# 2025-2026 TEXAS 4-H/FFA LIVESTOCK PROGRAM ETHICS POLICY
## (Updated April 2025)

This ethics policy applies to any 4-H/FFA member planning to exhibit animals at livestock shows in Texas. All classes of livestock offered at the livestock event are included: Cattle, Goats, Sheep, Swine, and any other livestock classes offered. This "Texas 4-H/FFA Livestock Program Ethics Policy" will be enhanced with additional rules and guidelines which individual fairs and livestock shows adhere to on the local, county, regional, and state levels. The provisions contained in this policy do not constitute a contract, express or implied, between Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas 4-H, Inc., or Texas FFA and any applicant, participant, or parent. Additionally, the terms and conditions contained herein do not create or expand legal rights already existing under the law.

**4-H and FFA livestock project exhibitors are under the supervision of an Agricultural Science Teacher or County Extension Agent who serves as the advisor for that project.** The Major Livestock Shows of Texas support the educational content and leadership provided by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, and the Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas. Also, the Texas Major Livestock Shows fully support the administrative authority of Agricultural Science Teachers and County Extension Agents to certify the fulfillment of all validation protocols and appropriate paperwork between the exhibitor, Texas 4-H/Texas FFA, the major livestock shows and the supervising educator. Exhibiting livestock is a privilege, and exhibitors must comply with this document and respect the authority granted to his/her supervisor. Additionally, any verbal, physical, or otherwise demonstrated threats or comments toward validation personnel, volunteers, or show leadership will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action, including but not limited to: disqualification, a cancelled validation record, and/or future validation records.

The following practices or procedures are unacceptable and are defined as being deceptive, fraudulent, unethical, and inhumane in the care, fitting, preparation and showing of all classes of livestock. The use of any illegal drug is prohibited. Any practice used to alter the appearance of an animal entered in livestock events is prohibited (See Rule #9 & #10). Proof of any animal being subjected to illegal and/or unethical practice(s) and/or procedure(s,), including inhumane animal treatment, abuse, or neglect, described herein may result in disqualification. If a violation is found of any of the following rules, this may result in a cancelled validation record or future validation records.

All 4-H/FFA exhibitors must follow these rules to enter livestock at organized competitive events.

**1.** Exhibitors must be bona fide members of a 4-H Club or FFA Chapter in the State of Texas and be in good standing and eligible to compete in accordance with each respective organization. The exhibitor must care for their animals under the direct supervision of a County Extension Agent or Agricultural Science Teacher. Exhibitors must be enrolled in, and attending, public or private and/or home school elementary or secondary schools in Texas. Texas 4-H and/or Texas FFA reserve the right to seek verification of enrollment, records, and/or passing status from the accredited governing homeschool association. Exhibitors must be Texas residents. State validated livestock must be housed and cared for in Texas.

**2.** County-Level State Validation serves as proof of ownership for state validated livestock. For breeding animals, the official ownership date is the date reflected on the registration papers. This date is the specific date for each breed of record as recognized by the validation program. (Individual show rules may determine ownership requirements for non-market animals.) Registered breeding heifers must show the exhibitor as the sole owner of the animal on the breed association papers. Registered breeding heifers with additional registration papers within the breed association of validation record or in another breed association may be evaluated for multiple ownership. If additional registration papers are found active within an association indicating ownership information conflicting with the exhibitor's ownership designation, the livestock may be subject to disqualification.

**3.** To gain the life skills developed through the livestock project, exhibitors must be closely engaged in the continuous feeding, maintenance, training, grooming and overall welfare of his/her animals. Exhibitors and immediate family/guardians are responsible for providing the primary and continuous daily care of livestock projects throughout the validation period. The validation period begins immediately following the county-level state validation date regardless of the validation deadline date listed. Exhibitors must provide continuous care for all cattle, sheep, swine and goats through exhibition at all livestock shows and/or animal's eligibility to show. Facilities and location/space are a major determining factor in livestock species selection by the exhibitor. In some instances, it may be in the best interest of the exhibitor and his/her learning experience to select a species project that is best suited for his/her facilities and feasibility of housing projects.

