



Animal Science Ambassadors advocate for agricultural industry

GEORGIA
4-H

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INTRODUCTION

Food animal production (livestock and poultry) contributes \$9.3 billion to the annual Farm Gate of Georgia (The University of Georgia Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development, 2024). That represents over 51% of all agricultural production in the state. However, according to the most recent USDA Ag Census, the average age of agricultural producers in the state is getting older, with 40% of farmers being 65 years old and older. The need to develop and inspire young people to learn about and get involved in food animal production is vital to its survival. It is important for youth to learn to be advocates for the food animal production industry.

Based on youth development research, there is a high confidence level that youth advocacy builds leaders and positive youth and community development. Therefore, to use youth advocacy as a method for building leadership skills, opportunities need to be provided for youth to build a knowledge base, apply that knowledge, share the knowledge and reflect on what has been learned.

OBJECTIVES

The goal of the Georgia 4-H Ambassador Program, established in 2005, is to prepare 9th – 12th grade 4-H'ers to become knowledgeable in a specific content area so that they can return to their counties and share what they've learned with others. The 4-H Ambassador Program requires a one-year commitment that begins upon completion of Ambassador Training at the Ambassador Training Summit. Georgia 4-H Ambassadors must commit to completing the following activities during their year of service: complete six learning activities related to their subject area; complete six sharing activities related to their subject area; and provide quarterly reports. The current Ambassador tracts include Animal Science, Health and Wellness, Pollinator, Science and Engineering, and Wildlife.

In 2023, the Animal Science track was added to the current Georgia 4-H Ambassador program. The mission of the Animal Science Ambassador Program is to provide educational experiences for youth to explore their interest in animal and poultry science. The program focuses on connecting youth with local animal production systems and industries, exploring the richness and diversity of animal production, developing advocacy skills, and increasing their access to career and post-secondary opportunities in animal and poultry sciences. As a Livestock Ambassador, the learning and sharing activities will focus on dispelling common myths about food animal production and being a spokesperson for the industry.

PROGRAMMATIC METHODS

Interested Georgia 4-H'er complete an application for the Georgia 4-H Ambassador program in the Spring. Accepted applicants are required to attend a 2-day Ambassador Training Summit at Rock Eagle 4-H Center in late May.

Curricula for the training summit includes:

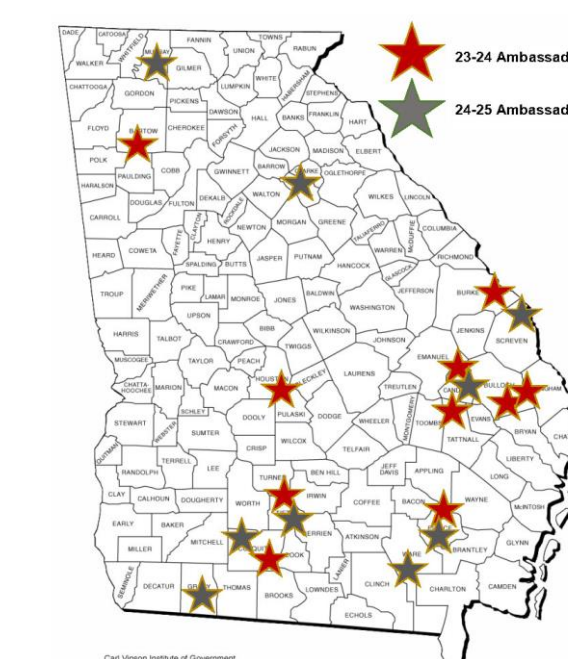
- a general overview of specie specific livestock industries (beef, dairy, swine, small ruminant, poultry, equine)
- importance of Quality Assurance Programs
- current issues surrounding food-animal production industries
- where to find reputable information
- advocacy and presentation training
- careers in animal sciences
- brainstorming and planning for their service year

Sessions are taught by the Georgia 4-H Animal Science Specialists and invited guest experts. The training is a compilation of lectures, group work, team building exercises, collaborative discussions, and role-playing scenarios.

