. Thank you for the high-quality videos, the fair classes, and your patience with the kids as they worked through it. I have 2 graduating seniors that have done this competition since 5th grade, and they were both very disappointed when they thought that poultry judging was just going to be cancelled. Thanks again for being a team player and making this opportunity available to others."

On June 10, 2020, a virtual awards ceremony was held to recognize those individuals that placed in the top 10 individually and top 3 as teams. During this ceremony, competition organizers also reviewed each class with participants and coaches. At the conclusion of the virtual contest and awards ceremony it was clear that the initial goal of providing a way for 4-H to continue to reach youth in a positive way during a global pandemic was achieved. 4-H'ers were able to experience belonging, independence, generosity and mastery.

Due to the success of this contest in a live virtual format, organizers of the state-level Virtual Poultry Judging Contest adopted many of the best practices used to execute a similar event for Senior 4-H'ers (grades 9-12) across the state in July 2020.