**a. 4-H and FFA livestock project exhibitors are under the supervision of an Agricultural Science Teacher or County Extension Agent who serves as the advisor for that project.** Excessive involvement of third-party consultants, breeders, fitters not affiliated with the Texas 4-H and/or Texas FFA programs is prohibited. Third-party involvement interfering with the exhibitor's ability to provide primary daily care of and engagement with livestock projects may result in the disqualification of all state validated livestock projects owned by all associated exhibitors/families. Likewise, third-party involvement interfering with the County Extension Agent and Agricultural Science Teacher's ability to properly supervise the livestock project may result in the

disqualification of all state validated livestock projects or future validation records.

**b.** Livestock projects must be raised at the physical address of validation record. Prior approval must be granted by the "Species Specific County-Level State Validation Committee" in the event the animal will be outside the direct care of the exhibitor, immediate family/guardian, and/or the supervising County Extension Agent or Agricultural Science Teacher. Failure to gain approval from the supervising Agricultural Science Teacher/County Extension Agent and the Species-Specific County-Level State Validation Committee will result in the disqualification of all state validated livestock.

**c.** To obtain prior approval, exhibitors must complete an official 4-H/FFA Validation Rule #3 Prior Approval Form. Exhibitors not obtaining prior approval as outlined above will be subject to disqualification of the livestock in question and any other state validated livestock projects. The form can be accessed here: https://texasyouthlivestock.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Rule-3-Approval-Form.pdf
By signing the Texas 4-H and FFA Livestock Program Ethics Policy, the exhibitor and parent/guardian, recognize his/her responsibilities for the primary and continuous care of livestock projects throughout the feeding period and hereby authorizes the State Validation Coordinator or designated representatives and/or State Validation Compliance Team, supervising AST/CEA and the "Species Specific County-Level State Validation Committee" **the right to inspect your livestock project(s), along with any other state validated livestock projects on premises, at any time during the feeding period with or without prior notice**. State validated livestock must be made available for inspection at any time requested at the address listed on validation record or any other property (public or privately owned) where the livestock may be located. Failure to make inspection available as requested will constitute a violation of validation rules and will lead to disqualification of the livestock in question and any other validated livestock. Additionally, any exhibitor in violation of the primary and continuous daily care rule is subject to disqualification.

**d.** The following is intended to serve as a guideline for housing state validated livestock. Texas 4-H and FFA livestock exhibitors are expected to follow these guidelines under the supervision and approval of their County-Level State Validation Committee and supervising Agricultural Science Teacher and/or County Extension Agent. In any instance of discrepancy, the Species-Specific State Validation Chairperson and the State Validation Executive Committee have the right to interpret these rules and will have the final decision on all housing inquiries.

i. All state validated livestock should be housed at the home of the livestock exhibitor or a family member or at a county or school ag facility. Any exhibitor who has existing livestock facilities or existing land to build such should house their livestock projects at their residence or at a county or school facility. It is the burden of the livestock exhibitor's family to research and contact all school or county facilities in the county before exploring alternative options.

ii. If the previous facilities do not exist, an alternative facility may be investigated to house the livestock. A facility of this nature can only be explored after previously listed facilities have been exhausted. Alternative facilities must be within the exhibitor's county and/or school district, unless deemed appropriate by designated approval documents. Alternative housing addresses must be listed on the Texas 4-H/FFA Livestock Program Ethics Policy Acknowledgement/Signature Form. Additionally, alternative facilities may only be used with approval from the County-Level State Validation Committee. These requests may be denied based on existing evidence of possible housing facilities listed in #1 AND/OR due to concerns of excessive third-party involvement. The burden of seeking approval is on the livestock exhibitor's family. The Species-Specific State Validation Chairperson and the State Validation Executive Committee have the right to interpret these rules and will have the final decision on all housing inquiries in instances of disagreement or interpretation. If an exhibitor is concerned of a potential housing facility that may not be acceptable according to the listed criteria, please contact the Species-Specific State Validation Chairperson for an advisory opinion. All interpretations, decisions and settlements will be made by program leadership to align these rules with the best interest of the program and participants. These requests and/or appeals will be approved/denied based on, but not limited to, the following criteria: existence or availability of housing facilities listed above, location, proximity to exhibitor, excessive third-party involvement, and previous instances of rule violation or excessive third-party involvement at the intended location. Excessive third-party involvement may be defined as, but is not limited to, the following:

1) Decision making or advice counter to that of the supervising County Extension Agent or Agricultural Science Teacher
2) Daily or frequent feeding, training, maintenance, washing, rinsing, blowing, or other care practices
3) Interfering with or denying access to CEA, AST, and/or any other county or state level committee member as listed in Rule #3 to supervise or check state validated livestock
4) Encouragement of or use of unethical fitting or showing practices as listed in Rule #9
5) Excessive or misleading advice at livestock shows
6) Any rule violations by the livestock housing provider

iii. Violation of livestock show rules or validation regulations by a livestock housing provider may result in the removal of that location from the list of approved validation housing sites, including Rule #3 Approval Form address.

**4.** Animals validated for the Texas state validation program may also be exhibited at other shows. Be advised, however, the sale or participation in terminal shows will impact the state validated animals per the directives outlined below involving chain of animal ownership.

**a.** If any Texas state validated animal is exhibited and SOLD at any other major livestock show officially sanctioned by Texas state validation, the animal will be ineligible to show at any subsequent major livestock show in the animal's lifetime. These shows include: Heart 'O Texas Fair, State Fair of Texas, Grandstand/Hill Country District Livestock Show, Fort Worth Livestock Show and Rodeo, Sandhills Stock Show, San Angelo Livestock Show and Rodeo, San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo, Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, Rodeo Austin, Texas' Elite Showcase, and the Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show.

**b.** Additionally, Texas state validated livestock offered for sale during the feeding period via private treaty, private or public auction (including terminal county livestock show auctions) will be ineligible to show at any subsequent major livestock show during the feeding period. If ownership changes or has the possibility of changing through a sale offering (including animal(s) purchased back by the exhibitor of validation record), regardless of method or length of time, that chain of animal ownership is considered broken and will be ineligible to show at any remaining livestock shows in the feeding period requiring state validation.

**5.** DNA samples obtained from livestock at the time of County-Level State Validation must match DNA assays obtained any time during the feeding period for the state validated animal and exhibitor record.

**6.** A state validated livestock project may not be simultaneously validated in more than one county or state. Additionally, a state validated animal may not be county or state validated under a different exhibitor's name in another county. State validated livestock projects must be validated through the County 4-H Program or Texas FFA Chapter in which they will enter and show the livestock project in Texas major livestock shows.

**7.** Any method used to misrepresent the age of an animal for a class in which it is shown is deceptive and considered a violation of the rules and guidelines. Any method used to misrepresent the breed or falsification of documents for a breeding animal, as determined by a recognized breed association or livestock show, is deceptive and considered a violation of the rules and guidelines and may result in disqualification of the state validated livestock.

**8.** Family validation is permitted under certain circumstances. "Family validation" means state validating livestock with related family members in the same household, or separate, in the case of split family divorce situations. To be eligible for family validation, the youth participants must be related family members. "Related family members" for the purpose of state validation means nuclear family, stepfamily, or siblings via guardianship. Failure to utilize the student's legal name on any validation form or livestock show entry form is a violation of the Ethics Policy and may result in disqualification. Documentation, including official government-issued documents, may be requested in order to certify the identity and/or custody status of the youth participant.

**9.** Showing an animal for another individual by claiming ownership in order to show in a specific livestock class/event or claiming ownership through signage, social media, or any other advertising method is prohibited. A false claim of ownership is a violation of these guidelines and will lead to disqualification.

**10.** Treating an animal internally or externally, with any irritant, counter-irritant, or other substance used to artificially change the conformation or appearance, or enhance performance, of an animal for show is considered unethical, inhumane, and is prohibited. Surgery, injection or insertion of foreign material under the skin and/or into the flesh of an animal to change the natural contour, conformation or appearance of an animal's body is illegal. This includes, but is not limited to, **injection of gas, air, oil, or other foreign substances**; cutting/tearing of the hide/underneath the hide or removal of tissue in any attempt to alter the physical appearance of the animal; numbing or "deadening" an animal's tail; cutting tendons of an animal; using foreign substances to build or cosmetically re-shape feet; as well as "twining" which includes the attachment of hair or hair substances (i.e. baling twine, cloth, fiber, etc.). Acceptable practices of physical preparation which are allowed include: clipping of hair, trimming of hooves, dehorning, removal of ancillary teats, and docking of tails.

