Livestock Show Ethics as Perceived by South Texas FFA Members and Advisors

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture teachers believe in the value of a strong FFA program and in its ability to positively impact the lives of youth. Today this program is needed to shape the ethical development of thousands of young adults. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of South Texas FFA students and their agriculture science teachers regarding ethical practices in livestock shows and the extent of their involvement in these practices. Surveys were distributed to randomly selected FFA members and advisors located within Area X in South Texas. Responses indicated that the majority of participants were able to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable practices and that they neither partake in the listed unethical practices nor knew of others who did. Some relationships were found to exist between respondents' ethics scores and demographic categories.

KEY WORDS: FFA, livestock shows, ethical practices

INTRODUCTION

Since 1928, the FFA organization has prided itself on leadership and character development. To locate evidence of these values one needs to look no further than the FFA Creed. Thousands of young FFA members proudly declare their belief in "leadership from ourselves and respect from others … the ability of progressive agriculturists to serve our own and the public interest in producing and marketing the product of our toil …in being happy myself and playing square with those whose happiness depends upon me. " (Official FFA Manual 2000)

Judging contests (Career Development Events), fairs, and livestock shows were incorporated into the program to teach members how to select for quality livestock and build enthusiasm for raising quality animals. Yesterday's small county fairs are quickly expanding to become big business, with large monetary payments for award-winning animals. Shows prohibit unethical practices, but some individuals continue to push the limits of what is and is not acceptable. Youth organizations such as 4-H and FFA as well as the livestock industry are aware of the adverse affects of the negative publicity that stems from unethical treatment of show animals. Organizations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) thrive on such negative publicity and use it as a means to increase their influence over the general public. The few people that continue to use unethical practices cast a terrible shadow over the other participants.

At the 1995 National Youth Livestock Program Ethics Symposium, Goodwin (1995) stated, "the most powerful, effective, and safe way to address this issue is from the

kids up". Dr. Goodwin envisions a stock show community that strives not only to teach youth real-world agriculture skills, but also to impart ethical decision-making skills that students can incorporate into their lives. The 4-H community adopted and implemented the *Character Counts!* Program, which consists of trustworthiness, respect, caring responsibility, fairness, and civic virtue, as one way to help instill morals and ethics into youth. (Josephson Institute of Ethics 2001)

This research will attempt to determine the size and scope of unethical practices in the South Texas region and serve as a reference point for FFA chapters looking to implement educational programs aimed at teaching ethical decision-making skills.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Instrumentation. The survey consisted of four sections: demographics, perceptions of competition, scenarios and self-disclosure of participation in unethical livestock show practices. The instrument assigned a numeric value to participant's attitude towards common generalizations concerning the ethical status of FFA competition as well as determined their awareness of certain unethical livestock show practices. The scenarios collected information on participant's ability to distinguish between ethical and unethical show practices. The personal experience section ascertained whether the individual had participated in questionable practices, and determined if he or she knew of others who had. The ethical perceptions questions and scenarios were answered using a six point Likert-type scale.

Population and Administration. The population for this study consisted of FFA students from randomly selected high schools within Area X in South Texas. High school FFA programs from each of the six districts within the area were categorized based upon their district and program size. The number of agriculture science teachers within the department was the basis for determining program size.

A survey packet, which included a cover letter and surveys for each teacher within the department (twenty to be administered to students and one to be completed by the teacher), was prepared for each of the selected programs. Fifty-eight packets were prepared consisting of a total of 1,197 surveys. Twenty-four packets were prepared for single teacher programs, four programs from each district, totaling 504 surveys. Twelve packets were prepared for two teacher departments, two programs from each district, and consisted of 504 surveys. Three packets were prepared for three teacher departments, one in each of the three districts that have large programs, and consisted of 189 surveys.

Prepared packets were hand delivered to schools at district Leadership Development Events and were mailed to those schools that did not participate. The Agriculture Science teachers were asked to administer the instrument to students and complete one survey themselves before returning all completed instruments. Completed surveys were returned at the Area X LDE contest as well as by mail. Follow up calls were made to those schools that did not return their surveys by 14 November 2001.

Analysis of Data. All data were analyzed using the Statistical Analysis Systems (SAS, 1989). Categories within each demographic question were used to group respondents so comparisons between responses could be made. Mean scores were calculated for the perception of competition, level of awareness, and the scenario sections. These scores

were then categorized as low, medium, or high. Innocence scores of none, low and high were calculated by summing the respondents' scores from the personal experience and knowledge of others participation section.