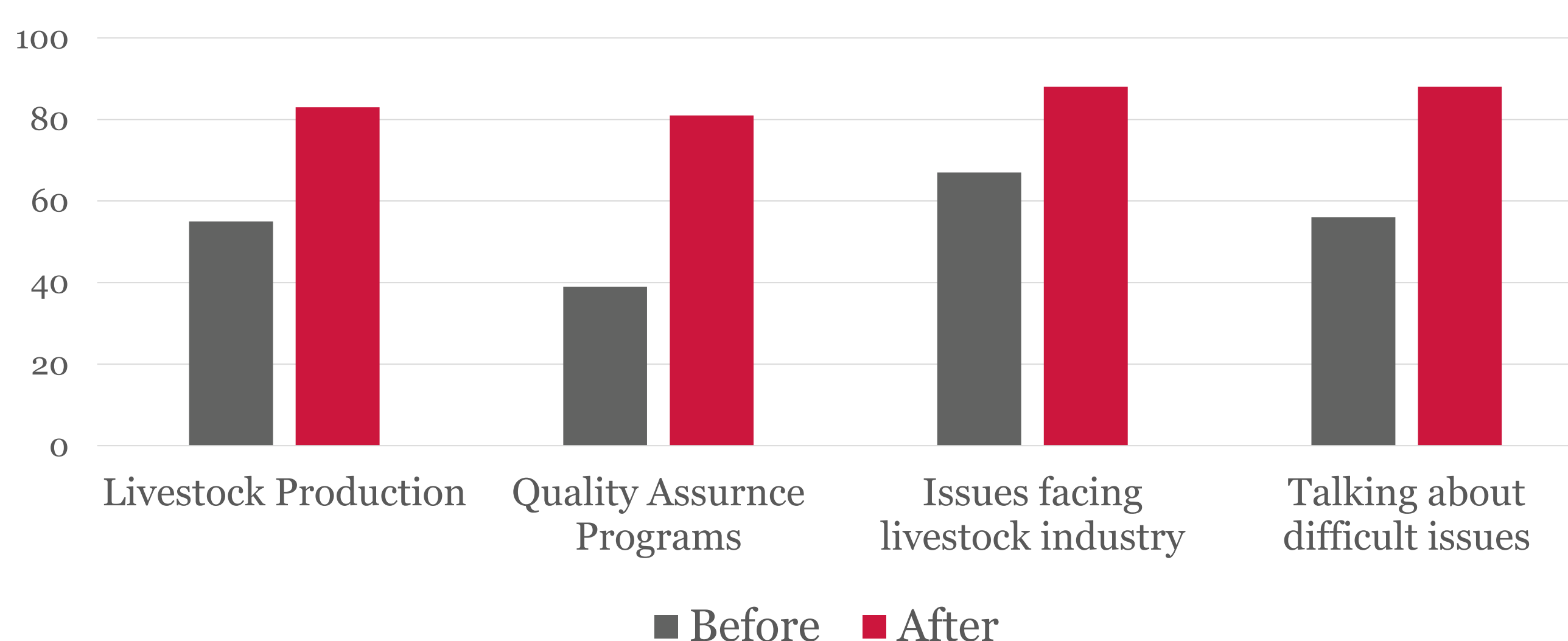
RESULTS

During the 2023–2024 program year, 13 youth served as Georgia 4-H Livestock Ambassadors. For the 2024–2025 program year the Georgia 4-H Animal Science Ambassadors have 14 participants, with 6 returning from the previous cycle.

Based on a post Training Summit Survey, participants were asked to rank their knowledge in training areas based on a scale of 0–100 (0 = no knowledge, 100 = expert knowledge). Results indicated that respondents increased their comfort and knowledge levels in all subject areas. All surveys indicated that participants were Moderately and/or Extremely Satisfied with the training. Participants responded that they felt prepared to complete their year of service after the Training Summit.



Knowledge Change in Ambassador Trainees



IMPACT

The Georgia 4-H Animal Science Ambassadors have completed a variety of learning and sharing activities across the state. Learning activities included interviews, selected research, tours, workshops and livestock events. One 4-H'er explained about their learning experience, "After getting a more in-depth experience in the cattle industry, and getting to see and do things firsthand, I can teach people better how to do those things. (example: tagging). Also let's me talk to people about the cattle industry with clarity."

Sharing activities ranged from county events to state-wide activities where the ambassadors shared their knowledge of livestock production. Some sharing activities of note included social media posts on sheep and cattle production, displays at local library, authoring newspaper articles, mini booth displays at state, regional and county fairs, assisting with livestock show clinics, and teaching younger youth about livestock. One Animal Science Ambassador organized a special needs showmanship class called "Mighty Showman" at the Georgia Junior National Livestock Show held in Perry, GA.

