When preparing to show livestock in 4-H, the Maryland 4-H program rules and guidelines and those of your county, can seem overwhelming at times. If you carefully read over all the rules and guidelines and have open communication with your 4-H Extension educator, 4-H Beef Department superintendents and your club leader, it will be easier to ensure a positive experience.

Each County 4-H Livestock Program is Unique

It’s important to ensure that you are meeting all the program requirements in order to show (breeding or market beef) and potentially sell your market steer.

1. Animal ownership - In order for your market steer or breeding beef project to be eligible to show for the current year, it must fit within the ownership deadline of the Maryland 4-H program.

   • Market steers must be owned by January 1st of the current year.

   • Breeding heifers must be owned by July 1st of the current year. If you are exhibiting a breeding heifer, the association registration paper must be signed by the breed secretary and stamped by July 1st to be eligible to exhibit the heifer in the current year.

   • Commercial heifers must be owned by July 1st of the current year. Your commercial heifer will need to have the proper 4-H paperwork (Livestock Registration Form (Figure 1)) and a Maryland 4-H commercial heifer ear tag by July 1st of the current year to be eligible to show. Most commercial heifers will be tagged at the county’s beef weigh-in (check with Extension office for weigh-in/tagging date).

   Take note of deadlines in your county 4-H program, particularly if the county has an earlier county fair. In that case, the ownership deadlines may be set sooner than the state deadlines.

2. Livestock Registration Form – The Maryland 4-H Program requires that the owners of each 4-H market steer or commercial heifer (non-registered heifer) complete a Livestock Registration Form (Figure 1). The form will ask
Figure 1. You will need to complete the Maryland 4-H Livestock Registration Form prior to attending weigh-in/tagging days in your county (Maryland 4-H Animal Science Resources, https://extension.umd.edu/4-h/4-h-program-areas/animal-science-resources)

Figure 2. The 4-H member and parent/legal guardian must sign to acknowledge they read and agree to abide by the Maryland 4-H Animal Science Code of Ethics
for your contact information, local 4-H club and your 4-H age. If you are keeping your animals at a location other than your home, you need to include the address of the farm where your 4-H beef project animal is housed.

In the box at the top of the form, check off if you are weighing a market steer or a commercial heifer. If you are tagging a market steer and a commercial heifer, you need to complete a separate form for each animal. You will need to complete as much information as possible including:

- **Official U.S. tag number:** The Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tag has a 16-digit number. The breeder of the steer or heifer will obtain the tag.
- **Personal ear tag/tattoo number**
- **Breed:** (Angus, Hereford, Crossbred, etc.)
- **Sex:** (male or female)
- **Bred and owned:** Indicate if you owned the cow/heifer who calved out your steer/heifer or if you purchased the animal.
- **Date of birth:** When was your steer or heifer born?
- **4-H tag number:** Leave this column blank since a 4-H ear tag number will be assigned when you attend the county weigh-in and tagging.
- **Tag day weight:** The steer will be weighed and the information recorded at weigh-in. This will be considered your animal’s beginning weight for your steer project.
- **Signatures required:** The 4-H member and parent/legal guardian must sign on the front of the form to confirm the information. Signatures are also required on the back of the form from the 4-H member and parent/legal guardian acknowledging they have read and agree to abide by the Maryland 4-H Animal Science Code of Ethics (Figure 2).

Depending on which county 4-H program you are enrolled in, there may be a charge for the number of ear tags you will need for tagging day. The cost of the tags is minimal. The Extension office will have information regarding any charges by the county.

**3. Livestock weigh-in and tagging** – All counties hold an initial weigh-in and tagging for market steers and commercial heifers. Dates will vary around the state and are available from your local Extension office. You will need to help with the care of your steer/heifer at the weigh-in/tagging. Some tips to help improve your weigh-in experience:

- **Paperwork:** Complete all of your paperwork before arriving at the weigh-in/tagging. Check with your local Extension office to see if you need to pre-register for weigh-in and tagging. Most offices will request your Livestock Registration Form beforehand to ensure they have ordered enough tags.
- **Registration papers:** If you are showing a purebred market steer, bring a copy of the breed association registration papers.
- **Halter-break your beef project:** Work with your steer/heifer(s) before weigh-in to ensure it is halter broken. A properly trained animal helps get you through the weigh-in line quickly and safely and keeps volunteers working at the weigh-in safe.
- **Communication:** During weigh-in/tagging, you will be asked questions related to your project and given directions that may be as simple as moving vehicles and trailers or allowing other families behind you to move into the weigh-in/tagging line. If someone is not listening and paying attention, the weigh-in process will take longer for everyone.
4. Animal Husbandry Quality Assurance (AHQA) program – Maryland 4-H members are required to participate in the AHQA online program to ensure they use best management practices in caring, grooming and showing safely and ethically. The program is designed to be completed one time per 4-H age division (junior, intermediate and senior).

