

MAP sale turns 50; sale Saturday at county fair

By Pam Chickering Wilson pchickering@gmail.com | Posted: Friday, July 8, 2016 9:14 am

JEFFERSON — This Saturday, Jefferson County's 4-H Meat Animal Project (MAP) sale will celebrate its 50th anniversary, having guided generations of young people through the process of raising and selling quality meat animals.

The event will take place Saturday afternoon at the Jefferson County Fair Park, in the specially dedicated Meat Animal Project building. The sale usually brings in hundreds of spectators, filling the building to "standing room only."

Typically, well over 100 buyers purchase close to 200 animals. Another 20 to 30 people donate outside of that process, helping to sponsor the sale.

The large-animal sale alone brought in \$480,000 last year, said Jeremy Chwala, a member of the Meat Animal Project Committee and an organizer of the sale, "Raising that much money in just four hours takes a lot of community support."

Chwala said the project encourages youngsters to present buyers with the best-quality animal possible.

Project members range from third-graders through "13th-graders" one year out of high school.

The event Saturday starts with a luncheon for all of the potential buyers, to which last year's buyers automatically are invited.

"Each of the kids turns in a buyer card with two meal tickets and two fair tickets," Chwala said.

The lunch takes place at 11 a.m. and the sale itself begins at 1 p.m. The large-animal sale usually runs through around 5 p.m., followed by the small-animal sale.

This year, the Miss Q milk quality competition and the dairy auction all will be incorporated into the MAP sale. These previously were held earlier in the fair.

All of the animals entered in this project must meet stringent industry standards.



GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

MEAT ANIMAL PROJECT — The 50th annual Meat Animal Project (MAP) sale will take place Saturday at the 2016 Jefferson County Fair. Shown above, contestants control their swine while competing in the middle weight barrow class.

And it's not just a matter of bringing an animal to the fair. Project members have to complete educational point cards, take part in educational events the Meat Animal Project holds throughout the year, and complete a recordbook that details their animal's raising, feeding, the cost of raising the animal, and necessary care.

"Even if the animal winds up becoming injured or sick and can't be in the Meat Animal Sale, the (project members) still have to complete a recordbook at the end of the year or they're ineligible to participate the next year," Chwala said.

The projects last for several months, the beef project starting in December and running through Fair Week, the lamb and hog projects starting in April.

The entire educational process, like Saturday's sale itself, is coordinated by the Meat Animal Project Committee, a group of adults and high-school-aged youth committed to the project and its successful running.

There are two adult representatives for every species on the committee, plus two high school representatives for all the species as well. The adults' role is to advise and to let the youth run it as much as possible.

As well as coordinating the project and related events, the committee plays a big part in soliciting donations to continue the program into the future.

"The kids do pay a small commission on the sale, but that doesn't cover all the costs," Chwala said. "We rely on community support to make this happen.

"The MAP sale is entirely run by volunteers from the committee," he added. "There's no county funding for this at all."

However, he said, the University of Wisconsin Extension-Jefferson County office staff (which oversees the Jefferson County 4-H program) does assist with sending out mailings, putting together the MAP catalog and doing computer data work. The committee meets once a month as an organization and also runs all of the workshops Meat Animal Project members take part in over the year.

"It's a big time commitment on everyone's part," Chwala acknowledged. "There's a lot of parents involved who have kids showing at the fair."

Chwala is one of those youth who came up as a participant in the Meat Animal Project. He served on the committee as a youth member two decades ago, back when he attended Jefferson High School, and 11 years ago he returned to the committee as an adult, along with his wife. Chwala has one year left on his current term on the committee.

"I enjoy it," he said. "It's a lot of work, but you do it for the kids."

The sale itself costs the MAP committee from \$15,000 to \$20,000 to put on. Thanks to community support from businesses and individuals from throughout the county, this continues to be possible.

Coordinating this year's sale was a little more hectic than usual since the county is without a 4-H youth development agent, the previous agent having taken a job out of state in the spring.

In the meantime, Chwala said, the University of Wisconsin-Extension office staff really has stepped up to help, and former county agent Sarah Torbert has been on speed-dial to answer the committee's questions.

Torbert also returned to Wisconsin to assist during the fair, he said, thanks to a special one-week contract with the county.

Meanwhile, the youth project members all have been working hard to prepare their animals for the MAP sale.

"We're trying to teach youngsters how to raise acceptable animals to send to market — that's why we have all the rules," Chwala said.

Thanks to excellent support from local businesses and individuals, youth who sell their animals at the annual MAP sale receive far above the amount they're receive "on the market."

That helps youngsters get their start in a business they might wish to pursue in the future. However, to offer some "real-world" perspective, MAP members are required to figure out the price their animal would have brought on the regular market as well.

The Meat Animal Project also includes a carcass contest in which the animals are scanned via ultrasound at weigh-in before the sale. The scan records key measurements like back fat, rib-eye (in beef) and loin eye (in swine.)

"It's quite a process, and it's different from how it was done years ago," Chwala said. "Years ago, the carcass contest used real-time data. When the animals went to slaughter, this was all measured at the packing house. Now, it's done here."

The carcass contest alone, he said, costs the Meat Animal Project \$4,000. Also included in the process is a seminar for participants after the weigh-in to help members understand what their animal's measurements mean.

"The kids are held to very high standards, but it is rewarding," Chwala said.

There have been lots of other changes over the years as market and industry standards have changed, as did the requirements to sell animals through the Meat Animal Project.

And, of course, the sale costs a lot more now than it did in the past," Chwala said.

Another really big change that has occurred in recent years was the construction of the MAP building itself.

“When I started out in the project, the sale was held in the Activity Center,” Chwala said. “Several years ago, the MAP committee raised the money to build the current building, with Gary Skalitzky serving as one of the biggest boosters.”

The specially dedicated building has made a big difference for the Meat Animal Project and the MAP sale, Chwala said. It also has been held in a tent or in other buildings.

“Before, you never knew where you were going to be,” he said. “It was a nightmare setting it up. Now it’s all in one spot. You don’t have to move stuff all the time. We have lots of fans. It’s cool. There’s a place for weigh-ins. It’s such a big improvement.”

Chwala said he expects to see a capacity crowd again this year for Saturday’s sale, and he encourages anyone with questions about the sale or about how to support the project to contact him at (920) 723-3557.