

FEED ME TENDER: Part 2
Feeding Your 4-H Livestock Project Animal
By John Fouts, WSU Extension Educator

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.

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

Once the youth exhibitor has the right size and age of animal selected, then they have to provide the feed that will allow the animal to grow to its fullest potential. There are two keys to feeding market animals properly. They must be fed enough feed to meet the nutritional demands of rapid growth and they must be fed feed of the proper nutrient composition to meet the nutritional requirements of their growing bodies. The two most important nutritional requirements to meet are protein and energy.

If we look at the animal's body like a brick wall, protein is the bricks and energy is the mortar. Of course, it isn't that simple, but there are some basics that hold true. There are limits to how much an animal will eat. And as the animal grows the protein requirement drops. Not total protein, but percent protein in the feed.

Market steers will eat 2-3% of their body weight. Early in the feeding period it is closer to the 2% and at the tail end of the feeding period it is near or above the 3%. As the feeding period progresses the protein requirement of the feed decreases from about 12% to about 10%. Well fed steers will gain 2.5-4.0 or more per day on feed for a 150 day feeding period,

Market pigs will eat 3-7% of their body weight. Just as with steers, early on it is near the 3% and later near or above the 7%. Pigs' protein requirement will decrease from about 17-18% to 14-15%. Well fed pigs will gain 1.5-2.5 pounds per day on feed for a 90 day feeding period.

Market goats and market lambs will eat 3-5% of their body weight. Early in the feeding period it will be near the 3% and later near or above the 5%. Goats and lambs protein requirement will decrease from about 15% to about 14%. The difference to note between goats and lambs is that the lambs will grow faster, so their feed consumption will increase faster. Well fed goats will gain 0.3-0.5 or more pounds per day on feed for an 80 feeding period. Well fed lambs will gain 0.75-1.25 or more pounds per day on feed for a 70 day feeding period.

Always provide lots of clean water. Cool most of the year, but not frozen in the winter. Without adequate clean water the animal can not utilize the feed components properly.

To keep your animals healthy, eating heartily and utilizing feed efficiently it is important that recommended vaccinations and parasite control is administered. Be sure to follow recommended withdrawal times and administration practices.

Feeding market animals is based on science, but has some "art" to it. Close observation of how the animals are eating and growing is the key to the "art" of feeding market animals that will produce a quality product.

Let's look back at customer satisfaction. If a customer doesn't have an enjoyable eating experience they 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.

Extension programs and policies are consistent with federal and state laws and regulations on nondiscrimination regarding race, sex, religion, age, color, creed, national or ethnic origin; physical, mental or sensory disability; marital status, sexual orientation, or status as a Vietnam-era or disabled veteran. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension office.