- **Tagging**: Ensure that your animal has been properly tagged based on the information you provided (Figure 3).
- **Junior members** (8-10 years old as of January 1st) must complete one AHQA program, which will cover them in all livestock species they plan on showing.
- **Intermediates** (11-13 years old as of January 1st) and Seniors’ (14-18 years old as of January 1st) are required to participate in the AHQA program when they age up into a new division. The program for intermediates and seniors will consist of a general program which then becomes species-specific. Therefore, these individuals will have to take a beef-related AHQA when moving into older age divisions.

Read the Fair Requirements as Soon as They are Available

Many fairs leave their department rules from the previous year posted online and by spring of the current year, the new rules for your fair should be available. If you are showing for the first time, talk with your club leader, beef superintendent or Extension educator about the rules and guidelines you need to follow.

1. **Fair entry system** – To be eligible to exhibit at fairs, you must pre-enter your steer/heifer(s). Most fairs use an online entry system and your county Extension office will release the information when the entry system is open. When making your entries, you will need to complete the following steps:

   - Register as a 4-H member exhibitor. The 4-H project must be registered in the member’s name;
   - Enter the correct classes with your beef projects, especially if you are exhibiting several beef animals. Make sure that your steer/heifer(s) are entered into the correct divisions (breed divisions or crossbred). Enter extra classes such as showmanship, bred and owned divisions (if applicable) and if offered, rate of gain (market steers only);
   - Enter the correct Maryland 4-H ear tag number (market steer/commercial heifer(s)) for each animal;
   - Market steer classes will ask for your animal’s beginning weight and date of weigh-in. Make sure to enter the date and weight your steer was when you attended the county weigh-in/tagging day;
   - When you have finished entering all classes for your beef project and you are ready to check out, make sure to pay any costs associated with the entry and confirm that you have entered. You should print out a confirmation number for your entry, along with receiving a confirmation email. Keep these in your records just in case there are problems with the fair entry system.

2. **Health papers** – The Maryland Department of Agriculture requires that all livestock entering the fairgrounds in the state have a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI or health papers). You will need to have a veterinarian come to the farm where your animals are kept to inspect them for good health. Make sure to have the following information written down for the veterinarian:

   - Name, address and phone number of 4-H member;
   - Name, address of fairgrounds and date of first fair; and
   - Information on the livestock being inspected (ear tag numbers (4-H and farm numbers if applicable), RFID number, breed, sex, date of birth).

When the veterinarian completes the health papers, you will receive a pink copy. Keep the papers with your records and they must accompany your beef project to all shows. If you are showing in Maryland, the health papers are valid for 120 days and you must complete a health check on your cattle before entering the fair. This will be verified by filling out the back of your health papers (self-certification) prior to each fair or show.

If you are planning to exhibit your beef project outside of Maryland, you will be required to have a new set of health papers for interstate exhibits. You will follow the same procedures as above, but these health papers are only valid for
30 days and are for the specific fair/show at which you are exhibiting.

3. Rate of Gain (ROG) (market steers only) – Maryland 4-H has a set ROG that your steer must achieve in order to be eligible for most of the fairs and livestock sales throughout the state. Rate of gain for Maryland 4-H is set at 2.0 lbs. daily. To calculate ROG, use the following formula:

1. **Calculate number of days from initial weigh-in through the final weigh-in at the county or state fair** (when calculating your days include day of both weigh-ins);  
2. **Subtract initial weigh-in weight from final weigh-in weight**;  
3. **Divide the total weight gained by number of days between weigh-ins to get the daily ROG for the market steer.**

**EXAMPLE**

Initial weigh-in: January 4th, the market steer weighed 783 lbs.  
Final weigh-in: July 30th, the market steer weighs 1,422 lbs.  
Number of days between weigh-ins = 208 days  
Market steer gained = 639 lbs. (End weight – beginning weight = pounds gained)  
Final ROG = 639 lbs./208 days = 3.07 lbs./per day

4. Minimum/maximum weights – Check with your local county or state fairs on the weight requirements for market steer projects. Each county may have requirements for what your steer needs to weigh when it arrives at the fair. Weight requirements are often used to determine if your steer is eligible for the local 4-H livestock sale.

