

Maryland 4-H Animal Science Program Guidebook

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Animal Science Judging

What is Judging?

Judging is an opportunity for youth to develop and practice skills they have learned in their animal science projects. In a contest, youth judge a series of classes consisting of four animals each. Youth rank or place each class in order of correctness and desirability in what they see. Youth also take notes and give oral reasons explaining why they placed a class a particular way. Youth placings of classes are compared to an official placing determined by an official judge or judges (experts). Each judging class is worth a possible 50 points. Oral reasons are also worth a possible 50 points for each set.

When placing a class, the four animals would be listed in rank order beginning with the animal that is the best or most correct and ending with the worst or least ideal. When placing animals they are broken down into three pairs with the top pair being the first and second placed animal, the middle pair being the second and third placed animal and the bottom pair being the third and fourth placed animal. The fourth placed animal is always the final placing. In some contests, specific classes are designated as “Reasons Classes” for which youth are given the chance to take notes and then compare their pairs while giving an oral presentation before a judge..

What does Judging Teach?

The primary objective of a judging program is to provide an opportunity for youth to demonstrate their knowledge of project related subject matter. Judging teaches a variety of life skills. It prepares youth in the areas of critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making, self discipline, teamwork, leadership, sharing, cooperation, communication, and self-esteem. In addition, youth acquire friendships that will last a lifetime. The skills learned through judging will remain with the youth no matter what occupation they choose.

Projects that Offer Judging Competitions at the State Level:

- Horse Judging: Judging of 4-6 conformation classes, 3-4 performance classes and presentation of oral reasons.
- Livestock Judging: Quality judging of beef, meat goat, sheep and swine classes based on conformation and oral reasons given to support placings.
- Poultry Judging: Judging quality of production, egg quality, dressed market poultry and presenting oral reasons.

- Rabbit Judging: Judging of breed, meat or fur classes; equipment, breed and disqualification identification; and completing a written exam.

General Information:

- Junior, Intermediate and Senior teams of three or four individuals and one alternate are determined by the county/city selection process. Most contests allow additional individuals to compete in addition to the designated team members. The state contests are held in late spring for Horse and during the Maryland State Fair for the other animal competitions.
- There is not a team division for Goat judging, only individual divisions. There is no limit on the number of participants from each county/city unit.
- High scoring senior individuals from the state contest in the areas of Dairy, Horse, Livestock, and Poultry areas may earn a position on the state team where they compete at the National Competition.
- Make sure you do not miss the entry deadline for the state competition and be sure to follow the rules and regulations.
- Just because there is not a state competition in your project area does not mean that you can't have a county or club practice or competition.
- All State 4-H Judging Contest Entries are made by the County 4-H Extension Educator!

What is needed to start a judging program?

- UME Volunteer(s) with judging experience or the willingness to learn and teach youth
- Interested youth
- Educational materials (printed, video, audio)
- Paper animals, live animals, equipment and/or samples
- Organized schedule of practices
- Group expectations (Set requirements to make the team, etc.)
- Judging cards
- Reasons cards and blank paper for notes
- Pens and/or pencils
- Hormel scorer and stopwatch
- Release forms
- Be familiar with the contest rules and regulations
- Lots of time and patience

4-H Age Breakdowns

- Juniors-8-10 years of age as of the current year
- Intermediates-11-13 years of age as of the current year
- Seniors-14-18 years of age as of the current year

Conducting Practices:

Most judging practices start in the early spring and are weekly or biweekly. Others are monthly and go year round. Most judging practice sessions occur for 2 hours at a time.

The first several practices start with the parts of the animal, the scorecard and explain the ideal animal parts. Also, they:

- Review the judging card and have the kids practice marking their placing
- Give a quiz on the parts of the animal
- Teach terminology
- Go over the oral reasons format and have kids listen to sample sets of reasons
- Go over several paper sets (slides or videos) of classes before going to a live animal practice

Coaches can set up live animal practices at local farms/shows. Try to make the classes at the start very placeable to encourage new beginner judges.

There are also regional practices that youth can attend.

Keep in mind to take steps to manage risks. Remember at on-farm/show judging practices to practice good biosecurity.

- Wash with soap and water before/after handling animals
- Wear clean clothes
- Wash/disinfect your shoes or provide plastic disposable shoe covers
- Try not to touch/handle the animals

Remember when judging, youth need to:

- Have the desire to learn/know about the animal
- Be familiar with the standard (Ideal animal)
- Observe the animals
- Compare the animals (Take notes if applicable and pay attention to details)
- Decide on a placing (Independently)
- Defend the placing through oral reasons
- Be aware of risks of the activity involving animals or the setting.