

**FEED ME TENDER: Part 1**  
**Feeding Your 4-H Livestock Project Animal**  
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What are we trying to teach our youth livestock producers? Life skills?  
Production practices? Yes and yes.

As youth livestock producers, it is important to realize that the animals we produce for the market livestock sale go directly into the food chain to the consumer. And with the consumer, quality is number one. Quality to the consumer means satisfaction.

What does it take to produce a product that satisfies the consumer? First: a safe product. Next: a product that provides an enjoyable eating experience.

What makes an enjoyable eating experience? Flavor, juiciness, tenderness? Meat quality is a term used to describe a range of attributes of meat. Consumer research suggests that tenderness is a very important element of eating quality and that variations in tenderness affect the decision to repurchase.

As an animal matures to slaughter weight, muscle fiber hypertrophy (increase in bulk) is accompanied by maturation of the endomysium (layer of connective tissue that ensheaths a muscle fiber), thickening of the perimysium (sheath of connective tissue which groups individual muscle fibers) and the formation of non-reducible cross-links between collagen molecules. Say what? That basically means that as an animal grows and matures, more of the tough connective tissue is produced in the muscle tissue. So, the younger the animal, the more tender it's meat will be.

What does this mean for our youth market livestock producers? It means that in order to produce a quality product for the consumer that we need to select young animals that will grow fast, so they will reach a marketable weight at the youngest age possible. This is why market livestock shows have weight limits for pre-weighs and at show day. Animals that are too big and too old at pre-weigh will either grow too big for the consumer desired end product or have to be "held" to

make weight. Holding market animals slows their growth rate and initiates the development of more connective tissue, leading to tougher, less tender meat.

### 2010 Walla Walla Fair Market Livestock Show & Sale Weight Limits

	Pre-weigh <u>Maximum</u>	Days to Fair	Fair Weight Range
Steers	900#	158	1100# to 1500#
Pigs	100# ***	95	235# to 280# ***
Goats	80#	81	65# to 110# ***
Lambs	90#	74	100# to 160#

\*\*\*note weight changes for 2010 WW Fair

With these weights and days on feed, the ideal weights and ages for your animals at pre-weigh should be as follows:

Steers – 700# to 800#	Born spring of 2009
Pigs – 50# to 70#	Born early to mid March 2010
Goats – 40# to 50#	Born spring 2010
Lambs – 60# to 70#	Born spring 2010

Back to customer satisfaction. If a customer doesn't have an enjoyable eating experience he/she may not buy that meat product again. That means less demand and less demand means lower prices paid for the product. It may be a long chain effect, but it comes back to the producer, whether it is a youth producer or a commercial producer. Produce an enjoyable eating experience and you will get paid for it. Produce an inferior product and it will hurt the whole industry.

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