** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at www.ksre.k-state.edu/news/stories/2021/06/4h-judging-contests-teach-critical-thinking.html

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4-H judging contests teach critical thinking, confidence

Youth are encouraged to test skills this summer

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Now and then, it really is a good thing to be judgmental. And especially when 4-H judging contests are involved.

“The objective of judging in the 4-H program is to help our members grow in their ability to think and reason and make logical judgments,” said Beth Hinshaw, a Kansas 4-H youth development specialist in southeast Kansas.

This summer, youth across the state will take part in contests where they’re going to be challenged to compare a set of four items, and decide which one is better than the rest. Many county fairs offer judging opportunities for youth, but even the Kansas State Fair gives them a chance to test their skill.

“When we’re talking about judging a class, there are four items or situations that they need to look at or read through and think about, then decide which one is closest to ideal,” Hinshaw said.

In a livestock contest, that might mean judging four Angus steers to decide which is best, next best, and so on.

Or in a family and consumer sciences contest, it could be four meal options for an outdoor picnic when refrigeration is not available.

Or maybe even a horticulture contest in which youth must decide which of four cantaloupes or mums they would actually like to take home.

“There are ideal standards for all of the things that youth judge, and those standards usually come from 4-H curriculum or research that happens at land-grant universities,” Hinshaw said.
“When I think about judging, I love that it teaches young people to observe carefully. You have to look at all of those choices and compare them to each other so that you know what you’re really looking at, and comparing it to the ideal standard.”

Hinshaw said judging helps youth build critical thinking skills. Some contests also require them to explain their reasons to judges, thus helping to build confidence in their decision-making ability.

“We always encourage our youth to practice judging,” Hinshaw said. “The more you do it, the more it becomes automatic that you think critically about things and make quick, educated decisions. Over time, you just start thinking like that.”

More opportunities for Kansas youth, as well as a list of activities scheduled this summer, are available to view online on the Kansas 4-H website. Youth and families also are encouraged to contact their local K-State Research and Extension agent.

-30-

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas 4-H Youth Development, www.kansas4-h.org

K-State Research and Extension local offices, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/stateandareamaps.html

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