

# Learn to Earn: Establishing and Creating 4-H Project Marketing Opportunities

Until 2020, we all took the county fair, state fair, 4-H ribbons and premiums, good friends and 4-H auctions for granted. Not so anymore. Pandemics change life.

Specifically, 2020 has meant that all 4-H programs look very different and many local and state fairs are canceled. So what's a 4-H member to do? No premium money and potentially weak prospects to obtain a nice price for livestock at auctions means it's time to look at alternatives.

Alternatives may be quite different from place to place. What is consistent though, is there are makers and users, producers and consumers. There are virtual options for 4-H youth to share their work. But how do we learn to earn from all the change? Marketing products is the key. From sharing information about 4-H project products, you may find people who would like to purchase those items.

So we market--not just 4-H livestock projects--but all tangible products from 4-H work.

## Marketing to Get 4-H Projects from Producer to Consumer

Marketing is the key for all businesses, even those who just want to earn a bit of money from their hobbies. Marketing is how to get a product into interested consumers' hands. It is the way to grab the attention of potential buyers and convince them to purchase a product.

There are many questions to answer when marketing products, including:

- **How do you present your items?** The success or failure of marketing your product depends on how the item or service is presented to consumers. Is it appealing? Why does the consumer want to make the purchase? Why should the consumer support the seller (4-H member)?
- **Define your product.**
  - *What is it?* – Products can come from any of a participating member's 4-H project areas. This could be vegetables from a garden project, a bench from woodworking or items made from a welding project.
  - *Who needs it?* – Who can benefit from your products? Is there a need for the products/service you can provide?
  - *What makes people want it?* – Does your product fit a WANT or a NEED of consumers? If it's a need, consumers may be more easily enticed to make the purchases. How will you make the sale for products that are considered a "want"?
  - *Why is your product the best?* – What does your product have that others do not offer? Sharing your 4-H story can give you an edge on competitors in showcasing the time and energy you put into making your product the best it can be.

## Consumer Products from 4-H Projects Vary from Livestock to Home Decorating Items

When thinking of consumer products from 4-H projects, there are some obvious areas. The goal of raising market livestock is to sell the animals at local and state fairs. At these events, the product (steer, lamb, pig, etc.) is sold for food for grocery stores or family freezers.

Another popular 4-H project is baked goods. Cake auctions and bake sales are frequent hits at fairs. There are many 4-H projects that yield consumable products.

Think about your 4-H projects. Ask yourself:

- **Will you make/build an item from your project?**
  - *Garden Project* – Growing vegetables, fruits or flowers can provide multiple avenues for building a product base. You can sell the vegetables/fruits directly to consumers, such as at a local stand. Or you may become a supplier to another business that sells at farm markets.



4-H member's cupcake design

- *Food Project* – You may add value to items from other 4-H ventures, such as your garden project. If you produce fruit, you could make fresh jams or jellies. Baking breads, or other tasty items are other potential ways to produce some income. If

these items are sold, be sure to adhere to the proper county health department guidelines.

- *Home Environment Project* – Sell your creative products to help others decorate their homes, offices and more. A member who makes pillows, quilts, or wreaths, for example, can market such items.
- **Will you raise an animal as a 4-H project?**
  - *Market Livestock Projects* – It is not guaranteed that your project will meet the criteria for a county or state 4-H livestock sale, even in the best of years. So having other options can be a plus. Think about working with local butcher shops, restaurants, and businesses as potential customers.



4-H member exhibiting market livestock project

- *Poultry Projects* – Broiler projects yield meat. Laying hens provide opportunities to sell farm-fresh eggs.
- *Breeding Livestock Projects* – This is a dual-purpose project area. Selling offspring to help others to either start or expand their project areas,

herds or flocks is one approach. Selling to consumers who want to raise their own meat is another.

- **Have you learned a skill through a 4-H project?**
  - *Welding Projects* – Skills learned through arc welding can be extremely useful. People seem to always need metal items repaired. Use your welding skills to create or fix items for others.
  - *Sewing Projects* – From creating machine-stitched projects to making hand-sewn items, these skills provide an opportunity to generate some cash from 4-H work. Put those skills to the test. Become a clothing designer or mend clothing for individuals. Repairing torn seams and replacing broken zippers may be a way to enhance earning potential.

### Advertise Your 4-H Products to Reach Potential Buyers

Once you have decided on what products or services you can provide, it is time to connect with potential customers.

- **The life skills you learned in 4-H will be useful when preparing your advertising plan:**
  - \* *Communication* – Developing crucial communication skills is vital in sharing your 4-H story with potential clients.
  - \* *Critical thinking* – Think creatively how to get your product to the public. Think carefully and answer these questions.
    - ◊ Where can you advertise your product?
    - ◊ What techniques can you use for advertising?

- ◊ Where are you most comfortable advertising and reaching potential buyers?
- ◊ How can you advertise for free? Are you willing to pay for advertising?
- \* *Self-responsibility* – You are your best salesperson. Get out there and advertise your product. Make sure your advertising plan is workable.
- **Share your 4-H story:** Each person has a unique story. You can tell yours to potential buyers. Get creative in how you share your story through your advertising options.
  - \* *How and why did you get started in your project?*

- ◊ Tell your buyers why you are passionate about your project. When and how did you get started?
- ◊ *Personal touches always add to your story.* People connect with your unique information. For example, is there a special reason you started your product/service? If so, share that reasoning as part of your story.

