

NACAA Search for Excellence in 4-H Programming: CU YALL Narrative

When the COVID-19 Pandemic hit South Carolina in March 2020, the Youth Livestock Steering Committee was forced to pivot, moving from an all hands-on program focused on experiential livestock opportunities that included shows, clinics, skillathons, judging, and more towards an all virtual experience that would provide the same knowledge based content without any of the in-person interactions. Not only were many livestock shows cancelled, but clinics and 4-H club activities were halted as well. Like many agents around the country, we faced the difficult task of figuring out how to reach our members, provide them with the experiences they had expected when registering for the program, and ensure their safety while handling their show animals, all from a distance. Additionally, Extension agents and specialist could not meet in person. Therefore, weekly Zoom meetings were held to accomplish the task of designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating the Clemson University Youth Academy of Livestock Learning (CUYALL).

Seven Agents and one Livestock Specialist representing the Clemson University Extension 4-H and Livestock Program Teams developed a nine week program that provided species specific educational modules via PowerPoint, live species specific question and answer sessions with an agent via Zoom, a competitive virtual skillathon to test knowledge gained, an opportunity for youth to give a virtual barn tour and/or sales talk based on the species they registered for, and a social media campaign that gave those not registered for the program a glimpse at what they were missing. Youth were given the opportunity to register for CUYALL in any of the following species: Beef, Dairy, Swine, Small Ruminant, Poultry and Rabbit, and could register for more than one if desired.

Registration for this program was opened via Eventbrite. Registrants could enroll in the track for one or more of the species offered and were required to choose an age division: Cloverbud (age 5-8), Junior (age 9-13), or Senior (age 14-19). Cost to participate was free. Program information was delivered to registrants using Mailchimp.

The educational modules were self-paced but were delivered via PowerPoint at a rate of one per week starting the first week of October 2020. Topics included breeds, confirmations, care, nutrition, breeding, and showing. Youth had access to the modules via the weekly email that was sent and via the CUYALL website: <https://www.clemson.edu/extension/4h/programs/ag-animals/livestock/youth-academy-of-livestock-learning.html?fbclid=IwAR3-AXB5nWtMcS8FlwOE3f7TBNbYkQPz2vmx8ZZ1O148PWIVJEIgDLs-xck>.

Following the first five weeks of modules, youth participated in live Zoom sessions based on the species offered. Zooms were held on three days during week six of the program, with two species per day. These live question and answer sessions allowed youth to ask questions of Agents regarding the species at hand and chat with other youth participants, some of which had participated in youth livestock events in the past and some had not.

During week seven, youth had the opportunity to compete in a virtual skillathon based on single or multiple species they designated during registration. These skillathon test were created using Google Forms and a link to the test was delivered via MailChimp. Youth had one week to open the test but were required to finish within one hour of starting. For those teachers that were using this program as a means to educate FFA classes, skillathon scores were shared for their grading purposes. Winners from each species and age division were announced on social media as well as sent a virtual certificate and Amazon gift card via email.

The final two weeks of the virtual program allowed youth to share videos they created. Week eight focused on barn tours where youth gave virtual tours of their show animals' living quarters. Week nine allowed youth to submit videos of themselves giving a sales talk for their show animal. All videos were shared on the South Carolina 4-H Youth Livestock Facebook page as a social media campaign aimed at boosting overall participation in youth livestock programs. During this campaign, we also hosted spirit days which included Mentor Monday, Transformation Tuesday, We Love 4-H & FFA Wednesday, Throwback Thursday, and Flashback Friday.

While registrations from 32 US states and two foreign countries show 482 youth participants, we are confident that some of those registrations were from teachers or organizational leaders who shared the virtual program with more than one student. Participants were emailed the link to a Qualtrics evaluation tool three times; twice during the final two weeks of the program and once as a reminder a few weeks after its conclusion. Two different evaluations were provided: one for youth participants and one for parents or teachers. The evaluation results showed participants favored the educational modules and live Zooms but were not as keen on watching pre-recorded sessions or producing their own videos such as the barn tours and sales talks. The majority of participant responses showed that the program increased participants' desire to choose a career in a livestock or related field and increased their desire to spend more time with their own project animal. Also, as a result, the majority of participants are more likely to raise their own livestock in the future. Participants agree the program contributed to their education and provided lessons relevant to their livestock project. On the other hand, the majority of parent or teacher responses showed that they believe CUYALL was beneficial for their student(s), contributed to their education, increased their student's knowledge of the species they registered for, motivated the student(s) to spend more time with their project animal(s), provided knowledge that was relevant to that project animal, and provided activities that they plan to use again in the future. As a result, these students show more interests in participating in livestock project in the future. The South Carolina Youth Livestock Steering Committee will take these evaluation results into account as they decide how these virtual materials will be utilized in the future, even after in-person programming is allowed.