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UTAH STATE JUNIOR TURKEY SHOW AND AUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Raising poultry such as turkeys is a popular activity that many 4-H and FFA youth participate in throughout the United States. Typically, these youth start their projects with 1 or 2 day old poults and raise the birds to maturity. Their projects culminate when their live birds compete in a state or county sponsored event, such as fairs and livestock shows, that declare a winner of the contest. Utah's State Junior Turkey Show is unique in that 4-H and FFA members raise their birds to market age just like other shows, but then the birds are processed in a state inspected poultry processing plant, cooled in stainless steel tanks, and judged for quality and conformation. The top 26 toms and top 26 hens from the judging are then sold at the Utah State Junior Turkey Show auction. In 2011, the highest price paid at the auction was \$425 and the average sale price was \$225 on 52 total birds. Youth are required to submit a record book on their turkey project and are eligible to compete for scholarships sponsored by the show.

Introduction

Most everyone knows 4-H and FFA are organizations that help youth develop skills they will use for the rest of their lives. Youth are able to develop skills such as how to run a meeting, express opinions in front of a group, set goals, and be responsible for caring and feeding of a livestock project. Through these experiences, members gain leadership, self-confidence and develop trust and responsibility.

The Utah State Junior Turkey Show is just one of many programs that assist youth in developing these traits. It has filled a niche for many Utah FFA chapters and 4-H clubs who have youth who want to raise a large animal project for the county fair, but for reasons such as the initial cost of the animal or lack of space, cannot do so. A literature review found that 4-H and FFA youth throughout the United States are still interested in raising small animal projects like turkeys, rabbits, or broilers as part of their 4-H or FFA project for the county or state fair. The North Carolina State Fair in North Carolina (2011), the Eastern Sierra Tri-County Fair in Bishop, California (2011), and the Fort Bend County Fair in Fort Bend, Texas (2011), all have market turkey shows and auctions as part of their county or state fairs. The Brazos County Youth Livestock Show and Auction in Brazos, Texas, has a market broiler show and auction and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo in Houston, Texas, has a broiler and turkey show and auction (2011) where they show and sell the exhibitors' live birds. Utah's State Junior Turkey Show is unique in that 4-H and FFA members raise their turkeys to market age just like other shows do, but the birds are processed before they are judged. The top birds from the judging sell at the Utah State Junior Turkey show auction just days before Thanksgiving, offering buyers fresh turkey for their holiday meals.

Show History

The Utah State Junior Turkey Show has operated in Utah for almost six decades. In the early days of the show, the turkeys were processed in Sanpete County in central Utah, then taken to the Hotel Utah in Salt Lake City, about 120 miles away, for judging and selling at junior turkey show auction. In 1987, the processing and show migrated to Box Elder County and have been there ever since.

In October of 2003, the turkey processing facility was purchased by a private party who wanted to ensure the continuation of this worthwhile youth program for as long as 4-H members and FFA students were interested in learning about turkey production and carrying on the tradition of the Utah Turkey Show. Since the year 2000, approximately 1,481 youth from more than 14 counties in Utah have been involved in the turkey show (Table 1). In the past four-years, participant numbers have ranged between 144 and 250 youth participating each year and have increased 363 percent since 2000.

Table 1. Number of Show Participants

Year	# of Participants
2011	250
2010	205
2009	151
2008	144

2007	90
2006	110
2005	101
2004	103
2003	94
2002	87
2001	92
2000	54
Total	1,481

Program Description

Youth who are interested in participating in the Utah 4-H or FFA turkey project sign up through their local 4-H office or FFA advisor in May. Poults are ordered from one hatchery and have the same genetics. The poults are all hatched the same day and received by all participants on a designated day in July. The delivery date coincides with the birds being ready to market as fresh turkeys, weighing between 25 and 35 pounds, at Thanksgiving time. Youth enrolled in the program are able to purchase and raise up to 10 hens and 10 toms and spend the next 17 to 18 weeks raising and caring for the poults (photo 1).



Photo 1. Turkeys ready to harvest.

