

Raising Livestock Projects Takes a Team

Some say that what separates livestock projects from other youth activities is the involvement of family members, guardians, county Extension agents and agricultural science teachers. Most people believe these projects bring families together as teams. However, sometimes there can be problems within the team, usually because of poor communication, lack of a shared vision, or lack of personal accountability. To prevent problems, parents and adult leaders should understand how successful teams are built.

Working in teams is an important element of organizational success. Although team members may have different goals individually, teams strive for success. Teamwork is a crucial component of a livestock project. A team should include people who are willing to help the young person develop physically, emotionally and mentally. Successful teams have synergy, which The American Heritage Dictionary defines as “the interaction of two or more agents or forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects.” Groups with strong synergy have unique characteristics such as (Long, Merten, & Boleman, 2007):

- ◆ Shared leadership roles among members
- ◆ Individual accountability
- ◆ Agreed-upon purposes and/or goals
- ◆ Collective work products
- ◆ Active problem-solving

Synergy is important for individuals working in teams toward one shared vision. A vision requires setting and working toward goals. Successful teams should have mutually agreed upon goals. That is why in the nurturing section, we spend so much time talking about goals. You will also notice that the goal exercise has a signature spot for the parents/guardians, the 4-H or FFA member, and the county Extension agent/agricultural science teacher. This was purposely done so that the “team” can begin to develop their shared leadership roles and define their shared vision. Individuals are better able to achieve goals when they work as a team than if they work alone. Adults should take advantage of opportunities to help build better teams and communicate the importance of teamwork to young people.