The importance of meat quality assurance

Imagine the most tender, juicy steak you can think of. Or maybe a tasty pork chop. As you're thinking of these two mouth-watering cuts of meat, ask yourself, was the animal that this meat came from raised in a safe, clean environment?

Did the producer and owner of the animal understand the provisions of the Wholesome Meat Act? To address these issues and concerns, Colorado 4-H requires livestock members to attend Meat Quality Assurance (MQA) trainings throughout the member's career in 4-H.

Colorado 4-H members who enroll in livestock projects such as beef, dairy, sheep, pigs, goats, rabbits and poultry typically attend MQA trainings three to four times in their 4-H years, depending upon when they enroll in the project and which livestock project they enroll in. At the minimum, members attend MQA the first two years of taking a livestock project, once at 12 years of age and once at 15 years of age.

The MQA program first started as a lecture-style presentation, but it was quickly discovered that 4-H members were not engaged in the class; therefore, they were not retaining information.

To remedy this situation, a group of Extension agents from northeastern Colorado developed a nationally award-winning, interactive program that teaches 4-H youth about good production practices for food animal production. 4-H members have the opportunity to walk around to various hands-on, interactive stations, which teach good production practices for livestock.

Some of the good production practices addressed by the MQA program are: properly administering and storing antibiotics, giving injections, proper injection sites, proper feeding and care of animals, proper animal identification, maintaining medication and treatment records and the veterinary/client relationship.

Current 4-H livestock members are the livestock producers of tomorrow. The 4-H MQA program is teaching these youth valuable skills for their future in the livestock industry. They are learning how to conduct themselves as food producers for their 4-H career and beyond. When 4-H youth follow these good production practices, learned through the MQA program, they ensure safe and proper livestock production practices that result in a quality food product.

If you have any questions about the MQA program, or any of the 4-H Livestock projects, please contact the Phillips County Extension Office at 970-854-3616.

Holyoke Enterprise March 15, 2012