Chapter 1

We Are Raising Market Projects

Livestock projects have always been the foundation for youth development in the 4-H and FFA programs in Texas. In fact, Texas leads the nation in the number of livestock projects exhibited. Most young people who exhibit livestock participate in county or state livestock shows where the animals are auctioned. These animals often bring premium prices. Young exhibitors may use their auction proceeds to purchase animals for future projects, pay feed bills, or pay for their college educations.

In 2006, 76,326 market projects (swine, meat goats and steers) and 13,452 breeding projects were entered in county and local fairs, for a total of 89,778 entries exhibited by young people in Texas (Coufal, 2007). From 2000 to 2006, the number of meat goat and beef cattle entries increased by 68.73 percent and 11.25 percent, respectively. During the same period, the number of swine and sheep entries decreased by 4.03 percent and 4.34 percent, respectively.

Adult leaders are often asked what happens to project animals after they are sold. Most of them are harvested at local packing plants or sent to a major packing plant. In 2006, the market animals exhibited by 4-H and FFA members produced 14,870,327.9 pounds of carcass (Coufal, 2007). After processing, this would be about 7 million pounds of meat added to the food industry annually by youth projects.

It is imperative that young people involved in market livestock projects understand the importance of producing a safe and wholesome food product. Adult leaders and parents can help by being role models and demonstrating proper ways to handle and manage livestock.

In this chapter, we will look at what young people need to know about the meat industry, or how market animals get from the show ring to consumers' plates.

Here are some important terms to know about the harvesting process.

- *Live weight* – Total weight of an animal before harvest
- *Carcass weight* – Total weight of an animal after harvest
- *Dressing percentage* – The percentage of the live weight that comprises the carcass weight (Dressing percentage = Carcass weight ÷ Live weight x 100)