5. Project records – Accurate record keeping is an important part of raising your 4-H beef project. Using the Maryland 4-H Market Livestock Project Records or the Maryland 4-H Breeding Livestock Project Records (Figure 4), will help you keep appropriate records and give thought to what you are learning throughout the year. You will be asked to complete the following areas for your beef project:

- **Goals** – At the beginning of raising your steer/heifer(s), what goals did you set for yourself for the year and did you achieve them?
- **Learning** – What did you learn throughout the year about your beef project?
- **Improve or do differently?** What is something you would like to improve on next year or something you learned you need to do differently for your project in the future?
- **Life skills** – Using the life skill wheel provided on the project record, what skills did you learn and how did you learn that skill?
- **Project activities** – What activities did you attend that relate to your beef project, such as beef workshops, livestock judging, spring 4-H show, county fair, etc.?
- **Project communication** – Most counties require 4-H member to have some sort of communication about their project. This could be a speech about “Why I chose to show Shorthorn steers” or a demonstration on “What equipment I need to show my heifers?” Most of the time you can give your speech or demonstration at a club meeting, a county demonstration or public speaking event.
- **Exhibits** – Where did you exhibit your steer/heifer? Write down all the shows you went to and each class you entered.
- **Information on project animals** – Keeping records on each steer/heifer(s) you raise is important so you know where you started and where you will end with the project.
- **Expenses** –
  - **Feed** – A daily expense during your project year.
  - **Other expenses** – There are many other expenses to think about with your beef project from equipment to entry fees for shows.
- **Health records** – You should keep records of every veterinarian visit and exactly what was needed, even if it’s a vet visit for health papers.
- **Income** -
6. Livestock sales (market steers) – Each county livestock sale is handled differently and will have different requirements. Most sales will have similar rules that steers need to reach a minimum weight and not exceed a maximum weight. Steers will need to make the State rate of gain requirement. Your steer will also need to grade, which means the steer will be evaluated for fat cover by a professional. Some sales will also stipulate that you must complete your project record forms for the current year to be eligible for the next year’s livestock sale. Always read the livestock sale rules to ensure you are meeting the requirements to sell your 4-H market steer project.

Enhancing Your 4-H Educational Beef Experience

1. Livestock workshops – Your 4-H county Extension office or the fair may hold beef workshops or field day opportunities. These events offer a variety of educational topics, including grooming, washing, showing, and animal health and nutrition. Guest speakers may enhance the experience of attending the workshops. If your county offers a field day, there will be a small show where 4-H members can focus on their skills in and out of the show ring (Figure 5).

2. Spring 4-H shows – Throughout the state, regional shows are held for 4-H members. These shows offer 4-H members of all ages and experience levels a chance to bring their steer/heifer(s). By participating in regional shows, 4-H members learn how to prepare their equipment and steer/heifer(s) for their county and state fairs.
3. Livestock skillathon – It’s important to consider other options to enhance your experience in the 4-H beef project. One way to expand the learning process is through the livestock skillathon program, which emphasizes the variety of items needed to raise livestock. The skillathon program gives you a chance to learn about livestock breeds, equipment, meat cuts, feed (grains and hay), animal quality assurance and opportunities to learn about judging. The program expands your understanding of the different parts of your beef project.

4. Livestock judging – Participating in livestock judging helps you learn more about qualities that make good quality cattle, sheep, swine and goats. Through judging, you will not only learn how to place classes of livestock but will gain important public speaking skills through reasons.

Source:

*Animal Science Guidebook.* February 2011. https://www.extension.umd.edu/4-h/4-h-program-areas/animal-science-resources

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This publication, *Maryland 4-H Requirements and Tools for Exhibiting 4-H Beef Projects* (FS-1125) is a series of publications of the University of Maryland Extension and the Department of 4-H Youth Development.

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