The value of 4-H record books

As spring approaches, 4-H members are planning and preparing their 4-H projects for county fair season. Undisputedly, the least favorite part of any 4-H member's project is completing the record book that accompanies the project.

While 4-H members may question the reasons for completing record books, the life skills the record book teaches are invaluable down the road as that 4-H member eventually leaves home and has to be responsible for his/her own finances.

Employers are often quick to point out that 4-H is an activity they like to see on a résumé, thanks in large part to the responsibility and the record-keeping skills 4-H teaches.

If you've never experienced the 4-H record book, either as a member yourself or a parent or guardian of a 4-Her, you may be wondering what kind of records 4-H members are asked to keep. Many times it depends on the specific project.

Horse, livestock, pet/exotic animals and general 4-H projects have separate record books. The horse and livestock record books are split according to the 4-H member's age. Juniors are ages 8-10, intermediates are ages 11-13, and seniors are ages 14 and older. The general project record books follow the same basic format but may have differences according to which project the member is completing the record book for.

A basic record book for the majority of the general 4-H projects (such as cake decorating, clothing, leathercraft, foods & nutrition, robotics, etc.) asks the members to record experiences about their project and 4-H as a whole. The record books ask members to describe how they participated in 4-H. The income and expenses for the specific project are also documented. Based on the income and expense, members can determine the cost of their project.

Livestock and horse project record books are more in-depth and require more time and record keeping than general books. These record books start with more basic record keeping skills for junior members and progressively ask for more advanced information as the member moves into the intermediate and senior record books.

The livestock and horse record books ask members to identify SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) goals for their project. Members also complete an inventory for their animals and equipment they own. Expenses such as animal purchases, feed, healthcare (veterinary and medical costs), equipment and miscellaneous items are all recorded on their own appropriate page.

A very important piece of an animal record book is a page for the member to keep health records for their animals. An income record page gives members the opportunity to see the money made through their project.

Livestock books have some specific pages regarding market livestock projects. One page points out the additional income that members gained by participating in the Junior Livestock Auction at the county fair versus the price they would have gotten if they simply sold their animals at market price. The second market animal specific page asks members to record weight gain and animal performance during the feeding period.

There is a financial summary page for members to financially analyze their project to determine profit or loss. The final pages ask members to describe their 4-H involvement and to write a story to explain their experiences with their project. It is recommended to have four pictures included in the record book to document progress made with the project. The final page asks members to reflect on the SMART goals they set at the beginning of their project.

For members enrolled in a pet animal/exotic animal project, they complete the corresponding record book. Members are asked to set goals at the beginning of their project and record them in their record book.

They are asked to answer some general information questions about their project regarding housing facilities, feeding schedules/responsibility and general care of the animal. Members are asked to provide information about their animal such as color, height, weight, age, registered

name, etc.

Similar to livestock and horse, health records are also included in the pet/exotic animal record book. Inventories of equipment, project expenses and project income are all documented. Members complete a financial summary to determine the cost of owning their animal.

A page in the book is provided to allow members to record any shows or exhibitions they took their animal to. The final pages ask members to describe how they were involved in 4-H and to provide pictures of their project in addition to a story about their project.

Record book completion is an important part of being a 4-H member. Through record books, members learn important life skills such as record keeping, responsibility, financial management and simple accounting.

If you have any questions about 4-H, or would like to volunteer for the Phillips County 4-H program, please contact the Phillips County Extension Office at 970-854-3616. Extension programs are available to all without discrimination.

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