General linear models (GLM) were performed to determine whether dependence existed between the respondent's ethics scores and their demographic categories. A 95% confidence interval with a value of .05 was used to indicate significance. GLMs were used to test the hypothesis that demographic category and ethics score are independent versus that they are not independent. Three hundred twenty-five degrees of freedom were used to analyze variance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics. A total of 398 surveys were returned. One hundred thirty four (34%) respondents were female and 261 (66%) were male. Ages ranged from eleven to fifty-seven with 340 (78.6%) respondents between the ages of 15 and 19, typical high school age students. The two most common ethnicity categories were White (50.4%) and Hispanic (45.5%). One hundred thirty-nine (36%) respondents resided in a rural or farm area. Ninety-seven (25%) lived in a town with a population less than 10,000. Fifty-six (15%) lived in a city with a population between 10,000 and 50,000 and the remaining ninety (24%) lived in a city with a population between 50,000 and 100,000.

Seventeen (4%) respondents participated solely in 4-H programs while 241(63%) only participated in FFA programs. One hundred and twenty-five (33%) respondents indicated that they participated in both 4-H and FFA programs. Three hundred seventy of the respondents participated in the programs as members. Twelve (86%) of the 14 agriculture science teachers were FFA members while in high school. The majority, 80.3%, of respondents had shown anywhere from 1 to10 years. Fifty-six (14%) respondents never participated in livestock shows. One hundred eighty-nine (49%) of the respondents had placed in the top 3 at a livestock show while 196 (51%) had not. The largest proportion of respondents, 41.7%, indicated that they had shown swine. Most of the respondents, 271(69%), exhibited their livestock projects at local county shows.

Ethical Perceptions of FFA Competition. Table 1 summarizes the respondents' level of agreement with each of the six negative comments regarding competition within the FFA program.

Perception of competition in the FFA program. A mean score was calculated for respondents to determine their overall perception. Scores were grouped as low ($\leq$3), medium (3.01-3.9), or high ($\geq$4) with low values indicating a negative perception of competition and large values indicating a less negative perception of competition (Table 2).

Ethical Perceptions of FFA Competition. Table 3 summarizes the respondents' perceived frequency of occurrence of the six comments regarding competition within the FFA program.

Table 1. Response to ethical perceptions of FFA competition questions

Questions	1	2	3	4	5	6
There is too much emphasis on competition in FFA.	17	22	102	168	49	37
Politics in competitive FFA activities tend to overshadow the quality of a project.	51	57	116	125	33	10
Competition encourages unethical practices.	25	34	113	127	38	53
In order to win, others will perceive them to be involved in unethical practices.	18	33	98	150	43	50
Large money prizes for top placing animals at livestock shows encourage unethical practices.	28	50	107	118	34	58
Pressure from family, peers and agriculture teachers encourages unethical practices on livestock projects.	12	31	98	131	58	64

Table 2. Mean scores for ethical perceptions of FFA competition

Low (≤3)		Medium (3.01-3.9)		High (≥4)	
Mean Score	**Frequency**	**Mean Score**	**Frequency**	**Mean Score**	**Frequency**
1	1				
1.8333	3	3.1666	25	4	33
2	4	3.3333	29	4.1666	27
2.1666	7	3.4	3	4.2	1
2.2	1	3.5	35	4.3333	13
2.3333	7	3.6	3	4.5	11
2.5	12	3.6666	23	4.6666	13
2.6666	18	3.8333	35	4.8333	10
2.8	1			5	7
2.8333	11			5.1666	2
3	26			5.3333	5
				5.4	1
				5.5	4
				5.6	1
				5.666	3
				5.8333	3
				6	5
TOTAL	**92**		**153**		**139**

Table 3. Respondents' perceived frequency of desired activity occurrence

Questions	0	1	2	3	4
Participants use non-approved methods to physically alter the appearance of an animal.	57	124	129	69	19
Judges of competitive activities are fair in their assessment of FFA projects.	22	30	99	129	118
Label guidelines and approved uses of drugs are followed by livestock show participants.	36	58	97	132	73
There is excessive parental involvement in competitive FFA activities.	13	40	111	122	109
Livestock exhibitors observe animal ownership deadlines.	18	26	94	135	121
Competitors make non-approved changes to animal ear tags or tattoos.	112	141	80	40	23

0= Does not occur
1= Rarely happens (0-25% of the time)
2= Sometimes happens (26-50% of the time)
3= Fairly common (51-75% of the time)
4= Very common (76-100% of the time)

Level of awareness of unethical practices occurring in livestock shows. Respondents' perceived frequency of occurrence mean scores were grouped as low (≤1.5), medium (1.51-2.69), or high (≥2.7) with low values indicating that desirable behavior is perceived not to occur often and large values indicating that desirable behavior is perceived to occur often (Tables 4).

