The 4-H Show

At a 4-H show, members bring the animals they have raised, the cookies they've baked, or items they have made during the 4-H year. All counties or units have a 4-H show. In some places, the 4-H show is a separate event. In other places, it may be held with the county fair. Watch for the 4-H newsletter and talk to your 4-H leader to learn more about what your county does.

You will receive information about what you should bring to the show for your project. You may need to sew a garment, train your dog, make a poster or display, or make a food item. It all depends on what projects you're taking. Read the descriptions for your projects carefully. Ask your 4-H leader if you don’t understand what to do.

In some areas, you may receive a special mailing in the spring about signing up for classes at the 4-H show. Read it carefully so you sign up for the right classes. Don’t be afraid to ask your leader or an older member for help. If you sign up for the wrong class, they may not be able to judge your project when you get there. Watch for the due dates and make sure you sign up on time.

At the show, the first step is checking in. Instructions for checking in will either be in the registration booklet, in a special mailing from the Extension office, or in a 4-H newsletter. If you don’t know where to go, ask!

Everyone is busy on 4-H show days, but someone will be able to help you get to the right spot. Sometimes, projects must be checked in by a certain time. Leave home early enough to get there and find where you are going.

After check-in, people who know about your projects judge them. All 4-H projects receive a ribbon or special award. Judges give blue award ribbons for projects that meet 4-H standards. Red award ribbons are for projects that need some improvement, and white award ribbons are for projects that need much improvement. In most 4-H shows and classes, everyone can get a blue award. They are not given just to one person. In this part of the judging, members are not competing against each other. Projects are judged on their own merit.

After the judging, judges may select State Fair winners, Champions, or Best of Show for some classes. Judges compare the blue award projects and the best ones are chosen as winners. At many county 4-H shows, judges announce the winners at special times. If you are a special winner, you should be told about these events. You must be 10 years old by September 1 of the 4-H year to be chosen for State Fair.

Dear 4-H member,

One of the largest events during the 4-H year is the 4-H show. The county fair or 4-H show is a very exciting time. You may feel like you’ve learned a lot in the past few months, but you can learn even more at the show if you keep your eyes and ears open!
Animal exhibits are different from other project exhibits, especially if you are in any of the large animal projects. Depending on your 4-H show, the large animal classes may be judged by competition only. The judge puts the animals in order, from top to bottom of the class. Then members receive ribbons from first to last place. In other areas, judges rank the animals in the same way, but all animals can get blue ribbons if they are good enough.

Take the time to walk around and look at other 4-H members’ projects. You may see one that you would like to take. Sometimes you can get an idea for next year’s project. Remember, though, you shouldn’t just copy what someone else has done.

**Conference Judging**

Many counties or units use conference judging at their 4-H shows. The State Fair also uses it for a few select 4-H projects. You can learn some new things from this type of judging. But we want to tell you about it here because it can be a little scary.

Conference judging is a one-to-one talk between you and the judge about your project. Other people may be listening, or it may be just you and the judge. Either way, the judge will ask you about your project. Why did you choose to do this item (if you had a choice)? How did you make it? Did you have any problems? What did you learn? The judges may also talk to you about what they see. They should tell you what you did well and talk to you about what you could do better next time. At the end of the talk, the judge will tell you how you did.

Talking with judges, who are “experts,” can be a great learning experience. Don’t be afraid to ask them questions, especially if you don’t understand what they say. They can give you tips on how to improve your project. And they can tell you where to get information that you need. Just relax and smile. They won’t bite!

**State Fair Junior Department and 4-H Show**

4-H members from across the state take their projects to the Illinois State Fair each year. But, you must be 10 years old by September 1 of the 4-H year in order to exhibit.

All animal projects are shown on set days, depending on the type of animal. You must sign up for horse classes by June 15 and other animal classes by July 1. Get a special entry form from the local Extension office. You can usually get these forms and information from the State Fair Junior Department Premium Book in early June. The Premium Book is also available on the State Fair website: [http://www.illinoisstatefair.info/](http://www.illinoisstatefair.info/). Judging for animal classes is competitive and premiums are based on the final ranking of the class.

Most 4-H projects must be brought to the State Fair before the fair begins for judging. Many times, the local Extension office will coordinate the efforts to get projects from the county to Springfield. You will need to listen or read guidelines from the Extension office carefully so you can follow all of the instructions necessary to get your project to the fair. Be sure to pack your item carefully so it will not be damaged along the way. You may want to plan a family trip to the State Fair to see your exhibit on display.

For action-type projects, you will have the chance to go to the fair and demonstrate your skills. Projects like Fashion Revue, Public Presentations and Food Skill-a-thons are judged on specific days. A few select projects may also be judged by conference judging on designated days. Your local Extension office will have the information you need for these exhibits.

Judging for general 4-H exhibits is not competitive, but it is more advanced than on the local level. All members receive an Award of Excellence rosette. A limited number of exhibits are named Superior Award winners.