

Benefits of Participation at the Nebraska State 4-H Horse Exposition

4-H horse projects can have life-changing effects for young people. Along with learning horsemanship and animal husbandry, 4-H'ers practice personal responsibility and decision-making.

In order to identify the specific skills that are enhanced through the 4-H horse program, participants at the 2001 State 4-H Horse Exposition were randomly surveyed. Thirty-four 4-H'ers representing 18 counties completed the survey. The majority (77 percent) of the respondents had participated in four or fewer State Horse Expos, and 82 percent had participated in a District 4-H Horse Show in 2001.

Note of explanation on the State 4-H Horse Exposition and District Horse Shows: 4-H members enrolled in the 4-H horse project may enter showmanship and/or halter at the State Horse Exposition without qualifying. However, most participants qualify for specific events at one of eight district 4-H horse shows statewide. 4-H'ers must pass Level II of the horse project advancement levels to participate at a district 4-H horse show. Additional classes are available at the state show for individuals who have passed the appropriate Horse Project Advancement Level. The Advancement Level program incorporates both improving 4-H'ers horsemanship skills and horse management knowledge. To advance through the four "Levels," 4-H'ers must show proficiency in advancement of their horsemanship skills and horse knowledge through skills tests, demonstrations, reports and exams.

4-H'ers identified the skills they gained as a result of participating at the State 4-H Horse Expo. Those ranking the highest included: personal responsibility, decision-making, and leadership. In addition:

- 95% of respondents said participation taught them to "do their best,"
- 77% learned respect for others,
- 74% learned respect for themselves, and
- 71% learned personal honesty.

Participation in the State 4-H Horse Expo also helped 4-H'ers lose graciously and caused them to be more likely to try new things (62 percent responded positively for each skill).

The Expo also improved development of personal relationships. For example, 77 percent of those responding identified working as a family, meeting new people and building relationships as outcomes related to the State Horse Expo. In addition, respondents said they learned to set and accomplish project goals (74 percent) and finish what they started (65 percent).

Regarding leadership skill development, more than two-thirds (68 percent) of respondents said they developed improved teamwork skills and over half (59 percent) felt they had improved their management skills. Several other life skills were identified as improving such as: time management, decision-making (68 percent) and following rules (62 percent).

Surveyed individuals were also asked to comment on how involvement at the State 4-H Horse Expo impacted their future plans. Responses include:

- "It helped me to understand horses better and decide what to do for a career."
- "Helped me to keep cool and appreciate what I get out of the day."
- "It has helped me build confidence to continue with my horse."
- "It will help me in the future."
- "I learned it takes a lot of practice to get my horse and myself ready to show."

In 2001, 628 individuals participated at the State 4-H Horse Expo and during the past 35 years, more than 19,000 4-H'ers have attended this event. Involvement at the State 4-H Horse Expo is one segment of the 4-H Horse project that centers on hands-on learning and encourages 4-H'ers to "learn by doing." As demonstrated, the State 4-H Horse Expo provides the opportunity for young people to gain numerous life skills while enhancing their knowledge of horses and animal science.

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