- \* *What is your product?*
  - ◊ The sale is in the details. Sharing as much information as possible about your product will give potential buyers greater confidence in the quality. Knowledge indicates interest in doing your best to meet buyers' needs.
  - ◊ Why is it important that someone wants it - Is it a WANT or a NEED? Explain why a potential client either needs or wants to buy your product.

What are the benefits of purchasing this product?

- **Pilot test ideas:** It’s important as you brainstorm to get feedback from others. Your ideas may seem great but sharing them with others can help you refine them. Think of this step as editing a school assignment to make it better. Where can you pilot test ideas?
  - \* *Club meetings* – 4-H clubs can be a great place to share your ideas and marketing strategies and get other members’ feedback. This group usually has a wide age range, with different personalities and they can be a valuable source of insight since they tend to be familiar with many 4-H projects.
  - \* *Family/Friends* – This group of individuals will most likely feel extremely comfortable being honest with you. If you are trying out ideas that may not be up to par, your family and friends will let you know. There may be important parts of your 4-H story that you have left out and this group can remind you.
  - \* *School* –Take advantage of opportunities to present your ideas to classmates and teachers. Since they may not know you in the context of 4-H, their feedback might give you a different perspective on your product and/or marketing plan. If they are not familiar with 4-H projects, informing them about something new may result in valuable feedback.

**Advertising Avenues: Getting the Message Out**

Once you have invested the effort in developing your ideas, it’s time to figure out how to market your product.

- *Social Media* – You can often reach a large number of people through social media. Work with your

parent(s) or club leaders to determine which social media platforms to use. Ideas are:

- \* *Facebook* – A “business page” can be a great resource. On a Facebook page, you can tell your story and present your product. Facebook pages can be shared with friends and they, in turn, can ask their friends to share your page.
  - ◊ *Tracking page* – You can also easily view the number of people reached, clicked on your post and had some type of interaction. This can help in knowing what works to reach others.
- \* *Instagram* – Young people tend to use Instagram more than older individuals so this social media platform will allow you to communicate with a different audience that may be more likely to buy your product. Instagram can help reach clients if you have products such as jewelry, clothing or wooden decor (ex. welcome signs). Post pictures and use hashtags to tell your story.
- \* *Twitter* – You can send out short messages (no more than 280 characters) about your product. Using Twitter, you can tell interested followers short bits of information about your product or provide updates about how many chicks hatched from your poultry breeding project or how many pigs your sow has farrowed.
- *Community Bulletin Boards* – This may seem old-fashioned but bulletin boards can be useful to spread the word about your product. If you make a flyer to advertise your product for social media, print some and post them in your neighborhood. Make sure you have permission before posting.
  - \* Community bulletin boards may be found at:

- ◇ Grocery stores
  - ◇ Community centers
  - ◇ Churches
  - ◇ Post offices
  - ◇ Electronic boards may be available in your area, such as Nextdoor.
- *Mini-newsletters* – Many businesses use newsletters to keep clients updated on company events and products. You can use this method for 4-H projects too. Any communication with customers helps but sending out a 2-page update can be very helpful. Whatever interval works for your needs is fine but quarterly may be sufficient.



Example of a monthly newsletter that can be sent to potential livestock buyers.

sale, prepare a newsletter that tells your 4-H story. Include pictures of your project. Talk about the importance of the project to you and why the buyer may want your product.

- ◇ 2<sup>nd</sup> month – Give more details about your project. What do you have to do daily to properly care for your project? If you are raising livestock, what does your project eat? What requirements do you have to adhere to be in the local sale?

- ◇ 3<sup>rd</sup> month – What will the buyer receive with purchasing your livestock project? Will they be responsible for hauling the animal to a processor? Approximately how much meat should they expect? Is the animal a female that can be used for breeding purposes? The more information you provide, the more likely the buyer will remember you.

Include information on how they can contact you to privately buy too.

- \* How to use a mini-newsletter to market livestock projects (a similar approach can be used for all project areas) –

- ◇ 1<sup>st</sup> month – Starting three months before your county 4-H livestock

- *Word-of-mouth* – One of the best ways to advertise a product is by word-of-mouth. Ask your friends and family to help inform others. Having some of your

closest friends and family involved can help you reach their friends, coworkers, and members of organizations they may belong to. Friends and family can also be used as your test groups on your advertising ideas.

### Building Buyer/Client Supports

Show your supporters appreciation. Whether the product you are selling is a one-time purchase, such as a decorative bench or it has potential for repeat sales, say thank you. Show on-going appreciation.

- *Thank you notes* – A simple gesture can go a long way to building your buyer/client relationships. Once the buyer has supported you, send them a thank you note. It's nice to be appreciated. Remember-- handwritten notes show that you put forth time and thought.
  - \* *Year-round thank you* – Build your buyer relationships all year. It doesn't need to be a flashy gesture. Bake some cookies with a thank-you note at the holidays. Face-to-face contact is a great way for buyers to remember who you are. You can always send thank you notes with updates on your project throughout the year too. Showing appreciation is key for getting repeat buyers.
  - \* *Email list* - Starting an email list is another way to reach out to supporters. It's an effective way to let people know if you have produce, baked goods, jewelry, etc. as part of your 4-H work. When individuals pay for their goods, you can obtain their email addresses to keep in touch.

### Resources

Cohen, H. (2011). *Actionable Marketing 101*. Marketing Resources. Retrieved from: <http://heidicohen.com/marketing-definition/>

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Becky Ridgeway  
[bridgewa@umd.edu](mailto:bridgewa@umd.edu)

Elaine Bailey (retired)  
[elbailey@umd.edu](mailto:elbailey@umd.edu)

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