

News Column

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COUNTY FAIR LIVESTOCK PROJECTS

We weren't in it for the money.

Yes. There was a premium auction at the end of the fair, where kind businessmen and community members competed for the opportunity to give my kids money. And, yes, my kids enjoyed getting that premium check.

But we weren't in it for the money....

Wait! Let's be honest. There probably were times that my kids were in it for the money. However, I certainly wasn't in it for the money because I could quickly calculate in my head the money going out and the money coming in, and the financial bottom line wasn't good. The kids made a little money,...and the dad lost his shirt.

Detractors sometimes like to ask, "Why do you do have 4-H livestock projects then, if they don't make money? Aren't you supposed to be teaching kids how to make a profit?"

And my response is, "I used to think that way too? But, how much money do you make with that \$300 baseball bat?" You see, we played that game too – it didn't make us any money either – but we sure thought it was worth doing.

I long ago gave up on the idea of our 4-H projects being profitable,... if you measure profit in dollars and cents. If you could measure profit in skills learned – responsibility, dependability, work ethic, public speaking, community service, to name a few – then our 4-H projects were extremely profitable.

Our participation as a 4-H family started in 1997 when Kelsey was five. Her first fair was in 1998, and Ryan's last fair was 2022. That's 26 years and 25 fairs, with one or more kids showing lambs at 23 of those fairs.

Some of you may not know that I spent my first 15 years in Extension in Clay County. That's where our family got started in 4-H, and where my kids wanted to continue as 4-H members. So, I have been juggling two fairs each year since 2001.

I believe it was 2006 when the two fairs landed on top of each other for the first time. I wasn't happy about Clay County changing their fair dates, but I knew where my paycheck came from and there wasn't any discussion about which fair I would attend. My wife and kids would be at the Clay County Fair and I would be at the Riley County Fair.

Kelsey was 13, Morgan and Samantha were five, and Ryan was two. Pam always handled the cooking, sewing, and crafty projects, so that was easy. The livestock projects were a different story. Kelsey was going to have to step up and get it done on her own.

And she did.

One of my proudest moments as a dad was realizing I wasn't needed. I stressed during the fairs that year, spent some time on the phone calming my wife, and more time on the phone just hearing my kids' voices. It wasn't fun, but the outcome was tremendously rewarding.

After the fairs were both over I learned that Pam and the kids had about everybody in the barns looking out for them. There were plenty of offers to help, and others who were ready to help, but could tell encouragement was all that was needed. Someone had to back the little short trailer I had sent them with, but that's about the only help they required.

My proud dad moment occurred a few weeks later when I ran into a 4-H grandma. She was excited to see me, bubbling with enthusiasm, because she wanted to tell me how well Kelsey

did taking care of her lambs, her sisters' lambs, and her two sisters all at once.

You see, Pam didn't quite understand how much help the two younger girls weren't, so she dropped them of to "help" on show day. Kelsey spent the afternoon getting her own lambs ready, and also getting her sisters' lambs ready too, while babysitting the two younger girls who were supposed to be helping.

I never would have guessed that the day I realized I wasn't needed would be one of my fondest memories and proudest moments....

Come see us at the Riley County Fair July 27-31, 2023. I might even get the whole family there this year.

If you have questions about 4-H or the county fair you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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