Spring weigh-in for livestock projects is a sign that fair is right around the corner. This milestone should mark an increase in many aspects of a 4-H project including more careful management and diligent handling of animals. When considering management of their project, 4-H members should take into account the market weight goal, the county fair date, and the expected average daily gain (ADG) of the selected species. Livestock not making weight, being too light or heavy could prevent a child from exhibiting their project. This stresses the importance of better understanding the growth of the specific species that will be shown and how to manage them to a desired weight.

It is important that 4-H’ers take note of the fair weight requirements which would eliminate them from showing if not met. Understanding the minimum and maximum weights of specific species at the fair, one can project the animal’s weight at fair time using average daily gain values for that specific animal to avoid disqualification. Making these calculations one can better understand if the animal will meet the requirements to show at the fair. Furthermore, visualizing the ideal weight and condition of your animal based on its structure will aid in producing a market ready animal by fair time. For example, a smaller structured hog should not be pushed to reach the maximum fair weight as it would be overconditioned and ready to market too soon. Having access to a scale between spring weigh-in and fair could be very helpful to prepare a livestock project for exhibition. Monitoring the animal’s rate of gain will allow one to recalculate the projected fair weight and maintain the feeding program or make adjustments as needed.

Once a weight from the spring weigh-in is available and a goal for the animal’s fair weight is set, one can use this information to further plan and manage the project as its prepared for the county fair. For example, if the average daily gain of a hog is 1.6 pounds per day one can estimate how much the hog will weigh at the fair by calculating the number of days between the spring weigh-in and fair weigh-in, multiplying the number of days by 1.6 pounds and then adding that value to the spring weigh-in weight. This however is just an estimation and weight, growth, and condition should be monitored regularly. Feed should be adjusted as the animal grows. As an animal gains weight it requires more feed to maintain that weight and then continue gaining if needed. Having a good understanding of this will more likely keep the animal on track so it will reach the goal weight.

It is also important to remember that the purpose of a market animal project is to produce a quality meat product and therefore the process should be cost-effective. Managing an animal in a fashion that uses financial resources excessively does not support the goal of 4-H. The underlying goal of 4-H livestock projects is to further understand the management and process of producing a food source and should be done in a way that is economical and humane.

While feeding and caring for an animal should be supervised by an adult, parents should also have realistic expectations of the child’s ability to show an animal. The child is expected to be able to exhibit the animal with little to no help. Therefore parents should find a project that is compatible with the child’s interest, confidence, and strength. Safety is key; the 4H’er should be able to handle and show the animal with little to no danger to others. Working with their project consistently will result in a more predictable show experience. Creating a bond with their livestock and understanding the behavior of the animal(s) will help the 4-H’er successfully finish their livestock project by exhibiting it at the fair. Caring for and handling livestock projects is a great opportunity for 4-H’ers to learn new skills and strengthen existing ones. To continue learning, parents should encourage youth to take on more responsibility every year with their livestock to gain animal care knowledge.

Please visit the Cheyenne County Extension Office or call (785)332-3171 with questions, resources, or for more information regarding livestock projects.