The Utah State Junior Turkey Show is held in Tremonton, Utah (Box Elder County), each year during the third weekend in November. Youth select the best hen and tom from their own flock to enter into the state show. They must raise and show their own birds, and are not permitted to use turkeys grown by another individual for competition in the show. Immediate family members may raise their birds together, but each exhibitor must select his or her own birds for the contest. The County Agent or FFA Advisor must certify that the exhibitor has a bona fide turkey project and has taken care of the birds. There is no entry fee for the show, but exhibitors are required to pay their own processing fees (\$7 per bird in 2010). In 2010, 205 youth entered 380 turkeys into the show.

Because of Utah Department of Agriculture and Food's processing and health standards, birds entered in the show must be processed in a state certified processing plant. Once killed and dressed, the birds are weighed and placed in stainless steel tanks containing ice water and chlorine bleach for 24 hours to lower the body temperature to 40°F or less to slow bacterial growth. The next morning the tanks are drained and the birds are sorted into two classes, toms and hens, and placed on appropriate tables by show committee members where the judging takes place (photo 2). Individuals from the show committee assist the judges in the positioning of the show birds. No other individuals are allowed in the showroom during judging for food safety reasons and to maintain the integrity of the selection process. Each class is judged as a single pool against each other as in other junior livestock shows. The weights from the previous day are used to determine the heaviest tom and hen and they are pulled out of the judging and placed in the sale order.



Photo 2. Turkeys being judged.

Judging is done by comparison according to dressed-bird standards with conformation (depth of body, width of breast, length of keel, width of back and shoulder and legs moderately short) worth up to 50 points. Fleshing (general covering with smooth coat and fat) is worth up to 25 points and Market Appearance (cleanliness of body bloom, free of abrasions and bruises and free of pin feathers) is worth up to 25 points, for a total of 100 points

Once the judging has taken place, the top 26 hens and 26 toms are sold at the auction. In the case of a contestant having two birds selected for the auction, only the highest placing tom or hen will be permitted to sell, allowing more youth to sell birds at the auction. Prior to the auction, birds are inspected, vacuumed bagged, labeled and placed in a walk-in cooler. The next day, the turkeys are transported to the local county fairgrounds and auctioned off in the following order: Grand Champion Tom and Hen, Heaviest Tom and Hen, Reserve Champion Tom and Hen, First Place Tom and Hen, and so forth. In 2011, the highest price paid at the auction was \$425 and the lowest amount paid was \$150 per bird. The average sale price was \$225 on 52 total birds sold.



Photo 3. A 4-H youth selling a turkey at auction.

All birds that do not make the sale are bagged and made available for youth to take home and sell as fresh turkeys for Thanksgiving. Many counties who have youth whose turkeys do not qualify for the state auction, transport the best placing birds back to their own county where they are sold in a county sponsored auction. Extra birds that are not part of the state show are processed the following week, and youth also market these birds as fresh turkeys for Thanksgiving.

Youth are also required to turn in a portfolio or poultry project record book if they are 4-H members, or entrepreneurship pages if they are in FFA, along with their turkey show forms, in order to participate in the Utah State Junior Turkey Show. By turning in a 4-H portfolio or an FFA record book, they are eligible for several scholarships made available through the Utah State Junior Turkey Show.

In reviewing the youth project expense records from their record books, if youth purchase a commercially available feed from the local feed store; their cost of production in 2011 ranged between \$35-45 per bird for a 25-30 pound processed turkey. The cost of production includes; purchasing the poult, feed and processing costs.

Summary

The Utah State Junior Turkey Show and Auction has filled a niche for many FFA chapters and 4-H clubs who have youth who want to raise an animal project each year, but for cost or space reasons cannot raise a large animal project for the county fair. Youth learn how to feed and care for their turkeys and are able to see how the birds are processed and dress out at the end of the project. They learn and practice marketing skills by providing fresh turkeys for sale to

friends, neighbors and family members at the holiday season. Participant numbers have increased 363 percent since 2000, demonstrating a continued interest in small animal projects like the Utah State Junior Turkey Show and Auction.

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