Table 4. Mean scores for perceived frequency of desirable activity occurrence

Low (≤1.5)		Medium (1.51-2.69)		High (≥2.7)	
Mean Score	**Frequency**	**Mean Score**	**Frequency**	**Mean Score**	**Frequency**
0.833	1	1.6	1	2.800	1
1.167	5	1.667	16	2.833	22
1.333	8	1.833	30	3.000	19
1.400	1	2.000	42	3.167	21
1.500	13	2.167	42	3.333	12
		2.333	44	3.500	11
		2.500	44	3.666	2
		2.600	2		
		2.667	47		
TOTAL	**28**		**268**		**88**

Distinguishing between ethical and unethical practices. Scenarios were used to determine the participants' ability to differentiate between ethical and unethical livestock show practices. Mean scores for level of agreement with scenarios were grouped as low (≤ 3), medium (3.01-3.99), or high (≥ 4) with low values indicating that they strongly

agree with the unethical scenario and high values indicating that they strongly disagree with the unethical scenario.

Eighty-four (21%) participants thought the unethical practices represented in the scenarios were ethical. The medium range consists of one hundred thirty-three (34%) participants whose responses to the scenarios fluctuated between agreement and disagreement. One hundred sixty-seven (45%) students indicated that they believe the practices in the scenarios to be unethical.

Participants' level of personal involvement and/or knowledge of others' involvement in unethical practices. A total innocence score was calculated for each respondent in order to determine their level of personal involvement. Individual responses to each question were categorized as 0 if the respondent had no involvement or knowledge of others' involvement or 1 if the respondent had been involved or had knowledge of others' involvement.

Total scores were categorized based on the number of practices they had participated in or had knowledge of others' participation as none, low, or high. One hundred sixty-six (42%) participants responded that they had not participated in the unethical practices nor did they have personal knowledge of others that had. One hundred fifty-two (38%) participants either had participated in or had knowledge of others participation in one or two of the unethical practices. Fifty-five (14%) participants either had participated in or had knowledge of others participation in three to five unethical practices.

Relationship between student's ethical perceptions and practices with those of their agriculture science teachers. Due to the lack of returned surveys from agriculture science teachers, there was not enough data to test the relationship between student and teacher responses.

Relationship between various demographic groups relative to ethical practices in junior livestock shows within South Texas FFA students. General Linear Model (GLM) procedures were performed between various demographic categories and the scores for each of the four ethics indicators. A value of $\forall$=.05 was used to determine interdependence (Table 5).

Table 5. Interdependence (p-value) of demographics and ethics scores

Category	Ethical perception score	Perceived practice Score	Scenario Score	Innocence Score
Sex	NS	NS	NS	NS
Ethnicity	0.0005	NS	NS	NS
Place in top 3 at show	NS	NS	NS	NS
Program membership	0.0351	0.0016	0.0466	0.05
Sex and ethnicity	0.0441	NS	0.0240	NS
Ethnicity and program membership	NS	NS	NS	0.0385

Analysis of variance with 325 degrees of freedom indicated significant interdependence between scores and demographic groups. Respondents who identified

themselves as being white had a less negative perception of competition within the FFA program than those who identified themselves as being hispanic. Respondents who participated solely in the FFA program tended to have the least negative perception of competition followed by those who participated in both FFA and 4-H. Respondents who solely participated in the 4-H program had the most negative perception of competition. White female respondents had the least negative perception followed by white males and hispanic males. Hispanic females tended to have the most negative perception of competition within the FFA program. Respondents who participated in both 4-H and FFA programs perceived desirable behavior to occur more often then those who only participated in FFA. Respondents who solely participated in 4-H programs perceived desirable practices to occur less often than did all other respondents. Respondents who participated in both 4-H and FFA programs tended to more strongly disagree with the scenarios than did respondents who only participated in the FFA program. Respondents who solely participated in 4-H programs tended to disagree less frequently with the scenarios than all other respondents.

Female respondents more strongly disagreed with the scenarios than did male respondents and those with Hispanic ethnic origin disagreed more strongly than their white counterparts. Those respondents that solely participated in 4-H programs tended to have a higher level of personal experience or knowledge of others experience in unethical procedures than did other respondents. Respondents who solely participated in FFA programs tended to have lower levels of personal experience or knowledge of others participation in unethical practices. Hispanic 4-H members had the greatest amount of experience and/or knowledge of others participation in unethical procedures followed by both 4-H and FFA members, white FFA members, white 4-H members and lastly hispanic FFA members.

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of students (45%) never participated, nor were aware of others' participation in any of the unethical practices listed in the personal experience section; furthermore, they (43%) correctly identified the scenarios as involving unethical practices. They (43.5%) had an overall neutral perception of competition within the FFA program, which coincided with their perceived frequency of occurrence of desirable activities rate of 50%. Similar to the students, the majority of teachers had low levels of personal experience or knowledge of others participation in unethical practices. They perceived desirable activities to occur 50% of the time and correctly identified the scenarios as unethical. There is no noticeable teacher perception of competition within the FFA program because the scores were equally distributed between the three categories.

General linear models indicated some interdependence between various demographic groupings and ethic scores. Relationships were found to exist between respondents' program membership and each of the four ethics scores. Ethnicity proved to be a factor in all the respondents' ethics scores except for perceived frequency of practice occurrence.

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