

## Ultrasound data provides valuable learning tool for Custer County youth

### AT A GLANCE

Data taken from all market livestock projects ultrasound at the Custer County Fair is used to educate youth exhibitors about the importance of end-product quality.

### The Situation

Youth participating in market livestock projects show their animals at the county fair. They also participate in a terminal sale where the animal they have raised and cared for is sold to a consumer and enters the food chain following the end of their project.

It is important that youth understand the responsibilities of following safe and ethical practices when handling and feeding their meat animal to ensure that the consumer who purchases their animal has a safe and high-quality eating experience. Providing safe and quality food for consumers builds trust and support from consumers.

### Our Response

The Custer County 4-H and FFA Sale Committee provides an ultrasound technician on site at the fair to ultrasound each animal that will ultimately be sold in the terminal livestock sale. Not only is this data utilized to rank the market livestock for a carcass contest, but it is also used to help educate the youth producers on what is “good” and what can be improved for consumer acceptability of meat quality. This data is provided for youth exhibitors and their parents, and is explained not only by the ultrasound technician, but also in an



Market beef 4-H and FFA members/parents watch a technician ultrasound their steers. Photo by UI Extension, Custer County.

educational event following the fair. This event showcases ultrasound data and outlines how the data is obtained and what it means. A question-and-answer period is provided for youth and parents to help them understand the meaning of carcass terminology and end-product meat quality standards.

### Program Outcomes

In the past ten years of obtaining ultrasound data and providing educational platforms and data back to the market youth livestock exhibitors, the quality of the market livestock has increased. Youth are utilizing the information learned and applying it to their market projects the following year, including improved genetics, care, nutrition, and general management techniques to ensure they bring a high-quality market

project to the fair. Below is a summary from 2013 to 2023:

Market beef:

- In 2013, only five steers graded Choice. The other nine graded Select or lower (n=14).
- In 2023, every steer graded Choice or higher, except for one, which graded Select + (n=29). There were eight steers that graded Prime, which is the highest Quality Grade for market beef.

Market swine:

- In 2013, only three market hogs met the five quality standards to be considered for the carcass contest (Backfat, Loin Eye Area, Grade, Average Daily Gain and Ending Weight) and graded U.S. Top #1 (n=30)
- In 2023, all market hogs met the five quality standards and graded a U.S. Top #1, except for three hogs who fell out because of the backfat requirement and two hogs for their Loin Eye Area (n=28).

Market sheep:

- In 2013, only four market lambs (n=21) met the five quality standards to be considered for the carcass contest (Backfat, Loin Eye Area, Grade, Average Daily Gain and Ending Weight).
- In 2023, all market lambs met the five quality standards, except for two lambs who fell out because of Loin Eye Area requirements and their Average Daily Gain (n=22).

## The Future

The 4-H and FFA Market Animal Sale Committee will continue to provide an ultrasound technician each year and encourage youth to participate in the educational carcass event following the fair to help ensure quality livestock projects are shown and sold at the Custer County Fair.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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