**11.** The use of unethical fitting, showing and/or handling practices or devices compromising animal welfare will not be tolerated.

**12.** Livestock exhibitors will be held accountable for the Species-Specific Validation Guidelines for each species in which they state validate livestock projects. Livestock exhibitors will also be held accountable for the rules and guidelines for each major livestock show in which they exhibit state validated livestock. Validation Guidelines may be found at www.texasyouthlivestock.com. To remain in compliance, livestock must be fully validated. A full validation is specific per species and may include: tag, tattoo, nose print, ear notches, and all associated paperwork. Livestock will be held to the full validation as stated in each species validation guidelines. Animals not in compliance with a full validation may be subject to disqualification.

**13.** The Texas 4-H and FFA State Validation Executive Committee reserves the final and absolute right to interpret these rules and to settle and determine all matters, questions, and differences in regard thereto, or otherwise arising out of, or connected with, or incident to "Texas 4-H and FFA Livestock Program Ethics Policy". All interpretations, decisions and settlements will be made by program leadership in order to align these rules with the best interest of the program and participants.

Any violation of the Texas 4-H and FFA Livestock Program Ethics Policy and/or associated validation guidelines, as well as specific rules as designated by individual livestock shows may result in disqualification and/or probationary status and/or loss of eligibility for future participation in organized livestock competition. **Possible civil or criminal penalties may be imposed by the proper authorities based on evidence provided by the livestock show of exhibitors in violation of the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act/or the animal mistreatment, neglect, and abandonment laws that apply on the local, state, and/or national levels.** All rule violations will be dealt with on an individual basis by the Specie-Specific State Validation Committee, State Validation Coordinators, and/or appropriate livestock show officials.

# 2025–2026 Texas 4-H/FFA Livestock Program Ethics Policy
# Acknowledgement/Signature Form

I, the parent/guardian and exhibitor, am verifying that I have read the "Texas 4-H/FFA Livestock Program Ethics Policy" and understand the consequences of and penalties involved for illegal, unethical, inhumane, and unfair practices in livestock competition. I am also verifying knowledge that my family and I may be prohibited from future participation in organized validation programs in the State of Texas and could face possible criminal prosecution and/or civil penalties if implicated in any of the aforementioned acts.

**ATTENTION:** Please list the address the livestock will be housed below. The address where the animal(s) will be located should be approved by the local validation committee. If a housing address change occurs during the feeding period, the exhibitor is responsible for notifying their supervising CEA/AST who-in-turn must notify the county-level state validation committee for approval. It will be the responsibility of the county-level state validation chair to notify the State Specie Specific Validation Chair of the address upon arrival.

**IMPORTANT: Only one exhibitor per form.**

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| **Physical Address (Livestock Housing)** | **City** | **Zip Code** |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| **Exhibitor Mailing Address** | **City** | **Zip Code** |

**Signatures of Acknowledgement: These signatures verify you have read the 2025-2026 Texas 4-H/FFA Livestock Program Ethics Policy in its entirety (Pages 1-3). Please return this page completed and signed.**

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| Exhibitor (Printed Name) | Exhibitor (Signature) | Date |

Exhibitor Family Phone Number:_____ Exhibitor Family Email Address: _____

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| Parent/Guardian (Printed Name) | Parent/Guardian (Signature) | Date |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Supervising CEA/AST (Printed Name) | Supervising CEA/AST (Signature) | Date |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Validation Chairman (Printed Name) | Validation Chairman (Signature) | Date |

| _____ | _____ |
|---|---|
| FFA Chapter and/or County 4-H Name | County Name |

**State Validation Deadline Dates (These are state deadlines only, local deadlines take priority over the dates listed below):**

**State Fair and Heart of Texas:**
June 30 for steers, heifers, lambs, goats, breeding sheep and goats, and swine

**All Other Major Shows:**
June 30 for steers
October 31 for lambs and goats
October 1 breeding sheep and goats
October 31 breeding heifers
November 30 for swine